

UJPO *News Special*



TRIBUTE TO ROZ (ROSELINE) USISKIN (nee WOLODARSKY)

Tribute published in *Winnipeg Free Press* on November 19, 2022.

With great sadness, we announce the sudden passing of Roseline Usiskin on November 2, 2022, after a brief illness. She was 94 years old. Roseline (also known as Baba, Rose or Roz) was an important person in so many people's lives. She was a friend and a mentor to us all; a shining example of integrity, principle and kindness.

Roz was born in 1928 in Winnipeg, the third of seven surviving children born to Joseph Wolodarsky and Florence (Litman). She married Larry Usiskin in 1949. Roz is survived by her sons Michael (Jean), Arnie (Robyn) and Len (Priscilla), and her grandchildren Jana (Nic), Josh (Shelley), Aaron (Kasandra), Beth (Rob), Jacqui (Max), Mika (Alekcei), and great-grandchildren Laurence, Miriam, Konrad, Julia, Felix, Aria, Nolan, Edie, Basil, Nya and Lola as well as her sister Evelyn, brother Bill (AnnMaree), brothers-in-law Dave and Sid (Viki), sister-in-law Marcia, and many nieces, nephews, great-nieces and great-nephews. Her parents, Joseph and Florence, her husband Larry, her siblings Doris, Jack, Shirley and Marilyn, and her sisters-and brothers-in-law Fred, Shirley, Sid, and Martin predeceased her.



Roz lived a remarkable and engaged life, which was shaped in her youth by radical left wing family members and friends who were writers and activists. She thought critically and was curious about the world and other's points of view. She loved to read and debate ideas and to discuss the pressing issues of the day.

Some of her activities and accomplishments include teaching kindergarten at Peretz and Sholem Aleichem schools; director of the children's summer Camp Husavik; completion of high school as an adult and then going on to complete a Master's degree in Sociology and History (earning a gold medal for both); lecturer at the University of Winnipeg; published articles and book reviews focused on the Jewish radical left in Winnipeg (she was widely consulted about her research); founding executive director of the Manitoba Multicultural Resource Centre; president of the Jewish Historical Society of Western Canada where she facilitated its move to the Jewish Community Campus; a lifelong member of the United Jewish People's Order (UJPO) serving for many years as local President and also as a member of the national executive board; member of the national editorial board of the *Canadian Jewish Outlook*; and member of Jewish Voices for Peace. Roz also translated (from Yiddish to English), edited and published two books of letters by her father and his relatives.

Roz's social and political activism included many progressive issues related to human rights, peace and social justice. She was part of the secular Jewish movement and was passionate about preserving Yiddish language and culture. She sang in various Jewish and labour choirs and was a founding organizer of the Sholem Aleichem Cultural group.

Roz and Larry travelled extensively all over the world. She loved attending cultural events – theatre, concerts, movies, ballet and opera.

Maintaining close family connections was extremely important to Roz. She was the matriarch of both the Wolodarsky and Usiskin families and she ensured that family and friends came together for every possible milestone or simcha. She loved to host suppers and gatherings in her Winnipeg home and at her Winnipeg Beach cottage. Food was an essential part of every get-together. She especially enjoyed lively conversations with family and friends, often with a cup of tea in hand.

Both Roz and Larry were supportive, loving and proud parents and grandparents. They raised three active boys in a modest bungalow on Burrin Avenue in West Kildonan. Roz was very involved in her children's and grandchildren's lives.

She was also involved in the lives of her siblings and many nieces and nephews. Many people not in our family adopted her as a mother figure. They knew they could always come to her for support and advice.

We are inspired by her enthusiasm for life, her kindness and generosity, and the curiosity and intellect she demonstrated throughout her life. Her whole family is proud of all her accomplishments and the ideals she stood for. We know Roz felt there was still much work to be done to make the world a better place for all, and she was involved in projects as recently as this past autumn. She planted many seeds for peace and justice, and her legacy will carry on to make a better world.

Roz's funeral was held Sunday, November 6, 2022, at the Hebrew Sick Benefit Cemetery. We are planning a larger celebration of Roz's life at Winnipeg Beach next summer.

Donations in Roz's honour may be made to: UJPO (United Jewish People's Order), the Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada, the Judaic Studies Program at the University of Manitoba, or to a meaningful organization of your choice.

https://passages.winnipegfreepress.com/passage-details/id-312150/USISKIN_ROSELINE

In tribute to the late Roz Usiskin

By Harriet Zaidman, *Jewish Post and News*

The Jewish community lost a valuable member when Roz Usiskin died on November 2nd at the age of 94. Roz spent her life working to make the world a better place through her activism for progressive causes, her research, writing, teaching and mentoring. Some of those contributions are highlighted here.

Much of Roz's work developed through her involvement in UJPO (United Jewish People's Order), which she joined as a teen in 1945. Dora Rosenbaum also joined UJPO that year, and the two developed a lifelong friendship. In conversation, she shared that Roz was always concerned about imbuing the positive values of Yiddishkeit in the younger generations. As the director of the children's program at Camp Husavick, Roz created the programming. "Each week-end our youth division would invite different ethnic youth groups out to the camp to build friendships between them," she said. "Russian, Ukrainian, Polish and, in particular, Nigerian university students. Roz played a leading role in that activity."

Mark Etkin remembered how Roz's support helped establish the secular humanist group, the Sholem Aleichem Community. "We got a phone call from Roz. She told us that members of the United Jewish People's Order were very interested in supporting our initiative. She attended our initial meeting, along with Dora Rosenbaum and Abe Arnold. Together they offered to be "advisors" to our young group. They offered start up money, to host meetings and provide food. Over those first few years they were instrumental in helping us to set up a Jewish Sunday School, to solidify our organization, and to plan Jewish holiday celebrations, in which they took on very significant roles. Roz also suggested a name, one with personal and historical significance for her and for UJPO, as there had been an earlier secular Jewish day school in Winnipeg with the same name. Within a short period, the Sholem Aleichem Community was up and running."

Roz loved to discuss and debate, applying critical thinking to the many UJPO forums she helped organize about topical issues. She had an unequivocal sense of fairness and held to her principles – those same values that her forebears fought for – opposing all forms of anti-semitism, all forms of oppression and exploitation. Politically, that translated into advancing human rights for all – which meant that as a Jew she could not be blind to the needs of the Palestinian people for recognition and nationhood. Roz was a principal organizer of a UJPO tour of the Palestinian Territories, where participants saw for themselves the human rights abuses and injustices meted out to the Palestinian people. Mark Etkin said that following the tour, there was much discussion about the need for a Canadian Peace Organization that would champion the Palestinian cause from within Canada. Roz encouraged discussions that became the basis, finally, for the development of Independent Jewish Voices – Canada.

Roz's interest in the radical Jewish left stemmed from her upbringing in a family of activists and writers. For her Honour's thesis she wrote: "The Winnipeg Jewish Community: its Radical Elements, 1905-1918", and a few years later for her Masters, wrote Winnipeg Jewish Radical Community, both which became the basis for two books. Ester Reiter,

who is now Professor Emerita in the School of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies at York University says Roz's writings "remain unparalleled for anyone exploring the riches of Winnipeg's history". Her writings formed part of a hallmark symposium on the Jewish left, of which UJPO was one sponsor, organized in the early 2000s.

Roz, along with labour leaders and others formed the Joe Zuken Memorial Association to honour the late city councillor's commitment to the broader social good, funding programs such as Rossbrook House. "As a trade union leader, I valued Roz as an ally and a mentor," Paul Moist, National President Emeritus of CUPE, said. "Most importantly, I valued her clarity of thought, her progressive values and her friendship."

"UJPO was the backbone of *Outlook* magazine," said Carl Rosenberg, who edited the independent, secular periodical from 1998 – 2016. "Roz was *Outlook's* Winnipeg Associate Editor from the late nineties until she stepped down in the early aughts. She played a valuable role whenever we consulted on editorials, articles and many other aspects of the running of the magazine. Roz's comments and criticisms were always cogent and constructive. Her approach was gentle and supportive, but also no-nonsense and well thought-out." Not surprisingly, Roz wrote many articles and reviews for *Outlook*. "She exemplified a progressive and secular humanist vision of society. She believed in the full potential of the human condition."

UJPO members were active in the anti-nuclear movement from the 1950s on, despite surveillance and intimidation by the RCMP. Every Mother's Day, Roz was among the women who stood in a silent 24-hour vigil at Portage and Main to protest nuclear proliferation. That movement merged with the anti-Vietnam War movement, and Roz marched under the UJPO banner with like-minded protesters. "Roz was my friend almost since I first stepped foot in Winnipeg in 1968 and joined Voice of Women in the struggle against the war in Vietnam," Reiter said.

On a personal level, Roz's warmth and friendliness are legendary. Jeanette Block, another member of the UJPO community, a co-choir and Yiddish Reading Circle member with Roz wrote, "My dear friend Roz has left us, but memories of her will stay with us. She was unique. A matriarch, a progressive feminist, a (Yiddish) translator, a leader who had many followers. Why? She was like a magnet. People were drawn to her because she cared about them. She fed them, not only with food but with ideas for making the world a better place. She left us, but memories of Roz will stay with us."

"Roz was an amazing woman. I loved being in her company," Ellen Karlinsky, Acting Chair of UJPO Winnipeg said. "She was so clear headed and intelligent and always got to the heart of the matter. She also got to our hearts, with her warmth and hospitality. She took an interest in people and made us all feel valued. This is how she encouraged each of us, one by one, to join UJPO, to get on the Board, to reach out to others, to make a difference and to also do more....always do more."

With all that she undertook, Roz was still able to put her family first. Her late husband Larry, her siblings, her sons and daughters-in-law, her grandchildren and great grandchildren brought her great joy. Our condolences go out to her family, whose loss is profound.

Many people sent their sympathies, wishing Roz peace. But Roz never rested. We can hear her asking, "What's next? We have to start planning!" At the time of her death, she had just secured a grant for UJPO Winnipeg to produce a video about the radical left, she was part of the UJPO play-reading group, the Committee for Yiddish and several other initiatives.

Over the next few months, UJPO Winnipeg will plan a suitable way to honour her legacy. Our goodbye to her will be to continue the work to make the world a better place. Max Wallace of Toronto said it best: "Rest in power, Roz."

We love you.

<https://jewishpostandnews.ca/faqs/rokmicronews-fp-1/in-tribute-to-the-late-roz-usiskin/>

Harriet Zaidman met Roz when they sang together in the North End Jewish Folk Choir. She joined UJPO at Roz's nudging and is now secretary. In 2019, Roz acted as a Yiddish consultant when Harriet wrote "City on Strike," a novel set in the Winnipeg General Strike. She will always be grateful for Roz's example and friendship.

Roz (Reyzi) Usiskin - In Memoriam

By Itay Zutra, I.L. Peretz Folk School Yiddish Teaching Fellow at the University of Manitoba

Sad news: Roz (Reyzi) Usiskin passed away. An angel was requested to attend the heavenly academy and Roz, who was short of 120 years old, had to leave us. What should I tell you? That Roz was like a grandma to me? That she was a human, a rabbi, a rabbi's wife, and a good soul, all in one person? Empty words that one engraves on Jewish tombstones whether the deceased was a righteous person or an evil one.

Roz who was born in Winnipeg (to parents who immigrated from Russia and Ukraine), studied and later taught at the Peretz School, taught at the University of Winnipeg, was a sister to her siblings, a wife to her husband, a mother to her children, and a grandma to her countless grandchildren, was an activist in Jewish and progressive circles, organized the Gwen Secter Yiddish reading group, sang in the Yiddish choir, and many more I forget. About Roz Usiskin it was said: "One who dances on two weddings at the same time". With lots of love, force, curiosity, and respect, she rushed to all corners of the world, helping people and making our world a better place.

When did I meet Roz for the first time? I moved to Winnipeg from New York ten years ago to teach Yiddish at the University of Manitoba and received an invitation to come to the Gwen Secter Centre and prove what a young man could do. I passed the test and since then became not only a guest in town, but gradually a close relative. In the last ten years (minus the difficult Covid years), I used to visit Roz in her North-End home (that was dear to her), not once but probably a thousand times. It was like this: I receive a call from Roz saying the following: What's doing with you? You better come by me for lunch. So, fine. I come to her apartment, drink coffee, eat tasty dishes, and speak with Roz (and other occasional guests, like her sister Vity) about world affairs: the war in Ukraine, US elections, the situation in Israel, etc. Everything she read in the local and international press was important and interesting to her. Roz loved people and always wanted to amend the world. About Jews, Yiddish, and Jewishness, she had sharp opinions: Jewishness to her was not a religion but a culture of free people. "We shall overcome" was her motto in life. I am not a big optimist, but with Roz Usiskin everyone becomes an optimist.

Roz helped me in many ways: she gave me food, raised money to sponsor my Yiddish projects, gave me good advice, and taught me the business of being a social activist and leader. Without Roz, it seems to me, one must have at least ten people to do what she could have done as a single person. In heaven where she resides now, she is probably telling the righteous men (and God himself) that they are wrong and what they should be doing instead. Not with anger or hate, but with gentleness and goodness. Such a righteous woman she was. A few weeks before her parting, at the Yiddish reading group meeting where I read yet another fairytale she didn't like (for her literature was only a way to improve the world, and she used to ask me: how can literature be of use?!), at the very end of the reading, she gave me a treasure: a folder containing the archive of the reading group. I have yet to open the folder and I wait until I am fully assured that she is really gone.

Sholem Aleichem wrote at the beginning of his last novel "Motl the Son of Peyse the Cantor": "I am good because I am an orphan". This is what Motel says when his father, Peyse the Cantor, dies and the boy is set free. But the book does not suggest that Motel does not have any responsibility for his mother, brother, and the rest of the Jewish people. He remains a Jew. Roz Usiskin, like Motel, was free but also a Jew. We, her orphans, must remain Free Jews. May she have a peaceful rest. She will always remain deep in my heart.

ROZ USISKIN – my friend, my comrade

By Ester Reiter

Roz Usiskin of Winnipeg's North End is no more. Writing about my friend is very difficult, because not any of the words I have at my disposal do justice to the enormity of the loss of Roz, to me personally and to the huge empty crater left in the Winnipeg community, as well as to our national organization, the United Jewish People's Order. At 94, her body was showing signs of wear, but Roz herself didn't decline – she just went ahead and died on us, in the midst of a life filled with more intelligence, insight, graciousness, commitment and principle than anyone I know at any age.

Roz and I go back almost to when I first stepped foot in Winnipeg in 1968, and joined Voice of Women to protest the war in Vietnam. We marched, we demonstrated, we signed petitions, we met with a delegation of beautiful women from North Vietnam. We wrote briefs in which we asked the new NDP government of Manitoba to take a stand against the ABM (anti-ballistic missile) sites in North Dakota. They were to protect Americans from Soviet invasion, by intercepting Soviet missiles 150 miles north of Grand Forks, in other words directly over Winnipeg. We actually had a meeting with the entire newly elected New Democratic Party cabinet of Manitoba, who greeted us warmly and, big surprise, did nothing. But what do I remember from those years? The goodies. Voice of Women was definitely the tastiest political organization of which I have ever been a part. Each meeting involved, tea, coffee and the most delicious homemade cakes and cookies ever--all made by Roz and her friends, the women from Winnipeg's North End.

I was excited to be at my very first academic department meeting at the University of Winnipeg in 1973 teaching my very first course, and who was on the agenda? My friend Roz. The department was proposing that Mrs. Usiskin receive the gold medal as the best student in Sociology for that year. Roz, whose three sons were now teenagers, had returned to university to begin her scholarly career. First she received her B.A. at the University of Winnipeg, followed by a Masters in Sociology and a teaching appointment at the University of Manitoba. Oh, and in between, organizing the oral history project at the Jewish Archives of Western Canada. This was when she also became the founding executive of the Manitoba Multicultural Resources Centre and president of the Jewish Historical Society of Western Canada during its move to the Rady Centre in the Jewish Community Campus. I was always amazed by the breadth of her friendships, which spanned Winnipeg's entire Jewish Community – rabbis, academics, doctors, lawyers, electricians, housewives. Everyone was to be found feasting at her table, and what an incredible cook she was.

Roz's heart – her political, social justice heart – was with the United Jewish People's Order. That's where she and I really had even more of our already so much in common. When the UJPO became a National organization in 1945, Roz was one of the founding members, serving as President for many years on the National Board. She also not only sang in the North End Jewish Folk Choir, but played a key role in keeping it going.

I grew up in the New York counterpart of the UJPO, called the Jewish People's Fraternal Order, attending the shules and Camp Kinderland. Not only were the politics the same, but even the people were, since my teachers, such as the Marxist Rabbi Bik from New York, were known in Winnipeg, often as visiting speakers.

When Roz's aunt Pesel (Pauline) was blacklisted in Winnipeg, and ended up living in Brooklyn, I learned that two of my classmates were Roz's nephews, Pauline's two sons, who had attended mittlshul with me. For both of us, it was the politics, the culture, the Yiddishkayt, that was so central to our lives, our identity. We didn't agree on everything, just the important stuff. Roz articulated with eloquence the difference between being part of an organization that for many years was pro-Soviet, and often dismissed as Red, and actually being a Communist Party member. Here's how she put it:

“I was never a Party person, but the kind of programs we had, the world view that was presented to us – equality, social justice, socialism, the new world order. We became so imbued with it that there didn't have to be a directive from higher up. It was something within the culture in which we were immersed....When it came to support [for] Joe Zuken [the Communist alderman in Winnipeg City Council all through the Cold War] everyone was out working for him, there was no one else like him. There was an integrity there, and an honesty that one didn't find with others.”

I learned so much from Roz. Roz's work on radicalism in the Jewish left. Her undergraduate Honour's Thesis, *The Winnipeg Jewish Community: Its Radical Elements, 1905-1918*, and then a few years later, her Master's Thesis, *A Case Study of the Jewish Radical Community*, are still the classic works to look at if anyone wants to explore Winnipeg's radical history. Those are two works waiting to be turned into a book. It was from Roz that I learned about the radical roots of the Arbeiter Ring, a coalition of all those opposed to the capitalist system. The Bund (the Marxist revolutionaries), the Anarchists, and the Territorialists, or left Zionists, were the three main groupings. Their slogan? “We fight against sicknesses, premature death and capitalism.” In Winnipeg and elsewhere they were particularly popular among young people. It was over the Bolshevik Revolution that differences developed.

Roz's gracious hospitality is legendary. And the delicious food was always accompanied by wonderful conversation. When I visited Winnipeg, we could sit at her kitchen table or in her dining room just off the kitchen and talk all day. Roz has helped me in so many ways in the long journey toward writing my book on the Jewish left in Canada. She shared

materials she collected, research she has done, and her stimulating ideas. Roz's book, *The Wolodarsky Family*, consists of the translation of handwritten letters her aunt wrote to her father. Polya (Pesel in Yiddish, and Pauline in English) was left behind in Russia because of the First World War, while Roz's father had arrived in Winnipeg just before World War I. There was a terrible pogrom in her town just after the Bolshevik Revolution. An estimated 100,000 Jews perished in what was known as the counter-revolutionary army's "White Terror." The White army had murdered every Jew they could find. In Rizhe, where Pesel lived, orphans wandered the streets. Their parents were killed or perished from the raging epidemics. What did Polya do? She and her comrades organized a children's home. They found an unused house, gathered volunteers to make beds, tables, chairs. With sewing machines and material gathered from the Kultur League from America, they made sheets and pillowcases. Pesel was seventeen at the time! Reading and talking to Roz about her father and her aunt as she was painstakingly deciphering the difficult handwritten letters in Yiddish that they wrote to each other gave an inside glimpse of the lived experience, and made that history come alive. My parents also lived through that perilous time, so I felt I was learning what they did not articulate.

Roz and I worked together as well. The penultimate chapter in my book on the Jewish left in Canada is based on a paper Roz and I wrote together and presented at a Canadian Jewish Studies Conference in Winnipeg. One of the very aggravating issues that the UJPO had to deal with since the 1950s was its expulsion during the Cold War from the Canadian Jewish Congress. Our views were deemed to be so outrageous that we were not deserving of a voice in this constituent body, supposedly reflecting all of Canadian Jewry. In a highly undemocratic move, violating many of their own rules of how they were supposed to operate, the leadership managed to throw the UJPO out of the Congress. We argued for the importance of greater democracy in the Canadian Jewish community, and for the healthiness of a community that can embrace dissenting views. Our concluding words were, "There is a generation of young people growing up feeling that they can either choose to be Jews or progressives involved in anti-globalization social justice concerns. UJPO offered a blending of the two."

The UJPO successfully rejoined Congress in 1995, although participants reported that they were marginalized. It is worth noting that the takeover of the community by the wealthy resulted in the abolition of the Canadian Jewish Congress itself, in 2011 replaced by CIJA, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs. Officials in the Congress noted with dismay that there was now nobody representing the interests of Canadian Jewry. And now with the ultra-right racist government recently elected in Israel, the separation between hating a disgusting government, and taking pride in a Jewish identity while struggling against anti-Semitism in North America, seems ever more pressing.

While some newer, younger members of the left saw as futile the effort to participate in the Jewish community in Canada which has been so ideologically uncritical of Israel and Zionism, Roz insisted that we continue to insist that our voice be heard as a legitimate part of the wider community. Roz never compromised or watered down her politics and her commitment to social justice, but it would be hard to find anyone in the entire Winnipeg Jewish Community who did not understand her important place and her value in the community. For me, visiting family in Winnipeg, but now without Roz in the North End, is a constant reminder of what we have all lost.

More Winnipeg Tributes to Roz Usiskin (1928-2022)

Carl Rosenberg, former editor of *Outlook Magazine*:

I knew Roz partly through UJPO, but mostly through *Outlook Magazine*, which I edited from 1998 to 2016. UJPO was, as long-time Vancouver UJPO activist Pauline Weinstein put it, the backbone of *Outlook*, and Roz was active both in UJPO and support for *Outlook* for as long as I could remember.

Roz was *Outlook's* Winnipeg Associate Editor from the late nineties until she stepped down in the early aughts and turned the post over to Mark Golden. She played a valuable role whenever we consulted Associate Editors on editorials, articles and many other aspects of the running of the magazine. Roz's comments and criticisms were always cogent and constructive. Her approach was gentle and supportive, but also no-nonsense and well thought-out. Roz wrote many excellent articles and reviews for *Outlook* (including several co-authored with Ester Reiter) on the Jewish left in Canada and related subjects. She and her husband Larry were always warm and hospitable whenever *Outlook* editors visited them at their Winnipeg home when attending *Outlook*-related events in Winnipeg.

Like everyone active in *Outlook*, Roz was deeply saddened when it folded in 2016. Nevertheless, we stayed in touch after that through our mutual involvement in UJPO, although Roz was far more active than I have been.

Roz made an enormous contribution to the Canadian Jewish community and the left in general, and to the Canadian Jewish left in particular. Her legacy will always be treasured, and all of us who knew her will especially cherish her kindness and friendship.

Jeanette Block, UJPO Winnipeg:

My dear friend Roz has left us but memories of her will stay with us.

She was unique. A matriarch, a progressive feminist, a translator, a leader who had many followers. Why? She was like a magnet. People were drawn to her because she cared about them. She fed them, not only with food, but with ideas for making the world a better place. She left us, but memories of Roz will stay with us.

Dora Rosenbaum, UJPO Winnipeg:

During the time when UJPO had the camp at Husavick – each weekend our youth division would invite different ethnic youth divisions, i.e. Russian, UK, Polish and in particular Nigerian university students. Roz played a leading role in that activity.

Mark Etkin, UJPO Winnipeg - Sholem Aleichem Community:

In the early 90's Frances Arnold and I were wondering how to provide Jewish culture and education for our young children. We knew that we wanted to engage other friends who were also parents, to raise our kids with a sense of Jewish community, and to do this in a secular way. We were not interested in engaging a rabbi, joining a synagogue, or having a traditional Jewish religious experience. We knew that there were a few families who had been gathering for Passover every year. We decided to develop a plan, and talk to a few folks.

Shortly after, we got a phone call from Roz. She had heard about our plan. She wanted to help, and she told us that other members of the United Jewish People's Order were very interested in supporting our initiative. Roz offered to invite other people she knew of who were in family situations similar to ours. She attended our initial meeting, and she came along with Dora Rosenbaum and with Abe Arnold. Together they offered to be "advisors" to our young group, and to help us out in any way they could. And they did. They offered some start up money; they offered to host meetings and provide food. Over those first few years they were instrumental in helping us to set up a Jewish Sunday School, to solidify our organization, and to begin to plan Jewish holiday celebrations, in which they took on very significant roles. Roz also suggested a name, one with personal and historical significance for her and for UJPO, as there had been an earlier secular Jewish day school in Winnipeg with the same name. Within a short period, we had a new and successful secular Jewish organization up and running in Winnipeg – the Sholem Aleichem Community.

Mark Etkin: UJPO Peace and Solidarity Tour to Israel and Palestine

UJPO came early to the realization that Israel's development in the Jewish Holy Land had displaced hundreds of thousands of Palestinians from their historical and family-owned property, and indeed, from their country itself. The events of 1948 and 1967, in increasing the land claimed by Israel, resulted in the further displacement of Palestinians.

Roz had been a peace activist her entire life. It became evident to her that one of the principal ways that the Palestinian calls for peace and justice could be supported was to bear witness to their struggles. In working with her dear friends from Toronto, Ronnie Jaeger and Sam Blatt, the 2005 UJPO Peace and Justice Solidarity tour was born. I was very fortunate to know Roz at that time, and to receive an invitation to participate in that tour.

Roz was a principal organizer of the Tour. She promoted the idea to friends and colleagues. Approximately half of the tour participants were from Winnipeg. Following the tour, there was much discussion about the need for a Canadian Peace Organization that would champion the Palestinian cause from within Canada. Roz was supportive of this call, and at the same time was of the clear opinion that UJPO could not be that organization. Roz believed that if UJPO were to focus on this major issue, that it would soon become a one-issue organization, and she believed that this would not serve either the organization itself or UJPO members very well. These initial discussions became the basis for the development of the

Alliance of Concerned Jewish Canadians, which, within a short time, morphed into Independent Jewish Voices – Canada under my initiative.

Ellen Karlinsky, Acting Chair UJPO Winnipeg

Roz was an amazing woman. I loved being in her company. She was so clear headed and intelligent and always got to the heat of the matter. She also always got to the heart, with her warmth and her hospitality. She took an interest in people and made us all feel valued. This is how she encouraged each of us, one by one, to join UJPO, to get on the Board, to reach out to others, to make a difference and to also do more always do more.

I knew Roz years before joining UJPO when we were part of the Sholem Aleichem Community. I was so busy with young children that I didn't take advantage of her presence. I wish I had.

Covid robbed us of time spent together. Our meetings became zoom gatherings and of course it was not the same. But Roz was still mentoring and inspiring us all with an ever growing number of projects and initiatives.

Roz had such depth and substance. She always provided us with a meaningful context for what we were doing in UJPO. Roz knew our history and she taught us that it was important and shouldn't be diminished. She persuaded me to join the National board by making solid arguments about continuity and connection and shared history.

Roz got me excited about Yiddish. About family history. About the past and the future.

I wanted many more years with Roz. I am so grateful I knew her.

Be at peace, Roz.

Roz (Roseline) Usiskin – The *real* WONDERWOMAN!

By David Abramowitz

Shortly after I became National President in 1983 Roz's significance to the UJPO became clear to me. I was invited to UJPO Winnipeg to speak at its annual memorial for the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

The UJPO's precursor organization (in Toronto, the Labour League Mutual Benefit Society - LLMBS) was founded by an overwhelming majority of Polish born Canadians in 1926 long before the state of Israel existed. The establishment of the LLMBS resulted from a split in the anti-Zionist Workmen's Circle (WC) where our members originally belonged. Among the schools which Roz attended was the I. L. Peretz Yiddish school.

Before Roz was born an event occurred which affected her and our entire future. The WC's international convention of 1926 was where many WC members, desiring the Soviet Union to be the inspirational home for future atheist, anti-Zionist Jews, became a divisive issue. WC officials of a similar opinion were fired, and their branches dissolved. Members of those branches became WC members-at-large, still entitled to its extensive benefits but having no representation/voice, at conventions (where policies and bylaws were passed.) This status was unacceptable to those members favouring the USSR so, in 1926, they created, in Toronto, the LLMBS, and across Canada they established individual, independent Proletarian Workers' Cultural Centres (PWCC) which, in 1945, amalgamated nationally with the LLMBS as the United Jewish People's Order (UJPO.)

This was the background into which Roz grew up. Her father was a unionized metal worker for the railway, and together with her aunt Polly (Pesel), were members of Winnipeg's PWCC. Being of a similar belief she and husband Larry (whom she married on December 24, 1949) joined the UJPO in 1945.



Wedding, December 24, 1949.

(l to r) Marcia Usiskin, Michael Usiskin, Roseline Wolodarsky Usiskin, Larry Usiskin, Esther Usiskin, David Usiskin. the brother of Roz's father-in-law, Mike, was a settler in Saskatchewan; Mike wrote a Yiddish book published by our LLMBS "Oxn Un Motorn" ("Oxen and Motors") and translated into English by her sister-in-law Marcia (also published by UJPO under the title of "Uncle Mike's Edenbridge".)

It was also shortly afterward that we learned of the vast number of Jewish victims of the Nazi holocaust. The outstanding resistance and sacrifice of Warsaw's Jewish ghetto became the memorial legacy when numerous Jewish organizations/synagogues initiated events to establish and perpetuate the now well known slogan – NEVER AGAIN! – as a future warning and message to coming generations – *be alert to anti-Semitism and remain constantly vigilant!* It was a topic of which I was well versed.

This was my first trip as National UJPO President to be the guest speaker at their commemoration and was very well received. Roz and Larry became my gracious hosts for this and several repeat visits (as they also were to many UJPO Toronto members). I met her family and our Winnipeg members.

Although active during her maternal years, Roz's major activity was raising her family, and when she and Larry felt they had been successful, Roz furthered her high school education and, as previously mentioned, attended the University of Manitoba as a mature student, graduating with a BA degree in 1974 and receiving a gold medal in Sociology, then a BA Honours in History and Sociology in 1976. She received her MA in 1978, and as of 1978 became a teaching assistant. She served on the Historic Sites Advisory Board of Manitoba (1982-1989) and became a highly regarded sociologist. Her Master's Thesis on "Jewish Radicalism in Winnipeg Between 1905-1920" has become a classic resource base for those interested in Winnipeg's secular left Jewish community.

She was, for decades, an activist on human rights, peace and social justice, having served as President of Winnipeg's UJPO as well as having been Executive Director of the Manitoba Multicultural Resource Centre and the President of the Jewish Heritage Centre of Canada, Past President of the Jewish Historical Society, a founding member of the Joseph Zuken Memorial Association and a recipient of the Joseph Zuken Memorial Award (2019) and the Citizen Activist Award. She was Winnipeg's member on the *Outlook Magazine* editorial collective and stated upon its demise that it was "a loss for Canadian Jewry. We lost an alternate voice. That voice was so essential, especially at a time when we have such deep divisions in the Jewish community over the Israeli-Palestinian issue."

I visited Winnipeg several times. On one visit, Roz, in her support of Yiddish culture, introduced me to Noah Whitman who broadcast a weekly Yiddish radio program. She had arranged for my guest appearance on it. He was one of the last Winnipeg WC members and I was unaware that most of his radio guests responded in English to his Yiddish questions, so he showed considerable surprise when I replied in (my then somewhat limited) Yiddish. None-the-less I was a guest on his radio program at least twice more on subsequent visits, each time putting in a plug for the UJPO. He also had a Yiddish TV broadcast on which I was a guest at least twice, the last time when he was 93! Roz arranged all my guest appearances on Whitman's programs.

Roz's parents and in-laws had Russian and Ukrainian roots as had the predecessors of many UJPO Winnipeggers and there was a collegial relationship between UJPO Winnipeg and the Ukrainian Labour Temple (the Winnipeg section of the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians - AUUC). Some of our Winnipeg members sang and may still sing in its choir located in the recently renovated centre which was also home to the participants of the 1919 Winnipeg strike. Roz always made sure to point it out to me as we passed it while driving to another destination. Its progressive programs are attended by some Winnipeg UJPO members.

Roz has authored numerous articles and two books on Jewish Radicalism in Winnipeg and has used her scholarship to preserve the Yiddish language and culture including publishing two books in English based on Yiddish letters from her father's family. Roz's lifetime of activism has included the preservation of the rich working class culture of North End Winnipeg.

UJPO Toronto last hosted Roz when she and Harriet Zaidman presented an excellent program on the centenary of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike, ably moderated by the late Leo Panich, during which two different presentation styles were demonstrated. The anticipated attendance was underestimated and additional seating was necessary.



Winnipeg Ukrainian Labour Temple

So, humbly and tearfully, I also say farewell Roz. There was so much more to this fantastic human being which is why I consider her to be the *real* WONDERWOMAN and how fortunate and privileged our organization was to have benefited from her intellect, wisdom and indefatigable skills. The current Winnipeg UJPO section has an executive whose well deserved and numerous attributes Roz was proud of and which is inspired by her example to carry on in her spirit. ***Long may her memory inspire us all!***

(ed. note -We are extremely grateful to and thank those who have helped in preparing this special tribute edition, namely - Sam Blatt, Ester Reiter, Harriet Zaidman, Mark Etkin, Carl Rosenberg, Ellen Karlinsky, Dora Rosenbaum, Jeanette Block, any I have missed, and Lyn Center who has produced numerous versions of the special issue till this final one while starting to compile the regular Spring issue of our newsletter. - *David Abramowitz*)

On February 19, UJPO Winnipeg will again present a series on Yiddish literature, a continuation of our previous successful lecture series

UJPO Winnipeg invites UJPO Canada to virtually attend our popular lecture series by:

Dr. Itay Zutra

I. L. Peretz Folk School Yiddish Teaching Fellow at the University of Manitoba

Series topic - **"YIDDISH INDIVIDUALISM: INTROSPECTIVISM, AMERICAN MODERNISM,**

AND THE INVENTION OF THE JEWISH SELF, 1920-1939"

Sunday, February 19: "Dos Pintele Yid": Jacob Glatstein, and A. Glantz-Leyeles and Jewish Ethnicity

Sunday, March 5: On Minor Poetry and Yiddish: Eliezer Blum-Alkvit, and Ruven Ludvig

Sunday, April 2: From Women of Valour to Circus Dames: Celia Dropkin, and Anna Margolin

Sunday, May 7: Back to the Tribe: Glatstein, and Y. L. Teller Facing Totalitarianism

Lectures via Zoom - Cost: series - \$75, or \$20 per individual lecture

To register: please contact Winnipeg UJPO Treasurer, Henry Shorr at hdshorr@shaw.ca

UNITED JEWISH PEOPLE'S ORDER

The United Jewish People's Order develops and perpetuates a progressive secular approach to social and cultural matters, our Jewish heritage, the Yiddish language and holiday and festival celebrations; we sponsor secular Jewish education, musical and cultural groups, concerts, lectures, public forums, and take part in social action and related community activities.

Opinions expressed in signed articles are the authors' and not necessarily those of UJPO.

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