

Those Passing



by Phyllis Chesler

Death keeps circling me, people I've known and loved are dying all around me. If you live long enough, this is what happens; not only do your mortal parts begin to fray, even fail—your friends, colleagues, and relatives are taken before you.

My cousin Gerri Colton (z"l), Brooklyn born, but a lifetime citizen of San Francisco, a woman who found expert witnesses for major lawyers, suddenly died last week. We do not know why—nor do we yet know when the funeral will take place. We spoke often, sometimes at length, as recently as this past April. Gerri called me, indignant.

“Why haven't I received an invitation to the party?”

“What party?” I asked.

“You know, your granddaughter Lily’s Bat Mitzva party.”

“That party? That’s mainly for kids, who jump up and down a lot to the noise which they consider music. You are certainly invited to her Bat Mitzva.”

“Yes, but I love parties, I love to dance.”

God bless her, the woman was a dancer, a party girl.

Down the decades, Gerri’s health began to fail, she fell, she broke bones, she needed surgeries, and when she developed bronchitis earlier this year, her doctors told her that she could not fly, could not dance at Lily’s party, and so we made a date for August.

Gerri would have turned seventy in September and now she never will...and with whom will I be able to talk about my aunt, (who was her grandmother), her father, Raymond, my first cousin, who was once one of my babysitters, and about everyone else whom we once knew. Oh, may she rest in peace.

There’s more. Yesterday, I read the Obituary for Ilana Rubinfeld, the mind-body genius who helped me avoid surgery for carpal tunnel syndrome. We had lost touch, this Greenwich Village regular went on to live and die in Oregon. Ilana had wanted to be a conductor but at time when the doors were shut to women. Instead, she “conducted” energy fields, synergistic music, which took people out of pain.

Last night I received news of Rabbi Arye Spero’s death. (May his memory be for a blessing). His loving wife, Beth Gilinsky, sent an email. He leaves Beth a widow and his twin boys without a father. Reb Arye was a pro-Israel Orthodox rabbi who worked with Christians, authored a book, wrote articles, and lectured widely.

Finally, early this morning—I read a long overdue Obituary for feminist Dolores Alexander in the *New York Times*. Dolores was

once the executive director of the National Organization for Women; a pioneering radical feminist against pornography, and the co-founder of one of my favorite restaurant in Greenwich Village: Mother Courage, which I frequented as much as possible. There are two photos embedded in her Obit. One of Dolores, younger, and one of other feminists on a Women Against Pornography panel. I recognize (and knew and worked with) every single woman on that panel. At least two of them have also died: feminist warriors Louise Armstrong and Florence Rush.

The past is always present.