



## Yes Mam in the Time of Corona

Somewhere in the history of the universe a tradition was started; that the first grandchild would name his / her grandparents. I am not sure who came up with this, but I have found it to be true in many families. Including my own. Thus, when CJ was born, it was up to her to name her maternal grandparents. To her grandfather she gave the name "Da". And to her grandmother she gave the name "Mam". And somehow the names stuck. As our kids grew up, they would always introduce their grandparents as "Mam and Da". It was never "Da and Mam". Mam came first. Secretly I wondered if my mother-in-law enjoyed this name because it always seemed so "proper". As in "Yes Mam and No mam".

My wife being only child and being raised in a military family has always been extremely close to her parents. Indeed, one of the reasons we moved to Las Vegas 32 years ago was to be closer to her family, who at that time lived in Reno. Well, about two weeks after we moved to Las Vegas, her parents moved to Las Vegas and the rest is "family history". Many are the dinners, birthday celebrations, anniversaries and milestone events that were shared. As I would often leave for Temple early on Friday, our weekly tradition became Sunday night. Everyone knew that this was sacred. No matter how busy we all became, we would come together once a week to catch up and spend time with each other.

A week ago, June 29<sup>th</sup>, Mam passed away.

During her many health challenges, she was under the watchful, persistent care of her husband. Better than any nurse or doctor, Chuck (Da) made sure that she was always cared for. Despite many surgeries and hospital stays, he never lost his patience or his ability to go above and beyond. One can only envy such devotion of 67 years of marriage. A marriage that survived economic down turns, many military moves and the Vietnam war.

Joni is about as devoted a daughter as anyone could ever ask for. She and her mom were ever present in each other's lives. Talking about the kids. Planning gatherings. Sharing stories. And often agreeing to disagree especially when it came to my wife's penchant for all things "cute and adorable". For example, when we were engaged, one of her first questions of me was "What are you going to do with her stuffed bear collection?" I thought it a strange question until she pointed to a partial gathering of bears. Turns out there were hundreds of stuffed bears my wife had collected by age 26. And she was just getting started.

Mam took incredible interest in her grandchildren. They could do no wrong. But that didn't mean wouldn't correct them or tell them what she thought. They were "perfect" even with their imperfections. It's a grandmother thing.

As for me, we had an understanding. She followed the goings on at the Temple better than I did. She would call Joni and ask her about when a bazaar was coming up or what was happening with a fundraiser. She would bake for the onegs and tell Joni to tell me when something wasn't quite up to snuff. And when she saw another rabbi on TV or in the paper, she would call and make sure we knew. And when I was in the paper or on TV she would nod. Like I said we had an understanding. For some words are just left unspoken. They are understood. About a year ago, she called and left me a voice mail. She said, "Sandy, I just want to call my favorite son in law and let you know how proud I am of you." It was out of the blue. Some understandings are hard to understand. But to this day, I have kept that recording. Words of praise that don't come easily are all the more precious. Thank you, Mam. We will miss you always and a day.

Rabbi Sanford Akselrad  
(The favorite son-in-law in case you missed that part)