

INSIDE JOI

Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities

Winter 2008

Jewish Community Mourns Loss of Outreach Champion

Terrence A. Elkes,
President, Jewish
Outreach Institute



If there is more talk today than ever before of creating a welcoming and inclusive Jewish community,

especially toward interfaith

couples, it is thanks to the work of a few trailblazing leaders. Sadly, the community lost one such giant on Friday January 18, 2008, with the sudden passing of Terrence ("Terry") Elkes at the age of 73. The board of directors and staff of the Jewish Outreach Institute (JOI) will greatly miss his vision, leadership, and dedication. Sincerest condolences are extended to the Elkes family.

Terry Elkes assumed JOI's board presidency in January 1999 after the passing of another outreach giant, David W. Belin, who helped found the Jewish Outreach Institute. Under Terry's leadership, JOI engaged its first full-time executive director, Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky, and moved from being an academic think-

tank at the City University of New York's Graduate Center to become an independent, North American organization offering direct-service programs as well as professional training, research, and advocacy. During Terry's presidency, the annual budget of JOI increased more than four-fold and the staff expanded from two to twelve full-time professionals.

In the wake of Terry's passing, Alan B. Kane was voted unanimously by JOI's board of directors to assume the organization's presidency. Of Terry's leadership, Alan points out, "In the eight years that Terry Elkes was president of JOI, segments of the Jewish community have shifted noticeably in attitudes toward intermarried Jews, finally beginning to build consensus that we must find more ways to welcome such families into our institutions. Terry's work through JOI was a key factor in encouraging that shift, but it's important to note that Terry himself never shifted. His message was the same since day one and remained unchanged throughout his tenure: we must provide meaningful Jewish communal experiences for all who would join us, including intermarried households."

Terry Elkes is perhaps best known from his tenure as CEO of Viacom, which he helped turn into the media giant that it is today. As CEO of Viacom, he oversaw the purchase of MTV and Showtime. But he was perhaps most proud of green-lighting "The Cosby Show," which was a trailblazing television series that finally offered viewers a break from the stereotypes by portraying an upper-middle-class African-American family.

As a savvy businessman, Terry continually pushed JOI to innovate its understanding of outreach best-practices, and to base its actions on real-world research and evaluation. Combining his media acumen with his philanthropy, he underwrote a short film (online at www.JOI.org/video) about the organization's work, including The Mothers Circle, JOI's educational program for women of other religious backgrounds who are raising Jewish children within the context of intermarriage. Today it stands as just a small part of his large legacy within the organized Jewish community.



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Remembering Terry

Presentation of JOI “Visionary Award”

By Peter D. Weinstein to Terry Elkes
during JOI’s 20th Anniversary Tribute
Evening, October 22, 2007

I have had the privilege of knowing this Renaissance man we call Terry Elkes for almost 40 years. Not only has he been a successful attorney, a successful CEO of one of the world’s largest media companies, a successful merchant banker, and a successful philanthropist, but he is, most importantly, a successful human being and family man with a sterling character.

Terry’s father died prematurely when Terry was young. It was then that he started on the long road of providing moral, emotional and material support to his widowed mother for many decades.

In my experience, his intellectual honesty manifested itself frequently when I worked for Terry from 1968 to 1972 as Associate General Counsel to Parsons & Whittemore. On those occasions, when I came up with an idea, Terry insisted that I present it personally, and alone, to the Chairman of the Board of the Company so that I would receive the full credit, while he stayed in the background.

Terry’s humanity is further demonstrated when a relative found herself divorced with two children to raise. It was Terry who voluntarily and unstintingly gave of himself to provide the means for her to resume her life and give her children the opportunity of living comfortably and receiving college educations.

It is said that only God can give life. While this is true, Terry has embarked on his most important mission now, in preserving and promoting the quality of life for the past two years of his beloved wife, Ruth. During this time, he has given of himself 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, and I am happy to report that he and Ruth are meeting with the same success that Terry has always accomplished throughout his life. It is with this background that I am honored to present to Terry Elkes, the President of the Jewish Outreach Institute, the 2007 Visionary Award for the vision and commitment to ensure a more inclusive Jewish Community.

A Life of Meaning and Memory

Remarks by JOI Executive Director Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky at Terry’s home during the Shiva [Mourning Period], January 21, 2008

The Jewish people have always had a unique approach to making space and time holy. We do so by coming together as sacred community. So we transform this place and time and make it sacred, simply because we have come together. And we do so to honor the life of a great man, a wonderful father, grandfather, and friend to so many. To use his son Steven Elkes’ words, Terry was larger than life for so many. He understood more than most that life only had meaning when it was lived in relationship with others.

This is an appropriate place to make sacred, because we are surrounded by so much memory. And it is memory that we carry forward with our own lives. It is also such collected memory that contributes to who and what we are.

Memory is a powerful teacher. It helps us to discern what is important and what has little permanence and should be quickly forsaken. Memory teaches us what is to be remembered, fought for, held close, and never abandoned.

As much as we would have wanted to hold on to Terry longer, we cannot do so. But he is not gone. We are the better because of the many memories of him that we share, because we were able to live our lives in accord with his own. These memories are buoyed by the love that he shared with us all, the love that will offer us comfort in the days of mourning ahead, some of which will be darkened by sadness. It is never a good time for death, but when one is taken from us so abruptly, we are literally shocked into a profound sorrow that seems to offer little respite. But there will indeed be light in the days ahead. And that light we be a direct result of Terry’s desire that we should continue on the path that he helped establish for us. I feel certain that he would have wanted nothing other.

Terry stood for so many essential values in his life. No matter how much he accomplished or how much he amassed, it was the essential values that he carried from his childhood and his youth, of hard work that brought him forward, that he held so dear, values that he never abandoned. For little mattered to him in life besides being a staunch advocate for these values

and making them the very foundation of his life. It is what propelled him to keep family at the forefront of his life and lovingly care for his wife Ruth during her two years of valiant struggle.

He wanted to make sure that the opportunities that were afforded to him were offered to others, as well. And he believed in an inclusive Jewish community—one in which everyone would feel welcome and embraced, irrespective of their background or predilection.

Such values were far more important to him than even the greatness he achieved at City College, at the University of Michigan, as an attorney or even as the visionary builder of Viacom or at the shared helm of the many projects that he and his business partner Ken Gorman dreamed up at Apollo Partners. Terry firmly believed in “paying it forward.”

Consider his “yacht” as an example—a kayak that he powered by rowing during the warm days of summer—often down to his friends the Grants. He didn’t need anything more. And the fact that he powered it on his own is what made it doubly important. Terry was an independent man who stood on his own strengths. And this “yacht” of his is perhaps what kept he and Ruth here most summers, particularly during their famed 4th of July parties, even if he yearned to travel during the rest of the year. This was indeed his paradise, his slice of the world-to-come in the world-as-it-is. So it is appropriate that we are here now, to honor Terry’s memory, and to take strength from his example of priorities well-ordered and a life well-led.



Announcing The Ruth and Terrence A. Elkes Memorial Conference, June 2009

To honor the memory of our late Board President Terry Elkes and his beloved wife Ruth, JOI will dedicate its next national outreach conference to their memory as the Ruth and Terrence A. Elkes Memorial Conference. Details to follow.

Moonlight

Composed, Music and Lyrics by Josh Elkes

Dedicated to my Grandfather Terry Elkes

Hit me like a ton of bricks in the rain
Now everyone around is saying your name
No I don't know how I feel all this pain is so surreal
Because who knew you were next in line

(Chorus) We used to sing how high the moon
Light shined through my window in the night
And I knew it was you and your sitting with me too
But why'd you have to see the light

No one can ever fill these shoes
Fictitious feelings I don't know how to lose
And I'm moving downhill and I'm moving there still
And I can't stop this ride

(Chorus) We used to sing how high the moon
Light shined through my window in the night
And I knew it was you and your sitting with me too
But why'd you have to see the light

You filled a void with an empty space
Never seen a man like you fall from grace
Who knew you'd fall too
Was it me was it you
Certainly wasn't my father this time

(Chorus) We used to sing how high the moon
Light shined through my window in the night
And I knew it was you and your sitting with me too
But why'd you have to see the light

And I knew you'd seen the light
And I knew you'd seen the light

Inside JOI © 2008 Jewish Outreach Institute (JOI.org). JOI is a national, independent, nondenominational organization dedicated to creating a more inclusive Jewish community toward all who would join us, especially intermarried families and disengaged Jews, by working to transform existing institutions and by creating new programs when necessary.

Terry Elkes: In His Own Words

The Phenomenon of intermarriage presents both a challenge and an opportunity.... As American Jews have moved into the mainstream of American life, the majority of marriages are now interfaith. Today, in our free and open society, Judaism is a matter of choice for those born Jewish as well as those not so born.

JOI's mission is to raise the awareness in the Jewish Community of the opportunities inherent in welcoming interfaith couples. And by building these bridges and developing effective means of communication, we can help assure the creative perpetuation of Jewish culture and heritage, while at the same time insure the existence of a vibrant and active American Jewish population and continued support for Israel for generations to come.

—From acceptance remarks upon receiving the "Visionary Award" during JOI's 20th Anniversary Tribute Evening, October 22, 2007

[As CEO of Viacom,] I basically had come down dead set against a program that my management team wanted to initiate on television. I came down against it because it was a situation comedy, and situation comedies were not scoring well on television. I came down against it because it was on NBC, which had the smallest audience. I came down against it because the star of the show insisted on having the show produced in New York, and that was very expensive to do. I came down against it because the show was basically a nightclub act, and I didn't see how you could sustain 25 weeks in a year on a nightclub act. The best thing that ever happened to me was I was overruled, or persuaded, by my management team that I had hired to make those decisions. And so we launched "Cosby." [The stereotype-breaking "The Cosby Show," NBC 1984-1992]

The point of this is that you cannot dictate. You cannot predict the uniqueness of the product. You don't know until you try.

—From panel discussion during "The Information Revolution in Midstream," The Marshall Symposium, University of Michigan, May 30, 1998

As president of an outreach organization that promotes Jewish choices among the intermarried, I come to that role from both a typical and somewhat atypical angle. Like many parents, I have been impacted personally by the phenomenon of intermarriage. However, I see my support for outreach as directly relating not only to the future of my own family, but the future of the State of Israel, as well.

—From an essay entitled "Help the Intermarried Keep Israel Strong," June 2002

Good Evening. On behalf of the Elkes and Sachnin Families, I am honored to receive the Ellis Island Medal of Honor. I should also like to thank my colleague, Lou Siracusano, for nominating me.

In a few hours, when we take leave of this blessed shore, we will return to a lower New York City skyline under a moonless sky alit with a fireworks display. Once again this will remind us of those tragic and infamous events that occurred just nine months ago this very day. Yet it is not in the least incongruous that we hold this ceremony in the shadow of that skyline.

What was consumed in that inferno on the eleventh day of September 2001 was property, real and personal, and human kind, young and old, precious and dear.

What was not destroyed was the American spirit, the American soul. What was not destroyed was our faith in the constitution and our respect for individual liberty. What was not destroyed is our belief in opportunity and education for all and a welcome hand to those who seek refuge and a better life in this land.

Indeed, the true core of the American ethos is more appropriately reflected by the twin symbols of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island than by man-made Twin Towers of steel and stone. The latter can be destroyed from without. The former only from within.

Tonight's gala is living testimony to this ethos. Those of us who are privileged to be honored are merely its representatives. Whatever contribution we have made and hopefully will continue to make to the betterment of our society are multiplied millions of fold by all of those who have partaken or who have shared in the benefits of the immigrant experience and who will do so in the future.

So tonight, when we look homeward at the altered skyline of this great city, be sad—yes, be sad—but then glance back at this island and the lady with the lamp, and rejoice. Rejoice in a revived, renewed and reinvigorated American Spirit. Thank you.

—Acceptance speech, Ellis Island Medal of Honor, June, 2002

Ellis Island
Medal of Honor

