

Shortly after I found out that my mother had died, my son Binny gave me this good advice. He said to breathe in and out four times; that this helps him when he's upset. And then we breathed together. I'm going to try his advice today, but I ask you to please bear with me, as I read these words in memory of Linda Hershberg, Ahuva bat Miriam v'Yakov. I speak for myself, my husband Hershel, my brothers Adam and Micah, and their wives Amy and Allison, for my sister Rachel, for my aunt Gail and uncle Bob and uncle Paul, and for my children Leah, Yakov, Dov, Shira, Binny and Yishai and my nephews Luke, Jake, Jordan and Jeremy. And I speak, with the permission of our father.

Just a few weeks ago, our whole family had the opportunity to be together here in Albany. We knew that our mom did not have very much time left. We had a big shabbos dinner Friday night, with lots of talking, playing games, cousins tossing a football around, reminiscing about old times...it was really a great weekend. On Sunday morning, I had the following slightly surreal experience. My mom called to me to bring a paper and pen, as she wanted to dictate her obituary to me. I had just sat down by her side when my dad said "Dear, you don't have to do that. I already prepared your obituary for you. Would you like to hear it?"

Now, there is already so much you can intuit about our parents from this exchange, but it gets even better.

Our father brings out one sheet of paper, visibly full from top to bottom.

Our mother said, “No, that’s too long”. Our dad said, “Why don’t you wait to hear what I wrote?”, and he began reading, listing our family members and that kind of information. When he got to the end of that paragraph, our mom said, “OK, that’s it”. Our dad said, “well, listen to what comes next”. “No, she said, “that’s all I want. Just the family. Nothing else. I don’t want it to say anything about me, what I did, or any other details of my life”.

Two weeks later, shortly before her death, our mother met with Rabbi Sifton (Palti) and reiterated, that she did not want people to talk about her at her funeral. OK, mom, we will not talk about you.

Instead, we’ll talk about what we learned from you. Mom, you were not one to show your emotions, or to lecture us or to be in the spotlight. You were a person of discretion and decisive action, and you showed us so much by what you did and how you lived your life. Many people here would describe you as a community leader, a good neighbor, and a charitable friend. But to us, you were just mom. Here are some things our mom taught us about life, how to be a good person and what’s really important.

1. **Anything worth doing is worth doing right.** By which she meant, doing it her way. Someone recently asked if my mother was controlling, and I had to say no. I never recall her telling me explicitly not to do anything, or to do something a certain way. She just always made it clear that there was only one logical and correct way to do things, and that was her way. Our mom embodied the sentiment “lo alecha ha melacha ligmor” - it is not your duty to complete the task “v’lo ata ben chorin l’hivatel mimena” - but neither can you avoid doing it. Whatever there was to be done, our mom would certainly not shirk from the task. Keeping track of the small details was one of her great talents. When she was doing the accounting for our school, the Hebrew Academy, she would not rest until the columns added up - even if they were off by only one penny, she and her trusty adding machine would hunt that penny down. Her skill with details was perhaps most evident in the Family Tree Books created by our dad. For those who have not seen it, this is not your standard little family tree, but a heavily researched 500+ page encyclopedia of names and dates that she proofread for the smallest typo or grammatical error. And although our dad would claim in his introduction that all the errors were his, thanks to our mom you would be hard pressed to

locate any mistakes in the Family Tree Book. Our mom was the one who, when our house was struck by lightning and caught fire, had the calmness and sensibility to throw our pets in the van, drive them out to the street and wait for the fire department - and then proceeded to direct the firemen on how best to put out the fire.

2. **Be loyal.** Be loyal to your sports teams - even when they always lose. Be loyal to your brands, your hairdresser, your vacation spot, your housecleaner. Once our mom's housecleaner got a diagnosis of chronic fatigue syndrome; rather than letting her go, our mom cleaned up while the cleaning lady sat and had coffee. New Coke in her glass? HA! I don't think so! Woe unto you, grocery store managers and product manufacturers who discontinued our mom's favorite items. She was known to stop shopping at a grocery store if they stopped carrying her favorite frozen yogurt flavor. And up until two years ago, we used to bring Pfeifers Thousand Island Dressing with us from Sharon to Albany.

3. **Don't jump on every trend.** To our mom, music always sounded better on vinyl. Our mom had a record collection AND a turntable. We believe she had the last non-touch tone phone in the entire 518 area code, and that she is probably the only adult in the state of NY who did not own a

cell phone. As far as she was concerned, every piece of technology other than cable tv and the remote control was just a passing - and relatively useless - fad. She was a true Luddite, in the most loving sense of the word, so we were all shocked when she easily took up reading ebooks on her Nook. Of course, this was only for the most practical of reasons. Our mom read a lot, and using the Nook was lighter than carrying a stack of books with her on her yearly vacation to the Islands.

4. **Have a hobby.** We can't remember a time when our mom didn't have a needlepoint, knitting or crocheting project or two by her recliner. We all have quilts, afghans, tablecloths and pictures all lovingly made by our mom's own hands. Grandchildren received a quilted cross stitched blanket upon their birth, and a specially selected afghan on their third birthdays. Once, out of the blue, our mom purchased a piano - ostensibly for our dad's birthday - which surprised us, as none of us - including dad - played the piano! But our mom found that she actually like playing, after hating many years of lessons as a kid. Our mom also enjoyed watching sports on TV, even boring ones like golf and tennis, gardening, feeding the birds in her backyard, doing fiendishly difficult puzzles and tai chi.

5. **Be organized. Keep a schedule. Write a list.** Even up until two weeks ago, our mom took the TV guide on Sunday and circled the programs she intended to watch each night, and kept a dated list by her chair, trying to be sure she did not miss an appointment. In our childhood, household tasks were done on certain days, and not others. Monday was laundry day, Wednesday was for grocery shopping. After dinner - dad cleared and wiped the table, mom washed the dishes, never any other way. Mom often packed her own groceries, so that they could be sorted into the “right bags” for when she got home to unpack them. Mom had a regular weekly menu - one night ground meat, one night eggs, one night chicken...Everything our mom did was so practical.. Some people might consider this a flaw, but for us kids, her daily routines resulted in a (mostly) smooth childhood. I thought I had avoided this part of my own background, until one day when I put up a white board on our refrigerator, and wrote down a weekly menu - just like the one mom had all those years ago.

6. **Be considerate.** Right to her last days, our mom was unfailingly polite; she said thank you for every small kindness - a sip of cold apple juice, a warm washcloth for her face, turning the volume up on the tv...When we were younger, Mom was even considerate to the family dog; she would pack us all up for our annual winter vacations in secret, so the

dog wouldn't notice and get upset. The only people to whom she regularly spoke unkindly were the poor referees and umpires who made calls against her teams, and store managers who stopped carrying those products she loved.

7. **Rituals are very important.** Our mom was not a "religious" person, in any traditional sense. But she was very religious about keeping certain rituals. The ritual of the birthday card - for all of our years, wherever we or our children were, those cards always arrived right on time. The ritual of Thanksgiving-aversary; every year, our mom (who hated cooking!) hosted a beautiful Thanksgiving weekend for us in honor of our anniversary. Many times she organized a family reunion around our anniversary - but only in warm weather locals. The ritual of the St Martin vacation (preceded by the ritual of St Thomas); this is the one where our always chilly mom got to leave frigid upstate NY and spend a month in the winter on an Island sunbathing and relaxing. When asked what one needed to partake of this ritual, she answered, "all you need is a toothbrush and your bathing suit".

The ritual of the hot chocolate; this is the one where our mom had a mug of hot chocolate every morning for our whole entire lives. Although we don't really know this for sure, since it followed the ritual of waking up late-usually long after we had already left for school in the morning.

8. **Don't be afraid to ring your bell.** Our Mom had an old school bell that sat on a shelf by the front door and was used for multiple purposes throughout our lives. When we were young, living in the just being developed wilds around Valley View Drive, its main function was to summon us kids home for dinner from wherever we were out playing. It was loud. Real loud. Standing on the front porch she would give it 3 or 4 rings that echoed throughout the trees and all the kids in the neighborhood knew that the Hershbergs had 5 minutes to be home, washed up and at the dinner table. It was an exciting rite of passage when we became old enough to be asked to be the bell ringer for younger siblings - not a job to be taken lightly. Later in life, it became the primary noisemaker at Adam's hockey games. Woe was the poor opposing goalie who had to endure the bell ringing after giving up a goal. And it didn't matter if it was the first goal of the game or the 10th goal, the bell got rung, albeit maybe a little less at the end, as it was not polite to rub it in. Mom also religiously rang the bell to welcome Adam's team onto the ice at the beginning of each period of the game. From the moment the first player stepped on the ice, to the time that the last skate left the locker room, the bell was ringing. This tradition meant that Mom needed to be in her place in the stands of the frigid rink earlier than any of the other people, who would stay out in the warming room until

the last possible moment, while our mom could always be counted on to be in her spot, ringing her bell for everyone to hear.

9. **Stuff doesn't matter.** Our mom was the "anti-hoarder". Perhaps it was a reaction to moving so frequently in her childhood, but our mom was not a big collector of stuff. Other than her crafts and pictures of her ten grandchildren, there is not much "decor" in her house. Nor did she have a lot of mementos, and she never missed a chance to remind us that there were boxes of ours in the basement (by which she meant a couple of boxes, dwarfed in the corner of that huge area). Our sages say, Eize hu ashir? Ha samayach b'chelko. Who is rich? One who is happy with what they have. By these standards, our mom was unbelievably wealthy.

10. **Make your house a home.** While the tasks of homemaking were not so enjoyable for our mom, she steadfastly performed the duties of cleaning, cooking, grocery shopping, laundry...because having a well running home was important to her. Once, mom was fed up with us kids. We must have been pushing her buttons, as kids tend to do, and she said something like, "That's it! I'm not cooking dinner tonight. It's up to you all!" This was a shock to us because if it wasn't Saturday night pizza, or Sunday night Chinese food, and we weren't on the road cheering Adam on at a hockey

game, then mom was cooking dinner that night. I don't recall what we made, but it was definitely a memorable event. Whether on Valley View Drive, or later on South Main Avenue, wherever we have gone in our own lives, we always knew that our home, the calm, organized home we knew so well, was waiting for us here. As our mom said to Rachel, who was hesitant to move across the country, "What's the worst that can happen? If you hate it, you can always come home".

11. **Be good to your siblings.** No matter how many you have, siblings are your first friends, and are important in your life, especially as we all get older.

12. **Find your true love.** She and our dad had 54 wonderful years together, and they deserved many, many more.

13. There are already far too many items on this list, because the first and most important thing we learned from our mom is that you should choose your words wisely. Our moms words were many things; often witty, sardonic, sarcastic, wry. Honest, sometimes painfully so. And always very brief. Sorry, mom. This is one time when we thought it was worthwhile to use a lot of words.

Mom, you will note; we did not mention anything about your volunteer work for the Hebrew Academy; the many offices you held there, both alone and with Dad, any of the organizations you belonged to or causes you supported. You never did any of those things for the recognition, but rather because it was the right thing to do for the community. Your involvement in things that were important you has had a lasting effect, as we have all gone on to support various schools, synagogues, charities and organizations in our own communities.

Now you are gone. There will be no more timely birthday cards from you. No more afghans. No more perfectly organized Thanksgiving dinners. No more sound of your spoon stirring your hot chocolate in the brown pot in the morning, or clinking against your bowl as you have your nightly ice cream. No more pictures of you smiling with your eyes closed and trying to avoid the spotlight at family events. I could say that “all” we have left is our memories...but that seems to trivialize what we are here to acknowledge, which is that you, and the way you lived and what you gave to us lives on - in us, and in our families and in the many people you taught by the example of your simple, honest, life.

Thank you, mom