My Golden Girls

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I am and have always been what we call an “old soul.” What does that mean? It basically means that if the movie is black-and-white and has a song and dance routine, I am sold. It means if the choice is between staying in and reading or going out and dancing, I’ll be reading. It means that I spent a lot of time growing up with older people and for a while my “crew” included a bunch of 70-90 year old ladies who were the shit, end of story.

Over the last year, I lost my crew of ladies who were there for me all the time, any time. Who I could call up to complain to or to cry with and who always got it and always told me the same thing, “When are you going to take care of you, lady? When are you going to rest? You run around like a chicken without a head.”

On one hand, I am glad they passed before I got sick so they did not have to worry about it for me—but, on the other hand, I missed them a lot during this cancer plot twist and also just in general.

My aunt Jean was my grandma’s best friend and then she became mine. I lost my grandma when I was 23; it was my first real loss. My grandma kind of raised me and she took care of everyone and everything for all of us. She could cook like a big time chef and was just so damn proud of her kids and grandchildren it was crazy.

My grandma and aunt Jean would often be in my kitchen, drinking coffee and talking about everything—aunt Jean had a mouth on her that would literally scandalize every living and dead truck driver / sailor ever since the beginning of time END OF STORY. Every kid in my family learned every bad word from her AND called her “aunt”; though she truly had no relation to us but she was there from before we could remember.

Every pair of shoes I ever owned for big events from baptism to when I got married were bought for me by aunt Jean. She always sent me the first birthday card and it always had something in it. She would beat my husband into shape anytime she was over. I would pick her up and take her to visit her children, who ALL predeceased her, at the cemetery. She was a strong ass lady who lost her husband young and never looked at another man.

Her hair was always perfectly coiffed in a blonde chignon and her makeup was always on point. Every finger wore a ring and earrings and necklaces were also used and sparkling. Her clothes were always pristine as was her 3 bedroom railroad room apartment on the 3rd floor in Park Slope

where she lived for over 55-60 years and where she independently lived, cleaned and went up and down those 3 flights of stairs until she was 91.

She lost her husband when she was still in her 40s and then right after that her youngest daughter died. Her son died years later and her oldest child died on mother's day suddenly and without warning many years later. I would take her to the cemetery and she would visit with them and say, "I think God forgot about me but I live for my 'kids'." I was her "kid", my kids were her "kids"—everyone were her "kids" and she thought of us and took care of us and I tried to do the same for her.

She passed away when I got my first full time job in over several years and I just felt that I could not take off to go to the funeral though I went to the wake. She was 93 and I guess that God remembered her and I hope she is in heaven with her husband and children and also watching over me and my family as she did when she was here. In life, she and I were together a lot so I forgave myself for not going to the funeral. I know she would have understood and I can still hear her in my head telling me to rest and relax when I try to do too much but it is a lot more colorful than that with some "f" bombs and such. She is definitely one of my guardian angels.

My other "golden girl" is someone that came into my life kind of by accident. My mom married her son and she became a step-grandma to me and step-great grandma to my kids. No one could ever say anything bad about Roe—she was just the best lady you ever did meet. She was strong, too.

She adopted her 3 children before it was "trendy" to do so and when it was actually "easier" to get young local children to love and care for—but to these kids, she wasn't their "adoptive" mother, she was their mother, full stop. She was always chatting and vivacious—she would take one look at me and go, "Why don't you slow down, lady? You need to take care of YOU! What happens if you fall down?" I think her Irish eyes could see the future.

She passed away right around my diagnosis; in fact, I missed her wake because I was meeting with my gyno to go over my "official" breast cancer diagnosis. When I found out I was "officially" with cancer, my mom and my mother in law and my dad and my brother were all at Roe's wake and believe it or not they all came together even though my mom and dad are totally the old school of divorce where it was all the other ones fault and all that crapola—but they were all crying together and came to my house and then my mom, husband and I went to my doctor while everyone stayed home with the kids doing a tremendous job of "Oh what, nothing is wrong, everything is GREAT!" all teeth smiles and more.

I often think about Roe and her sage advice, along with my aunt Jean. I had friends my age who would run over to come sit with Roe and aunt Jean whenever I was having an event or a big dinner. They were ladies who had some big shit happen to them. Roe lost her husband in the 70's and she too never looked at another man. They both were all about family and also the voice of reason to try to tell me to calm down, to take it easy and I NEVER EVER LISTENED. But I am listening now and it is their voices in my head when I know it is time to calm down and sit and take care of me.

One night, in the midst of chemotherapy and working full time, I had a dream and in it, Roe was there—we were at a party, a wedding of some kind and I looked at her and said, “How are you here? You’re in heaven.” Her answer to me was, and I quote, “I was bored so I came to visit.” That is just Roe—she would do whatever she wanted and ask permission never—my aunt Jean was like that, too. The next morning, I mentioned to my mom the dream I had and how Roe was just being Roe and she burst out crying and I was surprised but she told me, “Lisa, last night, I was telling Mick (her husband) how much I wish Roe was still here to help you go through what you are doing with chemotherapy and shit and then you dreamed of her! She listened to me!”

One of the last times I took aunt Jean out to do her errands and to the cemetery, she wanted to go into a deli to return something she had brought that was not needed. I went in for her as her legs were not doing too great. When I came out to tell her the story did not take returns, aunt Jean went gangsta. “Let me out of this car, I am going to f*@### kill him, that motherf*@#DDS, I will kick him to death with my good leg!” I just sat there laughing and holding her back while my kids put their hands over their ears as they were used to this from years and years of being with aunt Jean in the car. I just know I have some (well a lot) of her spunk and fight in me and I think she is lending it to me from heaven.

Both of these women loved my kids as though they were their great grandchildren. It was amazing to have so much love and so many women to fulfill the missing of their great grandparents. Not a day goes by when I do not think of them and how much fun they must be having in Heaven. I am sure there are a lot of new vivid vocabulary being learned by all the angels and saints, though. May they rest in peace and may perpetual light shine upon them.

What do you think? Do you have any special family members that you know helped you from heaven during your cancer plot twist.

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