

I am the lucky daughter born to Faigie and Mitchell— but I didn't always feel that way!

I went through the usual teenage angst, and I put the three of us— me and my parents— through a surprising education. I was certainly raised to think for myself, to make decisions, to problem solve. Sometimes, I made the wrong decisions, and chose the wrong solutions to problems, but I believe that there are no accidents and that my parents gave me the tools to learn to do the right thing even if we didn't always agree.

And we didn't!

My mom was complicated! She was one of the original feminists, and she taught me the same world view. She was a born teacher, strict but fair, in the words of one of her students.

And she wore her heart on her sleeve; her face could never mask what she was really feeling, which was a lot, openly, and honestly.

Mommy was proud of being Jewish. She was a life member of Hadassah; she was an unrepentant Zionist. She was liberal, politically, and while she never explained this to me, I think it was because she knew that collectively we have a duty to those less fortunate. In fact, I know she felt this way by the way she supported my and Michael's involvement with Ysis.

She had a master's degree in education from Hofstra, and she went to Brooklyn College. And it must be said that she earned her master's degree while working full time, and having three kids.

How did she do it? Beats the hell out of me. I asked her many

times, and she never had an answer. But that's the way it was- is!- with her generation. They just DID, that's all. She was emblematic of her generation, either remarkably unremarkable, or unremarkably remarkable, depending on how you viewed it, a generation that simply marched forward, doing the necessary, accepting the well-earned plaudits of hard work with understated and self-effacing grace.

She was, as Michael says, 'tough as nails', this characteristic being necessary to a 26-year teacher in New York public schools. And she loved her school, she adored her colleagues - many of whom became her dearest friends; she loved to teach, and more important, she loved her students.

She was a reformed smoker! she smoked until right around the time that Mark and Ellen married. It is a true fact that Mark threatened her with never coming over to the house again if she didn't quit. And she did! This is actual proof that, although Eric constantly tells us otherwise, Mark was the favored child!

As adults, she was my friend, and confidant. I remember once that she was so angry and frustrated because my Dad was annoyed with her, probably because Dad was fed up with her newspapers! But, you know what? this was the first time I ever heard her complain about Daddy. I always knew that he was perfect and I suspect that I wanted my husband to be just like my dad!

Listening to her go on and on as a girlfriend might, I finally said to her 'Mommy, why didn't you tell me this sooner that this was how men are?' She said, that if she had, she feared I would never have married! Of course, we disappointed her when we decided to raise cats instead of kids. She loved animals, though. And I learned, from

this interaction, and others, that together we would forge a new and adult relationship, making a transition that many never manage with their parents. We were lucky to have each other in a way she had hoped and wanted.

She loved all living things. Her passion for African violets and her gardens served as a foundation for my deep appreciation of the environment and the humane treatment of animals. And humans.

In the summer of 1969– the summer of love!– mom and dad announced to the family that we would be taking a cross country trip. There was no family discussion– we were going! There are lots of great memories on this trip, including an adopted cat in Kansas City– but here's what I remember: mom pointing out every typical rock formation, every chipmunk, and every single tree! and believe it or not, now I do the same thing which drives Michael nuts. Go figure.

Mommy loved living. She loved helping others more than she helped herself. She just hated being sick. Throughout the first 24 years of my life I don't remember her ever being sick, except when she had a bleeding ulcer and sciatica. She was the sort of person who never asked for help- a characteristic I gained from her- and she always stepped in to help others, frequently without being asked.

Recently, Michael and I have been mentoring our housekeeper's daughter Ysis– we spend so much time with her that we needed a way to introduce her so we call her our niece. Mommy knew Ysis for many years and always asked how she was doing in school [she's a straight A student, by the way]. She would listen to my frustration when Ysis was having difficulties, empathizing with the

difficulty I was having. She listened when I would just go on, and on, and on about my shopping adventures with Ysis, and remember the shopping fiascos I had as a young girl with her.

Mom remembered everything and everyone—and as we all know, she kept very careful track, writing down to whom she sent presents. She was apologetic last week about not sending Ellen her birthday gift and not sending the rest of us their annual Passover gifts. She loved to re-tell stories of my childhood to all my friends and students. Of course, my students loved the glimpses that she offered to them of me in my pre-yoga days. My students fondly remembered her and often asked me about her.

She would never miss a shiva call or a hospital visit of friends and family. She loved people.

And she loved celebrations! She hated missing anything and in fact rarely did miss anything. She could hear you talking in the next room even if the TV was blaring- and if she missed anything you said would ask for clarification! and usually from the other part of the house, I should add...

Less than a month ago my dad and mom and Teddy and Thelma drove to Naples to join our second annual Earth Day celebration. Last year, she was so much stronger. Before the party this year, everyone was asking if my parents would be back. We didn't know until the Friday before the Sunday party that they would come, and they did. She was very, very weak. Nobody knew she was bleeding internally.

A week later was Seder. My wonderful cousin Carla has been hosting Passover Seder for the past 7 years, and she told mom that

she should leave anytime, whenever she needed to. And did she leave the party early? NO. We were at Carla's for more than 3 hours, and she was talking the entire time. She didn't want to leave!

Two days later, on Monday, she went to the hospital. On Friday, she moved to the hospice floor, and on Monday night, she passed.

She didn't want to be in the hospital and none of us wanted her there. But it was beyond control at that point, and mercifully, she went quickly and quietly.

Most of you know that Mark and Ellen, Eric and Sylvia, and Michael and I were planning a party to celebrate her 60th wedding anniversary. Several months ago, I started bothering my dad for the years of films and slides she had, so we could digitize them for the party- and to save them, too, of course.

Dad had been promising us for years that he would do this, but somehow, life kept getting in the way, and it never happened. So, for the surprise party, and under the ruse that I would take care of this 'chore' for him. We got both of them to start going through the thousands of slides.

Then, one day mommy called me on the phone: "Suzie. I want to ask you something and I want you to tell me the truth- as if I would do anything else!- "No", I said, "we aren't planning such a party. You know how tight the economy is." I changed the subject but I think she knew the truth. And, at the hospital last week, and after speaking with my brothers, we decided to tell them about the plans. Mommy was already not very responsive but damned if she didn't hear the announcement and react. We had all hoped, and you all know what happened.

Eric returned to Texas on Sunday and was planning a return. Mark and David arrived on Monday. I was supposed to return to Naples Monday morning with Michael, but when we got to the hospital felt it better to stay, partly just to be with daddy.

I think she was waiting for Mark. Aunt Rifke and Aunt Myra told Mom stories over the weekend, she was responsive. She also spoke with Carla, Karen, Jeffrey, Cindy, Susie, and Stevie by cellphone.

A few weeks before she passed, Mommy and Michael had a tender and private conversation, in which she told Michael that the one thing she wanted before she died was for the entire family to be together and to forget old wounds.

Mommy had a wonderful life in so many ways. If there were any 'theme' to her life here on earth it is this: that we would all want to be together and be one loving family.

Today we are, and Mommy, you are with us.

But Ma, we will never, ever, outshine you.