



Ze'ev Orzech

November 5, 1926 - September 13, 2011

Professor Ze'ev Orzech died peacefully the evening of Sept. 13, 2011, surrounded by his family.

Ze'ev was born Nov. 5, 1926, in Wiesbaden, Germany. In 1936, when attending public school as a Jewish child became impossible, his parents enrolled him in a Jewish boarding school in Bex-les-Bains, Switzerland. In 1938, his family made its way to Tel Aviv, Israel (then called Palestine). In 1947, Ze'ev came to the United States to study economics at the University of California in Berkeley. There he met and married Miriam (Mimi) Weitz. In 1957, he and Mimi moved to Corvallis, where Ze'ev began a teaching career in the Economics Department at Oregon State University, from which he retired after 32 years.

Ze'ev and Mimi loved to travel, spending three sabbatical years in Israel, visiting friends in many European countries, and participating in Elderhostel tours to China, Morocco, Los Angeles and other exotic places.

People were often curious about Ze'ev's mysterious accent. English was his fourth language: He spoke German as a child, French at boarding school in Switzerland, and Hebrew as a teenager in Tel Aviv. He loved language, and many students in Corvallis, both children and adults, learned to appreciate the beauty and intricacies of Hebrew from him. He was a longtime member of the Corvallis French Club, whose Tuesday morning meetings were near-sacred for him.

When Ze'ev and Mimi moved to Corvallis in the late 1950s, the Jewish

community was tiny. Together they helped support the small group of Jews and over the years watched its numbers grow. For many years, Ze'ev served as advisor to Hillel, the Jewish student group on campus.

In 1974, he and Mimi were among the founding members of Beit Am, the Jewish Community of the Mid-Willamette Valley. They both devoted much of their lives to sustaining Beit Am.

A commitment to Jewish values and the continuity of the Jewish people infused all aspects of Ze'ev's life. Knowing and understanding Judaism mattered deeply to him. He never refused requests to present Judaism to the broader community, often leading Passover seder ceremonies for church groups and speaking to school students.

He loved being around and helping people. Even though he wasn't much of a cook, he was a fixture at Stone Soup, helping in any way he could.

In the many years the mid-Willamette Valley was without a trained religious leader, Ze'ev served as the community's rabbi figure. He led Jewish holiday observances and officiated at Bar and Bat Mitzvahs and weddings, never failing to infuse a bit of humor and Jewish teaching at every opportunity.

Ze'ev was also an avid patron of the arts, collecting original artwork by local artists, as well as an impressive collection of art by Japanese and Israeli printmakers. If he was not in his office in the Economics Department, there was a good chance he could be found in the halls of the Art Department.

He also served for years as chairman of Chamber Music Corvallis, and helped found the Barn Theater, a precursor to the Corvallis Community Theater.

After retirement, Ze'ev began editing the monthly newsletter of the local Jewish community, and writing a column exploring Jewish culture, history and beliefs.

The last several years of his life, he compiled and edited 16 years' worth of newsletter articles into a book, "From Aleph to Ze'ev," which was published in May. Ze'ev ensured that all profits from sales of his book would go to benefit Beit Am, the Jewish community he dedicated his life to building and supporting.

Ze'ev is survived by Mimi, his beloved wife of nearly 60 years; his brother, David; his children, Sarah, Daniel and Joseph; and six grandchildren whom he adored.

Donations in his honor can be made to Beit Am Jewish Community, P.O. Box 1143, Corvallis, OR 97339.

The funeral service will take place at 11 a.m. Thursday, Sept. 15, at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Corvallis, 2945 N.W. Circle Blvd. A memorial service will take place in the near future.