

Mom Funeral Eulogy

My mother was 30 years older than me. She lived to the age of 89, but I actually believe she lived many lives, through life experiences on 3 continents – where she reinvented herself along the way. Her tenacity, honesty, compassion, and fierce independence were so admirable. She was, needless to say, a strong person who lived her life on her terms.

Mom was physically strong, emotionally strong, strong-willed and of strong opinions – that’s for sure. They say that DNA can be quite strong, and I believe this to be true, given that her mother possessed many of the same qualities and this strength has continued to be passed down through generations.

While these past 2+ months of Mom’s decline seemed to pass slowly, it also allowed for conversations with her that were so meaningful. Recently, I shared with her that I thought living to the age of 89 was quite amazing, and that I was giving thought to her last 30 years, when all those years ago, she started a new life on her own, not necessarily by choice.

I also told her how much, looking back at the past 30 years, I admired how she “flew like a bird,” with such freedom and zest and soared to new heights in her life, as she created her own meaning and purpose. I told her how I thought she was so happy and fulfilled in many ways, and that I was so glad for her. Given another 30 years, I told her – which would put me at age 89 - I hoped to use her as an example of how to “soar to new heights.”

Mom was a very loving and caring mother, wife, talented homemaker, entertainer, and supporter and partner in my father's business. Somehow, she met many of her children's needs, shlepping us everywhere - to and from dance or music lessons, tennis practice, etc. She encouraged us to challenge ourselves and take risks, cheering us on all along the way. She provided us with a stable, warm home in the Boston suburbs, infused with Jewish traditions and love for Israel – a homelife that she had never experienced as a child. Having such a home was so important to her. She loved us so much, held us tight - sometimes too tight - with that protective nature of hers. After all, she was an immigrant, and her husband and children were all the family she had in the US. Many years later, when she moved to Baltimore, and started to share her own life story, I truly understood the reasons behind it all.

In the early 1990s, once Mom was on her own, she wasted no time in swiftly creating a life full of adventure and meaning – **on her terms**. She learned, travelled, socialized, and was excited about it all. It was so inspiring to see how empowered and energetic she became - finally free to forge her own path.

She moved out of the Boston suburbs, to Cambridge, where she explored her new “back yard” of Harvard Square, attending lectures, concerts, movies and theatre with anyone willing to join in. She thoroughly enjoyed sharing her enthusiasm for it all with old and new friends, and certainly with us during family visits. Mom never got enough of the view of the Charles River from her condo window, taking in the scene along the river – especially on Sundays when the river road was closed to traffic. She so admired and took pleasure in beauty in many forms - through art, dance, music and nature.

Travel to and from Israel – to spend time with family - and to many new world destinations - became a large focus of Mom’s life. She adapted to a variety of situations and through many experiences, she connected with people in deep ways. She was a loyal friend and relative, staying in touch with people over many years. Mom was a Safta (grandmother) in the true sense - being there from day 1 and throughout the years, listening, encouraging, adventuring, loving and yes – giving unsolicited advice through unique relationships with each of her 6 grandchildren.

A new chapter in Mom’s life started when she moved to Baltimore in 2004. She was ready to be closer to family and jumped right into life here. Mom was again able to find meaning and purpose – through time with her grandchildren, learning opportunities, and a variety of volunteer endeavors. The last 7 years at Edenwald proved to be quite special, where she connected to so many new friends, and enjoyed the offerings there with newfound giddiness.

As a Baltimorean, Mom finally revealed a part of her life that she had not really spoken to ~~anyone~~^{many} about – her experiences during the Holocaust. Along with other Holocaust survivors, I was surprised to learn of Mom’s new-found purpose and drive to share her story with groups -especially groups of school children. Through her story, she found a way to connect with most groups, and the children with her. She asked the children to imagine what it felt like to not feel safe, to be in danger, and to be responsible for her family and younger sister’s survival. The letters she received from the children after these events, meant so much to her and was a way for her to know that her message had gotten through to them. She identified more and more as a “survivor.” Frankly, I had never considered my mother to be a

survivor, and at first, found it difficult to accept. Over time, I understood that she was trying to define herself and come to terms with the past.

In some ways, these experiences strengthened Mom even more, giving her confidence to speak about the Holocaust and form lessons for future generations. Mom was so proud of the connections she made with people interested in Holocaust research, as she conducted extensive research herself in preparation for various Roots trips and genealogy conferences. She created quite an archive of Holocaust materials, in one of the 4 languages that she spoke and read fluently. She always wanted to research details and find meaning in it all.

At the same time, I saw the emotional toll that it took on her to relay her story and its painful details. and she was honest with us, her children, that the Holocaust and the trauma she suffered, shaped her into who she became.

Mom had a strong sensitivity and understanding of the immigrant experience, and in recent years, weighed in on her views of immigrant struggle and the world's treatment of immigrants. In addition to actively supporting Jewish, Israel and environmental protection causes, Mom connected to and supported immigrant organizations.

Her love of family was very strong, and she took an active interest in each member's goings-ons. Mom cared deeply for her children and grandchildren's happiness, and never lacked an opinion - both solicited and unsolicited. She supported and gave generously to us all in many ways.

When I think of Mom's unofficial vocations, I think of her as ***life-long teacher, student, op-ed opinionator, social worker and adventurer***. People always seemed drawn to her, to her background, her grace, and her genuine interest in others. Often, people would tell me that Mom left an impression on them.

I know she was proud of her final project – her memoirs. She tested herself (and us all) over the 3 years it took to have it published. Mom was able to share the story with friends and family and even virtually with groups. Somehow, she didn't mind putting herself out there, answering questions – many of them personal – about her life. Only after it was published, did I realize what an impact it had on people and her intention of the book's format. Mom wanted to educate people about the history of the Holocaust and her life through her experiences, and most importantly, remind us to ***not forget (or repeat) the past – especially the Holocaust - and learn from it to build a better future***.

I also think Mom has left us with these additional overarching messages –

1. Don't be afraid to challenge oneself to be the best you can be
2. Find fulfillment, while maintaining core values
3. Enjoy life to the fullest with others

It will be hard to think of her no longer here, in Baltimore, elegantly dressed in one of her colorful outfits, with seasonal jewelry and a stylish pocketbook - ready for an outing together.

However, as she said many times over the past 2 months – ***"I'm ready to go home"*** – home being Israel, where she had planned years ago to be at peace with her

mother, sister, and others. I'm comforted in knowing that she will be back in the land that she loved - near loved ones she had missed so much.

I wanted to share a final poem I read to Mom a couple of weeks ago – it's called ***Thank You Mom...***

Mom,

Thank you for all that you've done

Always keeping it real and teaching me a ton

Learning to stand up tall

While knowing that it's okay to fall

Challenging oneself is the way to learn the most

Forging ahead with life, taking risks, remembering to toast

The ones you love and care with a listening ear, offering so much support

Finding ways to share with advice and a detailed report

You have passed on great DNA to your kids and grandkids

As we continue your legacy, making you proud, speaking out honestly, and trying to rid

The world of hate and intolerance,
With a focus on love and acceptance, nothing preposterous

Always the student and teacher

Your zest for learning amazing, as you shared your wisdom, as quite the speaker

You knew how to have fun, never one to run

From new adventures which were like homeruns

I will miss you so much, and I don't want to make a fuss,

But, just so you know, as I share how I'll miss you, know that this takes guts..

I will miss..

Our many chats about our lives, politics, and the latest news

Enjoying these conversations, respecting each other's views

A great meal out, after a play or concert

It was special to dissect the event, often over yummy dessert

You always enjoyed a great view or nature walk

Taking in the world, while we would talk and talk

Holidays and celebrations together I hold special in my heart

And I won't forget the traditions you have passed on to me from the start

I'm not saying goodbye, but rather until we meet again
Where we will be at peace knowing that we will remain
Together forever, ready for the next endeavor....