

KUSSIM

A Tribute to Jennie

My name is Denise and I have been one of the four caregivers who assisted Jennie with her daily needs. Each of us had our own special relationship with her. I will share mine with you and I'm sure my feelings reflect the affection of Elva, Urszula and Josephine.

Someone I love died and has temporarily altered my soul. It is because my own soul has to process the loss of my close friend Jennie who was ninety something years old.

A short robust spirited lady that had the greatest greeting of "hello dear." There were many reasons to laugh together as she had a great wit. She enjoyed being the belle of the ball and always would recollect her love of a party with her dear Jack.

In the last few months that she could laugh at all was a wonder. Overall her life became a cycle of unwellness that found her in and out of hospital too regularly.

Jennie seemed to bounce back from everything in the past six years. Her recuperative ability surprised and pleased us all. We just took it for granted that she would be here to enjoy all that could be provided to her. But that has stopped.

When I came into Jennie's life there were a couple of criteria one had to pass to qualify as a companion. Foremost, you had to enroll in her YSL (Yiddish Second Language) and she would be the teacher. She was still correcting my mispronunciation up to hours before she entered hospital. You could not be thin skinned. Jennie knew that she came first in her world at all times and could test the best of us to see if we were made of the right stuff and if we knew she came first. Devotion to Jennie was rewarding as she claimed you as one of her own. She was very loyal and loving to her care givers.

In her lifetime Jennie wore many hats: daughter, sister, aunt, wife, mother, mother-in-law, grandmother, friend, business woman, singer, dancer, patient, most recently, great-grandmother. Over the years many of her hats were put on the shelf. She honoured those she put away and maintained the ones she kept with pride, to the end.

Jennie was a special gift to my family. My daughter and grand daughters will always remember her smile, open arms, quick wit and how she always looked and smelled delicious.

As this chapter in my life changes I recognize Jennie as my dolly. She was so easy to take good care of as she loved to be touched, impeccably clean and look her best. I shared her with her family and a team of people who's primary concern was her quality of life. Among the four of us we were able to provide her with care that is not easily matched. Our Jennie lived luxuriously.

Elva provided the principal care on a daily basis and has also been Jennie's sole travel companion as they globe trotted to Hawaii, annually; Vancouver, regularly; Winnipeg, Tampa Bay, Florida and Toronto. Elva was the eye behind the lens of the cameras creating a repertoire of memories that most of us could only wish to have.

Urszula supplied the Eastern European flavour to Jennie's day to day world. She sat bedside with Jennie affording her the consolation she needed in the wee hours of the morning. Urszula sometimes would play the piano in the evening, something she and Jennie enjoyed together.

Josephine came into Jennie's life when she was of higher need. Every weekend night shift, faithfully, whether at home or in the hospital, Josephine extended gentle care and compassion to Jennie.

Someone I love has died and the price of loving her is grief. The experience of bonding with her will bring me a step closer to becoming who I am.

KUSSIN

EULOGY FOR BABA JENNIE

I am reading this for my uncle Al, who wanted to speak for the family about Jennie, our mom, baba and great baba.

Words to describe Jennie are inadequate and meaningless to anyone who knew her. Even if you were a stranger in a restaurant or on an elevator with her in Hawaii, you were likely to be drawn in by her by a simple question. "Are you married? Do you like older women? Would you like to go out with my son? He's very good looking..."

She could disarm you with a twinkle of the eye and she had the brashness to speak to anyone at anytime about any subject (that's why I'm still in therapy). Nothing was too personal for mom. Hate you one minute, love you to death the next. Never good enough one second, and could do no wrong the next (especially when she bragged about her kids at the Drop-In Centre. Apparently, I've been an economist for 25 years).

National Geographic couldn't hold a candle to her. She loved to travel with her intrepid guides. First there was Dad, always walking a block or a hemisphere ahead of her. Then there was Elva, her best friend, who pushed her through airports, jungles, across continents—anywhere a new adventure was waiting.

Mom's later life was as good as it could have been. She lived in her house (her castle) to the very end. Her mind was as sharp as a tack. She could dissect your life in a nanosecond. "Have you eaten yet? You should buy a child—I'll pay for it!" And when you were with her you were really with her. She had a heart that was big enough to let anybody in.

Mom loved lots of things. She loved music (no taste, obviously, because her favorite was Molly's Oif'n Pripinshok). She loved jewelry and flowers. The only thing Mom worried about more than her family was "the red satchel". Mom loved her Bailey's (especially if it was FREE or appeared Free). Mom loved showing off her new English words. Mom loved to party. Mom loved saying that Dad would have liked to be here. Mom loved being the centre of attention. Mom especially loved counting money.

Mom had great care. Elva was with her over 10 years, joined later by Denise, Ursula, and Josephine. We owe you these last wonderful years. You are part of our family and will always be in our hearts. And, you've all learned a little Yiddish, a skill that should never be underestimated. We know how difficult the end has been for you. You have performed a *mitzvah*; she had the softest skin, the cleanest hair, the most beautiful nails.

To the end, Mom loved Dad. We trust they are finally together again. In heaven - with all the McDonald's coffee they can drink, where there is all the latkes you can eat, and where the streets are paved with Ge-hackte "anything".

Jennie had a wonderful long life. She was with us for longer than we could have hoped for. She loved dad so much and they were so inseparable that we feared she would never be able to carry on after he passed. We had to all try and fill an unfillable void in her life.

She thrived for 10 more years... at 91 we started to believe mom was eternal, there was nothing she couldn't beat. She had medical science right where she wanted them, always guessing. When a light and a smile that was brighter than a thousand suns goes out, regardless of age, the world becomes a much lonelier place.

Today, the world is a sadder place without Jennie but the world will always be a happier place because of Jennie. She was the cutest, most huggable lady this side of Pinsk. She believed in family - it was a tough club to get into, but once you were in, you were in for life.

My last dream of Mom, she asked, like she always did, "when are you coming to see me?" Well Mom, get somebody to get the spare beds ready because we'll all be coming to visit you one day.

Mom's ethos was reflected in her favourite quote from *Gone With The Wind*: "Frankly, Charlotte, I don't give a damn," she would recite with glee. Mom always knew what

was important in life and what wasn't. Yes, the end is final and lousy, and everyone, from her family and friends to the Alberta Potato market, will miss her deeply.

But this is not the end because Mom won't let it be. Jennie's presence has reverberated through all our lives, and we will continue to hear her in our hearts until we are reunited once again.