

‘We are all grieving their loss’

7,000 gather to say a heartfelt goodbye to the Shermans

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It's not often that a crowd of 7,000 people are stone silent. Indeed, a pin dropping was about the only sound that could have been heard before and between speeches of high emotion, stories of dignity, charity and family, and even dashes of humour at the memorial service for Barry and Honey Sherman on Dec. 21.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne and Toronto Mayor John Tory sat with the Sherman family in the front rows of the cavernous International Centre, near Pearson International Airport in Mississauga, Ont. They were joined by thousands of friends, family and employees of Apotex, the generic drug company that Barry Sherman founded in 1974 and grew into a multi-billion-dollar international business.

Company employees wore blue T-shirts with the message, “We will continue your legacy,” written on the back.

Two coffins were prominently displayed at the front of the hall.

Eulogies for the couple, who were found dead in their Toronto home on Dec. 15, mixed stories of their well-known and extensive charitable work, leadership in the Jewish community and business acumen, with tales of their humanity and foibles.

Following readings of Psalm 23 and *Eli, Eli* by Holocaust-era partisan fighter Hannah Senesh, the Shermans' son, Jonathon Sherman, was joined on stage by his sisters, Lauren, Alexandra and Kaelen. Jonathon Sherman declared that his comments would be “honest and raw and from my heart.”

Choking back tears, he said the past few days had been “a shocking adjustment to our reality. Before we can begin to grieve as a family and recover in a proper Jewish manner, we've had to navigate through a terrifying maze of non-information and unfounded speculation, all while trying to support each other emotionally.”

He said that the past week had been “painful and bizarrely surreal,” and “would have extinguished my family without the love and outpouring of support from all directions.”

The last few days, he said, “have reminded us what it means to be a Jewish family: when someone tries to snuff you out or eliminate important parts of your family, we rally together and emerge stronger than ever. Our family legacy emerged like a phoenix from the ashes of the European Holocaust, shattered and broken only to rise and rebuild – and to thrive.”



Honey and Barry Sherman, “loved life so much. They loved to celebrate,” their son Jonathon said at the memorial service.

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Jonathon Sherman

Nothing, he stated, prepares someone “to sit down and write your parents’ eulogy.”

Jonathon Sherman recalled the zest with which his parents did everything, including large, boisterous family meals. The two parents and four kids made trips around the world as “a six-pack,” in which his mother would usually lose a litany of belongings. Matthew Schechtman related that Honey once gobbled a boxful of doughnuts and ordered him to get rid of the empty container, he recalled to chuckles.

“They were funny people and they loved sharing their enthusiasm for life,” said Jonathon. “Any event, be it a bar mitzvah or wedding or just a simple Passover dinner, was an occasion to celebrate with gusto. Our parents loved life so much. They loved to celebrate.”

Neither parent was perfect, “but together they were wholly balanced and exceptional,” he said.

Jonathon Sherman revealed that his father received news just weeks ago that he would be named to the Order of Canada. “To our family, you were always the



Honey, left, and Barry Sherman in 1992.

great Canadian,” he said.

He also announced the creation of the Honey and Barry Foundation of Giving, which the children have asked Honey Sherman's sister, Mary Schechtman, to oversee.

Jonathon Sherman pledged that the next generation would continue to build on his parents' legacy of “loving life, caring for others and knowing, as our parents always reminded us, that with great privilege comes enormous responsibility.”

Through tears, Mary Schechtman conceded to being “confused and dazed and really angry, and I'm afraid for the shock that's going to wear off and the reality that's going to set in.”

She recalled that her parents were Holocaust survivors (Honey Sherman was born in a displaced persons camp in Austria) and that the family was poor, but that the sisters didn't know it.

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‘To know her was to love her’



From left, Barry and Honey Sherman, Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat and Yohanna Arbib Perugia, Jerusalem Foundation president, at the Jerusalem Foundation of Canada gala in June.



From left, Shoel Silver, Honey Sherman and Henry Koschitzky attend a cocktail reception for the Jerusalem Foundation of Canada in 2015.

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This is truly a sad day... We will feel it for years to come.

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne

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“All I had was my mother, father and sister,” said Shechtman. “My sister wasn’t just my sister. She was my best friend. She was my other half. We completed each other’s sentences.”

Shechtman recalled that when she first met Barry Sherman, she thought: “My sister’s going out with *this*? What’s the deal?” But she soon discovered a “brilliant, wonderful, kind man,” and a role model.

Honey Sherman “just wanted to make everyone happy. She wanted to give everything to everybody,” said Shechtman.

On some shopping trips, Schechtman recalled, the sisters did more laughing than buying.

Eulogies were also delivered by Schecht-

man’s children – Matthew, Noah and Rebecca – from close friend Fred Waks and from Barry Sherman’s nephew, Ted Florence.

Joel Ulster, who said he was Barry Sherman’s oldest friend, described him as “the smartest person, but much more importantly, he had the biggest heart.”

He said the Shermans gave away millions publicly, but also helped people quietly and privately.

Apotex president and COO Jack Kay recalled how Barry Sherman lured him from Montreal to Toronto in 1982, to join Apotex as a vice-president. “We’ll have a lot of fun and we’ll make some money,” Kay recalled Barry Sherman promising him.

They ended up working long hours in

offices next to each other for the next 35 years and saw the company grow from 70 employees in Toronto, to some 6,000 across Canada.

“Barry was just a regular guy,” Kay said, his voice breaking several times. “He was kind of a teddy bear in real life, but with a mind like a steel trap and the stubbornness of a bull. He changed my life.”

Tory said he was “profoundly saddened” by the Shermans’ deaths. The couple, the mayor said, helped many people “who wouldn’t even know who they were or how they were helped by Honey and Barry: the frail senior at Baycrest, the newcomer using the JCC at the Sherman Campus, the student at York University or the University of Toronto, the people helped by the United Way or the United Jewish Appeal.”

Honey Sherman, Tory noted, was “filled with an almost supernatural sense of joy and fun and passion. For every bit of Barry’s reserve, at least in public, she had a special kind of energy that more than made up for that. She was on everybody’s go-to list because she was loveable and fun, but also because she got the job done.

“What a joy to know her. To know her was to love her.”

The Shermans “were great citizens of this city and country, and outstanding members of its Jewish community,” Tory said.

In her remarks, Wynne also said that thousands benefitted from the Shermans’ generosity, but never knew it. “I get the sense that’s exactly how the Shermans wanted it to be,” she said.

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From left, Barry and Honey Sherman, Fred Waks and Toronto Mayor John Tory at the Sherman Campus groundbreaking ceremony in October.



Jack Kay, left, and Barry Sherman



Barry, left, and Honey Sherman



Honey and Barry Sherman, centre, at the opening of York University's Sherman Health Sciences Research Centre. Also pictured from York, from left, Stan Shapson, Mamdouh Shoukri and Paul Marcus.



Honey Sherman

Wynne said that one of the tenets of Judaism that she finds beautiful is the concept of tzedakah.

"Whereas charity is understood as a voluntary act of kindness, tzedakah teaches that we have an obligation to help those in need," said Wynne. The Shermans "fulfilled this obligation over and over again, both publicly and privately."

The premier said she was inspired by the couple's "passion and their belief in the

power of people and in government to do good, to innovate, to do better, to move our society forward and to make the world a better place.

"This is truly a sad day. We are all grieving their loss. We will feel it for years to come."

Speaking on behalf of the federal government, Senator Linda Frum, a personal friend of the couple, said her friendship with Honey Sherman began during a UJA mission to Israel.

Frum was an anxious flier at the time and recalled how Honey Sherman reached out and silently took her hand on the flight.

"I preserve this image of Honey in my mind, because it is how I will always think of her: as a woman who, by natural inclination, extended an open hand of love, friendship and kindness out to the world," she said.

"It was easy to love Honey, and everybody did."

The Shermans "loved and respected each other deeply and their values effortlessly aligned," Frum added.

Just a few weeks ago, Frum awarded Honey Sherman a Senate medal in recognition of the couple's contributions to Canada. ■

Photos courtesy of Apotex, Baycrest Health Sciences, Ontario Jewish Archives, Blankenstein Family Heritage Centre and Fred Waks

EULOGY

'They were tragically taken from us'

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As news of their deaths surfaced, UJA Federation lowered the flags to half-mast on its Sherman Campus, named for these two remarkable people. It is a campus that, just a few weeks ago, was a place of joy and optimism at a groundbreaking ceremony. The creation of that campus, like so many other initiatives across this community, this city and this country, was only made possible by the incredible generosity of Honey and Barry.

The Lipa Green Centre, which sits on the Sherman Campus, always played an important role in Honey's life because, as a youngster, she knew the importance of having access to what are today known as UJA Federation partner agencies. In fact, Honey always credited JIAS, Jewish Immigrant Aid Service of Toronto, with helping her family immigrate to Canada following the Holocaust. Someone made sure her family had a place to go, to meet, to thrive. Now, she felt that she had the opportunity to continue this important

initiative and that it was her – and, as Jews, our responsibility – to do so.

In fact, these are the reasons I took on the task of chairing the re-development of the Sherman Campus. I was fortunate to immediately receive the support and encouragement of so many who played vital roles in this grand and invaluable project. We all agreed that we needed a new facility to replace the aging infrastructure, but most importantly, we also owed it to Honey and to Barry, to make sure that their dream of renewal came to fruition. I suppose it was my way of honouring them; of paying tribute for all they had done for so many. Doing it for them.

The Shermans exhibited and exercised exceptional compassion, vision, kindness and generosity that have directly and indirectly impacted and enriched the lives of so many. They were not yet done with their important philanthropic work. They had not stepped down, nor discarded the mantle of responsibility for others to as-



Fred Waks speaks at the funeral service for Barry and Honey Sherman on Dec. 21.

sume. They did not leave us a completed legacy to carry forward – they were tragically taken from us, their family, their friends and their community. It is a loss of epic proportions. We deeply mourn their passing. And we know that their extraordinary accomplishments

will live on, never to be forgotten. ■

Fred Waks is the president and CEO of Trinity Development Group. He is chair of the Sherman Campus leadership committee and a past chair of the Jewish Foundation of Toronto.