

Among Sarah's other honors are a Distinguished Fulbright to Yugoslavia and her roles as media consultant to the National Endowment for the Humanities and humor consultant for the Library of Congress. Sara wrote and edited eleven plays and musicals (often with her longtime writing partner Joanne B. Koch). Sarah is survived by her husband Gary, her sister Bess Rosen Lichterman of Milwaukee, and nine nieces and nephews, including her great-niece Rabbi Julie Pelc of Venice, California, who recounts that Sarah told her she "was like the daughter she never had." "And, in many ways," Julie explains, "I was her progeny. . . . Sarah and I shared more in common than anyone else in our family; our relationship was profound and sacred. . . . My Aunt Sarah was feisty, rebellious, outrageous, brilliant, and creative. . . . My Aunt Sarah didn't just choose life, she took a lasso and wrung it around life and dragged life toward her. . . . In her death Sarah remains my greatest teacher about life." Another person who devoted herself to Sarah is Marla Frazer, longtime assistant, friend, and helper particularly in the last phase of Sarah's life. Marla promised Sarah and Gary that she would be a caregiver for them throughout their illnesses.

Sarah was memorialized at a service at Levine Memorial Chapel in Albany on Friday November 11, 2008, and buried at the Independent Cemetery in Guilderland. Sarah's sheer joy in living, her excitement in engaging in dialogue over all matters, and her sense of humor: these are the things I remember and these are the things that bring Sarah back to life for me.

*Elaine B. Safer is professor of English at the University of Delaware. She is author of Mocking the Age: The Later Novels of Philip Roth (SUNY Press, 2006).*

# BENNY KRAUT

(1947 – 2008)

*Eugene Korn*

Professor Benny Kraut passed away at age 60 on September 26, 2008, after a week-long coma caused by sudden cardiac arrest. He enriched the lives of all who met him, and his untimely death left both the academic and Jewish worlds significantly diminished.

Benny studied Jewish and general philosophy at Yeshiva College, where we first met and nurtured a close friendship that endured through the decades. He earned MA and PhD degrees in Jewish history from the Department of Near East and Jewish Studies at Brandeis University in 1970 and 1975, respectively. After teaching briefly at Vassar, Benny built the Jewish studies department at the University of Cincinnati, where he was department director from 1976 to 1998. Later in 1998 he moved to Queens College, CUNY to become professor of history and director of its Jewish studies program, as well as the director of the Center for Jewish Studies. He remained the Center's director until spring 2006, while continuing to teach in the department until his death. He augmented the center, revitalized its public Jewish Lecture Series, and created the Jewish Music and Theater Performance Series as well as a Cinema on Sundays Film/Dialogue Series. Under his academic leadership, Queens' Jewish studies program expanded and diversified, and earned national recognition for its quality and innovative programs. As Queens College president James Muyskens stated, "Benny injected the Center and the Program with new energy and ideas, turning them into first class institutions." At both Cincinnati and Queens, Benny won university awards for teaching excellence.

Benny was no detached scholar consumed by esoteric concerns but a passionate advocate for, and explorer of, Jewish identity, ideas, and the experiences of his people in modernity. His personality seemed to merge with his scholarship and he instinctively embraced the dilemmas of contemporary Jewish existence. More often than not, he intertwined his academic interests with his Jewish communal involvement in both Cincinnati and Queens.

Benny focused his academic work primarily in two areas: antisemitism and the Holocaust; and the American Jewish experience. His first book, *From Reform Judaism to Ethical Culture: The Religious Revolution of Felix Adler* (Hebrew Union College, 1979), was also the subject of his doctoral dissertation. He published two other books on Jews and the founding of America and on German Jewish Orthodoxy in America, and more than forty scholarly articles. A voracious reader with a fine critical eye, Benny was book review editor for *American Jewish History* and a member of the editorial board of *Shofar*. Over the course of his career he managed to pen a remarkable 170 reviews for a variety of scholarly journals and popular publications. He also published essays in Jewish-Christian and Jewish-black relations and participated in a number of academic activities in these areas.

Biography underlay Benny's résumé and his unusual conjunction of interests. He was the son of two Holocaust survivors. His father, Pinchas Zvi Kraut of Novo Sandz and Prezemysl, Poland, spent the entire war in flight one step ahead of the SS and imminent death. Wounded and ill with typhus in 1943, he was saved by a Christian woman who hid him for almost a year until the Russian liberation. The SS killed his wife and young daughter, and when the war ended Pinchas emerged as the only survivor of a family that had numbered more than thirty prior to



the war. Benny's mother, Mania Trachman of Brzozow, Poland, also spent the war in hiding as a young woman. For two years she lived in an underground bunker, hidden and fed by a local woman. Benny was named for Mania's father, Ben Zion Trachman, a devotee of Bobover Hasidim with a beautiful cantorial voice, who was shot by the Nazis while leading Rosh Hashanah services in September 1939. After the war, Mania linked up with her cousin Pinchas Zvi Kraut, and they were married in Krakow. They proceeded to a DP camp in Linz, Austria, futilely attempting to find family survivors. From there they moved to Munich, where Benny was born in 1947. Unable to obtain a visa to America,

they received a Canadian visa in 1951 and arrived in Montreal in 1952, where Benny was raised.

This tragic European history weighed heavily on Benny, giving his personality an unmistakable angst and existential weight. As Benny's son, Yehuda, himself a budding biblical scholar, poignantly noted in the eulogy for his father, "My father was not Job, but he was the son of Job." But Benny did not succumb to any permanent pessimism or nihilism to which living with the Shoah can so easily lead. He also had a charming boyish exuberance born of the spirit of the new world. He was intensely fascinated by the American and Canadian experiment, with its optimistic promise of acceptance, equality, and even success for Jews. Could the new society indeed be different for Jews, or would it prove but the beginning of another German "enlightenment"? Is it possible for Jews to escape antisemitism here? If so, at what cost to Jewish tradition and historic Jewish identity? If not, are discrimination and suffering essential to Jewish metaphysical and religious identity?

Hence Benny's academic and existential interests in the philosophic issues of suffering, Jewish history, the Holocaust, Judaism in America, and

Modern Orthodoxy, i.e., the experiment of synthesizing Orthodox commitment with modern values and social reality. He spent his last years researching and writing the history of Yavneh, the (Modern Orthodox) Religious Students Organization of America, of which he was an early member.

Ultimately it was the dialectic of these two opposing personality orientations that combined with his extraordinary analytic power, idealistic passion, and acute sense of responsibility made Benny Kraut an energetic life force. He was a beloved teacher, friend, and Jewish model to his students and to all of us engaged in plumbing the meaning of Jewish identity in modern culture.

Benny is survived by his wife, Penny, his three children, Rachel Hackel, Yehuda, and Sefi, his son-in-law Mordy Hackel, and three grandchildren. May his memory be a blessing.

*Eugene Korn is the American director of the Center for Jewish-Christian Understanding and Cooperation in Efrat, and editor of Meorot: A Journal of Modern Orthodox Discourse. He teaches medieval Jewish thought at Me'ah.*

## Contribute to the Syllabi Directory on the AJS Website

AJS has expanded the Resources section of its website to include a directory of syllabi in all fields of Jewish studies. This directory helps early career scholars develop new courses; introduces scholars at all stages of their careers to new readings; and gives institutions that are developing Jewish studies an overall sense of the field.

**AJS invites members to submit their syllabi in MS-Word or PDF format via the AJS website at [www.ajsnet.org/syllabi\\_add.php](http://www.ajsnet.org/syllabi_add.php).**

The screenshot shows the AJS website interface. At the top is the AJS logo (Association for Jewish Studies). Below it is a navigation menu with links: Home, About Us, Membership, Conferences, Publications, Positions Listing, NEW! Resources, Advertise & Exhibit, Giving Opportunities, and Contact Us. The main content area is titled 'Resources' and features a 'Submit a Syllabus' button. Below this is the 'AJS Directory of Course Syllabi' section, which includes a brief description: 'A directory of syllabi to assist AJS members in developing courses for the first time, and to help scholars identify new readings and assignments to incorporate into their courses. AJS members are encouraged to contribute syllabi to the directory as either a Word document or PDF through the online submission form. To view/download syllabus, click on course title.' It also notes that syllabi files are in PDF or MS-Word format and provides instructions for downloading and installing Adobe Acrobat Reader. A list of 'Subject Areas' is provided, including Bible, Gender Studies, Holocaust Studies/Antisemitism, Interdisciplinary and Other, Introduction to Jewish Studies, Israel Studies, Jewish History in Late Antiquity, Jewish Mysticism, Jews and the Arts, Linguistics, Semiotics, and Philosophy, Medieval and Early Modern Jewish History, Literature, and Culture, and Medieval Jewish Philosophy.