

Remarks made at the memorial celebration for Irma Maidenbergl June 6, 2009

Toby

Without sentimentality, mother always said - at the end of a visit - that our good-byes were just practice for that final one.

My mother was pretty and smart and fun to be with.

She sang along with the radio, and danced about the house.

She read and recited poetry and when I was in first grade and they thought I had rheumatic fever - she read to me for months on end when I couldn't go to school.

When I went to camp, she decorated my plain stationery with cute little designs. I think this was the beginning of her artistic itch which grew into decorating almost everything she could lay her hands on - and then creating whimsical pieces of jewelry and other things.

We would go on mother-daughter shopping trips to Indianapolis. The best part of these trips, for me, were the lunches we had at the Riley tea room at Block's department store, a room whose walls were decorated with illustrations of the poems of James Whitcomb Riley.

Mother liked to tell the story of how, on school nights, I would ask her to come into my room and help me decide what to wear the next day. Whatever she suggested, I said no.

In later years, she would suggest I wear one of her white shirts, but I always wore black. We found a way to co-exist in our parallel fashion spheres.

Mother's art and nurturing spirit spilled into her relationship with her grandchildren and the entire extended family. Anyone who knew her would be a beneficiary of her generosity.

Although she made us aware that all our good-byes could be the last, somehow all the practice didn't make it perfect.

Mike

She also had a way with words.

In her last months, she would ask for certain verses over and over again. There were three. They were quite different. The only common theme was...death.

"Gunga Din" was the first.

'E carried me away

To where a dooli lay

An' a bullet came and drilled the beggar clean.

Maybe she liked the twist with which Kipling ended the poem, the daring idea that the squidgy-nosed black-faced water-carrier was really the greater soul.

By the livin' Gawd that made you,

You're a better man than I am, Gunga Din

"Crossing the Bar" was the second. Tennyson wrote this considering his own demise. I think she liked the verse that goes:

Twilight and evening bell,

And after that the dark!

And may there be no sadness of farewell,

When I embark;

No sadness of farewell---she told us again and again she didn't want displays of grief. No blubbering around the grave. She wanted joy, song, she wanted the sentiment that's in the third verse about death, "Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries."

The title of the song has entered our language so completely that we rarely pay attention to the words. But Mother had the lyrics printed out and pinned to the wall next to the desk where she worked. She knew the words well.

You work,

You save,

You worry so

But you can't take your dough

When you go, go, go

And:

The sweet things in life

To you were just loaned

So how can you lose

What you've never owned

Philosophers have longer explanations, but Mother liked it simple: Life is just a bowl of cherries, live and laugh at it all!

But when I said Mother had a way with words, it wasn't only the words of others. Here is what she said at her 80th birthday:

"Life is a jigsaw puzzle, the pieces scattered with faces of past and present fitting into an intricate pattern at the center of which is the main character surrounded by all who have left an impression one way or another."

She goes on to say that as she looks around the room there are those who see her as a child, others as a young woman in Indianapolis, others as part of the duo of Milt and Irma, and still others who know her as mother and grandmother.

Of her children, Toby, Reed and me, she writes, "I'm finally getting to know them. But I sometimes wonder if they know me."

That's a hard one. But true to her nature she doesn't dwell on it, instead she lightens the mood by quoting another verse, this one by her beloved Dorothy Parker:

Life is a glorious cycle of song,

A medley of extemporanea;

And love is a thing that can never go wrong

And I am Marie of Rumania

Well, we've learned the lesson.

Life's mysterious. But don't take it serious.

And---we won't say our love for her never went wrong.

But---we will say it will never go out.

Johna

My grandma Irma was one of the most solid, loving and nurturing people in my life and I feel so lucky to be able to say that she was that way all the way to the end.

Some of my fondest memories are from the summer visits that David and I would take out here to Marion. After camp was over we would fly out together - sometimes without our mom. We would stay for two weeks, swimming at uncle Frank's pool or the country club, hanging out on the back porch, drinking cokes & eating mini burgers from grandma's magic miniburger machine, taking evening strolls to visit Betty and Henry Fleck where Henry would make us ice cream sodas, and just having a wonderful time with Irma and Milt - the two most loving grandparents that any kid could ever ask for..

Grandma Irma would set us up with art projects on the back porch. She had many different mediums that she worked with. I can remember early on there was the needlepoint and the collage art. Later there were the painted stuffed pillows and the sockem dockem dolls that she sculpted from cotton filled nylons. Whatever grandma was doing, I wanted to do and she would always see to it that I had something to work on. I wanted to be her mini-me.

Later as Irma's art evolved further and she was making her painted pins I was always so surprised at how difficult it was to make something that would come out as cute and effortless looking as the beauties that she had made – mine never came out as good but she was always encouraging.

As the years went on, Grandma Irma continued to be a strong presence in my life. There were frequent phone calls and meaningful visits spent together whether it was at family gatherings or more intimate time spent together... just me and grandma having our girl time in Florida. I was always a little protective of my time spent in Florida and wanted to make sure that no one would encroach on our time together.

Grandma always wanted to buy me a white blouse on our many shopping excursions... And - oh yes - we had many! Sometimes I would humor her and let her buy me a white blouse but I would never wear it. I just did not get her level of sophistication. In fact, it was not until summer of 2008 that my fashion sense finally caught up to hers, where I, too, would come to appreciate the simple elegance of the white blouse.

Grandma had a sophistication that extended beyond the small mid-western town that she lived in. She had style that rivaled any NYC or LA scenester of her day and that

was just the way she was. Au natural. That was my grandmother Irma. Style and personality aside, grandma Irma was a magnificent role model, a loving mother and grandmother and one of the most unique and interesting people I have ever had the privilege to have known. I am so grateful to have had her bright presence in my life for all of these years.

"Do not stand at my grave and weep" -- poem recited by the six grandchildren: Emma Rose, Dan, Ted, Joe, David, and Johna

Do not stand at my grave and weep;
I am not there. I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow.
I am the diamond glints on snow.
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry;
I am not there. I did not die.
