

A+. Yes...A+. That is what our Mother's grade in life was destined to be. She was born with blood type A+ and continued to measure up to that grade for the 29,300 days she lived. I obtained her entire scholastic record this past December from the school department in Queens, New York. She was one of only eight students, out of 340 high school graduates from Grover Cleveland High School who graduated with high honors. She maintained this high honor status for all of us, since 1951. During the 29,300 days of her life, she may never have said a harsh word about anyone. I cannot recall a single moment during my adult life when a negative comment was made regarding another individual. The book of Genesis states that we are created in God's image. Well, we may question that verse regarding some people...but not Bernice Grodman.

At times, it is said that we attend funerals for the surviving family members. While that may have some credence...I firmly believe that the overflowing attendance today is a complete tribute to this loving and gracious woman. She had a wonderful, bright and caring son...and then she had me. She wanted four boys...but, stopped after two. Her smile was radiant, her humor subliminal, and her selflessness was obvious. Oncologists know about infection. One of her oncologists told her, on two occasions Mom was in her hospital bed, that her smile was infectious. She would enjoy telling the story of my police record from 1964. At five years old, I snuck into an elderly neighbor's home with a friend and created a disaster in the kitchen with flour, syrup and so forth. My mother ended up cleaning the entire kitchen by herself. She never expressed dissatisfaction that my friend's mother did not assist in this cleanup effort. However, she made sure a police officer spoke with me.

In late January, I sat with Mom and asked how she would like to be remembered. She answered me with six points:

Clear thinking – check

Accepting of others – check

Generous of spirit – check

Generous of time and emotions – check

Provides for the unfortunate – check

Able to walk in someone else's shoes – check

Once again Mom...a score of A+

She reminded me of the Nir Tamid...the eternal light that is placed in front of the ark in synagogues. Her spirit was always alive and slightly subdued. She had a unique strength. She allowed others to bask in the limelight while she enjoyed their moment. During my school days, my father and she attended most of my soccer games. Later, she mentioned that she never had a clue what was happening on the field. Just this month I told her that "she is in all of us." She responded that "all of us are in her." She is my Nir Tamid.

We all have many stories which exemplify Mom's altruistic behavior. That is why we celebrate her life today. That is why it is my hope that we continue to think about, and emulate, her actions and words for years to come. She was unique and certainly created in the Divine image. We were in her oncologist's office in late January when told that she had stage 4 cancer.

She pumped her fist...smiled...and said "I like to go all the way!" She embraced the prognosis and thought of those surrounding her for each and every day that followed. I would like to tell two short stories that occurred at Beth Israel Hospital just this month. She was given a small high caloric shake each meal. When we suggested that it may be easier to have all three shakes delivered in the morning and she could gradually sip on them during the day, she asked the nutritionist if that would be a bother for the kitchen staff. Due to the fact that she had twenty family members and an equal amount of close friends travel the globe to spend a few minutes with her during her final month, there was often a bakery-type queue waiting for an audience with her. On one such occasion, there were about a half dozen visitors in her hospital room and she was asked if she would like to get out of bed and sit in the chair. Her response..."I don't want to take a chair that someone else can sit in." Her attitude defied, and rose above, human behavior. As recently as this past Thursday, while barely able to speak or move, she whispered to me "I can't believe I can be so happy." On this same day, when asked by a nurse how she was feeling, she raised both thumbs and said "great." I was alone with her during the morning of her passing. When the nurse asked how she was doing...her barely audible response was "all right."

Ladies and gentlemen, there are some people who teach us how to live. However, few individuals have left our presence teaching us how to live and how to die. I would now like to shine the light on Bernice, also called Grammy, also called Mom, and always called Honey...by my father for sixty years. Let us understand that their loving, nurturing and symbiotic relationship provided her strength, and vice versa. During the evening of February 10th we had a one hour telephone conversation. This was her final night at Beth Israel Hospital. Please allow me to now vocalize my mother's actual words during this warm and beautiful conversation of two weeks ago.

"I've had a beautiful life that that anyone would envy. I don't have many months. It is good to refresh the pot. There will be children born after me. That's the way it should be. Hopefully, they will be as lucky as me. I've received more nachas than I could ever have given. I have the best family in the world. There is a time for everything...as the song goes...there is a season for everything. I've had such a good life – such a good deck of cards. I'm feeling good. I'm happy with my life. It's OK. We all have to go sometime...it's nice for me to know when the time is coming. If you have the time to consider lots of things in your life...that's a gift. It would be wonderful if I made a good impression on people...that's nice. It always feels too soon. This is the time, but we all have to accept it. However, anytime is too soon. I have lived a happy life...a fulfilled life. I really don't have any complaints. It has been quite a ride."

So, when I said "I'll see you on the other side" she responded "that's something for me to look forward to." Well Mom, I promise not to rush to our next meeting...but, I know you will be waiting with open arms.

I love you.