



## Irving Nathan Rothman

April 10, 1935 - April 22, 2019

Dr. Irving Nathan Rothman passed away on Monday, April 22, 2019. He was 84 years old. He was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the son of immigrants, Max Roitman and Ida Weber. The name was changed to Rothman when Max entered America at Ellis Island.

Dr. Rothman was an identical twin. He and Elliot, along with their older brother, were reared in a small apartment above their father's barber supply shop. When the boys were young, their parents took in three more boys, the children of cousins who had been killed in a car accident. All six boys grew up in one small bedroom and they all went on to do remarkable things with their lives. When the twins were about 12 years old, they met a young man, Bob Geminder, who had survived the Holocaust and landed in Pittsburgh unable to speak English. They befriended him and invited him to join their Jewish youth group chapter, the Squirrel Hill chapter of Aleph Zadik Aleph, and that young man became their best friend and remained their best friend until Bob's recent death in January.

Dr. Rothman attended the University of Pittsburgh where he received an undergraduate degree, a Masters' Degree and his Ph.D. in English Literature. He was student editor of The Pitt News from 1955-1957 and also Director of Publications for the University of Pittsburgh.

In 1961, he met Hava Rae Bernstien from Lincoln, Nebraska, who had moved to Pittsburgh to teach special education in a steel mill area high school. They were engaged about seven months later and married in December 1962.

They were married for over 56 years. They had two daughters. When the children were young, Dr. Rothman would turn the great classics of world literature into bedtime stories, and the girls would be spellbound. Later, when they went to school, they recognized the classics when the stories of their earliest childhood unfolded in their classrooms.

In 1967 he came to Houston to teach at the prestigious University of Houston Department of English. Dr. Rothman was the longest serving member of the department with a well-known devotion to his students and their education. He served as Director of Graduate Studies for the English Department. He was advisor to the University's ODK Honor Society for many years. He leaves behind legions of grateful students and a few, less talented, who felt he was too tough. One of his finest students from the 1970s, Perry Riggs, came from North Carolina, three weeks ago to visit.

Upon hearing of Dr. Rothman's demise, the current chair of the department remarked in quiet shock that "Dr. Rothman is the department." There is not enough space to adequately express the breadth and depth of Dr. Rothman's fine career.

Dr. Rothman was one of the finest scholars in the world in his area of study. He was one of the leading experts in the world in 18th Century English Literature. In an arena where scholarship, clarity of expression, creativity, and attention to detail all matter, he was peerless. He was studious, brilliant, thoughtful, meticulous, and prolific. He was well published and adhered to rigorous standards and required the same of all around him. He participated in international academic debates in the Journal of Arts and Letters. He was awarded a patent from the U.S. Patent Office in 1978 for an editing desk. He

published a multi-volume treatise, *The Editions of Daniel Defoe*, and he also recently produced *Barbers and Barbershops: An Annotated Bibliography*, a body of work that spanned decades and pays tribute to his childhood.

In addition to his academic career, he built a wonderful technical writing business. During the energy boom in Texas and afterward, he wrote manuals, procedures and reports for some of the most significant energy and energy service companies: Brown & Root, Gulf State Utilities, Texas Eastern Corporation, Wanda Petroleum, Fluor Constructors, Halliburton, ARCO, Exxon, and others. He worked on the South Texas Nuclear Project and was featured in a full-page story in the May 5, 2008 edition of *Chemical & Engineering News*. He also wrote for the University of Houston's Space Vacuum Epitaxy Center and for NASA Life Sciences Division, earning a VIP invitation for himself and Hava to view the February 1994 space shuttle launch from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. Ever unselfish, Dr. Rothman used the revenue from that to ensure that his daughters were able to complete their undergraduate and graduate studies debt-free.

Dr. Rothman was a man of deep and unwavering commitment to his Jewish faith and the State of Israel. Upon moving to Houston in 1967, he and Hava joined Congregation Beth Yeshurun, where they have been active members for all the years since. He served on the Board of Directors for the congregation. He taught religious school at the synagogue for 40 years, having educated a large number of the Jewish youth who grew up in Houston during those years.

He served on the Board of the Jewish Family Service. In 1974, he and Hava were appointed as leaders of that summer's annual Houston Youth Pilgrimage to Israel. This was a seven-week Pilgrimage in which the couple led over 50 young Houstonians to Israel to learn about the Jewish faith and its ties to the

land. In 1994, he was awarded the Irving L. Samuels Outstanding Teacher Award for Judaic Studies by the Bureau of Jewish Education of the Jewish Federation of Greater Houston. In 1995, he was awarded the Ner Tamid (Eternal Light) Award. In 2015, Dr. Rothman was named the Minyanaire of the Year, for his faithful attendance at daily prayers; his reason for doing so related to his compassion for others. He wanted to make sure the daily quorum of attendees was met so that anyone who needed to say mourner's prayers would have the required number of people present. He participated in the development of the first Torah Learning College. He raised the funds to rescue a Torah scroll which had survived the Holocaust and bring it to the University of Houston. He devoted countless hours to strengthening Hillel Houston, which serves the University of Houston and Rice University.

His final act of faith was to find the strength to get up and go to synagogue on the Saturday morning before his death, to chant the Haftarah, the ancient way of singing thousand-year old selections from the Books of the Prophets.

He was a Zionist and a believer in the biblical mandate of the Jewish State. Along with his Israeli cousin, David, he was the glue that held his American and Israeli family together and created relationships that endure and are unbreakable today. He was vigilant about watching for and correcting misinformation and anti-Israel propaganda in local newspapers. He was so happy to have been able to visit twice in recent years, accompanied by his wife, his daughter and daughter-in-law. He was proud of the fact that he published in Hebrew on Gulliver's Travels.

He was a man of arts and letters, a man of faith, and above all, a family man. Dr. Rothman is survived by his wife, Hava, daughter Marcy Rothman and her wife, Tammy Pye, daughter Andrea Stoler and her husband Robert Stoler, grandchildren Daniele Miri Stoler and Garrett Nathan Stoler, identical twin brother Elliot Rothman and sister-in-law Martha Rothman, sister-in-law Maxine

Rothman and numerous nieces, nephews, cousins, and extended family in America and Israel. He was a generous spirit and his entire family, the Houston Jewish community, the educational community, and colleagues and friends everywhere will miss this remarkable man.

In lieu of flowers, the family would prefer donations to Congregation Beth Yeshurun for the Greenfield Chapel.