



A LIFE AND A LEGACY

TRIBUTE TO MRS. SUKEY GROSS A"H
IN HONOR OF HER SHLOSHIM

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The name Sukey Gross might remind you of your youth. As a young teen, you read her books. She was the teacher who helped you conquer your fear of public speaking, encouraging you to stand before your classmates. She taught you how to effectively communicate through your writing. But to us, she was a wife, mother, grandmother, and sister.

She raised 10 children and had dozens of grandchildren and great-grandchildren, but that didn't stop her from welcoming others into her home. In the '90s, it was recent Soviet refugees, strangers looking for a Pesach Seder or Shabbos meal. It was greeting her father-in-law's new wife and immediately embracing her as a member of the family. As teenagers, it was our friends who came to visit us but spent more time schmoozing with our mother.

And in recent years, while she reveled in the chaos of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren crowding her home, there were many others who called her Bubby.

She was the *bubby* who would converse with a teen for hours, embark on vigorous debates with those who thought they were grown, and come up with rhyming nicknames that became a silly joke. We learned to appreciate a good book through those quiet moments on the couch after a harried Erev Shabbos.

She was the mother who would join her daughters' trips and go along with whatever was planned. She could sit in contemplation, watching the crashing waves for hours, before eventually succumbing to an uninhibited frolic in the surf.

She was always excited to meet new people and try new things, even using three of her grandchildren for balance to conquer a hoverboard. She attended every siddur and Chumash play; in the photos, her smile while she squeezed her grandchild in a hug would have you thinking it was her first and only one. She took joy in the repetition of life cycles, referring to her grandson as the *Siyum* Machine with pride.

SHE LOVED CAMP. AS A TEENAGER, she tried all options—Emunah and Sternberg. She was the pied piper, the friend everyone followed for an adventure and a good time.

As an adult, she kept finding her way back to camp—Bais Yaakov, Yedid, the Zone, and eventually Camp Shira. Even then, she was still making new friends, proudly introducing us (“meet my daughter/son, s/he’s the one who...”) when we visited. The introductions were a barely necessary formality, as the whole camp already knew way too much about us.

She sought out multigenerational friendships through coworkers and neighbors, moving to the newly developed Westgate and finding friends in the neighbors who were her children’s peers. She would seek connection with everyone she met, once spending 45 minutes chatting on the phone with someone who called looking for a Mrs. Gross who lived in Westgate, having a good time even though she wasn’t the Mrs. Gross the caller had been looking for.

When her in-laws, Rabbi Moshe and Rochelle Gross, relocated from Philadelphia to Lakewood, she spent hours driving them to doctors’ appointments and providing the companionship they had sought in the move, all while also caring for her aging mother.

HER ORIGIN WAS IN A BORO PARK that looked very different in the 1950s than it does today. Named Chaya Sara after two great-grandmothers and born the week before *Parshas Chayei Sarah*, she was nicknamed “Sukey” by her brother who couldn’t pronounce that mouthful. That the name stuck is a testament to her playful spirit.

In a community of Holocaust survivors, Moshe Mordechai and Chana Stavsky were the American parents raised in New York with only the occasional Yiddish phrase thrown into daily life. She was raised in a home overflowing with *chessed* and *hachnasas orchim* and later built the same kind of home for us.

Sundays were spent visiting her Eider grandparents in Brooklyn and her Stavsky grandparents on the Lower East Side. She spent time with her father and grandfather at their silver and watchmaking store on the Lower East Side and was rewarded with a chocolate milk while they went to Minchah.

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She attended the newly founded Esther Schoenfeld High School in Boro Park (later renamed BYA), where she thrived. Her academic escapades—many of which are memorialized in her early books—led to a lifelong admiration of her principal Rabbi Ephraim Oratz, who used those tales of mischief decades later to demonstrate principles of *chinuch* to a class of aspiring *kiruv* rabbis that included her son. At BYA, she met lifelong friends who could still bring out the teenager in her on Shabbos afternoons or in nightly phone chats when we were young.

Despite what she knew about high school students and the pranks they might play on a hapless teacher, she spent most of her career teaching. Her favorite was ninth grade English, where she met her students as kids coming from elementary school and helped them develop the skills they would need in high school and beyond.

She loved that formative grade and preferred books and lessons that endured throughout the many schools and generations, but she was also quick to realize when changes were appropriate, adapting her long-standing curriculum post-covid when she realized her students needed something different. As one of her students said “she didn’t mince words, and we loved her for it.”

WHEN SHE MARRIED HER HUSBAND of 53 years, Meir Gross, they moved to Lakewood and lived a *kollel* life decades before it became the norm. Despite leaving New York in 1972, she maintained a Brooklyn accent that would

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blossom when discussing the various streets in Boro Park.

Never settling for what was comfortable, they took their toddlers on an adventure across the country, where they taught in various Jewish day schools in Dallas, Phoenix, and Boston before moving back to Lakewood. Her collection of '70s Pesach Judaica, gifts from Yom Tov guests, are a scrapbook of the open house that was her home in those cities.

Once back in Lakewood, she taught at RPRY in Edison and then ran a *gan* out of her garage. In addition to writing a curriculum for Torah U'Mesorah when she noticed a void—a guide that countless teachers told us they still rely on—she composed original songs we still use to remember our colors in Hebrew.

She taught at Bais Faiga, Bais Kaila, Ateres Nechama, and many other schools. She retired two years ago from Reenas Bais Yaakov in Highland Park. Her students there recalled her smiles that came with the encouragement that they could in fact read that book, write that story, or spot that grammar mistake.

When a student questioned why she needed to learn to write, the response was: "You'll have to write mitzvah notes for your children."

HER MOST PUBLIC LEGACY IS HER writing. In the 1980s, there were limited options for literature for young teens in the community.

She stepped into that gap with creativity and authenticity, drawing from her own high school experiences.

She authored 13 novels—eight in the Rivkah Gross Academy series, three in the Lower East Side series, and two standalones: *Secrets* and *Trailblazer*. She delighted in weaving the names of her children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren into those stories.

We'll remember her every time we see a typo and can't just keep reading and every time we pass the Viennese crunch at the store or break the melted cheese on an eggplant parmesan. We'll recall her witty sense of humor each time we say a joke that was smart enough for her or ironically name a pet goldfish Gefilte.

We'll long for her ever-extending table and ice cream at *shalosh seudos* as well as the secret stash of Pesach chocolate and the Swiss fruit-shaped candies we'd sneak from her supply of *bentching* prizes. We'll miss the ever-present warning "Don't do anything I wouldn't do" when we're doing something she would never consider doing and the constant refrain "Don't forget to say *Tefillas Haderech* and call me when you get there."

We'll read her books and gaze at her paintings when we need a small and inadequate memento.

SUKEY GROSS PASSED AWAY on November 12, 2025—the 21st of Cheshvan 5786. She leaves behind her husband, Meir Gross; her children Layah Mandelbaum, Shayndy Abrahamson, Malkie Horowitz, Mordy Gross, Bayla Hersh, Avrami Gross, Avigayil Bendkowski, Michal Gross, Rivky Bernstein, and Shulamis Gross; 36 grandchildren; eight great-grandchildren; her siblings Yitzchok Stavsky, Penina Feigenbaum, Estie Florans, and Yanky Stavsky; and her mother-in-law and friend, Rochelle Gross.

Please share any memories you have—even if it's just a quick thought—at rememberingbubbygross@gmail.com. ●

