

THEY CALL HER EMA: ROZI DAVIS

I had a beautiful brunch on Yom Haatzmaut, Israeli Independence Day, with Rozi Davis. Being invited to her home, is like being invited to her heart- - open warmth and hospitality and meaningful conversation. I am at once aware of Rozi's acute insight, wisdom, wit and charm. She shares her experiences openly, warmly and wittily.

We touched on so many topics in her life, her youth, her marriage, her children, her life presently...the move was effortless and insightful. Initially, I wondered where we were going. I had come prepared with questions, and decided immediately to throw them out in favor of top of mind conversation...I found out at the end, the punchline.

The only real question I wanted answered was regarding Rozi's book Living, Loving, Laughing and Other Things I Do Before Breakfast. I wanted to know whether she was able to use humor throughout her life to carry her through life's challenges, or whether it was only looking back, that she was able to use humor as her modus operandi in detailing her life.

The answer was both. She was able to use humor to help her through challenges, but did not use it as often as she would have liked. She suffered the details on processes on so many things that she felt should have been blown off...hindsight perspective.

We began talking about Israel Independence Day. Rozi told me how she listened to the radio on the day that the United Nations was voting..."we watched the radio, as kids today watch t.v. When we heard that the State of Israel would be born it was so very important to us in light of the recent end of the Holocaust...it gave us such great hopes for the future. I took a friend and an Israeli flag that I got from my after-school Talmud Torah class and went to 42nd street to celebrate...I had been such a great supporter of Israel. As a youngster, I went around with J.N.F. pushkas and everyone, no matter what color, put something into the pushka...it was thrilling to have someone put a quarter in the pushka...so when the State of Israel was born, there was no greater joy...we had such high hopes...those hopes were still there when I visited Israel for the first time in 1968, right after the 1967 war...hopes were still high. Hopes are no longer high...the Arabs have dashed them...even in the cold war, the Russians preferred life over death, so we knew that they would be in no great rush to push "the button"...but the Arabs preach the rewards of killing...they prefer death...they have taken back land that we fought with blood, sweat and tears...the International Community calls the Israelis 'settlers', that the Israelis live in "settlements"...then Roz' humor returned and she looked at me with a smile and said are we just settlers, is the Five Towns just a settlement...were the native Americans merely settlers, names people use to demean others for their own gain..."

As to marriage, she said "I was taught never to go to bed angry, so there were many nights I didn't go to bed." That is Roz, dead pan humor with elegance and panache. I asked her if life was harder now or then. She replied that she felt the pressure was stronger on couples these days. The costs of homes and tuition, the women who have to

keep a home and go out to work to make ends meet. She sighed when using the words “quality time”... “all time with family should be quality time.”

I asked Rozi whether it was easier for her in the early days or now. She said that when she was married, she lived in the lower east side and that all four of her children shared one bedroom, but she was rich because she had four bathrooms, smiling, she explained that her mother and siblings lived in the same building and they each had a bathroom and she was rich, because she could use any of the four bathrooms at any time. Insight and laughter, a charming mix in an elegantly brilliant woman.

Discussing her move to Lawrence, she expounded in detail how the Village of Lawrence dispensed a welcome wagon to her home to provide her a cake and welcome her to the neighborhood. These same old-timers showed up at her house to berate her for setting up a clothes line in her backyard...something too lower class for this upper crust neighborhood.

Asked if she were to teach a class to high school senior girls what she would tell them. Rozi paused thoughtfully and said “Have a Sense of Humor”. The road for women these days is bumpy. Family economics, the price of schools and homes are such that women are being forced into the workplace. There isn’t a working mother out there that doesn’t feel the guilt of wanting to be with her children when she is at work, and the pressure to succeed in work when she is with her children. “Simplify things”, one should never lose sight of her family and children. Enjoy the process and the years with your children. . “Make Time Meaningful”.

I asked Rozi if it was harder raising children or watching her children raise her grandchildren. The quick response was that it was way harder to watch her children raise her grandchildren and remain silent in the face of instances where she would have liked to intercede, but couldn’t for fear of overstepping boundaries. So instead, she says she never makes appointments during the day. She waits to hear from one child, grandchild or great grandchild as to what they have planned for her that day, because one or the other is always in need of her help, time, guidance or assistance, and it is they and their needs that dictate her day. Ema, as she is affectionately called by all, still very simply has her family as her focus and the family knows they can call on her at any time of the day or night...that they have her undivided love, affection and attention.

And now...she is happier to see the Jewish community in the Five Towns grow. Glad to see how we work together to help those in need. She is proud of her children. So proud that they have open homes...that the community knows that their homes will always be open to Chesed committees, charity parlour meetings and to the community. About the Community: “I hear about more and more diets, that more and more people are on diets, but that more and more luncheon spots are opening up...and again, we laugh.”

After I shut my tape recorder, she invited me to a room where she keeps her precious assets...a file with birthday cards from her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren...that is most precious to her. That is what she has invested her time,

effort and energy in all these years...these are her dividends. I viewed the cards and read them out loud...I could feel the energy of the sincerity of their love of "Ema". As she walked me out the door, she told me that her father learned with her a chapter of Torah each week. In those days, girls were sent to public school, and it was up to the parents to instill the love of Judaism and its Torah to their children.

In her book, Living, in the Memories chapter: " I remember watching Mama making strudel, rolling out the dough, spreading it as fine as parchment on the kitchen table; her nimble fingers throwing in crumbs, raisins, jelly and nuts, then rolling it carefully in order not to split the dough." In the Happiness is...chapter: "Happiness is being surrounded by my children and grandchildren and watching the anticipation and excitement on their beautiful faces. Happiness is togetherness. So get together with your families and enjoy life." In Rozi's chapter on Don't Worry- Be Happy: "We spend so much time with the commercial aspect of...holidays that we lose the warmth of spending time together. The greatest gift we can give is the gift of reaching out to people, to family, to relatives, to friends, sharing love and laughter and concern. Remember this, the finest articles of clothing will wear out and the most inventive toy will soon be obsolete. But a kind word, a tender hug, a loving smile could live forever. It is the most inexpensive gift you can find yet the most meaningful. You can give it over and over again."

Family is at the core of family values. Rozi told me stories of how her parents raised her, and I came away with an absolute knowledge that those seeds planted by Rozi's father and mother are at the core of the love of Torah and Yiddishkeit that she transmits to her children, who are brilliant in their secular education which is only surpassed by their constant drive to learn more Torah...they are always hungry for Torah...as the Torah says, "There are days coming, and I, G-d, will send a famine in the land...not a famine for bread, not a thirst for water, but a thirst to hear the words of G-d." Rozi and her daughters drink in the gallons of Torah in the neighborhood, and through their work, continue to support the foundations of Torah in our neighborhood, so that never again will there be the famine of Torah and Yiddishkeit that Rozi found when she moved here so long ago."