

EULOGY SPOKEN at the FUNERAL of SUNI SILVERMAN (Sept. 16, 1917 - March 12, 2013)
by her son, Arne Silverman - March 14, 2013
Edmonton Jewish Cemetery

You all know my sister, RuthEllen. I am the out of town brother.

My sister and I have never taken for granted how lucky we have been. We were both in our 50's when we lost our father, and now in our 60's when our mother has left us.

But we have been lucky in another way as well. We have been blessed with two mothers. The first who raised us from birth and taught us how to love and care for a child, and how to pass that on to our own children. The second, who began to arrive just 5 or 6 years ago who taught us how to love and care for an ailing parent.

That first mother loved us ferociously as she did all things about her family. The love for my father, for her children and grandchildren and her great grandchildren was stunning. She loved us desperately and there was never any doubt about that. We all knew it and we knew it all the time.

Her love of family extended beyond the Silverman family. She maintained the same fierce loyalty and love for the family in which she was raised and of which she was the last survivor of 6 children. She loved to tell stories about them and especially about her father with his broken English. Nobody could tell a story or a joke like my mother. She would begin laughing halfway through the first sentence and would laugh harder and harder as she proceeded. Tears would be coming to her eyes and her laughing would sound like hissing with her teeth clenched and a mouth full of bubbling saliva. By the end everybody there would be laughing, not at the story, because you couldn't understand a word she said, but at the manner in which she told it and in which she delighted telling it.

One of my earliest memories is of my mom teaching me how to learn. It's funny how some things stick in your mind even after more than 50 years, but I remember it as if it was yesterday. I was in grade one. My dad was distressed because I had not done well on a test. Not mad, just distressed. Worried I guess that my future was in jeopardy. I was distressed because he was distressed. My mother took the matter in hand. She sat me down and taught me how to prepare for the next test, the next day. I still remember the topic. It was a chapter on ancient Egypt. She sat up with me for what seemed like all night. Perhaps it was only a few hours. We went over each line, each phrase, each idea, and we never moved on until I knew every detail. It is a method of learning that I have used all my life and still use, and sometimes when I am working, I am reminded of when and how I learned to do it. A pretty neat thing to remember about one's mom.

My mom was a teacher after all. For all of her working life. When I was in kindergarten, she became a volunteer teacher at a school for children who we now call special needs children. We mainstream them now in the public school system but in those days, they were taught in schools whose only students were special needs children. After a short time as a volunteer, she became a full-time staff

member and stayed for what must have been close to 20 years. She loved her work because she loved those children. My sister and I would see that love on display. Sometimes a child would come to our house with his or her parents. My sister and I would go to social events at the school and see and play with the children. We witnessed the happiness that my mother's work brought to these special people and to their families and the happiness that it brought to her.

After she retired, she continued to work with children as a volunteer. One or two students would come to her apartment where she would work with them on simple reading or arithmetic. Some were now adults who had been her students when she was on staff. After that she volunteered for many years at the Talmud Torah, providing assistance to children who seemed to find it easier to learn in a one on one situation.

It was 5 or 6 years ago when mom began to change and our second mom began to arrive. Slowly at first, but noticeably. I thought my sister was slower to realize this than I was. I thought mom needed some help before my sister came to that conclusion. I was concerned about her living in an apartment with a stove and stairs. But RuthEllen was living here and I was not, so she was in the best position to make decisions on the ground and I accepted that. Still, I needed objective information and I cultivated a spy for that purpose. Someone who agreed with me that my sister was looking at things through rose coloured glasses. I will reveal here, for the first time and with his permission, his identity. I gave him a code name - Deep Throat. I named him, of course, after the informant in the Watergate scandal. It was amusing when the Watergate informant went public and revealed his identity just a few years ago, in the midst of my spy's activities. We were speaking on the phone and he had seen the news about Watergate. He had only a passing knowledge of Watergate - it had occurred before Steven was born after all - there you have it, my nephew, my sister's son Steven, a spy. He hadn't known that there had been a Watergate informant or that his code name came from that. Steven thought I had named him after some movie.

I will always remember my sister as the person who was here making all the decisions and doing all the work, while I was a thousand miles away. More importantly, I no longer see her as having been a little behind the curve when considering mom's problems. Instead, I see her as having been, always, my mother's champion, through all things and until the end. She advocated for her, she made her life more comfortable and I am convinced that she prolonged her life.

Eventually, mom went into an assisted living residence. She did pretty well at first but continued to gradually slip. A few years ago, she lost the ability to communicate, apparently a common symptom of some types of dementia. She would talk and it was clear that she seemed to understand what she was trying to say, but it wasn't English and we couldn't understand her at all. That was difficult for RuthEllen and I, but even more difficult for mom. It made it impossible to determine how much her mental functions had really deteriorated. Certainly, to a large extent they had, but we weren't sure what was left. We weren't even sure if she knew who we were, although she certainly always knew we were somebody important.

One thing that continued until just this last year was her physical health. She loved to go for long walks as a younger woman, and in that residence she would march up and down the halls for hours at a time, like a soldier on duty. When Rell or I would visit, we would walk up and down with her. Nobody else in the residence did that. But about six months ago, maybe a little more, she began to fall. On her face. The doctors didn't think the cause was physical. They thought it was the result of errors in judgment - getting her foot caught on a rug, or not lifting a foot where necessary. Several times, she was pushed by another resident. When I would come to visit, she would have bruises all over, including her face.

Then just a few months ago, she stopped walking. Whether that was a decision she made because she was fed up with falling, or whether she had just grown too weak to continue, we don't know. But my sister and I see that as a turning point for her. It was around that time that she seems to have lost the will to continue.

A little over a month ago, she stopped eating and drinking. She was taken to hospital. She promptly caught C. difficile. Although they didn't say it, the hospital staff indicated that we should get ready - the end was near. I flew in. RuthEllen and I believed that mom had stopped eating because she was ready to move on. And we were ready to let her. And then, to the amazement of the hospital staff, she beat the C. difficile as if she were a healthy teenager, began eating and drinking again and was out of the hospital within a few weeks.

We took advantage of the timing to move her to a different residence where she would have more care. And quickly, she again refused food or drink. The staff said she would clench her lips and teeth and jaw so tightly that it would take a vice grip to open them. Again, RuthEllen and I were convinced, and are convinced that she was speaking to us. She was telling us it's time to go. Let me go. We kept her comfortable, and then she finally left in the early morning two days ago, peacefully and without pain.

She will always be remembered by her children, and her four grandsons. Her great grandchildren, some not yet born, will learn of her. Life comes full circle. As my mother passes on, her great grandchildren begin to arrive. The oldest - a great granddaughter - now three years old. My mother knew her and loved. Two more great granddaughters, born just weeks apart and just a little over three months ago. And her first great grandson, in the oven as we speak, due to arrive just a little over three months from now. They will all be suffocated, figuratively, with love from their parents and grandparents. And they will learn that that's the kind of love that we all received from the magnificent lady who was my mother. If that is indeed her legacy, she would be thrilled.