

Hespet (eulogy) at the funeral of Dora Cramer, August 2004

– written by Alexander Gordon

We are gathered together to honour and pay tribute to *Devorah Bas Yehuda*, Dora Cramer nee Karbatznick. A daughter, a sister, an aunt, a wife, mother, grandmother, and a great-grandmother.

On the Shabbat just past, we read *Birchat Hachodesh*, the prayer for the New Month, Ellul, which starts tonight. In it we pray for a long life, a life of peace, of goodness, of blessing, a life of fear of heaven and fear of sin, a life free of shame and humiliation, a life of wealth and honour, a life filled with the love of Torah and fear of heaven, a life in which our heartfelt requests should be fulfilled for the good.

Such was the life of Dora Cramer, who has been taken from us aged 96.

Her name, as we know, was derived from Devorah, the prophetess and judge mentioned in the Tanach. The Midrash in *Tanna de Bei Eliyyahu*, explains that Devorah was a humble woman who was raised to honoured station in life because she made the wicks for the candles in the sanctuary in Shiloh. It suggests that she performed this task without prompting and without any thought of personal reward. This is a fitting metaphor for Dora Cramer's life, which was similarly so full of providing for others, without thought for herself.

The fourth child born into a still growing East End family, Dora was fond of recalling her childhood days growing up with her parents and her 7 brothers and sisters in a warm, loving and generous household, qualities that were instilled in her from an early age and which she herself displayed throughout her life. She left school early and turned immediately to the care of her mother, who relied upon her for daily help and attention.

Through her older sister Bessie, she met Sam Cramer at a wedding and they were married in 1934. They went into business together, working alongside each other in pubs for 35 years, first in Central Street and then later in Tufnell Park.

The famous tract from Proverbs which starts '*Eshes Chayil Mi Yimsa*' tells us of a woman of worth, and how her husband wants for nothing. Dora was the very model of the *Eshes Chayil*. A woman devoted to her husband and their home in every conceivable way. A woman whose *chesed*, lovingkindness, was the very essence of her personality, but who showed strength of character when needed.

During the war Dora had to suffer the heartbreak of evacuating her two young daughters Beryl and Lilian, aged three years and six months respectively. As in all in her life, Dora faced the difficulties of the war years, and of the Blitz, with customary stoicism.

Following the war, her daughters returned and Dora saw to it that they were raised in a traditional Jewish home and understood the value and importance of their Judaism.

Despite working in a tough and demanding business, Dora retained her essential gentleness. Such was Dora's sensitivity that when her own sister Miriam became widowed, she and Sam gave up their own business to go and work with her, in order to support and ensure her welfare.

Even in her retirement she did not rest. Her kitchen became her workplace as she put her energies to baking and cooking the great delicacies of the Jewish home with strict adherence to the laws of kashrut. She prepared everything with meticulous accuracy – she took great pains to ensure that her kneidlach were of equal size and proportion. Her biscuits: schtrudel, mandelbrot, kichels were baked as if meeting strict production line quotas. No visitor to her home ever left without a Tupperware box full of her home-made biscuits. Hers was the last generation that koshered their chickens, which she did every week using a veikschaft, a koshering board made by her own husband.

It was during these years that she, together with Sam, undertook the enormous responsibility of looking after their youngest grandchild Alexander, who lived with them, and who, along with their other grandchildren Helena, Simon and Leslie, was the recipient of unbounded love, and gentle guidance.

A physically slight woman in her later years, Dora possessed an iron will, powered by her absolute belief in God. This became evident following an accident in 1985 when she was very badly burnt. Though medical staff predicted the worst, her determination to be at her granddaughter's wedding six months later saw her through against all odds.

Indeed, she had the zechut, the merit to be under the Chupah to see all of her grandchildren marry: Helena to Philip, Simon to Louisa, Leslie to Sharon and Alexander to Laura. She also had the blessing of seeing seven great-grandchildren – Shoshi, Nikki, Daniel, Georgia, Jasmine, Joel and Estie – all of whom brought her enormous joy and pride. To all of them she gave her customary love and attention without making any demands.

Indeed, for Dora 'giving' was a state of mind, a way of life, it was the core of her *neshama*, her soul. To think only of others, not for herself in anyway came naturally to her, and her greatest pleasure came in making others happy. She was blessed with a particular sweetness of character, a grace, a sensitivity, and a spiritual beauty that was recognised by all who knew her. Dora never had a bad word to say about anybody, and a cross word never passed her lips – she was a woman who saw the best in people, and they responded by taking her to their hearts. Her brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, and friends whom she loved, all saw this in her and loved her in return. The number of visitors to her in her later years, beyond her immediate family, was testimony to the high esteem in which she was held.

Her greatest love though was reserved for her immediate family and in particular her husband to whom she was married for 67 years. Theirs was a model home of Shalom Bayit, of working together and living together in harmony. Her Shabbos table, surrounded by her family, passing on her love of *Yiddishkeit* and the traditions of the Ashkenazi kitchen, was the epitome of her devotion to the Almighty. She delighted in her daughters Beryl and Lilian, and in her sons-in-law Martin and Joe and their children, her grandchildren. To all of them she was a figure of love, wisdom, and blessing.

However, despite the continued love of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and the enormous love and attention given to her by her children and son-in-law, the effort of living without her beloved husband, Sam, whom she lost in 2001, became too much for her. The Almighty in His infinite mercy has now reunited the two of them in *Olam Haba*.

May He gather her up and place her close to His right side, the place held open for only the most righteous amongst His people, for that is a reward she so richly deserves for a life lived in service of Hashem, and partnership with her husband. It is a legacy of love and devotion which is treasured by her family, and her memory will always be for a blessing.