

On The First *Yahrzeit* Of My Teacher And Mentor, Colette Aboulker Muscat, z"l 1909-2003

By SARAH BERKOVITS

Colette, how can I explain to you what you have been to me? If I say you have been my friend, you have been much more than friend to me. If I say you have been my teacher, you have been much more than teacher to me. If I say you have been my mother, you have been that and more to me. If I say you have been my mirror, you have certainly been that to me.

You have taught me how to smile with teeth showing, you have taught me how to see with hope and vision, you have taught me how to accept myself and move forward, always striving to be more, to move vertically up the ladder of self-improvement, to express that part of me that is spirit. You have taught me how to move above the mundane, with its limitations, toward freedom. You have given me wings to become like the angels, messengers of G-d. You have given me confidence and courage, teaching me that if I risk nothing I gain nothing.

You have told me you have never been afraid because you have always been with G-d. You have encouraged me on my path. You have seen me for who I am, helping me to finally see me more like I am. You have taught me to let go of the past and live in the moment. More still, you have shown me (with me sometimes kicking and screaming) how to change the past to have a different present so I can have a different future. You have made me work hard, saying, "You're not here to enjoy yourself, you're here to grow."

You were the most loving taskmaster I have ever had, and the most patient, going over and over with me the lessons I found hard to absorb or accept. Giving up blaming and complaining, or feeling sorry for myself, meant I'd have to grow up. You wanted me to

grow up and experience the freedom that came along with this, even as I stubbornly chose to stay stuck in the pain, the anger, the hurt. But you never gave up on me, and finally I learned that being grown up is better than being shackled by anger to the painful past.

You paid attention to me. Oh Colette, how did you know I craved so much that someone see me, much as I also wanted to hide. But with you it was safe to be seen. You were non-judgmental, compassionate. You understood. I didn't even have to tell you. You knew.

One day I said to you, "Colette, you know everything about your students. I feel like I stand naked before you, and yet I have never heard you say anything bad about anyone. How is this possible?" You looked me in the face and said, "I see at first the good." Wow! What a lesson! To see at first the good. It puts everything in a totally different context.

I'm sitting here writing, Colette, at my kitchen table, and tears are coming to my eyes, and I can't see what I'm writing. Who will teach this lesson to the world now that you have left us? I can't help thinking, if the world saw things the way you did, what an incredibly wonderful place it would be. *Moshiach* would surely be here. I feel bereft at your

departure, yet strangely very full. I feel there is a hole in my body created by your absence, yet I feel whole, enriched, blessed. G-d was good to me in giving you to me. You used to tell me it was a two-way street. Thank you.

This morning, when I woke up, the world looked so grey to me. Everything with color had lost its sparkle; the blues weren't quite so blue, the reds had less luster, the greens had given up their shining luminosity. I remember the very early days after meeting you (that August of 1980) — I would walk down Shimoni Street after having visited with you, and I was struck by the leaves of the trees and the bushes. ← The greens were so bright, brighter than I had ever seen them. You had started to teach me imagery and I was beginning to learn to see. From the very beginning, you helped me see my environment differently, with more light, more color, more richness.

Thank you, Colette. You have helped me re-create myself and my life. You have shown me, and countless others, how to become the director, the actor, and the scriptwriter of our very own drama. And now we are able to do for others what you have done for us. ■

Sarah Berkovits is an educator, lecturer and child psychologist in private practice. Her book "Guided Imagery with Children: Successful Techniques to Improve School Performance and Self-Esteem is due to be released later this month. She can be reached at ssb316@msn.com

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