

# OUR COMMUNITY REMEMBERS EDWIN LAKIN

זכרו נו לברכה

May he be remembered as a blessing.

## Grandpa Eulogy

Nicole Lakin

I would like to share with you a bit about who Ed Lakin, the Grandpa was, on behalf of his 7 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren. We are all sure that Grandpa was the favorite and most prized role that he played in his long and impactful life.

Ask anyone, and they will tell you how he beamed when sharing stories of our accomplishments, how even in his later years and on his worst days, the one thing that could make him smile was a visit or a call from one of his grandchildren or great grandchildren.

No matter how busy Grandpa was, he never missed a Grandparent's day, never missed an opportunity to spend time with us, and always left us feeling heard and appreciated.

He always wanted to hear about what was going on in our lives. And if we ever made the mistake of thinking that he wasn't listening or paying attention, he was sure to remind us with his quick wit and warm yet mischievous smile that he didn't miss a thing.

If he wasn't ready with a clever one-liner, or found himself unable to find the right words, Grandpa often showed his kindness and humor with a: "Sure, if that's what you want," "Whatever you like," or if all else failed, enough of a laugh to make his cheeks rosy and to warm your heart enough that the topic of conversation no longer mattered. He had heard you.

There is something truly inspiring about the way that Grandpa heard people. He was always able to show up when you need him, and to say just enough to ease your pain.

Emily shared a story about a time when her beloved dog Casey was bit by a poisonous snake. Everyone but Grandpa was out of town, and Emily was beside herself in the waiting room at the vet's office. Grandpa showed up and sat with Emily, patiently waiting on word of how Casey was doing. When the vet came out and told Emily that she would have to drive across town to get anti-venom from the hospital, Grandpa insisted on riding with her. He was a calm but quiet presence, as always. At the end of a long day and a long ordeal, Grandpa turned to Emily and said: "You're an okay driver."

That may sound like nothing, not even a real compliment, but to his grandchildren, that was his way.

"You're ok, kid." That is what he told us more times than we can recount.

High school graduation: "You're ok, kid."

New job: "You're ok, kid."

New haircut: "You're ok, kid."

Those three words meant the world to us. They were so him. Not over the top, but said in the right way, and coming from him they were a pure and simple expression of: I hear you; I love you.

Grandpa was quiet but kind, serious but sweet, strong but mild, and patient but firm. He was small in stature, but could thoroughly intimidate with just a stern look. I don't think that many of us realized until much later in life just how impressive this was. He knew how to be larger than life when he needed to be, and to melt at the hug of his grandchildren a moment later.

And we tested this skill over and over. Riesa, for example, remembers one time while Grandma and mom were hosting an event at our home. Grandpa's job was to watch her and keep her quiet. At some point, Grandpa took Riesa downstairs to get some food to take back upstairs away from the guests. As they were heading back upstairs, he suggested that Riesa give him her drink so that she didn't spill it. Riesa resisted his plea, and taunted him subtly with drink in hand. He gave her a stern look, the one that worked on just about everyone. But Riesa saw it as a dare, an invitation if you will. She poured her entire drink on the floor, and poor Grandpa stared at her completely horrified. As I said, we tested him. Some of us more than others. But his love never wavered.

Over the last few days, I have had some time to reflect on loss and grief. And I realized that there are few people who knew loss like my grandfather. When we lost my grandmother 6 years ago, we all worried that Grandpa's grief and sadness would be too much for him to bear. Instead, grandpa showed us how you live with loss the way that he had been showing us our whole lives.

The author Anne Lamott writes: "[Someday] You will lose someone you can't live without, and your heart will be badly broken, and the bad news is that you never completely get over the loss of your beloved. But this is also the good news. They live forever in your broken heart that doesn't seal back up. And you come through. It's like having a broken leg that never heals perfectly—that still hurts when the weather gets cold, but you learn to dance with the limp."

My grandfather perfected this dance long before his grandchildren came into his life. He moved through the world with a warmth and caring grace that can only come from living through loss and carrying the love and memories of your beloved with you each and every day.

Some of my favorite memories of Grandpa came not long after our Grandmother passed away, listening to him recount stories as we sorted through old photos that documented his full and colorful life. Stories that he had never even told my dad before, stories that invoked tears of joy and of sadness. During that time, he began to talk more of memories growing up in New York with his sisters, of his first wife Reba, of the early days with Grandma and four young children. As we all mourned, he grew stronger and gave us all strength in the way that he accepted the loss and the heartbreak, and allowed his loved ones to live forever within his broken heart.

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Grandpa was larger than life in his own quiet way because he carried with him the love, laughter, pain and sorrow of all those that he loved.

Throughout his life, Grandpa showed us an example of how to live with loss.

He danced his way through life insisting on a dessert to end every meal, traveling the world with my grandmother and at times with each of us, being an active member of his community, giving back to those in need, encouraging us to pursue our passions, reminding us of the importance of family and of tradition.

Grandpa took pride in his many accomplishments, but more so in how they enabled him to impact others. He was generous and wise. He was thoughtful and had conviction.

As his grandchildren, we have lost someone that we cannot live without. Our hearts are broken, and there is a hole left behind that won't seal back up. We will never completely get over this loss. But we will learn to dance with a limp. We will follow in his footsteps and live by his examples. We will keep close to us the cherished memories, and fight to live a life with joy, compassion, and an appreciation of the small victories that life offers us each and every day.



I'm one of the many people around Albright and Reading who think of Edwin and Alma, his late wife, rather than just Edwin. Their fortitude and kindness came as a couple. When I first met them, it was at an Albright trustee gathering. I was still a "newbie" on campus (not yet tenured), but as faculty made the rounds and met the trustees, a couple came up to me and very kindly asked what I did, etc... Whenever I tried to steer the conversation back to them, they immediately redirected and asked about my newly introduced course on the history of the Holocaust (It was around 2002; I had been teaching it since 1997).

The discussion concluded with "teach it so all will know" and they thanked me for taking it on. Only later did I find out about their own personal and tragic experience in the Holocaust. They both chose to endow the college with funds to support Holocaust Studies, and that is one reason why I think of "Edwin and Alma" rather than one or the other alone.

Each as an individual came across as enthusiastic, but their fortitude and selflessness as a couple projected kindness and concern for others, not sadness about what they had undergone. This is what made each one a personality whom you respected and wish you could know better, to learn and appreciate.

Sincerely,  
Guillaume de Syon  
Professor of History Albright College



Of all the numerous tributes to the memory of Ed Lakin, there are two qualities that strike me the most:

One is his sheer decency. In this cynical world, he was that rare individual who treated all people with respect and dignity. It did not matter where you came from; it did not matter what position you held in society. When you spoke to Ed, he would give you his undivided attention.

The second quality was his integrity. When you were with Ed, you knew that you could trust him with no matter what. He lived that life of decency and integrity, and all who were touched by him, went away with the feeling, as the poet Robert Browning said: "God is in His Heaven; and All's Right with the World".

L. A. Rotenberg, MD

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As the fundraising and event planner at the Federation for many years, I had the distinct pleasure of working with both Alma and Ed Lakin. They were both truly the most gracious, kind, and delightfully charming people aside from the extent of their overwhelming generosity. Alma would call almost every day to find out what I knew about what was going on and to see if there was anything she needed to know and where she could be of help if necessary, much of which remained totally unknown to anyone. Ed was her quiet and willing accomplice. As a couple they hosted many events in their home to benefit the community. They always accepted a request.

At one leadership gifts event, I recall listening in on a conversation Ed was having during the evening with a guest who was trying to make small talk and asked what Ed did for a living. He replied that he was an accountant. The guest then asked how he was able to climb the ranks of an organization as important as Boscov's and he smiled and indicated that promotion was on hard work and merit.

Prior to a trip to Israel with Alma, I mentioned to Ed jokingly that he should watch that Alma didn't contribute the Boscov's East store to Israel. He smiled and assured me he would have to work diligently to make sure but it would definitely be a problem if she ever got the idea! Our community is blessed to have had both Ed and Alma in our midst.

Barbara Nazimov

Al Boscov set his limitations somewhere between ‘sky high’ and higher. It was his friend, brother-in-law and partner, Ed Lakin, who had the job of letting him know just how high the “sky” really was. Together, they went on to build the largest privately owned department store chain in the country, Boscov’s Department Stores, Inc. Sadly, Ed Lakin, the surviving member of the duo, lost his battle with Parkinson’s Disease earlier this month.

For those of you who knew or worked with Ed, you are aware of just how well he tended to the financial business of retailing. If you visited his office, you would find him hidden behind mountains of reports, meticulously reviewing the numbers, department by department, class by class. Ed was the numbers guy, the “cruncher.” He was brilliant, unassuming and reserved with twinkling blue eyes and a dry wit. He knew his role in the company and he did it to perfection. He entertained no fools having heard every excuse known to a company president but also took time to celebrate life’s successes not only with family and friends but also with those who worked with him on the retail front. Ed was a mensch.

Ed adored his second wife, Alma, having lost his first wife, Reba, to cancer shortly after their children were born. He and Alma made quite a team. On the home front, they raised a beautiful and blended family. Together, they were caring and philanthropic; community-builders known for their charitable endeavors in the Jewish community - locally, nationally and in Israel. They served on boards, giving of their time and resources. Their philanthropic work extended to the Berks County community broadly and generously.

Nothing made Ed smile or his eyes twinkle more than the mention of his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. He was proud of them and encouraged their individual aspirations and accomplishments.

Business was rarely ‘as usual’ at Boscov’s, much to Al and Ed’s credit. Opposites attract and also work well in retail as exemplified by these two incredible men. If there is a department store in heaven, I am certain there will be more in the very near future.

Tammy Mitgang



Tribute to Ed Lakin

Building a championship sports team means putting together a great offense and an even better defense! And, true... in business as well! Albert represented the “offense” for the Boscov’s Chain success, but it was Ed who led the All-important defense... in this case “The Finance.” Together they were the Super Bowl Champions of the Retail World!

Howard Hafetz

Our entire community was blessed to have Ed participate in so many different organizations to improve the human conditions

C Harold Cohn,M D



When Ed and Albert were building the Boscov's chain, they never had the luxury of sitting behind desks calling the shots. They were constantly on the sales floor and in the warehouse, working alongside their employees setting the tone for how business got done.

Ed brought that same mentality to his community and philanthropic efforts. In addition to their incredible generosity as donors, Ed and Alma were always the first to volunteer to "do the work" to advance the causes they supported. I learned from this that being a true leader requires giving your time, treasure and talent.

Ed and his peers — including my father, Bernie — established Reading as a highly respected, influential Jewish community that had impact on a national level despite its small size. Likewise, Ed was equally responsible for helping to put our Jewish community in a position of local prominence during a time when religious tolerance was not a given.

I will miss Ed's candor, his morality and his wisdom.

Michael Fromm, CEO  
Fromm Electric Supply

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This community has lost one of the most ardent supporters and philanthropists. I had the privilege to know Ed Lakin both professionally and personally. To many, Ed seemed quiet and reserved, but to those of us who knew him, he was much more. He was kind, generous, and knowledgeable and helped many in the community without asking for anything in return. His legacy will live on in the many Jewish and non-Jewish endeavors in which he was involved.

Alvin Katz



When Ed Lakin passed away, we lost a wonderful man, a community leader and a symbol of what is often called "The Greatest Generation."

For anyone who had the pleasure of knowing Ed, you knew an extraordinarily intelligent and insightful man who had a ready smile and an ever present twinkle in his eye. While I don't recall Ed as a joke teller, he had a marvelous sense of humor with a hearty laugh who enjoyed witty repartee and good natured ribbing. With Ed's passing, I lost one of the best audiences I ever had.

As a leader, Ed was someone who first listened to everyone's thoughts before he expressed his views. Since he always kept his focus on the most important elements of any issue, his opinions almost always prevailed. And he volunteered his leadership to both the Jewish Community and non-Jewish community.

Ed was able to focus on the big picture because he lived through and, most importantly, never forgot the lessons of historical events such as The Great Depression, World War II, The Holocaust, the Founding of the State of Israel, all its related history and much more. There was no important event in the Reading Jewish Community that Ed & Alma did not support or likely play a leadership role. In fact, when they were involved, it MADE the event important. Two that stand out for me are the fundraiser they hosted for the Holocaust Museum in Washington. That we raised the most money per capita in the United States is a story that has been retold.

Less remembered but of great personal importance to me is Ed & Alma's early and enthusiastic support for the Village Of Yemin Orde which provides a safe nurturing environment for Jewish orphans from around the world. Once again they hosted a dinner at their home for Chaim Peri, Director of Yemin Orde, where the leaders of our community not only contributed to Yemin Orde but agreed to make it an ongoing project of our Federation. Ed continued to support Yemin Orde for the next 17 years.

Ed along with Alma were role models from The Greatest Generation. Dena & I were proud to know them, our lives were enhanced by them and along with the entire community, we will miss them deeply.

Vic Hammel

