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Two Funerals: A Look at How Times Have Changed By Belda Kaufman Lindenbaum and Carol Kaufman Newman

Twenty three years ago, when our father died, his funeral took place in the main sanctuary of Congregation Kehillat Jeshurun Synagogue in New York City. There was no problem with the arrangements, our father having been a longtime and active member of the congregation. The logical person to deliver the eulogy on behalf of the family would have been our eldest sister, Judy, a gifted writer and speaker. But the idea of a woman assuming such a function at an Orthodox funeral, of giving a *hesped*, especially from the pulpit of a synagogue, was too outrageous to be considered at the time. And so, our brother spoke for all of us. Twenty three years ago our father's three daughters toyed with the idea of saying *kaddish*, went on occasion, but gave it up. We did, however, organize a *yahrzeit* dinner each year and learned for the occasion, attending services to say *kaddish*.

Today, as we write these words, it is remarkable to see how far we have come. Today we are not easily deterred and we are ready to challenge the status quo where *halacha* allows. Our mother, Rita Kaufman, died recently. There was no question that we wanted her funeral to take place in the same sanctuary from which our father had been eulogized. She was a learned, devout and longtime member of the synagogue. Twenty three years ago we only knew of one woman who had had her funeral in a synagogue, and this was not permitted in the main sanctuary, but only in the auditorium. At the time, this was considered a significant honor.

At our mother's funeral this year, among those who eulogized her was a daughter-in-law and a daughter. Her granddaughters participated by reciting *tehillim*, singing along with her grandsons in an unusual tribute, and accompanying the coffin as it left the shul. At the cemetery, a place where women are still often unwelcome, another granddaughter spoke. We all participated with the men in shoveling and covering the coffin and filling the grave. *Shiva*, too, was a different experience this time. We were not relegated to a separate room for daily services. Because we were told that a *mechitza* was unnecessary in a private home, we were able to sit and pray in the main room with a small separation from the men. Female as well as male family members learned *mishnayot* and led study sessions between *mincha* and *maariv*. It all seemed perfectly natural.

Today, we, our mother's daughters, along with her son, say *kaddish* every morning and afternoon. We are welcomed into the congregation, for the most part graciously. There are some occasions where we have asked for some changes to be more comfortable, and we are not afraid to ask. It is comforting to participate in these rituals and to deal with our mother's death as part of the community. We think our mother would have been proud to see the *kavod* she is being given, and to see her daughters engaging in the tradition which she loved and passed on to us.