

Eulogy – Harriet Rosen
November 2013 – Mt. Sinai Simi Valley
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On Friday morning when I went over to Harriet and Sam's house ... just before I left I took a walk in their backyard.

I walked among the rose bushes, and the berry plants, and the garden where she and Sam grew vegetables and harvested their bounty; I touched the vibrant yellows and the deep pinks and smelled the succulents. It was a bitter cold and windy morning.

And it occurred to me – that that garden, that backyard – was a symbol of Harriet herself: a beacon of beauty, and grace, kindness and tender love and care ... amidst an often cold and bitter world.

Leora told me that her mother's first memory was as a young child being caught in a tornado. Her family was driving cross-country from Philadelphia to California, where the dry air would be better for her mother. Harriet and her family were somewhere in the Midwest and they watched this *tornado* pass them as they sat inside a diner. They were caught in this chaos, this storm, and Harriet ... was resolute. She stayed totally calm under pressure. She was the rock ... the rock for her family. And that was who Harriet was throughout the rest of her life.

She didn't come from an affluent background, she didn't have *a lot*, but what she *did* possess was an adventurous spirit, a profound sense of obligation, a whole lot of spunk and humor, and a hell of a lot of determination.

Back in Brooklyn during her teenage years, Harriet was the nurturer. She was the caretaker for her mother, she read to the blind; the lifelong gardener, she delighted in bringing dying plants back to life.

Harriet would go to the museum and the library while the rest of her friends were off at Coney Island. She would learn and soak up as much as she possibly could because learning was so important to her, and it remained important for the rest of her life. In high school she was one of two girls in her AP science classes – classes that girls just "didn't take." But Harriet scoffed at that. She did her homework on the subway and committed herself whole-heartedly to education, eventually entering Hunter College to major in Biology. Years later, she passed *on* her deep love of learning to her daughter Leora. And she continued to be a sponge on anything and everything – from natural science to crossword puzzles to technology – up through her final days.

In 1967, at the age of 19, shortly after her mother's death, Israel called Harriet's name. Ever the trailblazer, she went to Israel alone, a young woman who didn't know the language or the culture, to learn Hebrew and work on a kibbutz. Eventually she convinced her sister Sylvia to join. Harriet was fearless ... and when a war broke out it was Harriet to whom her friends looked for guidance. Harriet was *their* rock. Uncertain of what the future held, they left, only to *return* in 1973.

This time around, Harriet was confident, she was fluent in Hebrew, she had a job for a member of Knesset, and she established a life for herself in Tel Aviv. She would rescue animals all the time – she *loved* those animals – and one time really baffled her roommates when she found a turtle with a cracked shell and used Plaster of Paris to repair the little guy. She may have driven her roommates crazy with all the animals she rescued, but that was Harriet: the eternal caregiver.

One might think that two stints in Israel – in 1967 and 1973, no less – would be enough action for Harriet, but *no*. After spending six months in Holland and learning Dutch – you know, like all of us do – she came back to the States and joined the US Army Reserves in 1974. Simultaneously working as a legal secretary for Northrup Grumman, Harriet pushed herself through the physical challenges of basic training at Ft. McClellan, rising to become a leader in her unit. She told Leora that basic training was her favorite part, because it tested her physical strength and showed her that “she could do anything.” The Army taught her to be tough and organized; it harnessed her smarts; it shaped the woman she would become. And it taught her, as she taught Leora, to always “follow her nose,” her intuition, and her instincts, back to base camp.

That same year, that tough Army woman met the love of her life. She and Sam first connected at a political event for Young Democrats in West LA. Sam was ... struck ... by this totally unique 70s goddess. She didn't talk like other women, she wasn't superficial, she had *opinions* and she was *smart* and she was *ambitious*. Leora told me that her mom remembered meeting “the smartest person she'd ever met” in Sam. He helped her get her life together; he taught her how to balance a checkbook. She rooted him, and he knew instantly that she was someone he wanted to get to know.

And so, this shy, highly educated young man and his girlfriend in the Army became a thing: she accepted him for who he was and exploded into his life with energy and fun and passion. They married in December 1976 and set up their little Bohemian life. As Sam said to me, “we were a little off the wall.” They did things *their* way, partnering in life and eventually in business.

After Leora was born in September 1979, Sam, with Harriet's help, started a new adventure with his own law practice. Harriet took care of their business, she took care of their baby, and she also took care of ailing family members. She was the rock, the caretaker, the nurturer. She gave and gave and gave and expected nothing in return.

As she helped Sam's law practice grow, Harriet tapped into her own creativity: into writing and telling stories. Many years ago the Daily News ran a contest for the “scariest Halloween story” ever written, and guess who won? Leora told me, “my mother wrote the scariest damn story I'd ever read.” With a tale true to life and touching and real – and obviously very scary – she took home the prize and had her picture in the paper. Harriet was also an artist, drawing beautiful doodles on Leora's lunch bags and elsewhere. All that creativity she passed on to her daughter, who not only became a teacher but a writer, as well.

Harriet committed herself whole-heartedly to not only Leora's education, but to her nephew Tal's, too, caring for him as if he were her own son. Harriet placed learning at the top of the priority list. She made sure her daughter went to NYU, to the school *Leora* wanted to go to. Harriet loved her with all her heart and made sure Leora got the education Harriet didn't get.

Throughout the rest of her life, Harriet was a rock, constantly giving – to her family, to animals, to Gabby and Vilma, to friends and coworkers and even to strangers. She nurtured countless people as if they were her own. To her friends she was fiercely loyal, dedicated, and loving. I will personally never forget how nurturing Harriet was to my mother-in-law following her double mastectomy. She was there, present, with food and laughter and Mad Men DVDs – because she loved that Jon Hamm – and because she loved her *friends* so deeply.

Just a couple years ago Harriet met her daughter for a vacation in Costa Rica. Leora, who definitely inherited her mom's adventurous spirit, brought Harriet to the deep rainforest. There, Harriet made friends with a rhinoceros beetle, she climbed over a suspended bridge in the rain, she explored the jungle

at night – all in her sixties, no less – and embraced that courageous spirit inside her sparked so many years ago in that diner in the Midwest.

She was unafraid to be afraid ... just as she was in so many parts of her extraordinary life. A life that she was beginning to wind down, a life where she was preparing for retirement with Sam ... a life that would have been about cultivating that passion for flowers and vegetables; tapping into that “science / medicine” part of her, and maybe even one day finally showing off her brilliant mind on Jeopardy, all the while never losing her sense of adventure. She was so excited that her daughter Leora had found the love of her life in Mark, and was no doubt looking forward to the future for her family.

(pause)

In these dark days that lay ahead of us, we will inevitably catch ourselves picking up the phone to call her. We will pause at the market when we see her favorite foods. We may find ourselves tearing up when we hear Italian operas playing, or Led Zeppelin or Janis Joplin on the radio.

In the days and weeks that lie ahead, we will find ourselves at Sam’s front door, bearing food and warmth. And eventually, I hope, we will make our way to the backyard.

There, we will be able to feel Harriet’s presence. We will see her reflected in the vibrant roses and smell her presence in the eggplants and the berries. There, in that backyard, Harriet’s memory will continue to nurture us through this time where we must learn to live without her. There, may we find comfort, may we feel her embrace, may we recall her desire to give us all that she possibly could, and let us always remember her as the extraordinary woman she was ... *our* rock ... our Harriet.