

Mom's Eulogy

A Jewel From the Bronx

Before I even begin, I must make a disclaimer than no words, superlatives, phrases or metaphors could adequately do justice to describe the immense quality of a human being my mother was. Also, this is a terribly painful time for all of us because we lost a matriarch of our family and the world lost a one in a million human being...but in time it will evolve into a celebration of Beatrice Edelson's life.

I was forever blessed the day Mom brought me into this world, and that blessing continued for 68 years without once ever faltering. Mom was the adoring, doting, supportive, ever loving sacrificing mother that every child cherishes, longs for and is emotionally set for life if that mother is his lot...the mother that helps guide and encourage and is there 24/7 throughout all the phases of his or her life. My mother was just that and more.

I grew up in Brooklyn and being a typical Jewish kid, my first memories are of Mom taking me to the bakery shopping and always getting me a Charlotte Rousse treat as I waited for them to slice the seeded rye bread. I always said.. "And get one for brother". She would look down at me so proudly that I always had brother on my mind. That was a slogan she would always remind me of for the rest of my life when she wanted to show me how thoughtful I was. I owe it all to mom's upbringing.

My mom was the kind of mother that all my friends would envy me for. I recall like yesterday my best friend in high school, Mike Schwimmer, coming over all the time to my house and the first thing he would say upon entering is "Where is your mother? I want to talk to her about the new Elvis movie I saw, or about Mayor Wagner's new school proposals, or Sputnik or politics. I would be practicing my clarinet in the basement while the two of them chatted in the kitchen. Boy that made me feel so lucky to have friends

come over to visit my mom! That continued throughout my life with my friends and girlfriends. They truly loved sitting down with Mom to discuss just about anything. Mom kept current and did not allow any generation gap to form. She could launch into a conversation with Richie about Gene Simmons and Kiss or any other rocker of the time.

Mom was always an “other directed” type of woman, starting a conversation with “Tell Me about You!” Even during the last months of her life, every time I called to ask how she was, I heard “I’m fine, now tell me about you and New York and Mount Sinai....no Oyyyyy’s I am in pain. Over my lifetime, mom and I always spoke often, and once they moved to Atlanta we spoke several times a week. When dad died in 2001, we would speak even more often, sometimes for hours at a time, and even 2-3 times a day, and almost every day. It was our ritual. Mom missed the culture and electricity of New York, and needed to live vicariously through my eyes. She constantly wanted to know about the Met openings or Moma opening or The Metropolitan Opera and Ballet I had seen. I once even called her quietly during La Bohème during a Pavarotti Aria and held the phone on my lap for the entire aria so she and dad could listen to him sing and hit the hi C’s that she loved.

She especially wanted to hear about the times I spent with her favorite actor/director Woody Allen, and one day I gave her the surprise of her life. I did not go to Atlanta on this particular Thanksgiving and spent it with Woody and his family. Woody generously picked up the phone and called my mother, and reassured her I was OK. He said Bea; I just want you to know that Ken is doing fine. I am keeping him off the streets today.

Mom was an intensely political woman who strived her whole life working for human rights, social equality and against social injustices. Mom instilled me with wonderful values, culture, art, liberal politics and good social values early on in my life. I recall as a small child one Sunday going with mom and dad and Steve with a lovely African American family, Alma and Bill Holmes and their children, to visit the Statue of Liberty. I also recall Mom and Dad inviting all of the African American employees of dad’s gas

station to my Bar Mitzvah. Recall, this was the 50's and a very unusual and progressively liberal thing to do.

Mom fought against social injustice her entire life. Perhaps she got the impetus for this from an afternoon spent with her father, a union organizer in the garment center, visiting the sweatshops and seeing the terrible working conditions there.

Mom was President of the Bnai Brith local chapter in Brooklyn, and was very active in the ADL, Anti-Defamation League; and the JDA (joint defense league). She was elected Co-Chairman of the ADL branch of the Borough of Brooklyn. Mom had a strong desire to serve humanity and made immeasurable contributions towards the bettering of human relations. She helped organize sting operations to weed out anti-Semitic hotels at that time in Miami Florida and taught against racism, prejudice and bigotry at the NYC PTA meetings to which I accompanied her as the audio-visual slide projector operator.

During the McCarthyism era of anxiety and uncertainty when most people were willing to yield to conformity rather than express their true feelings, Mom did not choose to succumb to the forces who said it didn't matter. She showed courage by continuing to fight for her ideals rather than go down in resignation. Mom always fought against these injustices and she did so actively. She marched against Viet Nam and the Nixon-McNamara administration as well as one summer leading a demonstration to the Mayor's office, filmed on National TV News, to force the city to give the polio vaccine to underprivileged children during the polio outbreak that summer.

Mom created not the gold but the platinum standard by which one should evaluate and treat one's fellow human being, especially ones loved ones. Mom was so comfortable in her skin, and was the role model for me in this regard. All my life people would ask me how I got to be so open and comfortable in my own skin. My only answer was " I was raised by the inventor of it" . Mom believed in solid values and that the comforts that money can buy should always be secondary to strong essential human values. She was a person of extreme steadfast convictions. I clearly recall getting a call from mom during the beginning of my freshman year in

college in September 1963 telling me she just heard the Surgeon General's report that smoking causes lung cancer and she and dad had immediately quite smoking and never touched a cigarette ever again. She apologized to me for all the years of sitting in the car with her with closed windows as she smoked her Chesterfields, not knowing how harmful it was to her children.

Mom was the quintessential sacrificing devoted mother to me. In 1979, a dear friend of mine died tragically and I was devastated. I was in NYC and Mom in Atlanta. Mom dropped whatever she was doing, got on a plane and was with me consoling me within 12 hours. She took me to the funeral and Shiva and then insisted that I fly back down to Atlanta with her to mourn the loss, and not be alone. I never ever ever forgot that monumental act of love compassion and support for me.

Mom was a strong proponent for women's rights and as a child I recall seeing on her bookshelf Simone de Beauvoir's book "The Second Sex", an analysis of women's oppression and a foundational tract for modern day feminism, and the Feminine Mystique by Betty Friedan which attacked the popular notion of the day that women could only find fulfillment through childbearing and homemaking. Mom, when she came to Atlanta in 1984 (originally 1973 then a short stint in Del Ray, Fla.) became active in Atlanta's OWL (Older Womens League) and was a true disciple of the early feminism movement. Mom was also an artist and a poet, and Steve and I have many of her paintings hanging in our homes and offices. Mom met dad on a Coney Island Beach in the summer of 1936 and they were married for 65 years through thick and thin and ups and downs. Mom was an extremely devoted wife to dad and vice versa.

Mom was someone who once makes a friend, it's forever. She was surrounded by devoted friends, two of whom are here today, Betty Hunter and Ann Bromhall, and whom mom bonded with like epoxy glue and who were always there to enjoy each other's company and help mom in her times of need without a moment's hesitation. She was devoted to them as well and loved them dearly.

Mom's true joy though were her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. She couldn't wait for them to arrive and spend time with her and she could listen forever to their tales of school, romances, hobbies etc.. She used to have long talks with Richie all the time about everything and anything and they truly enjoyed discussing each other's views. She was always up for listening to and kvelling from those stories that only a grandmother could appreciate. They brought her immense joy and love. Mom was a devoted sister to Jackie and the two of them like clockwork would call twice a day to check in on one another and discuss each other's issues of the day. This ritual lasted until the very end.

As much as I would have liked to have been there to care for mom all those years, I couldn't be living in New York. Fortunately Mom had a remarkable, caring and devoted companion caregiver, Katie Senhaji. Katie cared for mom as if she were her mother and mom often remarked that Katie was the daughter she never had. Thank you dearly Katie.

My mom was so unique in so many ways that universally my friends would remark upon meeting her once, that I was so lucky to have been raised by such a mother. She had this quality of warmth and sincerity and sincere interest in the other person's interests and issues that just engenders immediate friendship and loyalty.

Mom was always upbeat and a 100% Glass Half Full person, who was contagiously warm, affectionate, direct, open, discrete, compassionate, loyal, deeply devoted and honest to all who knew her. Her integrity and generosity were limitless.

I know we will all miss Mom so much, and there will always be a piece of me missing where mom's love filled, but I will try, as all of you should, to remember the wonderful Beatrice Edelson we were all so fortunate and blessed to know and share in our lifetime. Let's celebrate mom's life.