

MY MOTHER-IN-LAW

# ALIZA

**A Legacy of Light, Love & Spirit**



Aliza Feldman

MIRIAM RACQUEL FELDMAN

# My dear, brave mother- in-law, Aliza Feldman, was born in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1937.

Her mother, Rosine, was 14 and her father, Shlomo Davidson, was 40 when they got married. After a few years, Rosine and Shlomo divorced, and Rosine remarried an Arab Christian man, John. It soon became clear that John didn't want Rosine's Jewish daughters, Aliza and Chava, living in his house. John insisted that they be put in a Christian boarding school and Rosine complied, feeling she had no choice. Unfortunately, they were not treated well there.

Rosine's brother, Uncle Abud, who lived in Egypt, heard about the plight of his young nieces and could not bear that Aliza and Chava were

being raised this way. He drove from Egypt to Lebanon to rescue them, sneaking them over the border into Israel by hiding them in the trunk of his car. Uncle Abud dropped Aliza and Chava off on a newly formed *kibbutz*, where they were raised by compassionate strangers. What untold pain Aliza must have suffered, what confusion her spirit must have carried, to be raised by strangers when her own parents were still living. Her father, Shlomo, who had moved from Lebanon to Israel, would visit her and her sister on the *kibbutz*, but he had remarried and did not take in his daughters from a previous marriage. And Rosine, her mother, never visited at all, perhaps because of the tension that would have caused between her Arab husband and herself, as well as the danger of traveling to Israel from Lebanon in the 1940s. In spite of these painful circumstances, Aliza grew into a beautiful and kind young woman, as did her sister Chava.

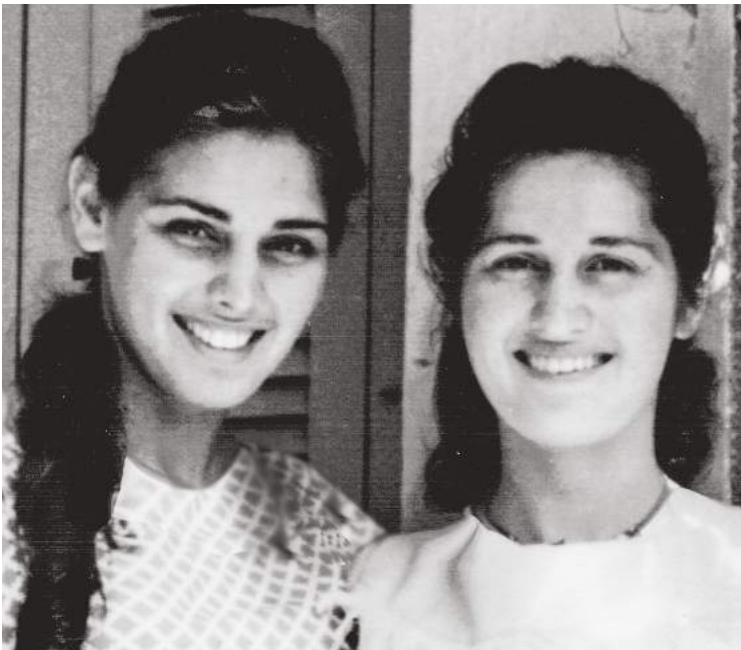
Aliza demonstrated tenacity and bravery throughout the circumstances of her youth. Even before she grew up and joined the Israeli army, Aliza had to defend her *kibbutz* from aggressive Arabs. Armed with a gun and seeking shelter in bunkers, her life was constantly in danger as she struggled to remain alive as a Jew in Israel. As a soldier, Aliza's mission involved spying over enemy lines by soaring high above in silent gliders. She was adept at navigating the skies in these silent planes, observing the enemy, and then landing them safely at home where she would be debriefed.

**UNCLE TO THE RESCUE, AGAIN**  
Eventually, Aliza, with her thick Israeli accent, made her way to

Chicago, where she had friends who invited her to come. There she met and married her husband, Gene Feldman. In 1948, Uncle Abud was forced to leave Egypt along with 850,000 other Jews who were expelled from Arab countries. He also moved to America and was living in Brooklyn.

During the early stages of dating Gene, Aliza went to visit her uncle in New York. When Gene innocently phoned her at Uncle Abud's apartment, Uncle Abud demanded to know what was going on. Who was this young man asking to speak to his niece, and what were his intentions? With no parents to look out for Aliza, Uncle Abud took that role on himself. He asked Gene flat out if he planned to marry Aliza. Taken aback at first, Gene soon responded, "Yes, I guess I do." After that, Uncle Abud allowed Aliza to continue the conversation. According to Gene, it didn't dawn on him until he hung up the phone that he had just gotten engaged to Aliza!

Gene's matrimony to Aliza not only joined him together with the interesting Uncle Abud, but he also gained Rosine as his mother-in-law. She was still living in Lebanon and working as a spy in the Mossad. John, Rosine's husband, was highly involved in the shipping ports in Lebanon. Arms, supplies and other goods would pass through his hands on a regular basis. Rosine, at the behest of the Mossad, would fly from Lebanon to France monthly to report whatever information she had regarding the shipments. This was fairly typical of the Jewish world at the time, where every person in a position of influence and knowledge was informally enrolled in some sort of information-gathering capacity for the benefit of the Jewish nation.



Aliza (L) with sister Chava.

Aliza (R) with her father, Shlomo Davidson, and sister Chava.



Miriam Racquel and Dovid Feldman at their wedding. Aliza is standing to the left of Miriam Racquel. Mama Rosine is seated, far left.





### ALIZA INSISTS ON CHINUCH

Back in the States, Aliza and Gene lived a vibrant life together as they raised their family. Though Aliza herself had been raised on an anti-religious *kibbutz*, she was despondent over the public-school education her kids were receiving in America and their lack of knowledge of anything Jewish. She insisted on sending them to a Jewish private school, which meant expensive tuitions that she and Gene could not afford. Gene had inherited a dry cleaning business; a little money trickled in. But for the sake of her children's Judaism, Aliza was willing to be *moser nefesh* to pay the costly private school tuition, and she convinced Gene of its importance. When the kids came home with Hebrew prayers and *tefillin* that were foreign to an Israeli who had grown up on a very secular *kibbutz*, she would beam with joy that her children would know of their Jewish heritage and be proud Jews. Her *pintele Yid* ensured that her kids would not forget their Jewish tradition in the land of the free.

Aliza loved cooking her children's favorite dishes like chocolate-covered matzah and baklava. She also loved to play the flute (*chalil*). When her non-Jewish neighbor, an unknown yet professional saxophone player, heard her playing Israeli and Jewish songs, he desired to learn from her. She taught him patiently in her small, humble home in Evanston, IL, what she had carried over from her beloved country. Years later, this neighbor, Ken Arlen, would become the top musician for Jewish weddings and bar and bas mitzvahs of Chicago. He used some of what she shared with him to play for thousands of people, including an audience at

the White House. Few besides himself and Aliza's family know that when he stands up and belts out Jewish heartfelt tunes, some of his training came from a humble Israeli woman named Aliza Feldman.

### ALIZA'S KIBBUD EIM

Eventually, Aliza helped bring her mother, Mama Rosine, and stepfather, John, to the United States from Lebanon. They settled first in Brooklyn and then in Florida, where Aliza would bring her children to visit them frequently. The beauty of Aliza's spirit was such that even though her stepfather had been unloving and her mother distant, she forgave them and treated them with respect. In keeping with the strangeness of her youth, both she and her mother could not communicate in their native tongues—Hebrew for Aliza and Arabic for Rosine. They spoke with each other in French or broken English, languages foreign to them both.

In middle age, Aliza became a victim of a terrible illness. Misdiagnosed at first, the disease spread and took over her life for 11 years. At times when she felt well enough, she would bring her Israeli flute to the hospital and visit other victims of the disease, bringing moments of cheer and love to friends. Until she passed away in 1998 at the age of 61, Aliza's heart beat with kindness and generosity to others. She and Gene raised four beautiful children, with an enthusiastic love for Israel and their Jewish heritage. Through her tenacity of spirit she passed on a beautiful legacy of Judaism to future generations. She is survived by her four Jewish



Miriam Feldman

children, Dr. Arica Hirsch, Dovid Feldman, Adam Feldman, and Eric Feldman, and grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

We are living through such strange and terrible times now with the pandemic, which call upon us to show particular tenacity and strength. As Jewish people, our history has prepared us well for this moment. Though no one would ever wish for our people to be tested again, we now have an opportunity to set an example and share our strength with the entire human race. May Moshiach be revealed to heal us and the world. Amen.

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Miriam Racquel Feldman is married to Aliza's second child, Dovid Feldman, a chossid and family and marriage therapist. They live in Chicago with their children and run over-the-phone marriage workshops. Miriam Racquel is a somatic healer, relationship coach and writer. She has also written a memoir about her intriguing spiritual journey and the miracle of the Rebbe's prophecy regarding her shidduch with Dovid, to be published in the near future, titled G-d Said What?! A Tale of Faith, Miracles and Prophecy. For more info, please visit [miriamracquel.com](http://miriamracquel.com).