

Shelly's Timeline

Herein you will find the story of Shelly's life told chronologically. Each of the entries in the Contents Table below is a link to the corresponding section, or period of her life. Each section concludes with a link back to this page. There are 20 sections covering 71 years. The sections are relatively brief, touching on mainly the highlights of Shelly's life. If you want more information, please contact [Ron](#).

This document constitutes Part I (the timeline of Shelly's life) of the ***Ode to a Great Lady***. Part II, a series of vignettes, based upon the events described in this document, can be found [here](#).

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Humble Beginnings. 1944-1950. Shelly's parents, Sam Kaplan and Clara Furstein, migrated from Eastern Europe (Estonia and Ukraine, resp.) to Palestine, and then to New York in the late 1930s. They married in New York in 1940, had a son in 1941 and then Shelly in 1944. They were poor, barely assimilated, unschooled, and they had a bad marriage to boot. Shelly's brother was somewhat limited. Shelly's mother's family remained in Ukraine and all were murdered by the Nazis. Shelly's father's family continued to reside in Palestine, eventually Israel. There was little

in Shelly's heritage or childhood environment to suggest that Sam and Clara's second child would blossom into anything special.

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A Star Emerges. 1950-1957. Shelly's parents spoke Hebrew and Yiddish to her. But when Shelly started school, she began to answer them only in English. Unlike her brother, who struggled with multiple languages, Shelly coped easily with all three. Moreover, it became clear in the early grades that the immigrants' young daughter was bright, conscientious, poised and self-confident. When it was necessary to navigate the vagaries of American life, father, mother and son increasingly turned to the daughter to illuminate the path.

Aside. Sam and Clara gave their newborn daughter the Hebrew name Rachel, but called her by its Yiddish diminutive, "Roochelah." When Clara introduced her daughter to her first grade teacher, the latter decided that the closest English equivalent was "Rochelle." Thus the name she carried throughout her life – although she decided as a young teen that she preferred "Shelly."

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A Teenage Beauty. 1957-1959. Puberty was kind to Shelly. She indeed blossomed into a strikingly attractive young lady with the beautiful smile that would light up any room she entered all her life. If you doubt it, see her junior high school graduation [picture](#). She was very popular in school – with boys and girls. And the first stirrings of her remarkable empathy, compassion and kindness began to emerge.

Shelly's early teen years were happy – she excelled in school, had a wide circle of friends, and was beginning to realize that her horizons did not have to be limited by the poverty, family strife and narrow visions that surrounded her. Her talents, her nature and her ambition could clearly propel her to a much finer life than that which characterized her childhood.

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Ron Enters the Picture. 1959-1960. Shelly and I had our first date in August 1959. Actually, we met briefly in the summer of 1958. At that time, Shelly was the 'girlfriend' of a casual high school friend of mine; and he brought her around one day to show her off. Kaboom! Ron was smitten for life. (For more on that fateful day, see the vignettes in Part II and the Eulogy.) But I had to wait a year until my friend, exercising exceedingly poor judgment, sundered the relationship. How fortunate for me! Shelly and I dated throughout the year, which was my senior year in high school, her junior year. In particular, I was her date at her sweet sixteen party in March 1960. By the end of the summer of 1960, at which time I was 17 and a half and she exactly one year younger, we had pledged to each other that we would be together forever.

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Thrust into Adulthood. 1960-1964. Shelly's late teens were considerably less carefree than her early teens. In the fall of 1960, her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. Her father

essentially disappeared from the picture and her brother hid under a rock. Shelly took an apartment, moved her mother and brother there, and literally became head of household – just shy of her 17th birthday. She finished high school and managed a year in college, but eventually had to go to work full-time to support the family. Her mother's condition waxed and waned, but eventually she succumbed to the cancer in the spring of 1964. During those years, Shelly worked hard to support the family, care for her mother, maintain a few significant friendships and attend to her boyfriend (i.e., me). We were formally engaged in January, 1963. In a certain way, it was the best of times for us. I was a student at City College during those years. But every moment that Shelly was not at work, I was not at school (or studying) and neither of us was in the hospital with her mother, we spent every one of those moments together. We passed a good deal of time exploring New York City (as if we were tourists) and we had a grand time. We were married on June 21, 1964, three days following my graduation from City College and six weeks after Shelly's mother passed away. After a honeymoon in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, we decamped for Cambridge, Massachusetts, where I would pursue a PhD program in Mathematics at MIT.

Throughout these four years, Shelly grew into a mature, enormously reliable and capable young woman, who – despite tremendous responsibilities and pressure – truly emerged as a special and precious individual: solicitous of those she dealt with, even when they didn't deserve it; always seeing the needs of others before her own; exhibiting great love and compassion for those that relied on her; unfailingly kind and generous in dealing with people; and always optimistic about the future and what life held in store for the two of us and her children.

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Married Life in New England. 1964-1967. Arguably, this was the happiest, most carefree time of Shelly's life. We escaped the family strife (in both families) and set up shop completely on our own in a small, but nice apartment in Cambridge, Mass. Shelly got a very interesting job as an executive secretary in a legal, real estate firm in Boston and I attended MIT. We had enough money, played house, made some nice friends and enjoyed Boston – indeed we travelled all over New England. Shelly enjoyed her job, cooking, keeping a nice apartment, dining out and socializing. Her first forays into the needle arts occurred in this period. Friends from New York came to visit us in Cambridge – in particular, Dave and Sharon Eig, with whom we maintained a very close relationship for the next fifty years.

Shelly had escaped the horrors that marked her life in New York, reveled in her ability to establish an independent existence, and was exceedingly happy as a young married woman with a partner who delighted in seeing her emerge as a highly capable, self-reliant, accomplished and compassionate woman. All who met her enjoyed her company. And it didn't hurt that she was the most beautiful woman in all of New England.

This was also the first time (summer 1965) that Shelly and I travelled to Israel to meet her father's family. Shelly loved connecting with them, especially her first cousin, Yardena, with whom she maintained a close relationship for the rest of her life. I could write a book about this trip and our many subsequent trips to Israel. Suffice it to say that Shelly shined during this time, impressing her relatives as a confident, highly capable and poised young woman. And once again, it didn't hurt that she was the most beautiful creature in the Middle East.

But Shelly was anxious to start a family and she urged me on to complete my degree, which I did in June 1967. Shelly typed my thesis, which, considering it was mathematics and the only tool we had was an IBM Selectric with interchangeable typesetting balls, was a challenging chore. During that chore, Shelly became pregnant with our first child. [Back to Page 1](#)

A New Mom. 1967-1969. I accepted a job as an instructor at Yale University and we moved to New Haven. Well in spite of what I said above, *this* may have been the best time of Shelly's life. Shelly LOVED being a mom. Kenny was born in December, 1967. With her innate empathy, compassion and kindness, you would guess that Shelly would make a fantastic mom. And you would be right. Kenny was a happy baby, due in no small measure to the fact that he had the most loving, nurturing, generous and caring mom imaginable.

Now that we had a little more money, Shelly set about decorating our new apartment. And in spite of our limited resources, it was soon evident to anyone who noticed that Shelly had a talent for creating elegant, yet comfortable living space. This was also her first opportunity to really indulge her creative impulses and her lifelong work in the needle arts took on a new seriousness. Whether through her own creations or imaginative purchases, our home began to take on the elegant, clever and inviting features that would characterize all the homes in which we lived (and which Shelly designed) during our more than a half century together.

It is also worth mentioning two people from New York with whom Shelly maintained a close relationship. One was her father, who re-entered her life and proved to be a good father, father-in-law and grandfather over the next dozen years. The other was my younger brother Barry – fifteen years my junior, who knew Shelly all his life. The two (in a kind of aunt/nephew relationship) cared for each other deeply. [Back to Page 1](#)

Shelly Comes to Maryland. 1969-1972. After I accepted a regular faculty position at the University of Maryland in College Park, we relocated to suburban DC. We rented a bigger, nicer, 3 bedroom apartment and once again Shelly exhibited her magic touch by creating an exceeding comfortable, yet surprisingly elegant home for the three of us. She also expanded her creative outlets, adding pottery and a little sculpture to her needle repertoire. From that point on, her creations adorned our homes. In addition, she was busy with exercise classes, caring for Kenny, keeping me happy, and meeting some new and interesting friends. As would

be the case throughout her life, she established the paradigm of making life incredibly smooth and happy for me and our children. She also developed a network of dear friends, some of whom she would retain for life. If anything, her extraordinary good looks only deepened, and at math department parties and other social venues, she continued to "light up" any room that she entered. Compared to the urban nightmare that she navigated as a youth in New York, Shelly was living the 1970s version of the American dream.

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David Arrives...in Our New House. 1972-1975. The year 1972 was an eventful one in Shelly's life: our second child, David, arrived and we purchased our first house, a brand new, split foyer in Adelphi adjacent to the University. Whatever magic Shelly had woven in creating spectacular living space in our apartments was multiplied many fold in our new house. In addition, Shelly added innovative gardening to her interior decorating expertise. Now Shelly was truly living the American dream: two kids, new car, new house, husband with good job, lots of nice friends. And virtually all of it was due to Shelly's ambition, perseverance and dedication. In some sense I was just along for the ride as most of the planning, initiative and direction were hers.

In the spring of 1974, I made a 30th birthday party for Shelly. Surrounded by many friends and family, Shelly could take great personal pride in her achievements over the preceding decade and appreciate the distance she had travelled from the constrained existence of her teens to the happy, prosperous and burgeoningly successful life that she enjoyed at age 30. Because of her kind and caring disposition, she was extremely well-liked. And she was still drop dead gorgeous.

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Overseas for a Year. 1975-1976. I enjoyed my first sabbatical from the University of Maryland, which, combed with a NATO Fellowship, enabled the four of us to spend the year in Jerusalem in Israel. Naturally, it was the adventure of a lifetime. We enjoyed the company of Shelly's relatives, made new friends, learned to live in a different society, travelled extensively (in Israel and in Europe), and enjoyed ourselves immensely. However, it is important to point out that it was a great challenge for Shelly to maintain the elegant, comfortable and carefree life for me and the boys that she had established for us in the States. But she did it. It was not easy, and it magnified for her the difficulties of living in an alien environment as opposed to the good old USA. It took me many years to learn to appreciate the magnitude of her achievements in this regard, and to understand the scope of the sacrifices she made in order to satisfy her exacting standards for family life overseas.

In social and academic gatherings in Israel, Shelly found her childhood Hebrew to be of great use. But it was not only that which ingratiated her to the numerous Israelis with whom we interacted; but more importantly her charm, her sweet disposition and of course those fabulous good looks.

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Changes Back Home. 1977-1981. Upon our return, we decided, with Shelly in the lead, to enroll our sons in the Jewish Day School, a parochial school, in lieu of the public school system. This also necessitated our moving – we sold our first house and moved to a second home that we bought in Silver Spring. And then, after we got settled, Shelly obtained a part-time secretarial position in the neighborhood Junior High School. In addition, Shelly enriched the content of our lives: we took dance lessons and went out dancing regularly; she expanded and upgraded her crafts activities; we joined and became somewhat active in a local synagogue. And Shelly took more of a leadership role in the social activities of the neighborhood, as well as in the school activities of our children. When I think back on that time, I see myself as much less multi-dimensional than my wife; for me it was mostly about my job, my family and maybe sports and politics. But Shelly had broadened her interests and was interacting – and leading – in various neighborhood, social, work and family endeavors – all in her trademark highly competent, organized, friendly and helpful style. And of course, she was still the most beautiful creature one encountered in all of those arenas in which she was active. [Back to Page 1](#)

Good Times. 1981-1985. Actually *Good Times* was the name of a disco hit from 1979, but this four year period certainly represented good times for Shelly and her family. Shelly increased her hours at the local Junior High School and formed a network of friends there (among teachers and admin personnel) that lasted for the next 30 years – and is still going strong, albeit in her absence. (The group was/is known as the Lee Ladies.) She took a great interest in her sons' activities at the Jewish Day School, where the kids were flourishing and from which Shelly took a lot of pleasure and pride. Her social network widened and she was always seen as a leader in organizing activities. I advanced in my career at the University and so our level of prosperity increased. Shelly used all of these advances to enrich the lives of our family and friends.

Shelly also enjoyed some of the extensive traveling that we did in this part of our lives. In addition to all the travel we did as part of the Sabbatical, we went to Europe a few times, to the Caribbean also a few times and to California a couple of times. Well not all of that was in this four-year period; but in the first thirty years of our marriage, we travelled extensively, very often with the children. Shelly enjoyed travel and in later years – when, because of health issues (to be discussed later) that curtailed her ability to travel, she was always grateful that we had travelled so much in our (relative) youth – especially since we did so with the children.

Aside: Two of those trips were to Israel for the Bar Mitzvahs of our sons – one in 1980, one in 1985. Shelly took enormous pride in our ability to offer these opportunities to our boys and she enjoyed both experiences immensely.

Another Aside: During this period, each of us made an elaborate surprise 40th birthday party for the other. All of our family and friends attended. These events were great fun and reflected the

happy lives we enjoyed – largely due to the charm, endearing nature, lovingkindness and wholesome goodness that were the hallmarks of my wife's wonderful persona. Not to mention that she was still a total knockout at 40 years of age. [Back to Page 1](#)

Revving Up her Career. 1985-1990. With both boys in their teens, Shelly felt free to return to work full-time. Initially, she landed a high-level secretarial job in the Montgomery County Public School system, at which she became one of the earliest users, and I dare say experts, in computer software. She parlayed that expertise into an even higher-level secretarial position at Marriott Corporation international headquarters in Bethesda. In a short time she rose to be head of the entire secretarial pool at the company, where she argued tirelessly for consideration of the needs of admin people in a large corporate environment. But bigger things were in store as we shall see below.

During this period, we celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary with a return trip to the Virgin Islands. Shelly also did a lot of hosting of dinner and other parties for our friends and family. She was less active in her creative pursuits as her career occupied a lot of her time. But she continued her loving and supportive role in her teenage sons' lives, kept a strictly kosher home for the family, and began to be active in exercise classes and other physical pursuits. [Back to Page 1](#)

The Nest is Empty. 1990-1995. With both boys out of the house (Kenny married Julie in 1993), Shelly focused her energies increasingly on her career. She moved from admin support to systems in Marriott Corporation. In fact she became head of their computer training effort. Her main duties were the following. Like many big corporations in the early 1990s, Marriott was staffed with middle age (or older) senior executives who had never seen a keyboard. Yet the company was computerizing rapidly and all those management folks had to be trained – effectively and quickly. But they were not about to go to classes; and the idea of a 20 year old computer whiz kid teaching them was a non-starter. However, one-on-one lessons from a non-threatening middle aged, sympathetic and, not to mention empathetic, expert was the ticket. Shelly trained dozens of senior executives at Marriott up to and including Mr. Marriott. It was a remarkable achievement and Marriott Corporation benefitted tremendously from her expertise, teaching skills and sympathetic personality.

Shelly did not form a permanent group of friends at Marriott as she had done at the Junior High School, but she formed a powerful friendship with a dear co-worker, Carol DuVall, that lasted until Shelly's passing.

In the spring of 1990, we took a lovely trip to Spain for a week (Madrid and Barcelona) and then another week in Israel. Also, in 1995, we took our sons and their significant others for a three week trip to Israel. As it would turn out, this would be Shelly's last trip to Israel. Although we

always enjoyed reconnecting with her family there, the ongoing difficulties Shelly would incur (see below) with IBS severely restricted her ability to travel in the next 20 years. Alas, with the exception of a trip to Poland in 2005, this was our last big trip – either domestically or internationally. And as mentioned, Shelly felt fortunate to have been able to do so much travel (esp. international) when she was young, because unlike many retired folks, she couldn't really do any in her later years. Not that she complained about it. Shelly rarely complained about anything. She was happy with her lot in life and especially appreciative of the things she had – of course the homes, and cars, and other material things; but especially the family and friends.

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Shelly and IBS. 1995-1999. In the preceding decade, Shelly began to suffer symptoms of IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome), which is the fancy name for "your stomach is often upset, and there is no apparent physical cause." In this period, her symptoms grew more severe – so much so that it began to interfere with her ability to perform her job duties. Shelly decided to retire, having successfully achieved much for Marriott – namely, training and organizing into a coherent support unit the entire secretarial pool, training the secretarial pool in software and computer usage, and training the entire senior executive cadre in software, email, internet, etc. This decision was abetted by Ron advancing to a senior administrative position at the University of Maryland, which took up a great deal of his time, but afforded an enhanced salary that compensated for Shelly's loss of income.

Shelly's first grandchild, Hannah Ariel was born to Kenny and Julee in 1998. Shelly adored her and showered her trademark love and affection on Hannah; as she did with all three of her grandchildren. As I said in the Eulogy, "The bond that [Shelly] forged with each of her three grandchildren was extraordinarily strong and abiding. It wasn't just that she was remarkably generous in buying them clothes, toys and books. She took them on trips, played games with them, soothed them when they were hurt and encouraged them to develop their talents and pursue their interests. It gives me some comfort to know that Shelly will live on in their memories deep into the twenty-first century."

Shelly and I continued to enjoy the friendship of several couples with whom we double dated often. Among them were cousins of mine, Bruce and Ann Goodman, who were extremely devoted to Shelly during her illness – as were our neighbors, Mike and Bev Stern.

Aside: During her 12 years at Marriott, Shelly participated in their fantastic profit sharing and retirement plans. She amassed a goodly sum. After her retirement, she managed the portfolio aggressively and succeeded in accumulating an even tidier sum. She left every penny to her children and grandchildren – she and Ron knowing that he had enough other resources should Shelly die. Thus Shelly continued to look after her children and grandchildren, even in her physical absence.

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Quilter Extraordinaire. 1999-2002. Shelly devoted a great deal of time during her retirement to her crafts, especially her quilts. She took some classes and bought a Bernina (the Ferrari of sewing machines), but her talent was innate and self-developed. An entire separate section of this web site is devoted to her quilts, the results of her labors over the roughly 16 years between her retirement and death. She created beautiful objects that were enjoyed by family and friends; and thanks to the efforts of Casey House (part of Montgomery Hospice, where Shelly spent two weeks during her illness) and others, will be enjoyed by many more people in the coming years.

During these years, Shelly's second grandchild, Sydney Claire, was born to Kenny and Julee and David was married to Emilia. These events brought great joy to Shelly and it enlarged the group of people who were blessed to receive the special attention, love and munificence that Shelly bestowed on her immediate family. [Back to Page 1](#)

Downsizing, 2002-2005. In 2002 we sold the single family home in which we had been living for 25 years and bought a townhome in a new neighborhood in Rockville. Although we had renovated our second home twice (in the 25 years) and Shelly's decorating skills were exercised copiously over that quarter century, Shelly now had the resources and time to create a truly special home environment. She did a fabulous job with our townhome, buying furniture, coordinating accoutrements, stocking with supplies, in short creating the elegant, yet comfortable and well equipped homes that she would be known for. And she took care of it spectacularly. Since it was only Shelly and I living there, I cannot describe the heaven that I alone experienced as my good fortune to be her partner. She entertained family and friends, made special holiday dinners and created a warm, welcoming environment that matched her perennial smile and incredibly hospitable personality, which everyone loved.

Aside: Just before we moved into our new townhome, Shelly had the misfortune to slip on black ice and break her leg. The repair required two surgeries and a lengthy rehabilitation. Shelly dedicated herself to the rehabilitation as she was determined to cure her limp and return to normal. It required two years of extraordinary self-discipline and dedication, but her perseverance paid off as she realized her goal. [Back to Page 1](#)

Final Trip, 2005-2007. As it turned out, Shelly made her final big trip in this time frame. In the summer of 2005, the entire family went to Poland to celebrate a Polish wedding for David and Emilia. Shelly and I had a fine time touring in Warsaw and Krakow and even finding some of the places in Lodz where Ron's grandparents lived a century ago. Shelly's stomach cooperated and she very much enjoyed being with the family overseas another time.

Back home, Shelly continued to be deeply involved in her quilting efforts, paying close attention to the activities of her grandchildren, staying active with her friends and looking after her

husband and children. And her third grandchild, Eddie, was born to David and Emilia in 2006.

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A Dream Fulfilled. 2007-2014. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, Shelly and I and the children always took a week's vacation in the summer in the mountains of western Maryland or West Virginia. We always talked about our desire to own a place in the mountains. We continued to fantasize about it for more than thirty five years; and finally in 2007, we fulfilled our lifelong dream. We bought a four bedroom place in Deep Creek Lake in western Maryland. Naturally Shelly set about to create an amazing living environment – but with the flavor of a mountain home rather than an urban/suburban townhouse. She did a phenomenal job. I, my children and grandchildren – and quite a few friends – have enjoyed wonderful times at our second home. And in all seasons. Shelly spent the entire summers at the Double R (as we called it), and when I retired, I did too. The children and grandchildren used the place often both when we were there and when we weren't. Activities included skiing, boating, swimming, cycling and hiking. And the incredible atmosphere that Shelly created made it a wonderful home away from home for all of us. As in our home in Rockville, it was comfortable, inviting and incredibly well equipped – and of course with elegant touches everywhere. Shelly spent eight summers at the Double R, where she would bring her Bernina and work on her quilts as she enjoyed the view of the lake and the mountain. It was an exceedingly happy time for her, and indeed for all of us. It gave me great pleasure to see her so happy there. But of course, she was thinking mainly about us, not herself as she created an environment and a life that was so pleasant for all of us.

Quilting and the Double R were the highlights of Shelly's retirement. But there was another high point. Shelly arranged a 5-day stay in New York City for us, the boys and their families. The nine of us stayed in three suites in Times Square. We saw Broadway shows, walked the Brooklyn Bridge, enjoyed the view from the Top of the Rock and so much more. In principle, this was a celebration of our 50th wedding anniversary, but in truth it was a generous present from Shelly to all the members of her immediate family.

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End of a Wonderful Life. 2015. Shelly was not feeling well throughout the winter of 2015 and eventually in April, she was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. It is a deadly disease and it took her life on July 19, 2015. Shelly had a wonderful life, enjoying her role as wife, mother, grandmother, friend and co-worker. She has two wonderful sons and three sterling grandchildren. Shelly and I were happily married for 51 years. Moreover, because of her extraordinarily wonderful empathetic, compassionate, kind and endearing personality, she was beloved by so many people. From very modest origins, Shelly rose up and lived the American dream. But more importantly, she enriched and improved the lives of her family, her friends and her co-workers. She was taken far too soon and she is sorely missed by all who were

touched by her wonderful nature. The legacy of elegance and beauty that she created and left behind (her quilts, her homes, her relationships) bear witness to the extraordinary person that she was; she is beloved and the memory of her is a treasure.

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