My name is Lisa Bernard. I’m a friend. Here from California. Hello to all of you. It is an honor and a privilege and also painful to be standing here today….

Many of you called him Rabbi Acrish. Some just called him "Rabbi". His brother called him "Sol-o-mon", his sons called him "Dad", his grandkids called him "Pop-Pop". To Terri…and to me… he was "Sol." Sol which means SUN in Spanish, his native language. And he was truly sunshine. To me his aura, his energy, his being, his presence, emitted rays of sunshine. Especially when he was in his white robe...with his tanned face...like a sunshine to me. He never quite felt of this world to me, he felt to me like an angel. His “Hebrew” name, Shlomo, means peace. Shalom. How fitting. A man who sought peace and comfort and healing for hundreds of congregants he led, for high school students for whom he was the psychologist, for black people in the south, for Israel, for family, for friends, and for all of us who are here.

My connection to this sacred man began in the most sacred of places, Jerusalem. My family was spending a sabbatical year in Israel, and so were the Acrishes.

I’m 14 years old. It’s a warm day. Clear skies. The quintessential landmark of Jerusalem is glowing. The sun is shining off the Gold Dome. It’s my brother Adam’s Bar Mitzvah and we are looking down at the exquisite symbol of thousands of years of history from a Temple in French Hill. My parents are there and so are our new friends who are becoming a part of our extended family. Kevin stands next to Adam at the Torah and has an Aliyah, Brian and Terri are nearby. And there is Sol. His energy and aura shine like that Golden Dome.

I am 17 years old. I am at Kevin’s funeral. A shocking, unexpected, bewildering moment. It is a sunny day though. And Sol is leading us in his gentle, wise, Holy way. His strength is astonishing and serves as an inspiration.

I am 27 years old. I am walking through the grass by a farmhouse in Vermont, past rows of my loved ones, in my wedding dress. The sun is shining. I walk down the aisle, stop next to my soon-to-be-husband Matt, and look at Sol, who is standing behind a table, facing us, under the chupah, ready to perform our wedding ceremony.

I am 35 years old. I call Sol and Terri to tell them that my daughter Emma has been born and that her middle name Kai is for Kevin.

I am 44 years old, I’m visiting Sol in the hospital. He knows his end is near.

“Lee-sa, you're a journalist,” he said, “Will you write my eulogy?"

I was speechless, honored, humbled, and devastated.

He directed me to read “Have A Little Faith”, Mitch Albom’s book about writing his Rabbi’s eulogy. And we dove in.

That was 2 months ago. I stand here, (still 44 years old), now delivering the eulogy of this precious golden, shining man who has been with each of us throughout our life events, usually as the one officiating the events. And today…did you notice? There is no sun. It is overcast and has been raining. “Nothing is a coincidence,” he always said.

I will share with you now our conversations. I will use his own words as often as I can, because he was wise and articulate. He also gave me the names of various people to contact, which I did. From Brewster to Alabama to Florida to Virginia to California.

I’m going to skim over the stuff most of you already know. He was a voracious reader, for a time a vegetarian, a Rabbi who didn’t keep Kosher, more humorous and playful than initially meets the eye…he spoke 7 languages fluently (Spanish,French, Hebrew, English, Italian, Arabic and Portugese). He was passionate about the violin. He treasured the year he spent in Israel, and his subsequent trips back to visit his mother and sisters and many nieces and nephews who lived there. The NY Senate passed a resolution recognizing his 50 years of service as a Rabbi here. He had a PHD in Psychology…But I am going to share the details that you may not know about the rich and textured life of Sol Acrish. He always urged connection, love, kindness and he demonstrated that in each country he lived, in each challenge he faced, and it is his lasting legacy.

This is a story of a man who, thanks to a series of unpredictable personal opportunities, found himself witnessing first hand some of the most significant moments in world history during his lifetime.

He was born in Morocco at the end of the Spanish Civil War, hefound himself in London at the end of World War II, in Montgomery, Alabama during the Civil Rights movement, in Jerusalem during a period of time when there was true harmony between all the peoples there, and great optimism…And here in NY on 9-11. He was areligious and spiritual leader who never preached politics from the pulpit, but he always urged compassion, kindness, faith and a commitment to TIKUM OLAM, repairing the world. With his terminal diagnosis clear, one of the first questions I asked him was “How do you cope with the knowledge that you will go soon...?” And Sol said "God has a plan for all of us. I deeply believe that. I will die when I have completed the mission I had in this life. I’m here for a reason.”“A purpose," he said.

On August 16,1939 Solomon Acrish was born into poverty in a mostly Jewish ghetto in Morocco. Food was scarce. And he told me very deliberately that he only had one pair of pants. It was a significant detail to him.“Every evening,” he said, “My mother would wash my pants and then hang them to dry overnight.” He told me sadly that he had to miss school sometimes in the winter if the pants had not dried by morning...because he literally had nothing else to cover his legs and wear to school.

At 15 he was offered a full scholarship to become a Sephardic Rabbi in London. Sol says even then, he knew profoundly in his soul that this was his opportunity to change the course of his life. He forever felt that he was given a gift in that moment, and he tells me he felt with deep conviction that it was his responsibility to pay that gift back to the world...

It was 1954. Sol tells me at this time the impact of World War II was conspicuous in London. There was visible destruction from the war. Damaged buildings. Food rationing for himself and his fellow students. He studied diligently, and says he felt proud that he was part of the legacy of Sir Moses Montefiore who had donated money to educate Sephardic rabbis through the Anglo-Jewish Association.

After 4 years...Sol says “It was time to earn some money.” He was recruited by a small synagogue in Montgomery, Alabama that was looking for a Rabbi. He tells me he knew nothing of Alabama, except that "Alabama-boy" was the name of a character in the book Moby Dick. He accepted the job.

As I mentioned, during the course of our many conversations in the past two months, Sol would direct me to speak to various people from different stages of his life. “Talk to Raymond Cohen” he said at this point. So I got the number from Brian, and I called Cohen's Appliances in Montgomery, Alabama. This conversation was typical of all of the conversations I had with the numerous people I spoke with in an effort to capture Solomon Acrish's history and legacy.

Raymond comes to the phone, “Hello?” he says with a deep Southern accent. I explain that I am a dear friend of Sol Acrish and that I am collecting stories to document his life. In an attempt to show how dear he is to me, I say,"He was the Rabbi that married me." And Raymond says, "He married me too.”…And I ask, "How old are you?" and Raymond answers, "84".

So Raymond tells me...”Sol almost never got here, you know?” Apparently, the American consulate hadn't paid any attention to his request to get a visa to come work in the U.S.. Weeks and months went by with no response. The congregation was getting restless. So Raymond Cohen tells me he contacted the United States Senator from Alabama. He was a "big wig" Raymond tells me. And Raymond wasn't kidding. I did a little research. Senator Lister Hill was the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Labor and Public Welfare in 1960. Senator Hillsaid to Raymond "Can't you find a Rabbi for your congregation here in America?" And Raymond said to him "No. There are very few Sephardic Rabbis in the U.S. and anyway, we want THIS one." Sol's papers were issued. And he told me, “ I arrived in Montgomery, Alabama, in the United States of America, on April 27, 1960. “ He was 20 years old.

Almost immediately the young Rabbi found himself in the crosshairs of the U.S. Civil Rights movement. He says there were 1800 Jews in Montgomery, Alabama then. Three synagogues and 2 Jewish country clubs. Temple Etz Ahayem had 70 families and Sol told me, “they were all related to each other.” He says the congregation welcomed him warmly, but it was a difficult time in Alabama. He described segregation, work strikes and riots.

Sol told me "We had a special relationship with the black community. I remember during the strike, the maids were not working as part of the movement to force change.Our sisterhood collected food, clothes, and money,” he told me, “and secretly gave it to the maids to keep them going."

But he says it was a very dangerous time, particularly for the Jews in the South, as the Jews in the North were agitating for de-segregation. And then..there was a bomb threatdirected at the synagogue from the Ku Klux Klan...Sol felt he was being followed one night. And at that point...he felt he had a responsibility to protect the community.He says "I could not jeopardize the life of everybody because of my principals. My principals are one thing, but I can't risk all of my community." So he spoke from the bimah about kindness and compassion without making incendiary political statements.

His time at Etz Ahayem is formally documented in 3 places.

Wikipedia actually lists a quote. In an entry it states, “During the Montgomery Bus Boycott then Rabbi Solomon Acrish spoke in favor of the boycott and against segregation, QUOTE "citing the demand in Torah for social justice."

I also discovered that he is mentioned in the archives and history of The Institute of Southern Jewish Life. And he is mentioned, by name, for his time in Montgomery in the scholarly book called "The American Synagogue: A Historical Dictionary and Sourcebook" published in 1996.

It was also in Montgomery that Sol met his first wife, an Air Force officer. And...he met Terri Berlin in 1963...but she doesn't come back into the story yet...

After 5 years in Alabama, Sol moved to NY, got married, and had two beautiful baby boys. He went back to college to become a Reform Rabbi, and he joined you all. Temple Beth Elohim, here in Brewster, NY. That was 1966. 50 years ago. He told me there were 10 or 15 families then...as you all know he created a religious school, developed a curriculum, and grew this congregation to, at its largest, 260 families with over 200 kids at the religious school. A profound achievement.

I spoke to the first person he Bar Mitzvahed here, Jeffrey Meyers. Jeffrey recalls a young Rabbi Acrish hosting the religious school class of then just 3 kids...at his apartment on Shabbat. He served them egg salad sandwiches and they discussed politics, history and the books he assigned them to read. Jeffrey says Rabbi Acrish's message was always to practice Tikun Olam, heal the world, and he urged them to be aware of injustice. The Meyers are just one of the many families that Sol has been connected to for multiple generations. Jeffrey’s mom is here today. She is 100 years old.

Initially he was only needed hereas a Rabbi part-time, and the salary wasn't enough to pay the bills, so he supplemented his income as a teacher at the high school. He taught Spanish, French and Italian (for 10 years) to hundreds of children. During this time, Sol again faced a life challenge and rose to the occasion. Following a divorce, Sol acquired full custody and became a single father of two young boys. Not a common occurrence in the mid-1970's in the US, but he didn't miss a beat. He worked two/three jobs and was completely devoted to Brian and Kevin.

And then….. he found a life long partner, to this day, when Terri got back in touch with him 15 years after they first met. 37 years of marriage. Together they raised the boys, they spent a magical year in Jerusalem, enjoyed trips to and from Florida, and all over the world…They healed one another, supported one another, cared for one another truly in sickness and in health.

Terri, I’m not sure if he serenaded you in recent months…but his love of playing the violin is worth noting. I asked him, “What is your favorite piece of music?” And he told me “Rachmaninoff’s Vocalise.” I researched Vocalise and found a write-up by a composer who wrote, “It is a very lovely melody, a very haunting melody. And it is one of those pieces that, in its apparent simplicity, conceals the complexity and subtlety and skills of the composer. “ Indeed, one could say the same about Sol….and the way he gently encouraged both adults and children to share their challenges with him so he could help them heal.

Hetold me he is extremely proud of the work he did as the school psychologist at Brewster High Schoolfor 15 years. He said it was mentally exhausting for him, as he empathized with the students and their problems, but he said it was also fulfilling. He said the young people would share their pain, anxieties, and fears with him. He told me "We took them out of the darkness, and helped them to lead a fulfilling life." There’s his light again.

But he had to endure an unthinkable degree of pain and darkness himself with the death of Kevin at the age of 17. I asked him how he coped, “How do you carry on after such a tragic loss?,” I asked. And he pointed to what he called his tremendously deep faith in God. He repeated to me that he felt that God had a plan for him. And God had a plan for Kevin. That is how he got through. Sol knew that he led by example. His grace and his strength with such a horrific loss was a model to all of us. He told me that he vowed “to serve as an example of endurance, fortitude and faith in God.” Sol told me he continued to feel close to Kevin through their mutual love of tennis and through his grandchildren, Max, Harry and Lily.He says he felt Kevin everyday.

I then asked Sol, “What is your favorite piece of Torah?” He didn't hesitate. "Leviticus," he said. "You shall be holy. For I, your God, am holy."…And he explained that the verse preceeds instructions “To be a good person. To have proper, compassionate behavior. To be kind. Honor your parents.” And I repeat again, that was truly, profoundly, his guiding principal in how he tried to live his life.

Kindness. And also…seizing opportunities and making the most of them. Remember the pants? The little boy from the ghetto in Morocco who only had one pair of pants and on occasion had to miss school if the pants weren't dry? In our chats, he came full circle with the pants, the irony not lost on him, as he told me a story of when Brian was about 9 years old. Sol got a call from the nanny helping him with the boys, and she told Sol "Brian missed the bus to school today, so he isn't going to make it to school today." She paused and said "Brian couldn't decide which pants to wear. He has so many pairs of pants, he couldn't make a decision which one to put on, and he missed the bus." (Now Brian wants me to include that his “many” pants were probably all hand-me downs from Andrew Lippman who was just a bit older than him in this congregation. Probably green tough-skins brand Brian suspects. I’m guessing they probably also had bell bottoms.). But although Sol was struck by the contrasting story of the pants in terms of the abundance in the US versus where he came from…I think he also had to have had a bit of pride in what he had achieved here and how he could provide for his son.

Indeed, Sol’s is the story of the American Dream. And when I spoke with his brother Albert, the ripple effect is clear. Albert tells me his big brother Solomon, after becoming a citizen, sponsored his little brother to immigrate to the US at the age of 19. Albert went on to have 2 children, and grandchildren here.

I suspect each of us here were made to feel like a little brother, an older brother, a daughter, by Sol. We didn’t have to be blood relatives for him to consider us “family.”I know that he told the same to Brian's girlfriend Dina this week. He said to her "you are my family." It’s perhaps the greatest compliment to receive from a man who has encountered so many thousands of people in his life and who values family fiercely He said of this congregation “These are people I love. It’s a family. They respect me and care for me.” He was deeply proud of what he built here. He recalled that in the early days it was a challenge to get enough people for a Friday night service. In his Rosh Hashana sermon this year, from this Bimah, he remarked “I have the privilege of being your Rabbi because you have chosen me. I have had the privilege”, he said, “of serving four generations of our people.” He points to his accomplishment of serving as Rabbi for 50 years and “making this congregation a loving and caring family.”

I think in asking me to write his eulogy, he wanted to solidify his legacy… I see his legacy everywhere, but I especially see it in Brian...The way Brian has cared for him always….and especially these very difficult past hours, days, weeks, and these past couple of years. Calling doctors, visiting doctors, arranging details, traveling back and forth to be by his side. Brian, you are right now exactly what he believed in and dedicated his life to modeling and inspiring. Devotion. Kindness. Compassion. Commitment. Sacrifice. Relationships. Love. Respect. Honor thy parents.Remember, it’s his favorite piece of Torah. Leviticus. And he told me his love for you and your children, Max, Harry and Lily helped heal his loss of Kevin. That is a gift you gave him.

Terri...you were his rock. What the two of you shared is it’s own tale of love, enduring love, commitment, second chances, compassion, acceptance, sacrifice, pain, joy, partnership. You navigated losses, victories, and life as leaders of a very special community here. You have reflected the same grace he showed in your devotion to him during these painful, demanding last few days and weeks, and always. You had to share him with all of us. There were constant demands for his attention. Thank you for sharing him.

And Albert….a health care professional. Again, “Nothing is a coincidence.” Youliterally helped keep him alive in recent months. Administering his IVin his home, multiple times a day. Incredible.

Sol told me he deeply felt the love of all of us here and beyond as he faced the end. He said, “I am flattered and grateful to see these people who I loved so much, also cared for me so much. It is very rewarding.”

This morning Max showed me a faded, newspaper article he found dated 1987…it was in a collection of clippings that Sol had saved. Sol had told a reporter “I would like to be remembered as a teacher.”

In his final days I said to him "You told me your time here would be done when you have filled your mission, God's plan for you. The little boy from the ghetto in Morrocco. You have touched the lives of hundreds and hundreds of people. High Holy Days, baby namings, Bar Mitzvah's, Weddings, Funerals, counseling, teaching, nurturing across several states. You were given this opportunity to get out of poverty if you accepted the challenge of becoming a Rabbi and thus giving of yourself back to others in their joy and in their sorrow, as a school psychologist, healing pain. You have fulfilled your mission, haven't you?” He said to me "Yes, I have."  And I asked him "Do you feel proud? I hope you feel proud of yourself, and what you have done during your time here." And he said "Yes, I do."

So as I stand here, this is what gives me peace. That the man who sought to bring peace, Shalom, Shlomo Acrish…is at peace and satisfied with his life and his contribution…and after recent suffering, is now himself,physically, at peace.But we all still see and feel his light, and we always will. His sunshine, his Sol.