

Eulogy for Seymour Einstein
Simcha ben Mosheh

Born March 6, 1919 in Chicago, IL

Died May 17, 2016 in Tucson, AZ

Funeral May 18, 2016, Anshei Israel section Evergreen Cemetery

Rabbi Samuel M. Cohon, Temple Emanu-El officiating

Speaking:

Shmuel Einstein, son

This week in the Torah we read the portion of *Behar*, in Leviticus, which highlights the commandments given by God as having originated at Mt. Sinai. There is a magisterial authority to the text, having been given to the Jews from the august heights of the most sacred mountain on earth. *Behar* also testifies to the fact that our religion is based on a covenantal connection to the Creator of all, the great structural engineer of the entire universe. We are given a set of injunctions that make it clear that we have the responsibility to preserve and maintain the greatest construction of all, our world.

This makes it a highly appropriate time to say farewell to Seymour Einstein, a commanding presence who was a talented and accomplished structural engineer himself. Seymour was a unique man, highly intelligent, interesting and charismatic, opinionated, uncompromising. He well understood what it meant to serve a commander on high, and to command himself. He accomplished much in his life, and his vivid presence will be missed.

Seymour Einstein was born March 6, 1919 in Chicago, Illinois to Morris and Sadie Aaron Einstein. His dad was a captain in the army, a career military officer, called back into service in World War I, having been active during the Spanish-American War and in Indian wars. Seymour grew up on the west side of Chicago and attended Harrison High School in Chicago, where he was president of his senior class, graduating young. He won a scholarship to the outstanding University of Chicago, and during a year there he did dog-walking to pay for his expenses. Although he sought to get appointed to West Point—like his dad he wanted to go into the army—he instead won appointment to Annapolis and the Naval Academy by his congressman, a huge honor, especially for a Jew in those days. And so it was the navy for him, enrolling in Annapolis in 1936.

While was at the Academy in 1938, Seymour instituted the first Jewish chapel experience for naval midshipmen. After experiencing the mandatory chapel as purely Christian experience, he wrote the commandant, and was authorized to organize the Jewish guys at Annapolis, at a time of great anti-Semitism, to start the program. It became the “Jewish Church Group” of midshipmen, the very first such group in the distinguished history of the Naval Academy. Seymour always marched to his own drummer, and he was often right. There is now a plaque on the Commodore Uriah P. Levy Jewish Chapel in Annapolis memorializing Seymour’s actions.

He completed the Naval Academy in 1941, and soon was on a ship in the Pacific where after Pearl Harbor he saw extensive action during World War II, ending up with a slew of medals. His first destroyer was sent to the Aleutians, and he then served in battle at Okinawa, Tarawa, and Iwo Jima, among many other battles against the Japanese. Seymour managed to save his ship on more than one occasion through his skill improvising repairs, and utilized his engineering talents to assist in a variety of unlikely and important battlefield missions on both sea and land.

In 1944 a mutual friend encouraged a 19 year-old Jewish woman named Sally to write to a lonely Lieutenant on a heavy cruiser in the South Pacific named Seymour Einstein. His ship fortuitously needed repairs, and it docked in San Francisco at Mare Island Navy Yard. Seymour had leave, and he took the Daylight Limited train to Los Angeles where he met his pen pal, Sally, who worked for the USO. He stayed at the Ambassador Hotel, and they enjoyed the swimming pool together, but in the morays of the time, Sally wouldn’t dream of visiting Seymour’s opulent hotel room. They dated for a week—Seymour says that they may have gone so far as to shake hands—and then he went away for a year, back to the South Pacific and the battles, of among others, Iwo Jima, where Seymour’s ship was hit six times, and Okinawa. The ship came back to California—San Francisco again—they saw each other for another week, and soon Sally and Seymour got married on May 10, 1945 in the Rabbi’s study of a synagogue on Wilshire Boulevard. The honeymoon was spent visiting La Jolla, their *shadchen*—a friend named Mel Kohen—in Sacramento, and then returning to Mare Island where they moved into half a Quonset hut, which served as married quarters. Seymour returned to the North Pacific—the war was over—and served in Saipan and Japan itself, continuing on ships until he

resigned from the Navy in 1946 as a Lieutenant Commander of a naval repair ship. He was in the Navy a total of ten years.

The young couple moved to Los Angeles and lived near Pico and La Brea. Seymour worked for the city for a while and then for his father-in-law, and Sally went to work and took the old Pacific Electric “Big Red Cars” to work every day. The young couple soon moved back to Chicago where Seymour got a job as a structural engineer. Actually, the Navy graduated everyone from Annapolis as an electrical engineer. Although he really did not know structural engineering, Seymour knew he could figure it out. So he went and learned what he needed to know on his own, by reading books, and from other guys at the firm. There is a story he told about his knowledge of earthquakes: they asked him when he started at the engineering firm in Chicago if he knew anything about earthquakes. He said, “Sure, I just got back from Los Angeles”, went to the library, and learned all about earthquakes before he went to work.

The young couple moved to Austin, on the west side of Chicago, and then in 1955 moved to Skokie where they remained for 44 years. They belonged to Temple Judea, later Temple Judea-Mizpeh, and were active in the congregation, attending services every Friday night and Sally went to Torah Study each week as well, and she singlehandedly raised the money to air condition the Temple. Shmuel was born in 1949, Marilyn was born in 1951, and Fred was born in 1958. Sally grew up much more observant than Seymour; she influenced him to give up pork, and he convinced her to take up golf and bridge.

In 1958 he formed his own structural engineering and design firm, building high rises and commercial structures in Chicago. Einstein and Associates won several awards for its buildings. Seymour was recipient of the Gold Key award from the American Institute of Architects and the Chicago Association of Commerce in 1985, the Silver Key award in 1971, and the Outstanding Concept and Design award from the City of Wheeling in 1984.

When Seymour went into business for himself in 1958 Sally became his secretary and bookkeeper—at first, working from the basement. After Seymour’s business had grown she decided to go back to school.

Seymour and Sally enjoyed travel and productive activity together, and as Sally said, “I fervently believe that each party in a marriage has to work at it

and never take each other, or the marriage, for granted even after many years.”

They were married for almost 59 years, and were a profoundly devoted couple, even through Sally’s dementia that settled in starting in 1995. They were always close. When first married they had very little materially, but provided a rich home life for their children, and encouraged them to “appreciate what they had.”

In 1998 Seymour and Sally moved to Tucson for better support and care for Sally. Sally and Seymour were deeply devoted to one another, and he took care of her over the years of her illness. She died in 2004.

Seymour, characteristically, went to work as soon as he moved here to Tucson, although he was in his 80’s, and he had several jobs that extended until the Great Recession began in 2007-2008, which meant the engineering firms didn’t have as much work for Seymour. He involuntarily retired around then... But he remained incredibly active, and you could see him at the JCC, at Temple Emanu-El, enrolled in Adult Education Academy classes at Temple and elsewhere in the community. And having lunch with the ROMEO group, and playing bridge.

Audrey and Seymour met in 2011 playing duplicate bridge. He was quite an accomplished bridge player, and Audrey was just starting out in bridge. They would have been married three years in June. She wasn’t so sure about Seymour when they met—he was a little rough around the edges—but he had a charisma about him. They finished the game, and he asked her out to dinner, and she said they could go for a coke instead. It began as a friendship, and then they fell in love and married.

Seymour is survived by his grandchildren, Rachel Einstein Sim, Gabriel Einstein Sim, Yitzchak Einstein, Dovid Einstein, Binyomin Einstein, and two great grandchildren, Batsheva Einstein and Aharon Meir Einstein. At the end of his life, there was a particularly beautiful moment of grace for Seymour. A four-generation photo that was taken just last week, with everyone there; his youngest son, Fred, was there on the phone, too.

Seymour used to say that he didn’t really need to be buried in any kind of fancy way; he recommended that instead of a hearse the family should transport him in the wheelbarrow from the backyard. When Rachel was

here for Passover, Marilyn told him that there was an updated version of the wheelbarrow at Ace Hardware that was on sale that would work well for him, and Seymour enjoyed the idea. He had a sharp sense of humor, and was a remarkable man. Not easy, not gentle, but brilliant, determined, unique.

Seymour Einstein lived life fully, without compromise. He fulfilled the covenant outlined in the Torah portion of *Behar*, to accept the responsibility of Mt. Sinai, to live proudly as a Jew and build on this earth that God created.

May his memory now bring blessing.

Lech L'Shalom, Seymour: go now in peace.

Simcha ben Mosheh

Meal of Condolence at Audrey and Seymour's home, 6133 North Pascola Circle, gate code #8930

Shiva Wednesday and Thursday, 7-9 PM at the home of Marilyn Einstein and Steve Sim.