

Hold On - from Many Winters - Nancy Woods

Hold on to what is good
even if it is
a handful of earth.
Hold on to what you believe
even if it is
a tree which stands by itself.

Hold on to what you must do
even if it is
a long way from here.
Hold on to life even when
it is easier letting go.
Hold on to my hand even when
I have gone away from you.

Thank you for being here today with our family! We are missing family members who are unable to be here today - my cousin David's wife Pam and daughters, Reina and Cali; Dad's sisters, Leyla Sacks and Shirley Kort of Vancouver, and their children; My daughter Jamie and granddaughter Antonia of California, were unable to get here in time; and many cousins and family friends who have been calling, emailing and texting their thoughts and love.

Over the past few days I have been thinking, as Judy and I sat with Mom, of the significance in our family of holding hands.....

I recalled a picture I have - of Judy, Mom, her mother, Jane, and me, taken many years ago. It was taken by one of those photographers we used to have in Edmonton, who took and sold their photos on busy street corners. This particular one was taken in the late 1950's on 104th street just north of the downtown Bay store. Judy and I would have been about 3 and 4 years old. Mom is walking with us and our grandmother, holding our hands..... a snapshot in time!

My life with Mom and Dad **began** with hand holding – the story Mom and Dad told was of walking through the nursery at the old Misericordia Hospital searching for a baby to adopt into their family. As Mom continued on with the Nun to look further, I grabbed on to Dad’s finger and held on tight, not letting go. I guess I held his heart with my fingers and Mom and Dad chose me to become part of their family. Judy grabbed Dad’s heart as well, when he went to the Misericordia as she was being born, he was there and saw her almost right away, and she was also chosen to be part of this loving family, and make the family unit complete.

Mom has guided, loved, and nurtured, as she held our hands – mine, Judy’s, Dad’s, and those of many friends and family – through the years. Take a walk with me – hold **my** hand – as I share some special memories of our Mom.....

Jean was born in Edmonton – Jean Myles – on February 24th 1917, to Jane and Thomas Myles and older sisters Alice and Elsie – younger brother Gordon arrived some 11 years later.

Jean spoke of good times spent with her family during those very tough years of the 1920's and 30's. The girls and Gordon, as well, played piano – with Jean achieving her teacher's certification.

Mom and her sisters learned cooking and household skills at the hands of their mother, Jane, a natural cook who never needed nor used a recipe. From their maternal aunts, Rose and Babs, who visited from their homes in Seattle and Los Angeles, the girls learned to sew beautiful clothing and to dance.

As a young woman, Jean worked at the downtown Army and Navy Store. At barely 5 feet tall, Jean was too short in stature to be seen over the dress racks and therefore could not be a salesperson. Jean worked instead as a cash runner. She told us about her time at the store and the many friends she made – Aaron and Zelda Kalensky became life-long friends!

Just prior to WWII, Jean moved to Texas, and was without citizenship when the war broke out and was thus unable to return to Edmonton. She worked for a time for Sheffield Steel as their switchboard operator, surviving much teasing about her "accent". Later she moved to Southern California, with her Aunt Babs, who, along with husband Al Renny owned the MGM Barkies, which supplied animals for TV shows and movies. Babs and Al held Jean's hand as she adjusted to her new life in California. Jean lived in California for more than 10 years.

Jean then worked for Hester and Smith Photography in San Diego and later in their Houston office as well. It was a wonderful time for Jean, who made many great friendships, especially with Johnny and Wanda Gough. Jean loved the California lifestyle and truly enjoyed her job at the studio. She worked with the public and selected models for photo shoots. Mom ended up one day as the model for the Mexican billboards for Tecate Breweries soda pop line of Lime-Cola and ginger ale. Judy and Jamie and I are lucky to have copies of these wonderful photos of Mom!

Jean returned to Edmonton, for what was to be a relatively short stay, just at the end of the war, to look after her mother during a second bout of breast cancer. Well, wouldn't you

know but Ben was **grandma's** doctor, and as they say “the rest is history”! Jean and Ben met and Ben was smitten – he persuaded her to stay and marry him. Mom later told me that “he promised me only kindness and all the good things in the world” – and Ben gave her the most wonderful life. They shared some 60 years together!

Mom and Dad really wanted a family – unable to have children they decided to adopt. Judy and I became their **own** children! Our favourite bedtime stories were “our” stories of how we were chosen to become part of Jean and Ben’s lives.

Mom and Dad held our hands as they told us bedtime stories each night in our shared bedroom, and soothed our physical wounds and injured hearts and spirits through the years.

Judy and I have been sharing some of these stories as we sat with Mom over the past days.

I remember Mom staying and holding my hand until I fell asleep – not uncommon for me to need to have my hand held as Judy will attest. Judy remembers HAVING to hold my hand each night until I fell asleep – timid child that I was – as we lay in our shared room, in our matching twin beds. We have sat holding **Mom's** hand till she fell asleep this past week.

I remember walking downtown with Mom during the Cuban Missile Crisis, holding Mom's hand so tightly, as I was frightened by the air raid sirens ringing out.

I remember **all** of us holding hands at home – when even Dad came home from work! – as the shooting of then US President John F. Kennedy played out over and over again on our TV sets.

I remember holding my parent's hands as they explained the nightly newscasts of the Vietnam War, which was made so real to us as it was reported each night on the TV news.

I remember, being ill at 13, and holding hands with Mom each afternoon as we together watched Siesta Cinema movies, as she tried to keep me resting in bed for a time each day.

I remember (with Judy's memory jog) Mom, with her hair in a ponytail, allowing me, a learner driver, to drive their orange Malibu convertible to Whitemud for a horse show very early one Sunday morning. Mom held my hand as we were stopped by police – who thought we were three teenagers out joyriding in perhaps a stolen car. Mom, who looked like a teenager herself, explained to the officer that she was indeed our Mother and a licensed driver!

I remember Mom holding our hands as we sneaked out of bed on Sunday evenings past our bedtimes, as soon as Dad went “out with the boys” to their regular Sunday Poker get-togethers. Mom always let us watch Judy’s favourite show – *Bonanza* – without Dad’s consent or knowledge – well, at least most of the time!

I remember Mom holding my hand with pride at my Grade Nine graduation as both Judy and I received Citizenship and Newspaper awards for our school accomplishments that year.

I remember fondly, Mom helping me get dressed and holding my hand for a special chat at her dressing table just before I got married in 1974 in the garden of their home on 100th avenue.

I remember and have a very special photo, of Mom holding my brand new daughter, Jamie, as she held her hand for the first time in April of 1977.

It seems, as Judy and I reminisced, that Mom was always there to love, nurture, and guide us, while she held our hands, and our hearts, through the milestones in our lives.

In later years, I can see in my memory, Mom and Dad holding hands as they sat in Dad's room at the Edmonton General Hospital, watching golf or some other TV show together. I used to stop and stand at the door just enjoying the sight of the two of them together and sharing while holding hands.

Judy and I have spent the past year and a half since Dad, of blessed memory, passed, holding Mom's hand as we visited with her, fed her, or watched TV with her in her warm and wonderful, very pink room at the General. Bright colours, flowers, and butterflies were some of Mom's favourite things. Any of you who visited with us at the General or for a Shabbat dinner or Seder over the years, will remember Jean's pink walled room on 11Y. The walls were adorned with family photos, ornaments of ladybugs and butterflies and birds, and her collection of stuffed animal friends. I will remember Mom hosting her visitors in bright pink, orange, and red outfits. Pink Phalaenopsis orchids grew on the windowsills of both Mom and Dad's rooms.

Judy, and Vilma (Mom's exceptional personal caregiver), the wonderful staff of unit 11Y, and I have all held Mom's hands, recently, tiny hands, adorned with the pink polish so lovingly applied by Vilma each week.

These past few days, Judy and I have both been lucky enough to have Mom hold and hang on to **our** hands as we sat together. Those tiny hands have held Dad, Judy, and me, the grandchildren – Jamie, Miles, Jennifer, and Ryan, and the great-grandchildren – Antonia and Zackery, with such love and strength through the years. I know I will always have the feeling of her hands loving and guiding me through life.

Thank you Mom! I will miss your presence, your 1000 watt smile, your bright blue eyes, your beauty and grace and style, but I will be held by your hands always.

Please just allow me another few moments of your time as I thank Vilma –

though mere words cannot fully express our thanks -

for her loving care of Mom these past 2 ½ years! Vilma, you have given so much to Mom and Judy and me.

And to the staff of 11Y – so many- too many to name individually - who have held Jean in their hands and hearts – thank you all so very much for your tender and gentle care of our Jean, our mom!