

Cedar Sinai Park honors the Fifth Commandment with comprehensive care

by Peter Korchnak

Hurricane Katrina swept away more than just Sheila Cohen Springer's house in Biloxi, MS: it took her health, too.

"Her house was completely gone, it ended up miles off the coast in a canal leading into the Back Bay," Sheila's son Bill Cohen recounted. "The trauma tipped her over, severely exacerbating the symptoms of early dementia she'd been experiencing."

An artist, teacher and printmaker all her life, Springer now lives at Miriam Suite, a memory-care unit that is part of Robison Jewish Health Center at Cedar Sinai Park, in Portland.

After a sojourn with her middle sister on the East Coast, Springer moved to Oregon in 2008. Cohen, who works as a policy analyst at the Oregon Department of Transportation, said, "Rose Schnitzer Manor was the only place we considered, no question. The quality of care has a great reputation in the local community."

"There are many other nursing homes out there. But I would not be nearly as independent in another place as I am here." –Judy Friedman

At the Manor, which is CSP's assisted-living facility, Springer was able to continue making art. Because her favorite printmaking technique intaglio requires specialized equipment and is very labor-intensive, Springer began exploring collage,



Judy Friedman in front of the Robison Jewish Health Center building in June 2012. Photo by: Peter Korchnak



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"A positive, rejuvenating experience for my mother and for me."

using materials she found in her daily activities. Several of her creations are on display around her Miriam Suite room today.

“Living at the Manor kept her active,” Cohen said. “She even had a one-woman show there, participated in the Manor’s 10th Anniversary exhibit, and placed in the Ageless Art contest.”

Aides often brought Springer to participate in the diverse activities at Adult Day Services, located in the Robison building, and she also received assistance from Sinai Family Home Service aides.

THE DISAPPEARING MEMORY

Soon, however, the illness caught up with her. She started wandering, and staff at the Manor recommended residence at the Miriam Suite. In March 2009, her younger sister Grace Rubin, a retired copy editor and grantwriter, moved from New York to Portland to be more closely involved in her care.

Rubin believes that if she could somehow break through the late stage of Alzheimer’s, Sheila would “go online and research every decision staff made for her. I also have no doubt in my mind that if she could express herself, she’d want to show her appreciation of the well-trained and caring staff.”

Inspired by her Robison experience, Rubin plans to volunteer to help elders with projects around their homes.

HOW TO ENJOY FREEDOM IN ELDER YEARS

Formerly known as the “Home,” Robison Jewish Health Center provides care for elders with physical challenges as well. Judy Friedman, who has multiple sclerosis, has resided there for 18 years.

“There are many other nursing homes out there,” Friedman said. “But I would not be nearly as independent in another place as I am here.”

According to Judy, care at Robison extends beyond basic needs like clothing, bathing, cleaning or medication. It also entails being able to practice one’s faith. She said, “Not only am I comfortable here as a Jew, other faiths are respected here as well. It’s important to me.”



Sheila Cohen Springer at the Rose Schnitzer Manor’s 10th Anniversary art show in 2008. Photo courtesy of Bill Cohen

Friedman has two projects lined up for the rest of this year. In the summer, she will volunteer for President Obama’s re-election campaign.

“I’ll be making calls and I’ll also help organize a rally on the Cedar Sinai Park campus,” she said. “But to be fair, I will also contact the Romney campaign to hold a rally here as well. Those are also freedoms I have here.”

The day after the election, Friedman said, “I look forward to writing children’s stories again.” The book will continue her series about The Upside Down People from the Town of Eat-a-Lot.

MUSIC MOVES THE MEMORY

Between her son and her sister, Springer gets a visitor several times a week. Though her faculties have declined with the progressing illness, Cohen said, “Mom still responds to music. There was a lot of music in her immediate family. All her siblings were involved in some form of music or art.”

As she glanced at the art pieces adorning Springer’s room, Rubin affirmed her sister’s artistic bent. “Sheila had a strong philosophy about art. She believed that beauty should be part of everyone’s daily life, and her family and friends were all the recipients of that passion.”

Cohen added, “We’ve used every service that this organization provides on its campus. I know mom is not the only person getting care at Robison, but she’s getting excellent care there. Staff bend over backwards to help.” 

Peter Korchnak is the online communications manager for Cedar Sinai Park. He writes about the Central/Eastern European immigration experience at AmericanRobotnik.com.



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