

Seema Leon

- I think I need one of those little pills Mom used to take at 5 pm.
- I suspect that if my Mom could have her way, she would want me to tell you:
 - (1) She is feeling just fine.
 - (2) Everything is wonderful.
 - (3) She wishes all of you the best.
 - (4) She loves you all – guess that would be very much.
 - (5) She hopes to see you soon – well, maybe not too soon.
- Because, as you know, she wanted everything to be perfect. And she lived her life on a daily basis trying to make it that way for others.
- But with her gone things will change:
 - No more daily phone calls
 - No more lunches and dinners – even if there wasn't a restaurant in Toronto that made food to her liking
 - No more taking frequent saunas – that's what it was like sitting in her apartment
 - No more getting to take her for the odd ride in my convertible – with her plastic scarf pulled tightly around her hair so it wouldn't get messed up
 - No more telling us – Dad would be so proud!

- Come to think of it – this is the first speech I have ever given in her presence that I won't hear – that was the best eulogy I've ever heard – Dad would be so proud!
- This is going to take some getting used to for all of us.
- And one more thing – Barry, Lawrence and I will never know the answer to the perennial question – *Which son did Mom love the most?* – she's taken that with her
 - Oh sorry – I didn't tell you guys about the conversation Mom and I had last week.
- Seema Leon was one of the kindest, wisest, most gentle people we will ever know.
- She was a wise Jewish woman, a chachamot and she would like that I worked a bit of Hebrew in to this
- What you learned about Mom you learned mostly by watching, by feeling, by experiencing what she did
- Anger was not an emotion in her repertoire
- You learned how she welcomed friends and strangers alike into her home – for a meal, for a night, for a month
- You learned how she loved her children, her husband and many of you – unconditionally
 - You did not have to do anything
 - She just gave and gave
- How she had such a strong belief in God and in her religious beliefs

- How she always had a kind word or a compliment for everyone – even if – truth be told – I can't believe she always meant it
- But I would like to try to take a different tack for a few minutes and reflect
 - How was it she managed to be so successful at what she did
 - How did this woman who didn't finish high school (oops – not sure I was supposed to tell that)
 - Succeed at being such a wonderful homemaker
 - Succeed at being at the very forefront of the fitness movement for women – actually for all people in Canada
 - Why was she the one who took up the torch from Mr. Jackson's gym?
 - Why did people literally flock to her classes and follow her when she changed locations?
 - > At this point she would want me to tell you that – almost right up to the end – she could still touch her toes perfectly without bending her knees and she continued to demonstrate this for people – without much encouragement
 - How did Seema go on to become a highly successful life insurance agent with Great West Life – with multiple awards and recognitions even though she had no formal training and no background in business

- In many ways, she was a feminist without really trying. I know what you are thinking – but it wasn't just the Komish, the raisin loaves or the bundt cakes that she so freely shared with one and all – much to Lawrie's chagrin
 - For one,
 - She was very smart
 - Not a lot of "book learning"
 - But the ability to absorb information, retain it and use it
 - For two,
 - She was wise
 - She had common sense
 - She understood people to know what they needed, what they wanted and in some cases what they wanted to hear
 - For three,
 - She was ambitious in the very best sense
 - > She wanted to achieve things
 - > She wanted to do things for her family and for others
 - > She wanted not necessarily to make the world a better place – she didn't dream that big
 - > She worked to make those around her better and better off
 - Physically

- Financially
 - Emotionally
- I think that's why she never spent much time doing charitable work – she was a charity in her own right
- For four,
 - She treated all people like they were important – she made people her friends
 - She put as much effort into selling a small RRSP to a secretary or assistant in an office as she did to selling a multi-million dollar group policy to that person's boss
 - There was no stretching the truth – she absolutely 100% felt that way. In this respect, she was genuine – the real deal and meant it.
 - Everyone was important in their own right.
 - For five,
 - She was relentless
 - > She hated to drive but she would force herself to do it – even at night – if someone needed her to; and
 - > She wanted to do things for people whenever she could
 - > Ben reminded me the other night how she pursued Walter Gretsky (I know I'm back in Edmonton) after he spoke at a Conference – telling him her grandson Ben was a very good hockey player, just like his son "whatshisname". A couple of

weeks later – it arrived in the mail – a picture autographed by Wayne with a message of encouragement to Ben – and Grandma's own words of encouragement to her Grandson

- Mom loved Dad completely – she never ever stopped
 - She was never the same after he died
 - In some ways I think she was just waiting to get together with him again
 - Because she truly believed that when she died, she'd go to heaven and be sitting around in lawn chairs in the sun – with lots of sunscreen – with Dad, her parents, her sisters, Jan and Lil, and her friends
 - I sure do hope it's true
- Which brings me to the present
- Because it was that belief that made her able to face what was about to come
 - She didn't want to die – but she wasn't afraid to die
- Some of you may not know much about what Mom was like over the past few years
 - She remained a proud woman
 - Quick to tell people about her career in fitness and in insurance
 - She loved to talk with us about Dad, about past events, things that happened – tell stories
 - > in part because she enjoyed reliving the stories

- > in part because she wanted to show that she could remember every detail
- she very much cared about how she looked
 - it is not a secret – she made the huge move of letting her hair go natural grey and she looked gorgeous in a new way
 - she remained to the very end beautiful – looking much younger than her years
 - in fact, she was somewhat obsessed with all that – it wasn't so much that she minded being older – she just didn't want to be old
 - > in the words of Bob Dylan, to paraphrase:
 - she wanted to be forever young
 - she wanted her hands always to be busy
 - she wanted her feet always to be swift
 - she wanted to keep her strong foundation even though the winds of changes shift
 - she wanted her heart always to be joyful
 - and her song always to be sung
 - and she wanted to stay forever young
- She tried hard – but she did struggle a bit and that frustrated her
 - Sometimes made her impatient

-- Sometimes even a bit cranky – if you can believe it

- She changed like we all do – but inside she stayed the same
- Last Tuesday when they took her out of her home at Russell Hill, she was having trouble breathing – but she put the blanket up around her head – like a perp doing the walk – so her friends wouldn't see her without her make-up and with her hair a bit messy – only at the back
- After my Dad died, Lawrie and Karen got to spend a lot of time with Mom and took care of her
 - they took her on trips with them and to Windermere
 - they made her smile
 - unfortunately, Karen can't be here, but she is here in spirit
- Cory Felber did much for her – she always talked about you and what you did for her
- After she was forced to come to Toronto – her own come hell or high water flood – Barry and Catherine and Carol and I had the opportunity to spend more time with her
- We were lucky to have that time with her to visit and to share
- Barry had the privilege of helping her with her bookkeeping and finances
 - they would challenge each other – with love – to see who could be more particular about things
 - Mom wanted to stay involved in her affairs and she trusted Barry to help her; she wanted to stay involved and he respected that

- He and Catherine had her over for lunch just 2 weeks ago when our cousin Eleanor Leon and her husband visited
 - Carol and I also got to see a lot of Mom and we took advantage of those meals and visits
- Carol treated Mom as if she was her own mother and Mom reciprocated
 - It was Carol who had helped her – fighting every step of the way – to move from her house to the condo in Edmonton
 - She helped her in the same way organize and make her new home in Toronto
 - She listened to her complaints
 - Mom confided in Carol – she told her things she wouldn't tell us because she "didn't want to worry the boys"
- Mom had stress and was anxious about doctors and dentists
 - She had to be pushed and prodded to go and Carol did that for her
- Last Thursday – just before she died – I think Mom realized things didn't look very good for the future
- She had just discussed her need for future care with the palliative care nurse
 - Carol had taken Mom to the dentist about a week before – just before Lawrie came to visit. There was a lot of stress involved.
 - Mom was sitting in her hospital bed – uncomfortable but let me stress – not in pain – she was lucky too

- But she turned to Carol – about the advice on future she had just received and said – one of her last conversations – "well, that doesn't sound very good – I guess going to the dentist last week was a waste of time wasn't it!"
- And Carol – she loved you back like you loved her – she would say how good you were to her – not only for all the things you did for her – but also because, after all – you gave her Christmas – which she thoroughly enjoyed
- Mom laughed and smiled right to the end – in between frowns, scrunching up her nose and going "phew"
- And she loved her grandchildren – yes she did – nothing – I repeat nothing – made her happier
- I asked Jenny and Ben the other day – do you guys know how much your Grandma loved you – Ben answered "yes – she told us every 10 minutes" and she did
 - Jenny – who you will hear from
 - "She is so gorgeous. She has such a nice smile. She's so smart – I'm so proud of her."
 - Ben –
 - "He is so handsome. He talks so well. He is so gentle. He talks to me so intelligently. I'm so proud of him."
- Do you detect a certain theme here?
- Everytime I talked to her – how's Jenny – how's Ben
- What am I, I asked? Chopped liver? She was proud of her sons but even more proud of her grandchildren – if that's possible

- Mom lived her life by the commandment – do unto others as you would have them do unto you
 - She was strong but gentle
 - wise
 - beautiful
 - If she had a "fault" – if it is a fault – it was that she wasn't good at change
 - But that was ok
 - She fought getting old
 - She fought getting sick
 - And given the way she went – I think she won
 - Her spirit wasn't the same – but she won
- In one of our last conversations, I did tell Mom that it looked that that life might not be the same – she would need more nursing care
 - She didn't want that
 - She scrunched up her nose and went "phew"
 - I couldn't help her
 - We were both very sad
 - But she was more concerned that I not worry
 - It brings to mind a song by Laura Branigan – "How Can I Help You Say Goodbye?"

*Sitting with Mama alone in her bedroom
She opened her eyes, and then squeezed my hand
She said, I have to go now, my time here is over
And with her final word, she tried to help me understand
Mama whispered softly, Time will ease your pain
Life's about changing, nothing ever stays the same
And she said, How can I help you to say goodbye?
It's OK to hurt, and it's OK to cry
Come, let me hold you and I will try
How can I help you to say goodbye?
How can I help you to say goodbye?*

- She did help us all
 - Her sons, her daughters in law, her grandchildren, her friends
- I always thought perhaps she missed her calling though
 - She should have worked writing the messages for Hallmark gift cards
 - On June 2 at 5:40, she left this message on our voicemail – it's still there.
 - "Hi Jeff. It's your mother speaking. I just wanted to tell you how much I love you. It was so wonderful to see you earlier. I'm sorry you got wet in the rain. Ok, I love you more than anything. Bye now."
- So Bye Mom – we love you more than anything.
- And I would be remiss if I didn't caution you all as follows – *Seema-isms* ...

- **For those of you driving**
 - Drive careful – I just saw an accident
- **For those of you travelling by plane**
 - Don't forget – Dr. Oz says to take off your shoes and walk around the plane
- **If it's cool out later**
 - Button up your coat
- **And my favourite – for those who will be joining us – as I hope you will for food and a drink –**
 - Remember – A moment on the lips means an inch on the hips

Jeff Leon
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