

*Rachel Cohen Horowitz died on March 1, 2000 at the age of 70 at her home in Sausalito after a short illness. She was born on January 8, 1930 in Brooklyn, New York and was the youngest of seven children. In 1953, she moved to Los Angeles where she married Abe Horowitz. She was active in Hadassah and was a volunteer at the Girls and Boys Club. Later in life, she relocated to the Bay Area to be near her family. Mrs. Horowitz is survived by her husband Abe, and two sons, Ira, married to Ann and George, married to Sarah and four grandchildren. She is further survived by nieces, nephews, other relatives and many friends. In addition to her parents, she was preceded in death by her siblings. Her funeral was on March 3 at Sinai Memorial.*

This obituary contains only the bare details of this woman's life. It does not tell us the "midrash" of her life nor does it tell us how the mourners in her life felt about such a loss. Life and loss cannot be contained by a brief obituary. Stories and in-depth descriptions don't lend themselves to such a terse format.

It is striking to note that Biblical texts have much in common with obituaries. We often encounter brief and few details, leaving us not much to glean about the feelings of the characters we find in the text. But yet it is in the details where we find what we need to make meaning out of a person's life. We seek out detailed *midrash* so that we can better understand text and better understand a human life.

On this second day of Shavuot, we read the book of Ruth. What does Ruth have to teach us about loss? Within three verses, we read the following narrative:

*Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth, and they lived there for about ten years. Then those two – Mahlon and Chilion-also died; so the woman was left without her two sons and without her husband. (1:3-5)*

In three verses, three men die. In so few words, Naomi loses her husband and her two sons. Where is the *midrash* on how these women felt about their loss?

Surprisingly, there is very little *midrash* on this exact question. However, the poem "Naomi: Loss" by Kathryn Hellerstein, from Reading Ruth: Contemporary Women Reclaim a Sacred Story, edited by Judith A. Kates and Gail Twersky Reimer (1994), provides a beautiful commentary on loss of life in the Book of Ruth:

*Suddenly, they were not "his sons" but "my sons",  
and I sat at the edge of this field sprouting green,  
far from the tawny hills the thirsty stubble  
we'd decided to leave just weeks before  
for the sake of our hungry boys, wondering  
why he had left me so soon. We thought the hunger*

*there would kill us. What made him die, here,  
where we have more than enough? They saw me weeping  
in the morning mist – drops bitter on my tongue,  
on the grass blades. They sat by me on the stone wall,  
one on each side, dear boys and they cried, too.*

*We made a new home, anyway. We worked hard in the fields,  
we made do without all the comforts of Bethlehem, without  
their father, without my Elimelech. I came not to mind  
sleeping alone. Years passed. The boys grew up.  
They started looking at the neighbors' daughters.  
I wasn't crazy about them marrying  
local girls, but I couldn't afford even  
a messenger to Elimelech's relatives back home.  
They chose well, Chilion his Orpah and Mahlon his Ruth,  
and their families made them sumptuous weddings, months ago.  
I'm glad to have the young women around to help  
with the planting and the cooking. But now,  
just as suddenly as their father, both boys are gone!  
How can such young brides be widows? They weep into their soup.  
Their tears bleach the laundry and moisten the muddy paths.  
Once again, seedlings come up, pushing aside the clods,  
pale leaflets furled in the fog. The crop promises*

*to be good this year. But I will have no grandchildren.*

On this holiday of Shavuot, we read the book of Ruth and we recite *Yizkor*. *Yizkor* is a time for recognizing our own *midrash* of what it means to lose someone we love and what it means to remember them. The first chapter of the book of Ruth and this modern midrashic poem teach us to tell our story, even if it doesn't exist in the text of the obituary – it may only exist in our hearts, in the form of *midrash*. We need to ask the question, "What do our stories have teach us? Our own experiences of loss can remind us to treasure the people we have in our lives now. If they are stories of joy – of times shared together, we need to continue to share these stories with those we love – this is how we honor the *midrash* of the lives of those who have gone before us. If they are stories of regret, of lost opportunity, we should examine our relationships now to see if we can avoid the type of loss now. Our lives and the lives of those we loved are so much more than an obituary. Tell their stories, tell your stories and you have the *midrash* of life.