



*A Heartfelt Tribute to
a Great Human Being –*

Val Levy

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Introduction

Alan and Valerie Levy, together with their young daughters Monica and Erika, came to Prague in 1967. It was love at first sight and the city came to love the Levys as much as they loved it. Apart from their enforced exile in 1971 (when they stayed as close as possible by moving only as far as Vienna!) they maintained their relationship with the city over the years. In the course of those years they made many, many friends here, both amongst the expat community and the real Czechs themselves. Both had the good fortune to die in the city they loved, and they will be with it for ever.

This compendium is a tribute to them both, but especially to Val, whose sweetness, generosity, love and humanity has touched so many people. Her friends in Prague, and those who have had to leave it, offer these reminiscences to her remaining family, her brother, daughters and grandchildren of whom she was enormously proud.

Thank you, Val for including us in your life. We are enormously proud and thankful to have known you. We will never forget you.

Note: Since this introduction was drafted Val's family has asked that their own contributions also be included.

How the Levys came to Prague

'I took my family rowing on Central Park lake the day I broke the news to them that we would be moving to a magic yellow city with a hundred gold spires and tiny blue cobblestones that workmen hammered back into place every morning. It was the summer of 1967 and Erika, going on three, wanted to know: "Will we be able to see the Empire State Building at night?"

"Not even by day," I said. But I quickly added that every day they would be able to visit a real castle or chose among four fulltime puppet theatres – two of which were perhaps the best in the world. Every hour in fact they could see a Town Hall clock whose twelve mechanical apostles, on a turntable, come out to toll the time while a skeleton clangs a small gong, an elderly courtier nods sagely, and a rooster crows. I even related the ghastly legend (more true than untrue) of the fifteenth-century craftsman who made that clock for an Emperor of Bohemia. The Emperor so admired it that, to prevent his unique masterwork from ever being duplicated, he had the clockmaker's eyes put out. The clockmaker outlived the Emperor and, when his own day of reckoning neared, he petitioned the Emperor once more before dying. The old man was carried to the clock. He passed his hands over it just once – and the clock stopped for two centuries.

"But now it works," I assured both my daughters. Then I told them that the Czech schools didn't bus you there. You were called for by a special trolley that had potty seats.

This was an unabashed pitch to Monica – at three going on four, the opinion-maker – in the hope that Erika would follow. Our rowboat drifted with oars locked and resting. Erika puckered at the enormity of a two-year's old precious routine being upended, but Monica nibbled at the bait.

"I would like to ride on that trolley," she announced. "But is this the boat we're taking to Prague?"

Before I could answer my wife Valerie cried: "Watch your head, Daddy! We're in a tunnel and going on the rocks!"

I ducked and lunged for the oars. I didn't know it then, but from that moment on we were Czechoslovaks, paddling upstream in a flimsy vessel amidst the tides and glaciers of steel that seem always to engulf dreamers in darkness'.

Excerpt from Rowboat to Prague – Alan Levy

Tribute to my sister at memorial service in Prague, Feb. 26, 2019

David Wladaver
Melina
Monica Levy-Kéloufi
Erika Levy
Maya

Dobry Den, Good Day, My name is David Wladaver, Valerie Levy's brother.

We are here today to pay our final respects to our dear friend Valerie Levy.

Val was a loving wife, mother, grandmother, sister and dear friend to so many of us.

She was the wife of the late Alan Levy, and here today are her two daughters: Monica and Erika

And three of her grandchildren: Lisa, Mélina and David. Her fourth grandchild, Maya, is not here today but is here in spirit.

Also here today is Carolyn, her sister-in-law.

I want also to introduce Zuzana Jurkova, her dear friend.

As you know, Val was a citizen of the world, who over time, chose Prague as the place she loved most. After enduring the Soviet tanks and bullets during the Prague Spring, Valerie and her family fled to Austria. But years later they returned to Prague. Val spent the rest of her days living in Prague, the city that was dearest in her heart.

She has left so many of us with loving memories of a person who made everyone she touched feel loved. We will all miss her so much, but we will all treasure our memories of this very special person.

(I then sang "I Will" by Lennon and McCartney, *a capella*.)

Who knows how long I've loved you
You know I love you still
Will I wait a lonely lifetime
If you want me to, I will

For if I ever saw you
I didn't catch your name
But it never really mattered
I will always feel the same

Love you forever and forever
Love you with all my heart
Love you whenever we're together
Love you when we're apart

And when at last I find you
Your song will fill the air
Sing it loud so I can hear you
Make it easy to be near you
For the things you do endear you to me
You know I will, I will

Thank you.

Dear Grndm,

Vont me manquer
I'm going to miss

Ton français joliment désuet
Your beautifully outdated french

Ton respect pour la singularité
Your respect for uniqueness

Nos parties de cartes à côté du radiateur brûlant
Our card games next to the blazing radiator

Ton exercice physique au rythme et au son de la voix de Jane Fonda
Your exercising at the pace and the sound of Jane Fonda's voice

Ta façon de prendre chaque chose comme un cadeau en faisant des moments les plus simples des sommets de bonheur
Your way of considering each thing as a gift by turning the simplest moments into a climax of happiness

La liseuse numérique dont tu ne te sépares jamais
The digital reader you always carry along

Supprimer nos voyelles pour faire semblant de parler en tchèque
Removing vowels to pretend we're speaking czech

La petite musique quand tu joues au Freecell sur ton ordinateur
The jingle when you play Freecell on your computer

Ton indéfectible enthousiasme pour le vin rouge et la viennoiserie française
Your unshakeable enthusiasm for red wine and French pastries

Ta vivacité d'esprit, poésie de ton intelligence
Your alertness, poetry of your intelligence

Les variations de bleu et de violet sur tes doigts gelés
The variations of blue and purple on your frozen fingers

Ce regard pétillant qui n'a jamais laissé personne indifférente
This sparkling gaze that has never left anyone indifferent

Ta soif de voyage et ta curiosité pour la beauté des paysages et des êtres
Your thirst for travel and your curiosity for landscapes' and people's beauty

Pouvoir dire „la chambre de mamie“ pour désigner la pièce devenue ton espace réservé quand tu viens nous rendre visite
Being able to say „grandma's bedroom“ to designate the room that has become your reserved space when you visit us

Ton envie, même dans les jours plus difficiles, de continuer à vivre et aimer et chérir les tiennes
Your desire, even in the toughest days, to continue to live and love and cherish your family and friends

J'ai été ravie de te connaître. Ravie de te compter parmi mes plus proches. Ravie de t'avoir comme modèle de femme et de liberté. Ravie de passer ces heures tendres, joyeuses, intimes avec toi. Ravie que tu aies gardé toute ta tête jusqu'au bout. Que tu aies pu rester dans ton appartement jusqu'au bout. Que tu aies eu une belle vie jusqu'au bout. I am very pleased to have known you. Very pleased you were part of my closest ones. Very pleased to have you as a role model of woman and freedom. Very pleased to have spent these tender, happy, intimate hours with you. Very pleased that you remained sane until the end. That you could stay in your apartment until the end. That you had a beautiful life until the end.

Le monde des vivantes perd une grand-mère, une mère, une sœur, une amie, une amante, une professeure, une partenaire de rummy, une voisine, une confidente, une source d'inspiration et un exemple. Tu n'étais pas encore prête à mourir. Ton insatiable appétit de vivre guidera mon souffle. Merci.

The land of the living loses a grandmother, a mother, a sister, a friend, a lover, a teacher, a rummy partner, a neighbor, a confidente, a source of inspiration and an example. You were not ready to die yet. Your insatiable appetite for life will guide my spirit. Thank you.

Melina

Dearest Mutti,

As a child, and even as an adult, I had actually been closer to Daddy, with whom I shared many interests, in particular a love for schedules, train – and tram-timetables and travel brochures.

I do nevertheless have fond memories of reading my favorite books, such as Heidi and Anne of Green Gables, to you, while getting my back and head scratched.

I somehow didn't seem to notice that you had any personality. But then again, Daddy wanted things done his way, or else he would throw a tantrum. When asked what you wished, you always answered: "I'll blend".

In a way, you lived in Daddy's shadow. I remember how surprised you were, after he died, to discover that his friends were also your friends. You had thought they were only interested in him. You were always so touched and grateful for their presence.

It was after Daddy was gone that I really discovered you, and the wonderful, loving, generous, playful and enthusiastic person you are. I realized that it's not that you blended, it's that you were always happy to come along and share bits and pieces of our lives. I know how my guitar teacher, my gospel choir leader and my African dance teacher already miss you so much.

And you were also the best grandmother... so open-minded and loving.

Of course, I owe my present life in France to the love of France and of the French language that you passed on to me.

I know how happy you were to spend vacations discovering new parts of France, and I remember how you cried when, just after having gotten my driver's license, I drove you to the Mont Saint Michel, which you had only seen in textbooks.

You so incredibly loved your friends and family. That is what kept you going at times when you were weak, you wanted to get your act together so you would miss as little as possible of your loved ones.

We weren't ready. You weren't ready. But then again, would we ever have been ready? Would you ever have been ready, when there was always more to look forward to? I am so sorry you are gone, but so glad it happened fast, and you really lived your life and your love to the very last drop.

Mindy

Tribute to my mother at memorial service in Prague, Feb. 26, 2019

I don't have words. There are no words for my feelings right now, for the beauty of my mother, her love, her joy, talents, intelligence, compassion, humor, wonderful motherness. I love you, Mutti.

So I'll use someone else's words, with the help of my son, David:

Owl Babies
by Martin Waddell

Once there were 3 owls, Sarah and Percy and Bill.
They lived in a hole in the trunk of a tree with their
Owl Mother.

One night they woke up and their Owl Mother
was gone!

"Where's Mummy?" asked Sarah.

"Oh my Goodness!" said Percy.

"I want my Mummy!" said Bill.

But their owl mummy didn't come...

"I think she's gone hunting," said Sarah

"To get us some food," said Percy.

"I want my Mummy!" said Bill.

But their owl mummy didn't come...

The baby owls came out of their house and sat
on the tree and waited...

"She'll be back," said Sarah.

"She'll be back soon," said Percy.

"I want my Mummy!" said Bill.

It was dark in the wood.

They had to be brave.

Things moved all around them!

"She'll bring mice and things that are nice!"
said Sarah.
"I suppose so!" said Percy.
"I want my Mummy!" said Bill.
"I think we should sit on my branch," said Sarah.
And they did. All 3 of them.

"Suppose she got lost or a fox got her!"
"I want my mummy!"
The 3 babies closed their owl eyes and wished
their owl mummy to come!

Twit Twoo!
And she came!
Soft and silent she swooped through the trees
to Sarah, Percy, and Bill.

What's all the fuss? You knew I'd come back!"
"I knew it" Said Sarah.
"I knew it" Said Percy.
"I love my Mummy!" Said Bill.

Mutti won't swoop in. But she is part of us. Look at my face, David's face, his eye color, my daughter Maya's personality, funniness. My husband, Philip, was touched by her compassion. Look at her family, all of you. She is part of you. You helped fulfill her—and she was fulfilled.

Tonight, Mutti, I have to say something you used to say to us every night, "Dors avec les anges." Sleep with the angels, my angel, my Mutti.

I love you.

Erika

To: Mammy Val
Love: Maya

Dear Val,
Happy visit I hope you
feel wonderful here
we are all so so
excited to have you
here. We also miss you
and now we get to
see you! a dream come
true

- Love,
Maya

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Au Revoir!

In the mid 90s while we were posted in Vienna Austria, we met you as the famous Madame Levy (phonetically in French La Vie) at the American School of Vienna teaching French. The impact you had on the students there is without words. Fluency in French is a gift you gave to our son for life and we are grateful for your encouragement.

It was surprising to meet you years later in Prague at the IWAP meeting as plain Valerie. Some people enter our lives for a reason and us meeting again was one of them.

Thank you for the gift of knowledge that you shared. You will be missed.

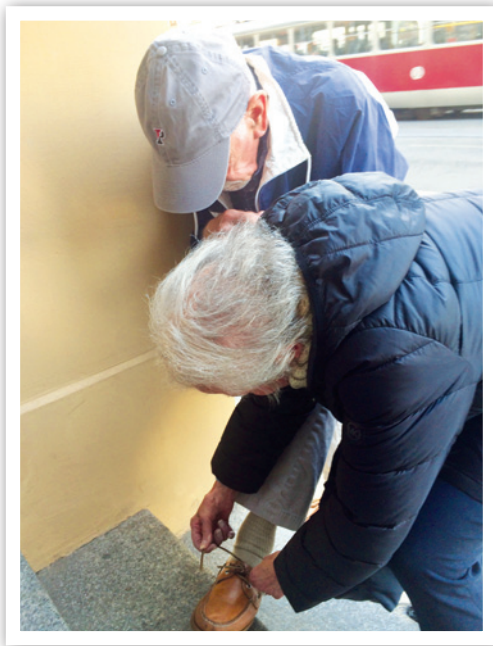
RIP dear Valerie, dear Madame Levy!

Au revoir from the Csaszar family and especially from your devoted student James.

Beata Csaszar

Transcending friendships

“Val, my dear friend David — who was like you born in New York and now lives in Atlanta — is coming to visit me in Prague. Would you like to meet him, let’s say on September the 26th?”



I asked her at the beginning of September with a little hesitancy. I knew how busy she normally is — and this was just a few days following the pleasant lunch at Mistral Café where she met with my friend Don of D.C. But I knew Val would enjoy meeting people I wanted to introduce to her. Yes, others warmed me that Val’s social calendar is so filled that in a period of three months ahead, she could usually find two 40-minute slots when she was not yet committed. In fact, I did not even hope that she could be free. But she agreed: “Yes, Pavel, dear. I love your friends, I want to meet them all!”

Three weeks later, the new Andělská kavárna Na Knížecí witnessed our laughs, sips of coffee and even a few bites of those Pra-

gue sinful desserts. (Both Val and David very carefully watch any calories that enters the system.) But the café also witnessed a lesson. “You need to do it more rigorously and use a different technique,”



The pictures spell a thousand words!

she told David when he kept complaining about those terrible shoe laces of his. We all know how frustrating they can be.

“Here, let me help you,” she said just like a careful mother — and on the small step, in the tiniest possible space right in the doorway of the kavárna, the demonstration of tying the best knot in the world began. And... man, what knots she could produce! For many days to follow, I would hear David saying so often: “Where is Val when we need her!?”

For me, “Friendship” is the best term to characterize Val in my memories. In fact, friendship with a kind of transcending quality. Like the brand new one I recently experienced upon my return from Copenhagen. Landing at Havel Airport, I was so close to IKEA, that it looked like a good idea to make a little side trip to buy the items I only can find there.

An older couple, literally shining from the distance, was approaching my bus stop. They were apparently slightly unsure whether this way was the right one. Maybe I should keep close just in case they needed help, I thought. And soon, my first impression hinting that they might not be Czechs was confirmed. They spoke English to each other.

“Prosím-vás. Je-de tehle au-tobus do IKEA?” the lady asked me when we boarded the vehicle a minute later. It was Val’s accent and diction that I have just heard.

“A-no, je-dete sprá-vně,” I said, speaking slowly and making sure that I pronounce everything, so that the student of this peculiar language would not get discouraged.

“Jak dlouho už žijete v Praze?” I couldn’t help thinking of Val right there, on the empty bus. It was the same determination to speak Czech and elegance and lightness of being that I could also see in this lady. She reminded me of Val so much. And I felt a strange urge — like the prince in Rusalka when meeting the glamorous unknown princess on his wedding day — to ask her The Question. I waited for the right moment when the bus would stop rattling on the potholes and when we are silent for a while, still keep the eye contact. Here it comes...

“Did you by any chance know Val Levy?” I finally asked. “Yes, she was a dear friend of ours...”

A few weeks later, we met again, at the cukrárna of Mr. Erhart, where we’d also sometimes go with Val. And now we think of a next meeting with the new friends. It made me realize how one can influence others, even after all life functions go silent. With Val, I would often talk about Alan and Richard and so these precious men have lived in our memories and thoughts. There is a saying that a man is not dead while his name is still spoken. But it is obvious to me that Val can do even more than that.

Pavel Farkaš

Přátelství překračující hranici

“Val, můj drahý přítel David z Atlanty, který se také narodil v New Yorku, přijede do Prahy! Chtěla by ses s ním seznámit, řekněme 26. září?”

Zeptal jsem se jí začátkem září s jistou dávkou ostychu, protože jsem věděl, jak je její kalendář nabitý. Už před pár dny jsme se na poslední chvíli sešli na oběd v Mistral Café s Donem z Washingtonu, nicméně i tehdy se ukázalo, jak skvěle si mohou lidé rozumět hned na první schůzce. Věděl jsem, že stejné by to bylo i v případě Davida. Přátelé s jistou nadsázkou (ale ne velkou) o Val prohlašovali, že její sociální program je tak plný, že v tříměsíčním předstihu dokáže nabídnout možná dva 40 minutové úseky, kdy zrovna ještě nic nemá. Ne, vlastně jsem ani nečekal, že by mohla mít volno. Ale překvapila mě:

“Ano, Pavle, drahoušku, já tvoje přátele zbožňuju! Chci se seznámit úplně se všemi!”

Nově otevřená Andělská kavárna Na Knížecí byla svědkem našeho smíchu, popíjení kávy, a dokonce i kalorií z dezertů, jimiž je Praha tak pověstná (i když Val i David si pečlivě hlídají linii). Ale kavárna viděla i zapamatováníhodnou lekci:

“Ukaž, pomůžu ti s tím... musíš použít jinou techniku,” řekla Davidovi poté, co si stále stěžoval na ty strašné tkaničky. Všichni víme, jak frustrující dokážou být.

A jako starostlivá maminka poklekla na schůdek ve dveřích, vlastně v tom nejtěsnějším možném místě hned ve vchodu, a započala lekci vázání nejodolnějšího uzlu na světě. A že je uměla vázat! Ani už nevím, kolikrát si během následujících dnů David povzdechl: “Kde je Val, když ji potřebujeme?!?”

Kdybych měl vybrat jedno slovo, které pro mě reprezentuje Val, bylo by to “přátelství”. A to s poněkud transcendentním přesahem. Jako to, které jsem navázal nedávno, když jsem se vracel z Kodaně. Cestou z letiště Václava Havla jsem se chtěl stavit pro pár maličkostí v nedaleké prodejně IKEA.

Starší pár, který se přibližoval k mé zastávce, zářil už z dálky. Zjevně si nebyl úplně jistý, jestli je na správném stanovišti... možná bych se měl držet nablízku, kdyby potřeboval pomoci. Brzy se potvrdil můj první dojem, který naznačoval, že se nejedná o Čechy: mluvili spolu anglicky.

“Prosím-vás. Je-de tenhle au-tobus do IKEA?” zeptala se mě neznámá paní o minutu později, už během jízdy. Slyšel jsem Valeriin přízvuk, dikci i frázování.

“A-no, je-dete sprá—vně,” odpověděl jsem pomalu, s důrazem na každé slovo a jeho výslovnost, abych studenta tohoto zvláštního jazyka neodradil od záměru komunikovat v češtině.

“Jak dlouho už žijete v Praze?” Nemohl jsem nemyslet na Val. Před sebou jsem viděl stejné odhodlání mluvit česky, stejnou eleganci a lehkost bytí. Vzpomínky se vynořovaly a já cítil nutkání položit jí Otázku. Okouzila mě jako neznámá kněžna v Rusalce omámila prince v den jeho svatby. Teď jen počkat na ten správný moment, kdy autobus přejede díry a přestane rachotit... snad neskončí chvíle, kdy bude možné se stále ptát... Teď!

“Neznala jste náhodou Val Levy?”

“Ano, byla to naše drahá přítelkyně...”

O několik týdnů později jsme se sešli v cukrárně pana Erharta, na místě, kam jsme občas zašli i s Val. A nebylo to setkání poslední. Uvědomil jsem si tam, jak člověk může ovlivňovat druhé, ačkoliv jeho životní funkce již vyhasly. S Val jsem často hovořil o Alanovi i Richardovi; tihle drazí muži stále žili v našich vzpomínkách a myšlenkách. Říká se, že dokud se o někom mluví, ten člověk je vlastně stále naživu. Ale je mi jasné, že Val toho umí ještě více.

Pavel Farkaš

A Royal Afternoon

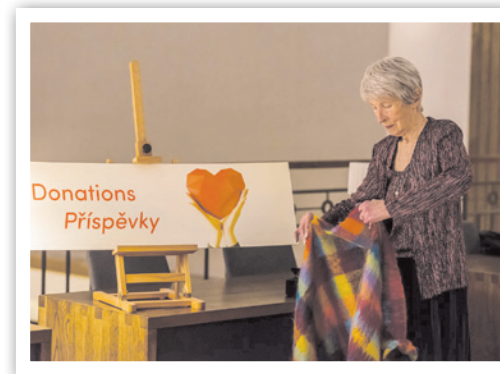
The date was Sunday, May 19th, 2018 – The world was preparing for the impending royal wedding in London, of British Prince Harry to his beautiful fiancée, the renowned American actress Meghan Markle.

Val and I decided we would celebrate at Beckett's, the popular Irish pub and restaurant in Vinohrady. The screens were set up for all of the guests to view the lavish affair. Most of the people there were British and sipping champagne throughout the ceremony, proud of their heritage, traditions and of course, a new chapter in the royal family.

I think Val and I were the only guests who ordered cheeseburgers to honor the new American royal. We chose to celebrate our way – savoring, not the bubbly but the trademark of American cuisine. What a grand day – We had a fabulous time, impressed with the non-traditional choices made that day, both at St George's Chapel and at Becketts'.

Val, like Meghan, was her own person, always ready to discover something new, standing up for what she believed in and embracing change. These were unique gifts she possessed – ones which truly mark her legacy. She was dignified, noble and stately – A true ROYAL.

Janet Feinstein



One the very last social occasions attended by Val was a fund-raising cabaret (for a childrens' unit in the Motol Hospital organised by Janet Feinstein in the Marriot Hotel). Val, being Val, enjoyed the occasion very much, despite her increasingly failing health. The photo shows her in typical mode making an extra contribution to the cause.

Val's Gramma Kit!

Val always inspired me! No more so than when I asked her what kind of presents did she bring her grandchildren. Like Val, I spent the better part of a year away from three small people and I didn't really know what I should bring them when I came to visit. I knew only that it was essential to bring something! My own children had always waited impatiently for their grandmother's gifts barely giving her enough time to walk through the door before asking, 'Grandma, what presents are you bringing us this time?'

Val thought seriously about my question. Her reply surprised me; I would never have thought of it and indeed it was a hit, a continual hit – one that even now, years, later, has them asking 'what's in your gramma kit this time?'

Val suggested I bring a kit full of variety items, a puzzle perhaps, pick up sticks, possibly crayons and a coloring book. She said I should include a few sweets and some chocolate. I was to explain to them that all but the candy would return home with me and on my next visit I would bring the gramma kit back again, restocked with some old favorites and yes, new items too and definitely more candy!

I'm now on my second set of grandchildren and I continue to keep Val's idea of a recycled gramma kit in service! I'm grateful for her unique suggestion that has become a family tradition!

Suzanne Formanek

A Fond Farewell from Denver

I met Val in 2007 and immediately enjoyed her company. My family (husband Bill and 2 daughters, Jessica and Alissa) were living in Prague as expats as I was working for IBM. We had Val over to house for dinner, for Shabbat and I believe for a Passover seder also. Val always reminded me of my mother, who at the time was back in our home town of Denver, CO. Val was direct and so lovely. I loved hearing her stories of Prague from 1968 and all of her life there.

We had planned on returning to Prague in April of this year, and I had hoped to see Val then, but of course it seems God had a different plan.

Lynn Geller

The following photograph taken in March 2009 shows Val with Lynn, Janet Feinstein and Eunice Kron.





Val and Lynn Geller (Nov 1th 2008)

Remembrance with Borscht!

At Val's memorial celebration, I told the story of one of the best (and unfortunately last) visits I had with Val.

She and Carol Sanford came over to my house for lunch and a movie – what I've now renamed 'Borscht and Bader-Ginsberg'.

I knew Val would love this documentary film about the Supreme Court Justice, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, as they were contemporaries. Both New Yorkers, both about the same age, both involved in 'healing the world', although in very different ways.

I also knew that Val was having a hard time getting enough to eat, so I decided to make a dish that would be nourishing for the body and the soul. What good Jewish girl doesn't love Borscht?

We had our steaming hot bowls of borscht with fresh bread from the fantastic Antoniovio Pekarstvi. Val was delighted with the food, and she ate it all.

After watching the film, RBG, which is the amazing story of Bader-Ginsburg, how she rose from a quiet shy girl from New York to become one of the most influential women in American history. Val was smiling from ear to ear during and after watching.

We talked about the film for a long time, and when the party broke up, Val asked me for the borscht recipe, which I shared with her.

So I'm sharing it now in the hope that you'll try it on a cold, wintry day and think of our lovely and loving friend.

Bonnie Hagan

Stove top Borscht (8 servings)

- ½ large or 1 small yellow onion, sliced into half moons
- 1 pound beets, (2 large beets) cubed
- 2 medium potatoes cut into ¼ inch cubes
- 2 tablespoons butter (omit and increase oil for vegan)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ½ head cabbage (red or white) sliced into small pieces
- 4 cups vegetable stock
- 3 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 cup water.
- 1 tablespoon dill
- 5 to 7 tablespoons red vinegar (add 5 first and add more if you like)
- 1 teaspoon salt and ground black pepper to taste
- Sour cream (could use vegan sour cream as well)

Saute onions in the butter and olive oil for around 5 minutes on low to medium heat. Add beets and potato, vegetable stock, tomato paste and water and bring to the boil. When the vegetables are soft (around 5 minutes), add the cabbage. Cover and bring to the boil and reduce heat and simmer for 20–30 minutes.

Season to taste with salt and pepper. Add the dill (you can use fresh or dry) and then add the vinegar (add more if you like it tangy). Serve hot with a dollop of sour cream, horseradish and a crusty piece of bread for dipping.

A Great Lady

To me Val Levy was the epitome of a great lady. Her brilliant mind was just one of her many assets. From the time we met Val took an interest in helping me with my study of the Czech language. She realized that I was having trouble with Czech pronunciation. As a result we had many sessions at her flat with her in the role of teacher and me as her student. My Czech is still not good, but much improved thanks to Val.

My memories of our lunches and ,lessons' are among my most treasured memories of the friendship that developed between Val and me. I met Val soon after I moved to Prague, so our relationship spanned over fifteen years.

It still amazes me how the lady from New York and the man from the rural deep south could form such a solid friendship. This only proves that Val Levy was a great lady.

Marshall Johnson



Marshall with Val and other friends at a concert given by a young student of Nancy Heninger.

You got me singing even tho' it all looks grim



No need for words! Celebrating Val's birthday 8 June 2017.

In her very first email to me in March 2004, Val wrote, “You have become a very important part of my life.” And from that very moment, and for the next fifteen years, this was how it was for both of us.

Because of its centrality to us our friendship grew and strengthened with the passage of time (as the fox tells the little prince in Valerie’s favourite book: *It’s the time you spent on your rose that makes your rose so important*) and we spent time together quite a lot. At a guess, six, perhaps, seven thousand hours. During that time, I got to know Val as an immensely sensitive and, at the same time, exceptionally intelligent human being, for whom life was not always easy: She found it difficult to abide egoists, torrents of words tired her, and she downright suffered by other people’s unreliability. And yet! Yet, or perhaps because she knew how painful life could be, she literally accepted everyone with open arms, an open heart and open ears, was ready to listen – and to help too when necessary.

During those thousands of hours we spent together, drinking coffee, taking walks, enjoying lunches and dinners, attending exhibitions, cinema, theatre, and conferences, taking trips, we experienced so much that you could write a book about our time together. Our last two meetings that week, which ended with Val dying unexpectedly, seem very important to me now.

She had had a cold that weekend, and I had tried over the phone to convince her to stay in bed, although she didn’t like to. All the same, she phoned me on Monday morning and said she’d like to go out to a restaurant for lunch. We went to the nearby La Palma, sat in the sunshine on the covered terrace, had a bowl of soup between us, and Val, who had been such a lousy eater of late, managed to finish off her entire plate of salmon and salad, and have a cappuccino. On the way home, although she was so weak that I took her on my arm, she kept on repeating: “I am so lucky! I am such a lucky person! Then she listed all the reasons: family, me, her apartment, Prague, her friends...

On Wednesday, she asked me to come over to visit her. While I was eating my bread roll with tuna, Val had a cup of milk and little round sponge biscuits or piškoty, as they’re called here. (I had been worried about how skinny she had become and about her difficulties eating). When I asked her after lunch whether she wanted to go for a short walk, she said, „I would love to, but my body doesn’t want to.“ So, we stayed in and read Saroyan’s *Tracy’s Tiger*. Even though we only got halfway through the book and didn’t get as far as the final revelation that the tiger is love, Val thoroughly enjoyed the book being read aloud to her. It was obvious that she knew well what it was about.

That was the last time we saw each other. She phoned me on Thursday to tell me that she had gone to the hospital because she wasn’t feeling well, and that they might operate on her gallstones. Then in the evening she phoned me again, but it was as if her voice was fading away. Tiredness, she said. And then her voice faded for good.

That image of the weak and fragile Val, whose body didn’t want to do much anymore, and yet who, in her own words, is a tremendously “lucky person”, is the one I carry around with me. That’s also why Leonard Cohen sang to her at her funeral, “You’ve got me singing even tho’ it all looks grim, you got me singing the Hallelujah hymn.”

Zuzana Jurková

You got me singing even tho' it all looks grim



At Seder 10. April, 2011 in the Czech Hussitic Church in Slaný.

Hned v prvním e-mailu, který mi Val napsala v březnu 2004, stálo: „You have become a very important part of my life.“ A od té chvíle to platilo pro obě z nás celých následujících patnáct let.

Protože důležitost vzniká a potvrzuje se stráveným časem (jak praví liška malému princovi ve Valeriině nejoblíbenější knížce: *Pro ten čas, který jsi své růži věnoval, je ta tvá růže tak důležitá*), strávily jsme ho spolu spoustu. Odhadem šest, možná sedm tisíc hodin. Za tu dobu jsem ve Val poznala nesmírně senzitivní, a zároveň ohromně inteligentní bytost, pro kterou život nebyl vždycky snadný: bolestně vnímala egocentriky, jenom trpně snášela záplavu slov, vysloveně trpěla nespolehlivostí... A přece! Přece (nebo právě proto, že věděla, jak může být život bolestivý?) ke každému přistupovala doslova s otevřenou náručí, otevřeným srdcem a otevřenými ušima, připravenými poslouchat – a pokud to bylo potřeba, tak i pomoci.

V těch tisících hodin při kafích, procházkách, obědech, večerích, na výstavách, v kinech a divadlech, na konferencích, výletech... jsme toho prožili na knihu, i víc. Teď mi připadají hodně důležitá naše poslední dvě setkání v týdnu, na jehož konci Val tak nečekaně umřela.

O víkendu byla nastydlá – a já jsem se jí telefonicky snažila udržet v posteli, ačkoli to hrozně neměla ráda. Hned v pondělí ráno mi ale volala, že by šla ráda na oběd do restaurace. Šly jsme do blízké La Palmy, seděly na kryté terase na sluníčku, podělily se o polévku, a Val, v poslední době tak mizerný jedlík, zvládla celý salát s lososem i capuccino. A cestou domů – byla tak slabá, že jsem ji podpírala – opakovala „I am so lucky! I am such a lucky person!“ Načež vyjmenovávala všechny možné důvody: rodinu, mne, svůj byt, Prahu, přátele...

Ve středu si přála, abych přišla k ní. Zatímco já jsem obědvala dala-mánek s tuňákem, Val měla hrneček mléka a piškoty. (Její vyhublost a potíže s jídkem mi v poslední době dělaly starosti.) Když jsem se po obědě zeptala, jestli by chtěla jít na kratší procházku, odpověděla: „I would love – but my body doesn't.“ A tak jsme si četly Saroyanova *Tracyho tygra*. I když jsme přečetly jen polovinu, a nedostaly se tak spolu až k závěrečnému odhalení, že ten tygr je láska, Val si četbu ohromně užívala. Bylo vidět, že dobře ví, o čem se píše.

To bylo naposled, kdy jsme se viděly. Ve čtvrtek mi volala, že šla do nemocnice, protože jí bylo zle, a že jí možná budou operovat žlučnickové kameny. Večer pak volala ještě jednou, ale její hlas se jakoby vytrácel. Prý je unavená. A pak se vytratila nadobro.

Ten obrázek slabé a křehké Val, jejíž tělo už toho moc nechce dělat, a ona je přesto ohromně „lucky person“, ve mně zůstane. Taky proto jí na pohřbu zpíval Leonard Cohen „You got me singing even tho' it all looks grim, you got me singing the Hallelujah hymn.“

Zuzana Jurková

A Message from the USA

Although I cannot be here today in person, it was so very important to me to be able to pay tribute tonight to a special lady who was not only so very dear to me, but who was (and will continue to be) a tremendous role model.

I first met Val (and her late husband Alan) through my parents when they were living in Vienna. Alan and my father in particular were good friends. To my surprise (and subsequent delight), she was to be my French teacher during my years at the American International School in Vienna, where she taught. I am so thankful for having had such a wonderful teacher, a person who was hard-working, caring, loving, disciplined, thoughtful and incredibly knowledgeable. Someone who I looked up to and who supported me.

We remained in contact after I left the school and she left Austria for Prague, exchanging emails with regularity. There was always an open invitation to come and see her in Prague, an offer which I am glad to say I took up with my now-husband in November 2017. It was so lovely to be able to see her again, to talk face to face, and also to see Monica again after so many years. It was to be the last time I saw her.

To me, Valerie was not only a kind, sweet, sensitive and intelligent person, but also a strong and loving woman. She helped me through some dark times in my own life and I will be eternally grateful for having had her in my life and for the privilege I had in calling her a friend.

We were due to come and see her again this summer, this time with my baby boy of just a few months. I was looking forward so much to seeing her again and for her to meet my baby.

She will always be in my heart.

Margery Kaplan

Our Last Lunch

Dear Val, I am so glad we had met for lunch just a week before you passed away. You chose your favorite restaurant close to Palmovka, I was there with my family, your lunch was just a tea and we were arguing about the bill. You insisted that this time it is your turn and we agreed the next time is our turn. I guess this last thing becomes also part of the "I owe you".

It was a privilege to meet you. Privilege to meet a person so kind, giving and full of life. I can hardly think of another person in my life who I have never seen angry. You were always able to provide during our discussions another way of looking into the matter, in most cases a kinder point of view I was not aware existed. Once I had asked you about what would you do differently in your life if you could go back in time. And you said that you know you had made few bad choices but would make them again. Still, despite them, you felt truly happy with the way things have turned out for you. Having a wonderful family and friends living in a place you love, with days filled with activities and joy. Something so inspiring I will remember and aim for.

When my wife was expecting our first child, suddenly I had noticed there are so many pregnant women walking down the streets, riding trams, shopping. Like these women had not been there before. The same happened to me when you passed. I started to see you on the street, on the subway, in the shop. I was just about to run to meet you but then in a fraction of the moment I realize that my own mind is playing tricks with me. Just for this brief moment you were still here with us. And you will be here with us anytime anyone will recall any memory of you.

Thank you for everything.

Love,

Roman Kmoníček

Drahá Val,

Jsem tak rád, že jsme se viděli týden před tím, než jsi odešla. Vybrala jsi svou oblíbenou restauraci na Palmovce, já přišel se svými dětmi a manželkou. Nebylo ti moc dobře, a proto sis dala jen čaj. Při odchodu jsme se dohadovali na tom, zda-li jsi ty nebo my na řadě s placením. Trvala jsi na tom, že tentokrát jsi na řadě ty a příště to bude na nás. Už ti to neoplatíme, a tak se to stane součástí všeho toho, za co jsme ti vděční.

Jsem moc rád za to, že jsme se potkali. Přemýšlel jsem na tím, zda-li jsem někdy potkal ještě jiného člověka než tebe, kterého jsem neviděl rozčileného. Nebo člověka, kterého jsem neslyšel si na něco stěžovat. Na nikoho jiného jsem nepřišel. Během našich rozhovorů jsi nabízela další a další pohled na věc, většinou takové pohledy, které by mne samotného nenapadly. Jednou jsem se tě zeptal na provokativní otázku. Pokud by ses mohla vrátit v čase, co by si udělala jinak? Odpověděla si mi, že jsi vlastně opravdu šťastná za to, jaký život si prožila. Že jsi udělala pár špatných rozhodnutí, ale pokud by na to přišlo, udělala bys je znovu. I přes tyto chyby se cítíš opravdu šťastná a spokojená s tím, jak šel život. Obklopená báječnou rodinou a přáteli, životem ve městě, které miluješ, s dny plnými událostí a radosti. Přístup, který by měl inspirovat každého a měl by být cílem nás všech.

Když moje žena čekala naše první dítě, najednou byly ulice plné těhotných žen, plné tramvaje, nákupní domy. Jako kdyby ty těhotné ženy tam před tím nebyly. Stejně jsem prožíval v týdnech po tom, co jsi odešla. Začal jsem tě vidět na ulici, v metru, v obchodě. Už už jsem se chtěl za tebou vydat a pozdravit tě, ale pak mi ve zlomku vteřiny došlo, že se mne snaží ošálit moje vlastní mysl. Ale na ten krátký okamžik jsi tam byla. A ačkoliv tě už nikdy neuvidím na ulici, v metru nebo v obchodě, budeš s námi kdykoliv si na tebe vzpomeneme.

*Děkuji za vše.
Roman Kmoníček*

My 'Huggable' Fairy!

I met Val as the wife of the writer Alan Levy. After the revolution in 1989, my husband Jirka and I moved to the USA for him to pursue studies in choral conducting. While working in academia we created a program for college students spending part of their semester in Prague. Having them learn about the Czech history of 20th century led us to search for the author of "Prazske pereje" for a possible lecture. To our astonishment, he was living in Prague!

We met Alan at the champagne bar in Rudolfinum, during an intermission of a 2002 Christmas concert and became friends on the spot. Val was always with Alan but somewhat in the wings of the "alan levy show". Val never interrupted his storytelling that was keeping audiences (large and small) fixed on Alan but she was always there, listening in as if it was the first time that she was hearing his entertaining pieces.

When Alan passed I was in Prague, free to help Val with whatever was needed. I finally got to spend time with this frail looking being and discovered the truth in the proverb „Behind every great man is a great woman“. Over the years that followed I found a jewel of a friend in Valerie: always eager to know what was new with me, supportive during my painful divorce time, reluctant to take sides and always helping with seeing the big picture and value of everyone, sharing the news from the Czech culture scene and updating me with the development of her grandchildren.

When scheduling our „dates“ it always amazed me how busy her calendar was, reflecting her rich social life and dedication to her family in New York and France where she traveled to especially during the holidays. No wonder she was sometimes hard to catch on my trips to Prague. Luckily I lived close to New York City so we managed a couple of meetings there. I met Erika and her family and spent even more time with Monica who participated in our festival Gospel in Prague.

Val's daughters and grandchildren were number one but living far. So she knitted her friends in Prague into her surrogate family fabric providing additional love and connections, keeping her safe and secure in the time of need. She had a unique way of touching the hearts of people even if she met them for just a moment. I believe that it was

her way of listening without judgment that attracted others into her company.

My nickname for her was „FAIRY“, feeling it as the perfect description for her role in my life. Whenever I was giving her long hugs, I was worried to crush her invisible wings. She LOVED hugs!!!

I am cherishing the time I had with her and as far as I personally feel – she is and will be always with me.

Lucka Kratochvílová

P.S. When dating my short memory piece (2. April 2019), I noted that it is exactly 15 years from the day Val's husband died. I hope they are now reunited in a peaceful place.

Říkala jsem jí „Vílo“

Val jsem poznala jako manželku spisovatele Alana Levyho. Po revoluci v roce 1989 jsme se přestěhovali do USA, kde chtěl manžel Jirka studovat sborové dirigentství. Během našeho působení v univerzitním prostředí jsme vytvořili pro studenty program, který jim umožnil strávit část semestru v Praze. Protože jsme je chtěli seznámit s českou historií, rozhodli jsme se kontaktovat autora knihy „Pražské peřeje“ doufajíce, že by se uvolil k přednášce. K našemu velkému překvapení byděl autor v Praze!

S Alanem jsme se setkali v baru Rudolfiny, o přestávce vánočního koncertu v roce 2002. Okamžitě jsme se spřátelili.

Val byla vždy na blízku, ale poněkud ve stínu „Show Alana Levyho“. Nikdy jeho strhující vyprávění nepřerušovala, ale vždy naslouchala, jakoby ty zábavné historky slyšela poprvé.

Byla jsem v Praze, když Alan zemřel, a tak jsem Val nabídla, že jí pomůžu, s čím bude potřeba. Teprve teď jsem mohla trávit více času s touto křehce vypadající bytostí a zjistit, že přísloví „Za každým úspěšným mužem stojí žena“ je pravda pravdoucí. Během let jsem ve Val našla drahocnou přítelkyni, kterou vždy zajímalo, co je u mě nového. Byla mi oporou během bolestného rozvodu, přičemž zůstávala nestranná. Vždy jsem měla od ní zprávy z české kulturní scény a novinky týkající se jejích vnoučat.

Kdykoli jsem se snažila domluvit si s Val schůzku, nevycházela jsem z údivu nad jejím zaplněným kalendářem. Byla to známka její společenské nátury a lásky pro rodinu, kterou pravidelně navštěvovala v New Yorku a Francii. Nemohla jsem se tedy divit, že nebylo lehké zastihnout ji během mých cest do Prahy. Naštěstí jsem v USA žila nedaleko New York City a tak jsme se mohly setkávat i tam. Poznala jsem Eriku a strávila nějaký čas s Monikou, která se v Praze zúčastnila našeho festivalu „Gospel in Prague“.

Valeriiny dcery a vnoučata byly její prioritou, ale žily daleko. Utkala si tedy v Praze svou náhradní rodinnou „sít“, která jí poskytovala pocit bezpečí a péče, když to bylo zapotřebí. Měla úžasný dar dočkat se srdcí lidí i během jen letmého setkání. Jsem přesvědčena, že získávala přátele díky své schopnosti vyslechnout druhé bez toho, že by je soudila..

Říkala jsem jí „Vilo“, jako trefné vyjádření její role v mém životě. Kdykoli jsem jí dlouze objímala, bála jsem se, že pocuchám její neviditelná křídla. Val se objímala moc ráda!!!

Velmi si cením našeho přátelství, setkání a rozhovorů a pokud jde o mě – Val je a vždy bude se mnou.

Lucka Kratochvílová

P.S. Když jsem chtěla tuto krátkou vzpomínku opatřit datem (2. dubna, 2019), uvědomila jsem si, že je to přesně 15 let, co zemřel Alan Levy. Doufám, že se opět setkali v místě věčného míru.

‘Why don’t I know you?’

This was the first sentence Val Levy said to me when I was introduced to her at the Virtual Village Praha coffee meeting about three months ago. Direct question, direct gaze. Too much for me from a complete stranger – it had been a long time since I was used to such directness.

I shrugged. ‘I work a lot’ I said vaguely, out of habit, deflecting.

‘Where do you work?’ she immediately replied, undaunted.

I didn’t like it. But looking at her almost defensively, I sensed that this was neither interrogation nor rude arrogance: this was curiosity, genuine interest. Connection. Eyes sharp and full of intelligence and depth. I felt my reticence begin to melt.

By the end of the hour we were new acquaintances, parted with a firm handshake, and even exchanged emails several times before the next meeting. I enjoyed seeing her the following month; she sent me another email with a link she had promised to forward me.

In many ways we could not have been more different. I was greatly looking forward to getting to know her.

I have read all of the group emails forwarded to me since her death and seen how socially active she was, and for so many years. She must have known hundreds of people – and yet, two months before she died and after such a long and full life she still had the time, the energy, the aliveness, to make a new friend.

I consider that remarkable, and the way humanity should be.

For the Levy family, with sincere condolences

Beth Lazroe

The Isle of Avalon

Somewhere, somewhere,
There is a place, a place somehow we'll know,
A place e'er lost midst clouds of mist
Where the sacred barge doth go

There is a place, a place somewhere,
a place somewhere sublime,
beyond the seas of circumstance,
beyond the seas of Time

A place the soul doth yearn to be,
somewhere a place long gone,
a place of forgotten fantasy,
a place called Avalon

Lost to the wanderers of the world,
ne'er seen but by the inner eye,
led by light that beckons beyond,
beyond to shores e'er nigh

Beyond to still and sacred ground,
beyond to that haven, that Holy Isle,
where great the gathering is found,
and hence shall rest a while

Yet seen by third eye vision,
for those with eyes to see,
that place beheld by the wise of the world,
that place where all are free

That place, that place forever known,
forever known as Avalon,
that place, that place known ever as,
the Holy Isle of Avalon

*Composed by Ann Morris, dedicated to Val Levy
and read by Ann at Val's memorial service*

A Chance Meeting!

I first met Valerie in the spring of 1995 or 1996. I had met a painter in the queue for tickets for the Prague Spring, who was travelling regularly to the Czech Republic to paint, and she invited me the next day to an IWAP meeting in Kaiserstein Palace, where she introduced me to Valerie. When Valerie heard my bad English, she invited me to join her "class" that coming Wednesday. After that, we met each other when possible ... I will never forget her elegance, patience, kindness and sense of humor.

Eva Mottlová

Náhodné setkání

Potkala jsem se s Valerií poprvé na jaře 1995 nebo 1996. Seznámili jsme se tehdy ve frontě na vstupenky na Pražské jaro s malířkou, která jezdila pravidelně do Česka malovat, ta nám pověděla o Valerii a pozvala nás na příští den na setkání IWAP do Kaiserštejnského paláce, tam nás představila Valerii. Když Valerie uslyšela mou špatnou angličtinu, pozvala mě do své „třídy“ hned na nejbližší středu. Od té doby jsme se vídaly pravidelně vždycky, když to bylo možné... Nikdy nezapomenu na její noblesu, trpělivost, laskavost a smysl pro humor.

Eva Mottlová

A Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed!

I first met Val through IWAP and discovered that we were near neighbors at the time in Palmovka. It was to Val I turned when my husband, disputing ownership of his mobile phone with a phone thief managed to break his shoulder and his jaw, necessitating wiring of his teeth. I had only recently arrived in Prague and needed Val to locate sources of drinking straws etc to ensure my husband could get some nourishment (he lost 6 kilos!) Our friendship developed over the years, and why wouldn't it with such a lovely woman? We managed to break into Val's luncheon routine, always delighted when she could fit us into her incredibly busy schedule. We tried many restaurants with her to which we regularly return with others of her friends, in memory. Being Jewish, she used to boast that she didn't cook! So we were pleasantly surprised when she invited us for a domestic fondue meal in her apartment. Of course, we had to do the cooking but the preparation was excellent!

An incident which stands out most in my mind and is so typical of the beautiful helpful soul she was last year when I was suffering from irrythmia. We had just had lunch with her in Palmovka and it being such a beautiful day Val suggested a post prandial stroll along the river. Val was striding out chatting with my husband when she noticed I was lagging behind (the irrythmia affected my breathing and I was finding it very difficult to keep up). She immediately took me in hand, found me a bench to sit on and reassured me until I recovered. At the time I was about sixteen years younger than she was!

Val has several deep loves motivating her, she loved her family and she loved life. She had a deep love for the city of Prague and its people. We spoke many times of the favorite vantage points throughout the city from whence, suddenly turning a corner, we immediately espied Prague Castle. What a magic place! What a wonderful woman!

Kathy Reen O'Sullivan

A True Mensch

I have many memories of Val over the years, like the time she was responsible for the most difficult dinner of my life when she seated me between two intellectual heavyweights at table, her husband and Dick Wiest (I have rarely been so intimidated!), but I want to talk instead about myself, or rather the way that Val changed my outlook on life.

We in Ireland did not have much experience of Jews. There was only a small community, mainly in Dublin. They generally kept their heads down, as small communities tend to do, although we did have a famous Jewish Lord Mayor of Dublin for many years (Ben Briscoe) and a very able Minister for Justice and Defence in government (Alan Shatter) and of course the 'Big Book' that most Irish claim to have read was about Leopold Bloom, and a day of his life in Dublin.

It took Prague to rectify that omission in my life experience, and it was such an honour to meet people of the calibre of Alan and Val (and Jerry Newman who was exactly the same age as Val but had been born in a less salubrious district of New York! She had Polish roots and his were Slovakian, and I had the pleasure of introducing them to each other in Prague). Of course I was aware of the awful history and consequences of the second World War, but what effects me most, because it has to do with the very future of Europe is the loss to us on the continent of so many gifted and humane people. Most of those who survived managed to escape to the US and elsewhere, and left us with a loss in Europe from which we may never recover. We need them back!

Val and Alan were Jews, they were Americans (and proud New Yorkers), but they were also fundamentally Europeans, and this is why I think that they felt so much at home here. They were home! Val used to tear up whenever the Czech national anthem was played – Kde Domov Můj (Where is my Home). Her home was clearly here, in the city she loved. Alan as a journalist had always been a champion of human rights, and Val showed in abundance her intolerance of bigotry, championing minorities (like the Roma) who always seemed to be at the butt end of society. Val by example taught me how to be a human being. I treasure her memory.

Sean O'Sullivan

The Good Fairy!



*Zleva Květa, Valérie, Jarka Kramulová, Běla Al-Dabaghová,
Eva Mottlová, Anna Červenková, Jitka Jandová
(19. listopadu 2003)*

Valerie was to us like a good fairy. She took charge of our circle of aspiring students. She was our teacher, but above all our friend. For more than twenty years, we met regularly in her apartment to practice English conversation in a relaxed and homely atmosphere. However, while we enjoyed her hospitality and she was very patient with us she nevertheless insisted on our using English throughout. She was a strict teacher and we loved her for it!

I know that throughout the years she had experienced some joy, but also sadness, but she was strong and, in our company, always funny, balanced and positive. We knew she was seriously ill, but because of her great courage, we had no idea how advanced her illness was, and her passing came as a great surprise and hit us all badly.

She was part of my life and now she's gone, and I miss her very much.

Šárka Radová

Dobrá Víla!



*Zleva Dana Kramulová, Marie Tománková, Eva Žížková, Anna Červenková,
Běla Al-Dabaghová, já – Šárka Radová, Rhonda Křížková, Eva Hrdličková,
dole Jarka Kramulová s Valérií (2. října 2013)*

Valerie se nám zjevila jako dobrá víla. Ujala se našeho kruhu věčných studentek. Byla nám učitelkou, ale především přítelkyní. Více než dvacet let jsme u ní nacházely přívětivé pohostinství s anglickou konverzací, která nebyla formální, ale vždy připravená a vedená s laskavou přísností. „Only English“.

Vím, že ji potkalo během let něco radostného, ale také smutného, ale ona byla silná a v naší společnosti vždy vtipná, vyrovnaná a pozitivní. Věděly jsme o její těžké nemoci, ale díky její velké statečnosti jsme netušily, jak je pokročilá a její odchod nás velmi zaskočil a těžce zasáhl.

Patřila do mého života a teď pryč a velmi mně schází.

Šárka Radová

Val's love of the Arts

The week before she died in February 2019, Val and I met at a screening of *Porgy and Bess* at the American Center in Prague. I had forgotten to bring her a booklet, '1930 Remember When... A Nostalgic Look Back in Time'. The first red and green traffic lights were installed in New York City where she was born a few years later and the first transcontinental air service began. The air service she took for granted, flying to the US every year to see her daughter and her family.

My husband Peter and I first met Val and Alan 20 years before at Patty Goodson's dinner table where we all laughed as Alan wove his story of his experiences with the notorious tram 22 pickpocketing gang. As we chuckled, Val was quiet. After Alan finished and regular conversation began Val sat mostly silent except for a remark or two now and again in a concise sentence or two aiming directly at the heart of the discussion. I was embarrassed for my babbling self as I listened to her linguistic economy. The rest of us were enjoying expounding on the stage, strutting our clever delivery. Val had no need to perform. I had some things to learn from her.

She and Alan were busy going to events. Multiple theatre and concert events seemed to fill their calendar making it difficult to schedule meeting. During that time I was lucky to have Alan for a lecturer in one of my journalism classes. Watching him teach gave me a glimpse of their dynamism that shaped their lives.

The last time I saw Alan and Val together was a week before he died in April 2004. We were at a performance in a restaurant in Prague. Alan was frail, but looked in his element smiling, happy to be out doing what he and Val loved most – sharing a cultural event with friends.

After he died, Val offered his books and records to friends, some of which I took. We began meeting for lunches and sometimes theatre, although her schedule was still hard to crack. The free tickets that she and Alan used to get were extended to her, a generosity she was thrilled with.

Although Val was born in another world in New York in the 1930s, she lived in the present moment, always interested in the latest news. Her passion for music, theatre, books, observing all with the same precision and clarity I saw in her when I first met her. Most of all

I know Val for her deep gratitude for her family, her friends, her life in Prague. Perhaps her thankful love helped make her see so well her life around her which she spoke of with such mindful clarity, always present for everybody, giving them the best gift of all, truly listening to each and everyone.

Carol Sanford

A Competitive Player!



I used to play Mahjong with Val for many years, and we lunched together.

Val was a great supporter of our Mahjong group in IWAP and attended the regular Friday games (except when she was travelling). She was a very good and strong player. She was so good! I miss her and miss her challenge.

Val was also one of my lunch friends and in the past two years we determined that U seminaristy, in Spálená, was to be our regular lunch spot.

I attach a photograph of Val's beautiful smiling face taken at one of IWAP's September presentations for Newcomers.

Heidi Strnad

Yet Another Chance Meeting!

As it happens so often in life, I met Val by sheer coincidence. In September 1997 I was freshly released from the military service and she had just retired from a teaching job in Vienna and joined Alan in Prague. She was looking for a Czech teacher and our mutual friend recommended my wife. She was busy at the time and I stood in.

When I first met Val, she declared her wish to speak Czech fluently within 5 years. Our lessons lasted till the very end of her life. And it's not because she couldn't reach her original goal earlier. That happened years ago. But she was so keen to learn new things and understand the Czech reality and that kept her going on. I can see her – an elderly lady riding a tram or metro with her regular week load of Czech vocab extracted from a movie review or an article about Gypsy music. I remember her joy when she had all diacritics right in her homework, and the frustration when she didn't.

During those 20-plus years we got to know each other rather well, yet she never stopped surprising me. How often do you meet a person who talked with JFK, was a friend of Miloš Forman and had Jiří Šlitr compliment her on her pronunciation of „ř“.

We learned from each other and I will never forget this amazing person who was a part of my life for 21 years.

Otakar Šprta

Seznámili jsme se čirou náhodou

Jak už to v životě chodí, seznámil jsem se s Valerií čirou náhodou. V září 1997 jsem měl čerstvě po vojně, ona právě odešla do penze a přestěhovala se z Vídně za Alanem do Prahy. Hledala učitele češtiny a náš společný kamarád jí doporučil mou ženu. Ta tehdy nemohla a já za ni zaskočil jako náhrada.

Když jsem se poprvé potkal s Valerií, prohlásila, že chce do pěti let plynně mluvit česky. Naše cíle nedokázala dosáhnout dřív. K tomu došlo už dávno. Jenom chtěla neustále poznávat nové věci a chápat českou realitu kolem sebe – to ji motivovalo k dalšímu studiu. Dokážu si ji živě představit – starší dáma jedoucí v tramvaji nebo metru s pravidelnou porcí českých slovíček vypsanych z filmové recenze nebo článku o romské hudbě. Vzpomínám si na její radost, když měla v domácím úkolu všechny háčky a čárky správně, a taky, jak byla nešťastná, když se jí to nepovedlo.

Za těch víc než dvacet let jsme se dobře poznali. Přesto mě nepřestávala překvapovat. Jak často potkáte člověka, který mluvil s JFK, přátelil se s Milošem Formanem a kterému Jiří Šlitr pochválil, jak dobře vyslovuje české "ř".

Učili jsme se jeden od druhého. Valerie byla fantastický člověk. V mém životě zaujímala významné místo a nikdy na ni nezapomenu.

Otakar Šprta

A Patient Teacher

I first met Alan Levy when we were working together in the Prague Post. I can say we quickly became friends. Alan introduced me to Val and I introduced him to my husband Milan. We always spent a nice time together, for example during the concerts of the Czech National Orchestra conducted by Alan's friend Paul Freeman.

Val was so kind and she invited me to join her English group after my retirement. I met there some very interesting ladies. We spent there a very cheering time together. Martina who was at that time on maternity leave was taking lessons with her small baby, or Květa who did not have place to put her dog so we had lessons with the dog! Val was always in a good mood and even in the last years in spite of her serious health problems

She took part in visiting the sculpture exhibitions of our member Šárka, or we visited Jarka, Dana and Eva in their homes.

Val always prepared for us interesting articles concerning American life and culture. These lessons were an inspiration for us and an a good topic of conversation, and she was very patient with our English. I miss her very much.

Renata Vaněčková

Square Dance

After the revolution in 1989, I worked at the Academy of Sciences where an „intellectual life“ bloomed. Everyone wanted to learn English, and „the Yanks“ were everywhere so we had many willing teachers. That’s why I started to go to square dances. It was a great opportunity to have fun and to learn English. There I met Alan and Val Levy. Val wore a custom square dance petticoat, but comfortable sneakers. We kind of laughed at her – if we knew how the sneakers would be popular today!

There were stronger relationships in square dance, families started to visit each other. From time to time the Levy’s invited us to a concert, sometimes I invited them to a Czech dinner. When Alan died, my husband left me at that time, so Val and I clung to each other. Because activity is the best medicine, Val started to teach me English, we exchanged opinions on life situations. Once when she needed to repair the computer, I recommended to her a young doctorate from Academy of Sciences and all became friends. Now with his young family the friendship continued.

Then my daughter got married and moved to France, I started to learn French for her and guess who was my teacher? Well, Val! On one occasion she brought a mirror to better fix my poor Fren////////ch pronunciation. We watched movies together, recommended books.

As life goes, I became a grandmother and Val also visited my grandchildren. She always acted like a lady. There was a white cloth on the table, silver cutlery, good food. And two-year-old children! Who was the parent who knows how to eat and drink with a two-year-old child? But Val has always mastered the situation with refinement, and the children have seen how good dining looks and how they should behave in the adult society.

I liked Val very much. I could confide in her personal problems and leave her in a balanced mood. She had a different opinion to me on many occasions, and after the years I know she was right. She gave me such self-confidence, and assurance.

I’ll miss you a lot.

Eva Vrbová

Square Dance!

Po revoluci v roce 1989 jsem pracovala v Akademii věd a tam „intelektuální život“ kvetl. Každý se chtěl učit anglicky, „amíci“ byli pro nás lidé, kterým se musíme vyrovnat, byli nová autorita v našem životě. Proto jsem začala chodit na square dance. Byla to výborná příležitost se pobavit, naučit se anglicky. Tam jsem se seznámila s Alanem a Val Levy. Val nosila na square dance předpisově spodničku, ale k nim pohodlné tenisky. Tak trochu jsme se jí smáli – kdybychom věděli, jak budou tenisky populární dnes!

Na square dance vznikaly pevnější vztahy, rodiny se začaly navštěvovat. Občas nás Levyovi pozvali na koncert, já zase na českou večeři. Když Alan zemřel, mně v té době odešel manžel a tak jsme s Val k sobě přilnuly. Protože nejlepším lékem je aktivita, Val mě začala učit angličtinu, vyměňovaly jsme si názory na životní situace. Jednou potřebovala opravit počítač, doporučila jsem jí mladého doktoranda z Akademie věd a stali jsme se všichni přáteli. Nyní i s jeho mladou rodinou.

Pak se moje dcera vdala do Francie, já se kvůli ní začala učit francouzsky – a hádejte, kdo byl mým učitelem? No přeci Val! Při jedné příležitosti i přinesla zrcátko, abych si lépe mohla opravit svoji ubohou francouzskou výslovnost. Dávaly jsme se spolu na filmy, doporučovaly si knížky.

Jak jde život, stala jsem se babičkou a Val jsem také se svými vnoučaty navštívila. Ona se chovala vždy jako dáma. Na stole byl prostřený bílý ubrus, stříbrné přibory, dobré jídlo. A do toho dvouleté děti! Kdo byl rodičem, ví, jak jí a pije dvouleté dítě.... Ale Val vždy tuto situaci zvládla s noblesou a děti viděly, jak vypadá správné stolování a jak se chovat ve společnosti dospělých.

K Val jsem chodila moc ráda. Mohla jsem se jí svěřit s osobními problémy a odcházela od ní ve vyrovnané náladě. Měla mnohokrát na věc jiný názor než já a po letech vím, že byl správný. Dodala mi sebevědomí, sebejistotu.

Bude mi moc chybět.

Eva Vrbová

Our cats loved her too!

During the 12 years we lived in Prague, Valerie and I became good friends. I used to take part in the English conversation class at her place, where I met interesting women, all fans of Val's. We went to lunch, met at IWAP meetings, took in a concert or an art exhibit together; she deepened my understanding of Czech culture and made my life richer. When we were packing up to leave Prague I fell and fractured my ankle, had surgery, spent a week in the hospital and was advised to put off flying to Seattle, but we had to vacate our rented house. Val offered to put us up, so Dick and I, our two cats (Libuše and Přemek) stayed in Alan's apartment next door to Val and enjoyed her kind hospitality. I will always remember that precious time. Later we kept in touch by email, sharing joys and sorrows as friends do. I will miss her very much.

Ina Wiest

A Wandering Minstrel...

Val's kindness, generosity and breadth of perspective as an exemplar of the liberal human spirit at its best will be sufficiently attested by others. Hence I would like to recall her sly wit that so delighted me. As a single instance I note a cultural rubric (or 'meme' to nod to current jargon, which I suspect she disliked as much as I do), which we often shared to great mutual hilarity and fun memories. Namely the Gilbert and Sullivan operas. Val knew swathes and snatches from the librettos, which we would trade back and forth, and summon up recollections of performances past. Unless one is familiar with this particularly Anglophone tradition, this side of Val may not be known to her friends who are not native speakers of English, or not otherwise immersed in the G & S canon. W.S. Gilbert was arguably the wittiest wordsmith/rhymester in the history of English and our dear Val was ideally formed to value him. I loved Val for much but this quirky aspect of her rich character made me love her all the more.

Dick Wiest

Yet Another Appreciative student

I went to Valerie's for English lessons every Wednesday for several years. But this wasn't just any English course; most of all, it was a lovely, friendly gathering. Valerie was always in a good mood. Her table was set beautifully, and she made excellent coffee. We students took turns taking something sweet to the lesson – cake, marble cake, pie, strudel, etc. The atmosphere was perfect for good conversation on various topics. And if it was someone's birthday, the celebrant brought along a bottle of champagne and a bottle of non-alcoholic bubbly for those of us who don't drink alcohol or happened to be driving. Then we would read a variety of internet articles chosen by Valerie. So, it wasn't just English lessons; we also got to expand our horizons and learn about different subjects. Whenever she had to cancel a lesson, Valerie always sent us an email to reschedule, always adding that she missed us very much. But we're all going to miss her so much now too. Unfortunately, those beautiful Wednesdays have come to an end.

Eva Žižková

Krásné středy již bohužel skončily

K Valerii jsem docházela několik let ve středu na kurz angličtiny. Ale nebyl to ledajaký kurz. Bylo to hlavně krásné přátelské setkávání. Valerie vždy v dobré náladě připravila krásně prostřený stůl a výbornou kávu. Pokaždé někdo z nás, studentek, přinesl něco na zub – dort, bábovku, koláč, závin apod. V takovémto prostředí probíhala báječná konverzace na nejrůznější témata. Pokud někdo slavil narozeniny, přinesl navíc i šampaňské, a to jak alkoholické, tak nealkoholické pro ty, kteří alkohol nepijí a nebo přijeli autem. Pak následovalo čtení nejrůznějších článků, které Valerie vybrala na internetu. Takže nejen angličtina, ale i rozšíření obzoru z různých oblastí. Prostě to byly nezapomenutelné, vynikající středy. Když občas nebyla angličtina, Valerie posílala mail s informací, kdy bude další angličtina a vždy dodala, že jí moc chybíme. Ale i ona bude velice chybět nám všem. Krásné středy již bohužel skončily.

Eva Žižková



Brenda Zejdl supplied photos illustrating Val's love of games.



Brenda Zejdl supplied photos illustrating Val's love of games.



Brenda Zejdl supplied photos illustrating Val's love of games.



**A CELEBRATION OF
THE LIFE OF VALERIE LEVY
June 8, 1932 - February 22, 2019**

Prelude - O Mio Babbino Caro,
Giacomo Puccini

Come, come whoever you are
Wanderer, worshiper, lover of leaving
Ours is no caravan of despair
Come, then again come

Chalice lighting and welcome

Introduction of Val's family

Poetry by Anne Morris

Video by Melina

Memories of Val

From the Minister

From the Family

From her Friends

Meditation Music - In Memory, Leoš Janáček
and
Candle lighting ceremony

Benediction

Extinguishing the chalice

Postlude - Poeme, Zdeněk Fibich

Social hour

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Prague
Anenská 5, Čapek Hall, Prague 1
Susan Goldberg, Associate Minister - Lukáš Olejník, Music Director
pragueunitarians.com - Facebook Prague Unitarians



Valerie Levy

June 8, 1932 – February 22, 2019

Ceremony

Wednesday, February 27th 2019

Speakers

David Wladaver

Peter Gyori

David Yanowitch

Music

Going Home – Leonard Cohen

Gustav Mahler

You Got Me Singing – Leonard Cohen

Final Farewell 27 February 2019

DOMŮ *Going Home*

Moc rád mluvím s Leonardem
Je to sportovec a pastýř
Je to povaleč v obleku
Ale dělá, co mu řeknu
I když mu to není po chuti
Nemá ale svobodu
Odmítnout
Bude říkat vědoucí slova
Jako mudrc, jako vizionář
I když ví, že sám je nic
Jen trochu vylepšená trubice

Jdu domů
Beze smutku
Jdu domů
Někdy zítra
Jdu domů
K lepšímu místu
Než předtím

Jdu domů
Zbaven toho, co mě tíží
Jdu domů
Za oponu
Jdu domů
Bez té masky
Co jsem nosil

Chce napsat píseň o lásce
Hymnus odpuštění
Návod k životu s prohrou
Nářek nad utrpením
Oběť za uzdravení
Ale nic z toho není tím
Co od něj potřebuji

Chci jen, aby pochopil
Že nemá nic, co ho tíží
Že nemusí být vizionář
Že má pouze svolení
Plnit mé okamžité pokyny
Tedy říkat to, co jsem mu přikázal
Opakovat

TO KVŮLI TOBĚ ZPÍVÁM *You Got Me Singing*

To kvůli tobě zpívám i když přicházejí špatné zprávy
To kvůli tobě zpívám tu jedinou píseň co znám
To kvůli tobě zpívám od té doby co řeka vyschla
To kvůli tobě přemýšlím o místech kde se můžeme ukrýt

To kvůli tobě zpívám i když svět už pominul
To kvůli tobě přemýšlím že bych rád šel dál
To kvůli tobě zpívám i když všechno potemnělo
To kvůli tobě zpívám chválu Haleluja

Zpívám tu chválu Haleluja

To kvůli tobě zpívám jako vězeň v žaláři
To kvůli tobě zpívám jako omilostnění ve schránce
To kvůli tobě si přeju aby nám naše malá láska vydržela
To kvůli tobě přemýšlím jako lidé kdysi

To kvůli tobě zpívám i když svět už pominul
To kvůli tobě přemýšlím že bych rád šel dál
To kvůli tobě zpívám i když se všechno pokazilo
To kvůli tobě zpívám chválu Haleluja

Zpívám tu chválu Haleluja

Final Farewell 27 February 2019

Final Farewell 27 February 2019

