

# remembering Shirley Disend



Jewish Community Foundation  
of Central Pennsylvania



In her diary, Anne Frank wrote, “How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.” Shirley Disend was not one to wait nor waste moments. A longtime resident of Harrisburg and member of Temple Ohev Sholom, Shirley had an unmatched passion for serving the local Jewish community and beyond. We are grieved at her passing on September 22, 2023, at 99 years old, and are inspired by the legacy she has left us.

The list of Shirley’s triumphs is extensive. She was one of the first women trained as aeronautical draftsmen during World War II, a founding member of Hospice of Central PA and a volunteer for 40 years, and a Director of the Tri-County Association for the Blind where she established the “Wizard of Eyes” safety program and recorded books-on-tape for the vision-impaired. These are only a handful of her accomplishments.

Among her acts of service to the local Jewish community, Shirley was an officer of Temple Ohev Sholom Sisterhood, a member of B’nai B’rith, and a Life Member of the Guild of the Jewish Home of Greater Harrisburg. Shirley was co-chair of Temple’s “Operation Exodus” program, which helped resettle Russian immigrants fleeing the Iron Curtain.

Her involvement with the Jewish Community and Temple Ohev Sholom was important to her. After her son, Randy, passed too soon, to ensure that Randy would always be remembered, Shirley established the Randy Disend Education Fund to support programs for Temple youth.

Paulette Keifer, Executive Director of the Jewish Community of Foundation of Central Pennsylvania, visited Shirley on September 13, nine days prior to her passing. Shirley wanted to meet to ensure we codified in the Randy Disend Education Fund agreement that it would be used for educational programs for Temple confirmands and youth; specifically, that they learn about civics, other cultures, how Congress functions, and lessons of the Holocaust.

During their visit, Paulette noticed an award the Foundation presented to Shirley during the 2023 Annual Donor Recognition Dinner was prominently displayed on a window ledge in Shirley’s home. Paulette commented how it was illuminated by the sunlight pouring through the window glass. Shirley said the placement was intentional, “... visitors can’t miss it there.”



Shirley felt the chrome and gold sculpture of a hand embracing a globe of Jerusalem, presented to her for service to the Jewish community, held particular meaning to her. When guests asked about the award, she took it down from the ledge, placed the globe of Jerusalem into their hands and said, “The Jewish world is in your hands.”

While saying good bye to Shirley after their visit, Paulette offered Shirley the usual hug. Shirley said, “Make it a good hug that will last.” Reflecting on that moment Paulette shared, “That last lovely visit, that eternal hug, Shirley’s life and her moving story about the globe of Jerusalem... she can never know how she inspired me to continue helping others create their own legacies.”

Just as Shirley wished for a hug that would last, may her legacy and memory last. Forever blessing the lives of all who knew her and will benefit from her generosity to Temple and the community.

