

From: [David Kraemer](#)
To: [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)
Subject: FW: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 6.22.20
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From: Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>
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To: MOJO210AL <MOJO210AL@aol.com>
Subject: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 6.22.20

WAGON WHEEL CENSUS 5 Trucks 3 Runners 2 Cars 1 Bicyclist

Tonight, marks the 1st of Tammuz—the fantasy date of both the biblical Joseph's birth and death. It also marks the start of the second yahrzeit (anniversary of death) of two people who were dear friends and whose lives briefly intersected inside my former congregation: Rabbi Paul Drazen(zl) and Elaine Hartsman(zl). So [this morning](#) I spent my walk smiling about stories from their lives, reflecting on lessons they taught and filled with sadness that their deaths stilled their voices and wisdom inside this broken world.

Paul's death was the first of a summer, fall, winter curse whereby American Jewry lost three 60-something rabbis who contributed mightily to the Jewish narrative. His death was followed in the autumn by the death of Rabbi Sam Frait(zl) and then that winter by the death of my brother, Rabbi Danny Allen(zl). But on the 1st of Tammuz we did not know what was to follow. Paul was a member of our shul in Mendota Heights for 4 years. Those were great years, of personal friendship and of professional support. I first met Paul in 1968. Truth be told I met his wife, Susie, in 1968 as well when we were both campers in the same division at Ramah while Paul was already on staff. He ran the radio station—Kol B'ramah (a play on the phrase from the prophet Jeremiah) "610 on your radio dial." It was the only Hebrew speaking station in Wisconsin's Northwoods and serving as a "morning wake up DJ" was both an exercise in speaking broken Hebrew and an opportunity to spin some of your favorite vinyl. Paul also taught me how to announce a baseball game in remote fashion. Learning how to quickly say the count was 2 strikes and 1 ball in Hebrew, or that Steinberg hit the ball off the wall of the Ulum in Hebrew was a skill that I still remember with fondness. But Paul would go on to become a skilled rabbi whose greatest strength was not his kindness—though it ran deep, or his wisdom—which was equally great—it was the dedication to his understanding of his craft. He was always prepared, and he wanted his congregations and his community to also always be prepared. Once he developed a successful piece of his rabbinite—he codified it. He had pamphlets for everything— from how to kasher a kitchen to how to visit someone in a hospital. He honed those skills while working at Ramah. When he was the Business Director at Ramah, he knew exactly how many cans of pineapple juice were needed to provide a division with 103 kids enough for a 4-ounce cup at Shabbat Kiddush. His precision and his ability to plan and calculate were skills that sometimes made others of us crazy, but when he budgeted for his shul you could count on the expenses matching to the last penny. His sense of humor was unique as well and sustained him in his battle with the dreaded disease that would take his life. But what I will always hold onto about

Paul was his work ethic. Young colleagues could learn a great deal from him. He worked and worked with passion up until the very end. He worked so hard that even from his bed in Syracuse, he still was sending out emails to his congregants just days before his death. Never asking for anything from his congregation during this illness, he demonstrated what rabbinic dedication was all about. I miss him, and while I still hope that our friend Bruce M. confesses to that dastardly prank pulled on Paul and Susie on our last day of camp as staffers in 1977, it may be a little too late now. His memory is only for a blessing.

If Paul's death that day wasn't enough, later that same afternoon our dear friend Elaine Hartsman died. About to make a quick visit to a party for Lois Newberger(zl) at the Sholom Home and then to attend a dinner with dear friends to discuss the upcoming elections with a few other guests, I was pulled into a room and informed that Elaine had died. Her death, not unexpected but still shocking, took away one of the most courageous individuals I have ever had the privilege of knowing. Elaine lived with CP but while it defined her life for everyone else, it would not deter her from achieving many of her life goals. She was the first woman to become President of my former congregation and invoked some of the most vivid imagery when she spoke. She once gave a sermon to the shul about her life and said, "My disability is not my CP, you are my disability." She meant by that that people who lived with a veneer of victimization mentality when blessed with profound privilege made her life nearly impossible to explain. She was one of the most dynamic and brilliant people I have ever had the pleasure of knowing. She was a person who had the ability to listen and truly hear and to then reflect back with you what really was at the heart of an issue. She had a love of children and of chocolate. There are too many Elaine stories to share, but I will just tell you one. After attending a Jewish conference with her in California, we were in line at LAX and when we approached the desk agent, he turned to me and said in loud and slow speech "could you tell your friend that I will need to see her ID if she wants to get on the plane?", Elaine responded with "here is my ID sir and my friend is very hard of hearing so next time could you speak even louder and slower." She then gave him that wry smile and as she turned away from the counter said, "F*ck him."

The 1st of Tammuz might have been the date of the ancient Joseph's death, but for sure it is the date of Paul and Elaine's. If Joseph was known as a careful communal planner and visionary steward of resources, Paul's life honored that tradition perfectly. And if Joseph might have been his mom's (and dad's) favorite, Elaine fulfilled that role as well. Each of them gave this world more than the world gave them and each of their deaths deprives their loved ones and friends of their presence. Somewhere in the heavenly realm tonight, Paul is measuring out just enough vodka for Elaine's vodka tonic, and he himself is taking exactly a shot of his most recent favorite scotch and together they are smiling down on all of us. We should join them tonight in honoring their lives. May their memories only be for a blessing. Morris

(For new readers, these are quick responses to my morning walk. They are unedited and not reviewed or reread prior to sending them out)

Sent by my iPad