IRVING PAUL ROTHBERG (1921-2020)

Irving Paul Rothberg of Lathrop Community, Easthampton, Massachusetts died peacefully in his sleep on the morning of Saturday, November 28, after spending his final days in the company of his loving family.

Irv was born on June 8, 1921 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the youngest of three children and only son of Harry and Jenny Rothberg, Jewish immigrants who had fled czarist pogroms in pre-Revolutionary Russia.

Growing up in north Philadelphia during the Depression, Irv spent his youthful days playing “biffo” and “halfball,” local versions of street baseball, excelling in school, and in his teenage years attending the ballroom shows of popular big bands from that era. After graduating from Northeast High School in 1939, where he won his numerals in class baseball, Irv worked at various jobs, including at a photographic equipment store (kindling a lifelong interest in cameras and photography) while attending night classes at Temple University and the University of Pennsylvania.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, Irv enlisted in the Army Air Force in February 1942, where he was assigned to the Intelligence unit of Troop Carrier Squadron S-2 Section. After training in numerous locales around the United States, Irv’s unit had postings in Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Sicily, England, France, Trinidad, and Brazil, where his unit supported the Allied invasions of Italy and France (notably, on D-Day). Among his duties was keeping the war diaries and official history of his unit. He received his honorable discharge in September 1945 with the rank of Staff Sergeant, and throughout his life was able to recount the exact dates and locations of all the many stops during this formative experience.

After the war, Irv, like many of his generation, attended college on the G.I. Bill, graduating from Temple University with honors and a B.S. in Education in 1948. From 1948 to 1954, Irv attended graduate school at The Pennsylvania State University, earning an M.A. in 1951 and a Ph.D. in Romance Languages in 1954, becoming the first Ph.D. with a specialty in Spanish at Penn State.

During this time in graduate school, and while working in 1951 as a camp counselor in the Poconos, Irv met Irene Podhurst of Jersey City, New Jersey. They were married in 1952 and she became his companion, support, and lifelong love through all the many personal and professional milestones that were to come.

A series of faculty positions followed at the University of Connecticut (Instructor: 1954-58) and Temple University (Assistant/Associate Professor: 1958-62), and in 1960 he served as a Fulbright Scholar at the Universidad del Valle in Cali, Columbia. Irv joined the faculty of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in
1962, beginning a 30-year career in the Department of Spanish & Portuguese, where he became a full professor in 1967, served for a time as Department Chair, and from which he retired in 1992.

Irv’s academic specialty was the drama and poetry of Spain’s Golden Age, with particular emphasis on the work of playwright Lope de Vega (“the Spanish Shakespeare”). The author of numerous publications and papers, he also served as Editor of *Hispania*, the scholarly journal of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP), from 1966 to 1974. After the editorship, Irv continued to work with the AATSP, becoming Vice President in 1982 and then President in 1983.

In recognition of his professional accomplishments and his work encouraging the study of Spanish language and culture, in 1978 King Juan Carlos of Spain awarded Irv with a knighthood, the Cruz de Caballero de la Orden del Mérito, which honors extraordinary service by Spanish and foreign citizens for the benefit of Spain.

Irv retired from the University of Massachusetts in 1992, remaining active with a number of pursuits including as editor of AATSP’s *Enlace* newsletter. In 2001, on a whim, he cast a write-in vote for himself on the Amherst Town Meeting ballot, which he then participated in for five years, serving on the Cable Advisory Committee and as chair of the first Town Meeting Coordinating Committee, tasked with recommending changes to the structure of Amherst town government.

In 2006, Irv and Irene moved to the Lathrop Community in Easthampton, Massachusetts. There, Irv developed a website for residents, and also worked with other tenants to re-launch the community’s *Nor’easter* newsletter, for which he served as the inaugural editor.

A lifelong fan of the Phillies and the Eagles, Irv could often be found watching or listening to the broadcasts or streaming iterations of their games. His other loves included the music of the big band era, the classic American songbook and the Broadway theatre, the great works of literature, and anything and everything technological.

Quick of mind and ever ready with a quip, a pun, an etymology or a witticism, either verbal or written, an excellent dancer and a sharp dresser, Irv was always up for an outing or adventure of one sort or another, and enjoyed the company of family, friends and acquaintances. Irv will always be remembered as a warm, wise, and generous son, brother, husband, father, and (doting) grandfather.

Irv is predeceased by his wife Irene, parents Harry and Jenny, and sisters Sally and Clare. He is survived by his two sons, Seth of Amherst and Adam and his wife Janet of Croton-on-Hudson, NY, and granddaughters Isabel and Maggie.
Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the family will hold a private graveside service at the Cemetery of Congregation B’nai Israel in Northampton, with a virtual memorial to be held at a later date.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations may be made to the JDRF Diabetes Foundation.

He was with us for a long time, and we will miss him.