

## Jack Price

*The following tribute to Jack Price (1928-2016) is based on a recent oral history interview with Jack conducted by the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, in collaboration with the Price Library of Judaica, on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2015.*

The staff at the Isser and Rae Price Library of Judaica mourn deeply the passing of Jack Price (ז"ל), one of our major benefactors, and a very modest, kind and dear man. The son of an immigrant father, Jack, together with his brother Samuel, grew up to play a substantial role in Florida's real-estate development, particularly the building of Holiday Inn resorts and, through his great philanthropic efforts, to make a strong impact on the development of Jewish education and community life in Florida.

Jack, was the second of four children born to Isser Price, who came to the United States from Poland in 1914. While living in Baltimore, Isser met and later married Rae Gartner, also born to Polish immigrants, and together they would establish an enduring and devoted family life in Jacksonville, Florida. Growing up, Jack witnessed the great entrepreneurial skills of a father who always found innovative ways to provide for his family through his salvage operations, and of a mother who engaged in community service and instilled in her children the supreme importance of Jewish community, education and charity. Both Isser and Rae were instrumental in establishing the Jacksonville Jewish Center in the late 1920s. The Price family was tight-knit unit, and Jack bonded deeply with his siblings, Samuel, Florence and Eunice, forever regarding them as his “guiding light,” particularly after the premature death of his father.

In the 1940s, Jack attended the University of Florida, embarking on a course in building construction. For him, it was a simple life choice, based somewhat on whim and somewhat on the wonderful experiences he had as a child building bridges with his brother Sam. As he fondly recalled in a recent oral history interview: “We would take the dining room table and lay out newspaper and take toothpicks and put them together in the form of a bridge, take up the whole table.”

In the late 1970s, following many successful real estate ventures, the brothers, having heard that the University of Florida had been awarded an NEH fundraising grant to build a Jewish studies library, decided to give a major gift in honor of their parents. At that time, Jack and Sam’s gift was the largest single donation the UF libraries had ever received, and the new

Judaica library was officially named for Isser and Rae in 1981. Reflecting on their donation, Jack recalled that he simply recognized the importance of promoting Jewish Studies at UF. In the years that followed, he would express great pride in the extraordinary Judaica library their gift had helped build and sustain.

Jack's other contributions to Jewish charities were of similar great significance. In 1966, having visited Israel during the Six Day War, the brothers were deeply affected by what they saw there. On their return to Jacksonville, they campaigned hard to raise the equivalent of a million dollars to ease the suffering of injured Israeli soldiers.

For Jack, another tremendous source of pride was his role in helping to establish the new site and ongoing support for the River Garden Hebrew Home in Jacksonville. From its inception in 1946, River Garden quickly became a major facility for the care of the elderly and a central part of Jacksonville Jewish life. Even more significantly, its standard of care would go on to serve as a model for homes for the aged around the state of Florida. Recalling the first day the new larger facility opened in 1989, Jack said: "we moved every occupant, every patient, in one day in December... It was a beautiful scene, a beautiful scene."

Yet, at his heart, Jack was a very modest and self-effacing man: his success in business, his great philanthropy, and his personal contribution to his nation's war effort in Korea aside, when asked what he felt was his greatest life achievement, he quickly answered "Ned, Susan and Michael," his three children. His greatest blessing in life, he added, was having been married to two wonderful women, "two tens," as he called them: the late Judith Price (1931-2000) and Dr. Miriam Finegold-Price. And when asked to ponder the importance of his life's work, he simply remarked: "I think anybody else could've done it if they put their mind to it... Be proud it kept me off the streets."

Asked to send words of wisdom to the next generation of students, Jack was ever practical: "learn accounting," he advised. Being armed with a basic understanding of finances, he felt, would set each and every student at the University of Florida on the road to success in their future careers. Nevertheless, at the core of Jack Price's business and personal life stood one simple but wise belief, that whatever you do in life, "do it for your heart," he said.

Our hearts go out to Jack's family. He will be greatly missed.

*See also the tribute in the [Florida Times Union, Jacksonville](#)*