

IN MEMORIAM  
JOY ZITA ROCHWARGER BALSAM  
YOCHED V'ZLATA BAT FULYA FEIGE V'YITZCHAK TUVYA



February 2, 1967-May 21, 2004  
22 Shevat 5727-1 Sivan 5764

## Eulogy delivered by Joy's husband, Jerry Balsam, on May 21, 2004 at Fifth Avenue Synagogue, New York City

As we gather on this literally dreadful day — a day we have dreaded — I lack the theological deftness to justify the unbearable. I am shattered with grief. Joy, with an upper-case “J” and a lower-case “j,” came into my life unexpectedly, and all too soon she is gone.

I want to reminisce about the Joy we love and focus, insofar as I can, on the good times. We will do plenty of weeping today, and I'd like us to smile a bit, too.

The first time I called Joy's phone, in October 2002, she screened the call and didn't pick up. Afterward, I later learned, she called her friend Leah Schlager and said: *I just got a call from this weird guy. Do I have to go out with him?* Somehow, Leah talked her into it. My diary shows that we went out for the first time on October 23, 2002, for dinner at one of her favorite restaurants, Estihana. By November 17, we were having dinner at Haikara, together with Leah and Herbie Schlager. Joy was ready to have her friends check me out. When I had to prepare these remarks, I enjoyed looking back at the diary I kept, a history of how Joy and I fell in love. I can remember the elation I felt as I realized that I had found my soulmate. Joy and I became engaged on our 25<sup>th</sup> date, on December 19, the birthday of her father. On March 13, 2003, a bit less than five months after we met, we were married in Jerusalem. One of the small consolations available on a day like this is the memory of our love, as it grew and matured. The physical presence of my beloved can be taken away; the love itself endures forever, in me, and in the people who knew Joy and me. Feeling and expressing that love made me a better person, and for that I am grateful.

We were as happy as could be during the early period of our marriage. We traveled to Israel, Maui, Newport, Cape Cod, and the San Francisco Bay Area. As we got to know each other better, our love only deepened. Just before Sukkot in the fall of 2003, when we had been married for not quite seven months, we found out that Joy was suffering from a highly fatal form of cancer, metastatic melanoma. Notwithstanding the terrible news, we continued to have good times, especially after Joy initially had such a good response to treatment — a response that surprised her doctors but not Joy. We celebrated the upswing by returning to Hawaii, this time the island of Kauai, and then to Israel for our anniversary. Shortly after those two trips, on Pesach of 2004, the news turned bleak again. We learned that the cancer had returned in an even more ominous form. Even after that, Joy seized as much life as she could during the time that was left to her. Until the last week, when the disease tightened its grip and overcame even Joy's indomitable will, her refrain was *I'm not going anywhere* or *You'll see, we'll have a baby together*.

That she would seize life was typical of the woman I loved, who relished all the blessings around her. Joy was a great friend to so many people all around the world. She never went far without her cell phone, and her friends were always calling or sending an e-mail. Perhaps the most important component of marriage is friendship, and Joy made an ideal friend and companion.

She had an oversized capacity for love, of which I was the primary beneficiary. From the day we were married, her main priority was to make me happy, and in that she succeeded in spades. We could talk for hours. We laughed together all the time. Joy loved the silly moments we shared. For example, in an update of the game “Punch Buggy,” whenever she spotted a PT Cruiser on the road before I did, she was allowed to punch me. Those of you who have seen the digital photos we took on various vacations and other occasions will remember her impish smile and the poses she took for the camera. Though Joy put in a full day at work, and then some, she felt obligated to cook dinner for me night after night. She worried about me constantly. When we first learned she was ill, she begged our friends Lauren and Ezra Merkin, who stood by us in exemplary fashion throughout the ordeal, to take care of me if she were not to survive. It was and is heart-breaking — and, yet, utterly characteristic — that she worried more about me than herself.

Joy was highly intelligent, not only as measured in secular academic achievement but in her curiosity about many topics, her enjoyment of a good novel, and especially her devotion to the study and teaching of Torah. She stayed in touch with her students at Midreshet Moriah and savored their successes.

She was dedicated to the betterment of the world. Her devotion spread from those closest to home, as evidenced by her great concern for me, to her parents and siblings and their families, to the Jewish community at large. She certainly made me a better person. Joy developed an extraordinarily loving relationship with my parents and sisters, thereby bringing me closer to my own family. She was very close to her own parents and her five brothers and sisters and their families. In Joy’s world, you would drop whatever you were doing to help family, and she did so all the time. I need not tell you at length how much Joy did for the Jewish community of Poland, or how dedicated she was to the State of Israel — where she lived for 12 years and to which we had planned to return — and its people. Her relationship with the State of Israel can be captured in one fact: wherever she was, she kept her watch set to Israel time.

Joy was a tiny girl, barely 5 feet tall, and fanatical about keeping her weight down. But her spirit was anything but small. You could never lose Joy in the shuffle, because her presence was always known. She was a bundle of energy, certainly before she took ill and even afterward. She loved to go for long power walks and tried to drag me along; she loved to swim. We did share one athletic passion, which was tennis. Joy would wear a blue skirt that covered her knees, handed down by her friend Zehava Witkin, a T-shirt, and a backward baseball cap. She’d stand at the baseline and swing away, hitting everything hard and flat, with only one hand on the backhand. We spent many a happy hour swatting tennis balls at each other.

When you heard Joy’s voice, there was no mistaking who was talking. I can hear some of her favorite expressions now. When she didn’t like something, it was *horrible* — *horri-BULL*. When she found something frustrating, she had her sing-song *oy oy oy*. For something amazing, she would exclaim *Oh . . . my . . . gosh*. She loved to tease me affectionately, saying: *You’re such a nerd*. Of course, she was right. How many times did I hear her say *I’m not worried* or *It’s not a problem*? So many, and not enough. And the best thing I ever heard from Joy, and was fortunate enough to hear repeatedly, was a sincere *I love you*.

It is customary, not to say trite, to note of those who succumb to cancer that they battled the disease courageously. And still I must say this of Joy, who fought with everything she had, with the caring assistance of her compassionate doctors and nurses. They, like everyone she met, became her friends, and they rooted for her as we all did. Joy nearly defied the odds and escaped with her life, till the disease returned and had the final say. Still, she did not fall into self-pity. Her focus was on doing everything she could to live and to avoid letting me down, if you can believe that.

Joy would not have been the person she was without the love, guidance, and support of her family: her parents and her siblings, Cheryl and Yechiel, Michelle and Laurence, Geoff and Mimi, Cindy and Yehoshua, and Jonathan and Mandy. The Rochwargers are an extraordinarily close family, and they accepted me into their midst graciously and happily. They also stood by us during Joy's illness with a level of concern and self-sacrifice that no one should ever have to display. Whenever I thanked them for their super-human efforts, they didn't even understand what they had done that was so special. As a natural outgrowth of her relationship with her siblings, Joy was a superb aunt. She loved her many nieces and nephews, and they loved her. That she was so good with them was an indication of how well suited she would have been to care for children of her own, which she so wanted to do.

I said at the outset that I was not equipped, either by professional training or disposition, to deal with the theological implications of this awful day. On the Shabbat after Joy and I found out that the cancer had returned and spread to her brain, we read the Torah portion concerning the deaths of Nadav and Avihu. Faced with the tragedy of his sons dying all too young, Aharon was silent. Silence may be all we have. I can say this much, however. If the divine decree, for reasons that we will never understand, was to take Joy from us so soon, then it was my privilege — a bitter privilege, but a privilege all the same — to provide her with aid and comfort in her final days. If I brought happiness into her life before and after her diagnosis, I find this, too, is a consolation, small though it may be in the face of such tragedy.

Joy, if I ever failed to measure up to the standard of the husband you deserved, if I ever hurt or insulted you, I ask your forgiveness now. Go in peace, my sweet angel.

## Eulogy delivered by Joy's sister Michelle Berkowitz on the evening of May 23, 2004 at Eretz Hachaim Cemetery, Beit Shemesh

Strong and smart, deeply sensitive and playful what a powerful combination. These are the qualities I loved most about her. From the earliest times in our lives I remember us always running. In the beginning, most of the time we spent running away from each other. And when we figured it out, that together, we made a much stronger team, we ran towards each other. There we stayed arm in arm, head to head, spirit and soul.

When we were young in school most of the students admired her and kept at a safe distance from her. Even most of her teachers were afraid of her. When they figured out that she was smarter than them, they would suspend her from school from sheer embarrassment that she could run logical arguments around them.

We were the first two girls on the YIQV baseball team. She quickly was accepted as pitcher and a "sure hitter" and quietly explained to me that 88 was not an acceptable number to put on my uniform. Later my father took much pride in teaching her other sports and with his help she quickly mastered. Riding her bike head first in the one way alley in the back of our Queens house, a starting point guard on the Central basket ball team, and an award winning tennis player which later in life she learned was another hobby she and Jerry shared.

Joy and I often remarked that you, mommy and daddy, had done something right to have 6 kids who don't drink, do drugs, or have left the fold. You laid the foundation for Joy to accomplish all she did and Joy would want you to look around and take some comfort in the fact of how many people love and respect her.

She was orderly and clean, read books quicker than a wink, and spent many hours alone in our room. She liked to go to sleep early and I liked to go to sleep late. She liked to read herself to sleep and I liked to chat with my friends. She liked total darkness and I wanted the hall light on. She liked to hang her clothes up neatly in the closet and I liked to throw my stuff on the floor. We would fight all the time and my mother would try to quiet us down as my mother shook her head and said, "One day you will look back on this and laugh because you will be the best of friends."

Things quickly changed between us as she went off to Israel and something new and beautiful began to grow inside her. She learned to direct all of her energy and spirit into her observing Judaism and began her search of self that lasted until her very last minutes. She searched for the truth in her family, in her friends, in her teachers, in her studies, and most of all in God. She befriended giants in Torah like Nechama Lebowitz, Rabbi Aberman, Dr. Leiman, Aviva Zornberg, Dr. David Applebaum and Dr. Bryna Levy who were quick to catch on to her fire and became close confidants with them as well as sharing with them a Chaveirah-talmidah relationship. In the list of heebie geebies that Joy and I collected, stands her relationship with David T'zal who have been connected at the hip both in life and death. She requested from him to be Jerry's and her mesader kedushin because of their closeness and his unique understanding of herself. Joy also firmly be-

lieved that David was her Maleatz Yosher, and if he had any say in her short termed suffering than we owe him even more.

While many students can boast of their sharing Nechama Leibowitz's learning table and files few can also tell the stories of spending every Friday morning with her for years discussing much mundane things like, what it is like to eat this triangle food everyone calls pizza and Nechama Leibowitz asked Joy to accompany her to the pizza store to taste it for the first time. "Nechama", as Joy fondly referred to her, would beg Joy to take her to her to corner Lotto tachana to see if she would get lucky, before returning home from their pre-Shabbat shopping spree.

Joy had a way of attracting people. It was not a mystery on how she did it. Her giggle and inviting smile lit you up and warmed you into a safe place for you to enjoy and share with her. She treated my children as though they were her children and she had a way of making them and all of her nieces and nephews feel special. Amitai would come in laughing and excited to be swept up into Joy's great big bear hug. She always knew how to talk to Ariella and believed that Ariella looked and behaved just like her. Ayelet was someone to tease and laugh with and Joy enjoyed hearing her 4 year old logic and questions. Yair will miss having such a strong personality in his life. They already miss her and with God's help Laurence and I will be strong enough to help them through this loss.

She took her teaching very seriously. She always said she had enough experience to know what *not* to do. This also, by the way, was the basis for her material she used when she starred as Mrs. Hannigin in the camp, end of the year play. She regarded each student as her child and cared for them and spoke with them in a way most of them had not experienced before her. She decorated her office reflecting her style – A collection of Sifrei Kodesh and books, some of them being The Rambam and the Ramban, Rav Hirsh, and her latest passion the *Pachad Yitzchak*, books and novels of interest and self-help materials. She read them all and referred to them accordingly. At a closer look, one could see the delight she took in caring for her tropical fish, her gadgets and toys of all shapes, colors, and sizes and lent them to my kids for a time. I wonder if her students ever figured out that they were around for her enjoyment as well as theirs? Her lesson plans were always built in a way to entice the student to think about the thoughtful material that was placed before them. She was interested in what they had to say and she was pleased when someone came up with a novel idea or an honest critic. She was about being "real." That is the way she lived her life and expected from others to relate to her in the same way. She played hard and studied Torah seriously, and at a very young age it became apparent that she was a talmidah chachama in her own right. She figured every minute of every day was precious and wouldn't waste her time with shtuyot. It was at this time when she taught at Midreshet Moriah that she made some of her closest and dearest friends like Ruthie, Achie, and the Gershinsky clan and Vicki and Rabbi Burglass. Joy constantly spent time with you and needed you in her life even after she moved to N.Y. You constantly gave her support and the chance to fight for her life. We consider you as part of our family and words can not express how much we know Joy loved you and you loved her.

As Joy and I grew up, we learned to laugh at our serious attitudes and about how we saw life and the people in it. We would analyze our relationships and our Judaism till there was nothing left to say and then come back to it an hour later with a new thought or

an old one that needed to be said again. For example, Joy would be leaning into my ear right now and giggly tell me that 75% of the men here, she dated. Then, she would look warmly at Jerry and smile and say, “You know Michelle, I thank God I found him. Where would I be today with out him?”

She was a woman with optimism, hope, and great dreams in her heart. When she was single, she would get quickly annoyed at a comment made to her or about her about her being too choosy and too pickey. She knew she was waiting for the “right one” and when she realized that Jerry was the one, she quickly got used to the idea and planned her life accordingly. Jerry, you were able to bring her Joy in a way that all of her family, friends, and life couldn’t. She admired you and your work, and your need for independence because she shared these values as well. She loved you the way you came to her and felt peaceful that you did not want to change her. She knew you admired her and respected her dedication to Avi Chai, Arthur, Mem, Ezra and Laura and her relationship with the people in the Poland community. She especially loved that you did not like her wearing make-up because you only wanted to see the *real her*. Honestly Jerry, in the beginning I was jealous of the loved you shared and learned to move over and fill my place. I have grown to accept and admire the way she loved you and watch you give her your love and take care of her before and during her illness. Even now you continue to ensure respect and devotion towards her.

During her illness she only wanted you to be with her and felt she could handle anything, even the challenge to live, when you were by her side. She believed that she would live and look back at this period as one of the many challenges she faced in her short but full lifetime. Her death, no matter how shocking to all of us, was, probably the most shocking to her and what I would pay to be the fly on the cloud listening to her argue with God on why He thought that this was her time. She had everyone believing that she would beat it. Even some of her doctors.

Joy and I would talk about food, what to eat and what not to eat and how much to walk if we ate too much. We ate tasty delight till we would throw up, sushi and cold cut wraps. We ate fat free muffins and slipped in some chocolate when no one looked. We walked to Aroma and back and even when she was sick we walked to her office together. She wanted to walk because she was in the business of living life to its fullest and enjoying being out there with the people. She had a taste for fine wine, classical music, clothing, China, furniture and literature. Her biggest passion, besides loving Jerry was her desire to live in Israel. She was the first of the Rochwarger clan to make the move at an early age and set the path for the rest of us. She was known around Yerushalayim as “the walker” and enjoyed seeing the city and its inhabitants evolve and change over the 12 years she lived here. When she moved to New York, she only did so by first making sure that we all understood it was for a brief moment in time because her heart was here and for the Jews who were brave enough to live here. When she walked through Central Park she noticed the leaves turning colors and the cherry blossoms blossoming. She made it a point to tell me these little things and I loved her for it.

Many people know Joy from the “big” things she did. Her building up the Jewish community leftover after the war in Poland when most people would like to believe that there were no Jews left. Many students remember her fondly for her teaching in Shevach, Midreshet Moriah, and Matan. For working in NCSY and JOLT, summer camps and the

like where she affected and infected those around her with her zest and zeal. But the biggest things she accomplished were her most private and devoted work she did on herself and on her relationships with her family members and God. And even though we learned many things together both formally and informally this is the greatest lesson of all she taught me. Live life like it counts. Don't say things that you don't mean but if you do go back and say you're sorry. Say something different and try not to look back and say that you regret.... She was my sister, a mentor, my friend, my confidant, my biggest and most loyal supporter. I was her sister, her friend, her student, and her biggest admirer.

And even though I do not know how I will get through the years ahead without her, I try to believe that she will be right beside me, somehow, guiding me like she always did gently and firmly at the same time. Yehi Zichra Baruch.



## Eulogy delivered by Joy's friend Zev Gershinsky on the evening of May 23, 2004 at Eretz Hachaim Cemetery, Beit Shemesh<sup>1</sup>

Birshut Jerry, birshut Joy's parents, brothers, sisters and the whole family, birshut Midreshet Moriah family, Kahal Kadosh.

Joy entered our family about 11 years ago as a guest, but as time past she became a Bat Bayit. So many times people would ask: "who is she?" and we would all answer: "she's the older sister we never had." Five boys, with one adopted older sister, a sister anyone would wish for himself.

When I tried to understand what was Joy for all of us, and I assume for anybody who knew her, I looked in the Sfarim Joy exposed me to. I remember our first discussion about Torah, when she sat and explained to me Shmonah Prakim. Her knowledge and love of Torah was so obvious when one got to sit and learn with her. Mostly, she opened for me a window to the Pachad Yitzchaq, which she took upon herself the task of translating Rav Hutner's special language of Torah into English, so more and more people all over the world could enjoy and learn it. That was the way Joy did everything. Never keep it to yourself. Always share your Torah with other people. The other Sefer she loved was the Netivot Shalom of the R' Mislonim. That was our wedding gift from her. Looking through the Perush of the Netivot Shalom to Pirkey Avot I came across the Mishna in Perek Sheni:

ניע רמוא רזעילא ר'. מדאה הב קבדיש הרשי ךרד איה וזיא וארו ואצ: רמוא היה (יאכזו ןב ןנחוי ןבר) אוה בל רמוא רזעלא ר'. דלונה תא האורה רמוא ןועמש ר'. בוט ןכש רמוא יסוי ר'. בוט רבח רמוא עשוהי ר'. הבוט "סכירבד וירבד ללכבש סכירבדמ ךרע ןב רזעלא ירבד תא ינא האור מהל רמא. בוט

The Netivot Shalom explains each answer of R' Yochanan's talmidim in a way that reflects some of Joy's qualities that we all saw in her. Ain Tova is the ability to be satisfied with Hashem's way of leading us without envying other people. Joy's life was not always easy, but we never heard her say: "I wish I'd had..." always Smecha B'chelka. Always full of Emunah in Hashem that she was blessed with what she had at the time.

Chaver Tov. This was Joy's best character. She was a Chaver Tov to everyone. He explains that every person has to deal in life with different temptations. The way to deal with them is by having a good friend who you could talk to whenever you feel you need to. Whose good advice and wisdom of life you could trust. Someone like Joy.

Shachen Tov. There were times when we were Zoche and Joy was a Shachen Tov, and other times Joy was a Shachen Tov for others, but always close to us, through phone or E-mail. She always gave us a feeling as if she's just around the corner so whenever we need...

Haro'eh Et Hanolad is someone whose actions are carried out after deep thought of their consequences on the closeness to Hashem. I remember different conversations when Joy asked herself "Will this make me closer to Hashem?" It could be different topics such as taking this job or that one, about living here or in the States etc.

The last Tchuna is Lev Tov, which is Taharat HaMidot. Yes, Joy had the wisdom and the skills, but above all she had Taharat HaMidot. Never arrogant, always gentle. There

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the US version of Windows has rendered all the Hebrew in the text below backwards.

are many more things we have to mention about Joy's qualities, such as her love for Eretz Yisrael, and especially the love for Yerushalaim, the love for her family and her Gadlut Batorah, but I feel that any attempt to put Joy's character into words and letters will lessen who she really was.

I want to tell you Jerry that you had the Zchut of marrying Joy. You had the Zchut of having her true love and of making her the happiest person in the world. Joy always said: "I don't want to compromise" and she didn't. She felt she got the best. The way she fought the last 7 months is due to you.

Since the last deterioration on Wednesday, when the Gershinsky family kept on updating each other with any new piece of information I felt one thing. I felt proud to have the Zchut of being Joy's second family. Joy, I have to ask Mechila from you if any of us ever showed disrespect to you or offended you in any way. Please go up there to your 2 rebbies, Nechama and David, and urge them to go up to Kisei HaKavod, to ask that we have no more sorrow. May you be a Melitz Yosher for your loving husband, your parents and your entire family, Ima and all of our family, and all Klal Yisrael.

Rabbi Jeffrey Saks, a graduate of the Jerusalem Fellows (Machzor 16), is the director of ATID.

[saks@atid.org](mailto:saks@atid.org)

## Joy (Rochwarger) Balsam ר"י<sup>1</sup>

Joy (Rochwarger) Balsam ר"י, who died on May 21<sup>st</sup> in New York at the age of 37, proved the Talmudic dictum: מִיֵּרַג אִמּוֹשׁ, that one's name has an effect on her nature (*Berakhot* 7b). Her parents א'טחלברי were surely blessed with foresight in selecting the name Joy, and she epitomized it, both in the happiness countless people experienced in friendships with her, but more so in the sense of *Joie de vie*: full, spirited, vigorous engagement with and love of life – both temporal and spiritual.

Joy had many accomplishments, personal and professional. She grew up in Queens, NY, received her BA from Barnard, and wrote her MA thesis at Touro College on the *Ishbitzer*. She had begun her teaching at the Shevach High School in Queens, but following her *aliyah*, and for most of her tragically short career, she was the Assistant to the Dean at Midreshet Moriah, a Jerusalem seminary for Diaspora students who spend a year or two studying in Israel after high school. It was there, as a teacher and coordinator of the Beit Midrash that she found her niche as a mentor to the many hundreds of young women that passed through the school over the years, and with whom she maintained close contact.

During her time as a Jerusalem Fellow she established Atara (Alternatives for Torah Renaissance Abroad), to serve as a framework for what was by then her longstanding commitment to and involvement with Polish Jewry. She would travel regularly to Poland to teach and organize *Shabbatonim* and study seminars, for some years going for a few days each month, and arranging for some of the leading rabbis, teachers and scholars from Israel and America to serve there as scholars-in-residence. From her hospital bed, days before succumbing to the cancer, she was still organizing and giving instructions for the next teacher scheduled to make the trip. On one occasion when I had the privilege to teach a group of Joy's students who had been brought to Israel for a more intense summer seminar, it was obvious to me that Joy was, for these Jews, the virtually exclusive lifeline to all things Jewish. This, to my mind, is one of the unique things about her contribution to Jewish education: She was able to see things from a different, often global perspective. With the opening of Eastern Europe to Torah learning and Jewish experiences in the 1990s, most American educators approached the opportunities presented from a local viewpoint: now we can bring our North American, British, Israeli, etc., students to see Krakow and Warsaw – what a positive effect it will have on them to see the "old country". Not to belittle the value of such programs, Joy saw things differently. She said to herself (and anyone else that would listen), "There are still Jews there, and we dare not give up on them." She knew someone had to teach them, and help them re-forge a new Jewish identity – the renaissance, as she called it. She jumped in, pulling along so many other talented people, with the same energy and contagious enthusiasm that she brought to everything she did.

During her years in Israel Joy developed a very close relationship with Nechama Leibowitz ר"ל, one of the twentieth century's leading teachers of *Tanakh*. Committed to

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<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, the US version of Windows has rendered all the Hebrew in the text below backwards.

the principle that “*shimush talmidei/ot hakhamim*” is as essential as any cognitive learning, Joy supplemented her attendance at Nechama’s *shiurim* and the more intimate setting of her renowned Thursday night classes (conducted in her apartment), by accompanying Nechama on her Friday shopping and errands for the last six years of the great teacher’s life. The deep and personal bond they formed helped crystallize Joy’s own commitment to *Ahavat Hashem* as the polestar for all Torah teaching, and – from Joy’s own account – was a profoundly formative component in her own religious, personal and professional development. To those that knew her well it’s unnecessary to mention that Joy’s commitment to *Talmud Torah*, spiritual growth, and working towards personal improvement, were foci of her existence. To those that didn’t know her, it would be impossible to adequately explain exactly how fully this informed who she was, and how she interacted with others. [See Joy’s tribute to Nechama, “Words on Fire” in *Torah of the Mothers*, ed. O. Elper and S. Handelman (Urim, 2000), pp. 57-81.]

Although I seem to always remember knowing Joy (I can’t remember where or when we first met), it was only during the year that we overlapped as Jerusalem Fellows that we really became close. During the program Joy impressed everyone – especially in the give-and-take, rough-and-tumble discussions and seminars – as a person of *substance*. As was mentioned in her sister Michelle’s eulogy (and by many others), Joy was *real*. *Authentic*. An *Isha Chashuva*. I developed a great admiration for her, and she became involved with us in the first, founding year of ATID. Had she not gone to New York after the Fellows, we had both hoped that she would have come to work with us in the administration of our program. Until her final illness we would still occasionally talk and email about a project she wanted to do for ATID “one day”: to prepare a teacher’s resource guide for using Rav Hutner’s *Pachad Yitzchak* (one of her passions) as a source for teaching Jewish thought.

Paradoxically, her substance and seriousness never alienated students or colleagues. On the contrary, it drew them nearer. Her humor, playfulness, and warmth blended perfectly with her candor and drive; her deep commitment to tradition and traditionalism was only enhanced – never compromised – by her unconventionality.

The same global vision I mentioned above allowed her to show concern for projects that others were involved in. After a failed fundraising attempt for Atara, she immediately called me to let me know that this otherwise unknown foundation couldn’t help her out, but would likely be interested in ATID, and thus helped us secure early seed money for our program. (This story may be atypical – few donors could reject her. She was an effective fundraiser for her causes not because she could sell someone a “bill of goods”. She couldn’t. Her commitment, vision, charisma – in the positive sense of the term – did the job for her. Some of the leading philanthropic forces in the Modern Orthodox community supported her projects because they knew *this* was a person worth backing.)

On the final day of seminars at the Jerusalem Fellows, we had a concluding program in which everyone was asked to bring in some object, and describe how that symbolizes what they gained from the year. Honestly, I don’t remember what anyone else, including myself, brought or said (besides a particular woman’s hat – *ha-meivin yavin*), except for Joy. She had a type of child’s wind-up toy, which, when released, would bound about the floor in a convulsive frenzy. She said that a friend had once bought it for her as a gift, because that’s how she viewed Joy: boundless energy. Joy said that during the year at the Fellows she had begun to think that it might be time to

put more focus into what she was doing, personally and professionally – stop bouncing about quite so much – although surely not to diminish the seriousness she brought to her work and life. This may have been part of the reason she chose to go on “*shlichut*” to New York during these last four years (there was never any doubt she’d return to Israel). She worked first at the Mandel Foundation’s North American office, where she was responsible for setting up training programs for Jewish educators in JCCs. Most recently, she was a program officer at Avi Chai, where she took great pride in her work overseeing the publication of BabageNewz, the prize-winning journal for children, used in Jewish schools. With her typical professionalism and enthusiasm, she sank herself into her work, but she was candid to her friends that she was working with similar vigor at “settling down”. Her whirlwind romance with Jerry Balsam culminated with their March 2003 Jerusalem wedding. Those that danced at that wedding never saw a bigger smile on what was always a smiley face.

Tragically, within a half-year she was diagnosed with melanoma. At first there was optimism, but the remission was fleeting, and in little over a year she had died.

Her infectious joy and enthusiasm, substance and authenticity – and that smile! – won the hearts of countless students, colleagues and friends, in America, Israel and Poland, who will always treasure the memories of Joy.

#### ה' בצנה

*To download a packet of obituaries and eulogies as a PDF file (507KB), click here: [www.atid.org/joy.pdf](http://www.atid.org/joy.pdf)*

*To share your memories of Joy with her family, or to send condolences, contact Joy's sister, Michelle Berkowitz, at [lmberko@barak-online.net](mailto:lmberko@barak-online.net)*

# Get Connected @ the JCC in June



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Join Chef Sharon Lebewohl, acclaimed cookbook writer and owner of the Second Ave Deli.

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To register or for a full spring schedule, stop by the desk in the lobby, call 646.505.5708 or surf [jccmanhattan.org](http://jccmanhattan.org).

Connect to our JCC community. Visit the Member Services Department on the mezzanine or call 646.505.5700.

First price listed is for members; second price is for nonmembers

Unless otherwise noted, all programs are held at **The JCC in Manhattan**  
The Samuel Priest Rose Building  
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## OBITUARY

# Joy Rochwarger-Balsam, 37; Jewish Educator

## Staff Report

Joy Rochwarger-Balsam, a Jewish educator and activist who single-handedly founded and ran a program of seminars for Jews in Poland, was mourned by hundreds of family, friends and former students at funeral services in New York last Friday, and on Sunday evening in Bet Shemesh, Israel, where she was buried. She was 37, and died of cancer, having worked until a week before her death.

At an overflow service at the Fifth Avenue Synagogue Friday morning, relatives and rabbis recalled her breadth of knowledge, seemingly boundless energy, devotion to the Jewish people and family, and her deep faith and good spirits even in the face of a dire medical prognosis seven months ago.

Her husband, Jerry Balsam, spoke of their meeting in 2002 and whirlwind courtship. They were married in Jerusalem in March 2003, and lived in New York, where Ms. Rochwarger-Balsam was a program officer at the Avi Chai Foundation. Balsam said she brought him a lifetime of happiness in their brief time together, and that she assured him she would defeat her illness and become a mother.

Rabbi Yaakov Kermaier of the Fifth Avenue Synagogue said that when he would visit Ms. Rochwarger-Balsam in the hospital, her main concern was for her husband and family members.

Ms. Rochwarger-Balsam, a native of Queens, graduated from Barnard College, and soon combined her love for Israel and Torah education by moving to the Jewish state and teaching at Midreshet Moriah, a yeshiva for young women in Jerusalem. She became assistant to the dean and coordinator of the Bet Midrash program, developing a strong mentoring relationship



**Joy Rochwarger-Balsam: "Boundless energy."**

with many of her students during her eight years at the school. She stayed in touch with many of them, here and in Israel.

She spent many summers leading seminars and educational camps in Poland. In 2000, Ms. Rochwarger-Balsam founded Atara (Alternatives for Torah Renaissance Abroad). She would spend one Shabbat a month in Warsaw, bringing scholars in residence with her "to help teach people what it meant to be a Jew," explained her brother, Geoffrey, who went with her last year to dedicate a Torah to the community.

From her hospital bed five days before she died, when speech was becoming difficult for her, Ms. Rochwarger-Balsam gave her husband a list of people to call to make sure that arrangements would go smoothly for the scholar due in Poland the following Shabbat.

Yossi Prager, the executive director of Avi Chai in New York, told The Jewish Week he "thought of Joy in perpetual motion, a woman with exceptionally high standards and a passion for Jewish life, but with great humor and positive energy, always caring about other people."

"She never stopped fighting the little battles that would make a project 10 percent better," he noted. "That was an exceptional quality."

Lauren Merkin, a trustee of Avi Chai and close family friend, described Ms. Rochwarger-Balsam as "a very patient person who was a real doer. She was all about the community."

Among her projects at Avi Chai, she helped guide Babaga Newz, an educational magazine for children, and Write On For Israel, a Jewish Week program in advocacy journalism for Israel for local high school students.

In addition to her husband, Ms. Rochwarger-Balsam is survived by her parents and five siblings and their families. ■

## It's A Guy Thing

Continued from page 10

of the Democratic turnout vote in the district.

"What [the district] has in common is that it's a community of almost exclusively private homes, two-family and single family homes," said Klein.

Kaufman said Velella was effective in pushing legislation of importance to the district and the city, as well as bringing home needed resources. "The main issue in the Bronx and Westchester is maintaining that continuity and not losing that funding and legislative access," he said. ■

Members of Hadassah will spend a day in Albany on June 2 to lobby for state legislation that supports stem-cell research. The trip is an initiative of the newly formed New Yorkers for the Advancement of Medical Research, a coalition that includes diverse organizations representing tens of thousands of New Yorkers who suffer from diseases whose treatment and cure could ultimately result from stem cell research. They include Parkinson's, Tourette's, lupus, juvenile

diabetes, cancer, and paralysis.

After President **George W. Bush** limited federal funding of stem cell research in 2001, state legislatures took up legislation to permit wider research. California and New Jersey recently passed such legislation and are being used as models for NYAMR.

Assembly Speaker Silver introduced and passed a pro-stem cell research bill last year, and introduced it again this year. The Senate has yet to take up such a bill. ■

The chairman of the New York State Republican Committee, **Alexander Treadwell**, recently returned from a fact-finding tour to Israel organized by the newly opened Republican Jewish Coalition chapter here.

Joined by national board members of the RJC, Treadwell met with Deputy Prime Minister **Ehud Olmert**, former Labor Prime Minister **Shimon Peres**, Tourism Minister **Benny Elon** and others. The group also toured Masada, the Palmahim air force base, the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial, the Old City of Jerusalem and Hadassah Hospital. At the latter stop, they were presented with

a grisly display of bomb fragments removed from victims of terror.

According to a statement, Treadwell, after touring Israel's anti-terrorism barrier, said "I fully support the security fence and I hope that one day soon [when there is peace] it will come down."

The delegation was led by RJC Regional Director **Greg Menken**, a former liaison to the Jewish community for Gov. **George Pataki**. ■

# In Memoriam

## Hollander, Fritz

Riverdale Jewish Center extends condolences to our member Per Hollander on the loss of his beloved father, Fritz Hollander, a hero of the Shoah and the patriarch of Swedish Jewry. May the entire family be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

Jonathan I. Rosenblatt, *Rabbi*

Harry M. Feder, *President*

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THE NEW YORK TIMES **OBITUARIES** SATURDAY, MAY 22, 2004

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**BALSAM—Joy.** We mourn the passing of our friend and colleague, Joy Balsam, a woman of extraordinary energy and spirit. Joy's passion for Jewish life, and her high standards of excellence, inspired us all. We will miss her. May her husband, Jerry Balsam, and the rest of her family be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.  
The Trustees and Staff of  
Avi Chai

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THE NEW YORK TIMES **OBITUARIES** SUNDAY, MAY 23, 2004

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**BALSAM—Joy Zita** (Rochwarger). Fifth Avenue Synagogue records with profound sorrow the passing of our esteemed member and extends heartfelt sympathy to the bereaved family.  
Yaakov Y. Kermaler, Rabbi  
Ira Leon Renner, Chairman  
J. Ezra Merkin, President

**BALSAM—Joy.** We deeply mourn the death at a young age of Joy, beloved wife of Jerry—loyal friend of Re'uth Medical Center, Hamakom venachem otcha.  
Re'uth  
Ursula Merkin, Chairman  
Rosa Strygler, President

Jerusalem Post ads placed by Avi Chai  
and the Mandel Foundation

We mourn the untimely passing of our  
dear friend and colleague

**Joy (Rochwarger) Balsam** ז"ל

and extend our heartfelt condolences  
to her husband, Jerry, and her entire family

*May you be comforted among the  
mourners of Zion and Jerusalem*

**אבי צ'אי**  
**AVI CHAI** Trustees and Staff



**The Mandel Leadership Institute**

mourns the untimely and tragic passing of

**JOY (Rochwarger) BALSAM** ז"ל

who was both a Mandel Jerusalem Fellow  
and a member of the New York staff of the Mandel Foundation.

We will forever remember

Joy's profound love of  
Eretz Yisrael and her passionate devotion to Jewish education.

We extend our condolences to her husband, Jerry,  
and to her parents and siblings.

**The Faculty, Staff and Fellows of the  
Mandel Jerusalem Fellows,  
Mandel Leadership Institute**

*In addition to the eulogies included in this collection, other tributes, for which texts are not available, were delivered by Joy's father, her brother Geoffrey, Rabbi Yaakov Kermaier of Fifth Avenue Synagogue, Rabbi Peretz Steinberg of Young Israel of Queens Valley, and Rabbi Reuven Aberman.*

*Below is an e-mail account of Joy's funeral in Israel from Shalom Dinerstein:*

**From:** [Shalom Dinerstein](#)  
**To:** [rabbi@fifthavenuesynagogue.org](mailto:rabbi@fifthavenuesynagogue.org)  
**Cc:** [Jonathan Schwartz](#) ; [tropez14@yahoo.com](mailto:tropez14@yahoo.com)  
**Sent:** Monday, May 24, 2004 9:21 AM  
**Subject:** Funeral of Joy Balsam

Dear Rav Kermaier, Rav Schwartz and Larry Present,

Shalom!

I want to share with you the most extraordinary experience I had last night at the Eretz Hachaim cemetery near Beit Shemesh.

There were hundreds and hundreds of people at the funeral last night; the crowd was so large that many were not even able to enter the chapel where the hespedim were given. An incredible variety of people - all ages, all kinds of backgrounds, secular (apparently, at least according to the clothing) and religious.

To my great sorrow, I have been to far too many funerals, including some (like Sunday's) that were truly tragic. But I have never been to such a dignified, mechubad levayah as last night's. If it had not been such a sad occasion, it could have been a vast shiur Torah, musar shmooze and lesson in Halakha all combined into one.

There were many hespedim: Jerry spoke first, and then Joy's sister Michelle, Joy's father, the son of another sister (I think), a young man who apparently was in a family that got to know Joy well in Jerusalem, Joy's brother, perhaps a few more speakers, and at the end, Rabbi Aberman of Michlelet Moriah, where Joy once studied (I think).

It seems strange to say it, but the effect of each hesped and then the combined power of all the hespedim together was uplifting. Although I never actually met Joy, by the end of the evening I felt I "knew" her very well.

Each and every hesped, in its own way, was dignified and gave honor. But the most remarkable of all was Jerry's. I am not saying this "stam" to "give a compliment." No one knew how he found the koach to rise to the challenge. I have never heard a more remarkable, beautiful tribute. And I doubt I ever will hear anything approaching it for its content and for feeling. He even made people laugh! If it is a mitzvah to maspid, then Jerry fulfilled the mitzvah mehadrin min hamehadrin.

I don't know if there can be any consolation after such a tragedy. But if there is even the tiniest opening for the smallest amount of consolation, it is that the maspedim gave such honor to the nifteret.

I believe that the hespedim were video-taped. If you should have an opportunity to see the video, or even hear tape recordings, you will understand what an extraordinary experience it was.

About 5 or 6 years ago, on a family visit to New York, I was in the Fifth Avenue Synagogue on a Friday night, and Jerry, realizing I was “new,” came up to me and greeted me with a “Shalom Aleichem.” In chatting, we realized that we had an indirect keshet: his sister Sheri Gross also lived in Har Nof; her husband Menachem had been our pediatrician; and her son Naftali was in class with my son Yosi. And so on successive annual visits to NYC, I always looked forward to seeing Jerry and talking with him. He gave us valuable tips on shopping for food, minyanim, stores, etc. So he is not really a “close friend” of mine, but I consider him a good friend, always there if you needed him. When I called Sheri Gross Friday morning to know of Joy’s condition, and Sheri told me the devastating news, she also said that Joy was also that kind of person - always there if you needed her.

I guess that is all - I wanted to share this with you.

I don’t have Rav Israel Halpert’s e-mail - could you please share this with him. Thanks.

Also, please feel free to share this with anyone else in the kehila to whom it would be meaningful.

All the best,

Chag Sameach!

Shalom