

A TRIBUTE TO AUNT JO



It is with renewed sadness that I stand before you to speak about my Aunt Jo. I must admit to you that in the last few years Aunt Jo was not the Aunt Jo that I grew up with. I do not think that it was only old age that caught up with her mind and memory. I think she just could not cope with the loss of both her nieces, Jean and Ellen or my sister Robin and my cousin Jim. She felt very alone and missed them all.

I want to first take you back to my childhood memories of Aunt Jo. She was a frequent weekend and holiday guest in our home and at my Aunt Jean's house. Some might think of your grandmother's sister as a distant relative, but, to us, Aunt Jo was very much a part of our immediate family.

My earliest memories go back to New York City. Aunt Jo shared an apartment with my grandparents in Washington Heights. She also helped out in the bakery they owned and later moved into an apartment across the hall in the same building. Ultimately, she perfected her English and her business skills and worked as a bookkeeper in the garment district and the Empire State Building. Her accounting skills were impeccable and carried over into her home records.

When I was very young, I remember going to a park in New York City facing the old Palisades Amusement Park. I would sit there with my mother, Grandmother, Aunt Jo and Aunt Jean. I distinctly recall Aunt Jo plunking wild dandelions and daisies and braiding me a beautiful floral crown. Life was much simpler back then.

Aunt Jo was always dressed beautifully and until the day she died, never ever wore slacks. Believe me...I took her on many shopping excursions and tried to encourage her to at least try on a pants suit. She was emphatic that she looked better in dresses and skirts. She was equally stubborn about wearing high heeled shoes and only stopped wearing them a year ago after they were hidden on her so she would not fall. Shopping trips with Aunt Jo were certainly an adventure. She did not make purchase decisions easily and if she did buy something, you knew that you would be going back to the store to return it for her.

There was never a time that Aunt Jo came to visit that she did not come laden with cakes, cookies or pastries. Of course, that was not the only thing tucked away in her little bag when she came to visit. She always came with an assortment of pins, needles, thimbles and threads. For you see, Aunt Jo was also an accomplished seamstress. She could fix anything, move any zipper and basically restyle any garment that needed to fit better. She also made slipcovers and curtains like the best of professionals.

I remember that Aunt Jo's purse was quite large and seemed to contain all of her life's treasures. To dissuade my youngest sister's innate curiosity, Aunt Jo pretended that there was a mouse in her pocketbook. Every time my sister tried to peek in Aunt Jo's purse,

the imaginary mouse was her deterrent! Years later, my sister found a beanbag mouse and snuck it into the bag. It was among Aunt Jo's prized keepsakes at the time of her death.

Although Aunt Jo never married, she had an array of male suitors and was always considered a bit of a coquette. Even in her older years, she had an eye for good looking men and would remark on handsome doctors and others that assisted her. When her apartment in New York City was robbed in the late 90s, she was very happy that the police department assigned a good looking detective to the case.

Aunt Jo babysat for generations of our family's children, starting with my own mother and aunt and ending with my own girls. Ultimately, as life has it, the roles reversed, and there came a time where the youngest kept an eye on her to make sure she was safe.

Like the rest of my family, Aunt Jo had a strong appreciation for the arts. She was a frequent visitor to Lincoln Center and Radio City. She knew every opera and could discuss their meaning in detail.

More than likely, she was the family's first Registered Democrat and held very strong political views. She watched the news diligently and even when she moved into Assisted Living in Clifton, she wanted to make sure she had access to the local channels, so that she knew what was going on in Clifton and in New Jersey.

Aunt Jo had a strong work ethic and did not take from society. She did not make a lot of money during her lifetime, but made sure to save what she could from her earnings. It was her foresight in worrying about old age that in fact took care of her when she did reach the point where she was unable to take care of herself. It was that savings that kept her out of a nursing home and in the private care of a very lovely lady named Dorothy who cared for her these past two years.

When you go through a person's belongings after they die, you find out a lot about what has meaning to them. I can tell you without question that it was my family that meant most to Aunt Jo. She saved every card and every note that any of us ever sent to her. She had records of all of our accomplishments and in typical Aunt Jo style, had them all neatly organized and dated. It is no wonder that she started to fail when everyone else predeceased her. She had little else to care about and longed to be with them.

When my mother died a year ago, I felt the biggest loss of my life. In many ways, I am reliving this as Aunt Jo is the end of my mother's family as I knew it. I wondered how Aunt Jo outlived them all and how my mother left without giving me instructions about Aunt Jo. They say that God only gives you what you can handle and I guess He figured I could take care of someone who was so important to me.

I would like to leave you all with one of my angel stories. I truly believe that when you dream of a loved one, it is an angel paying a visit. On the eve before Aunt Jo died, my sister says she dreamt of Aunt Jo, my mother and Aunt Jean riding together in a car. I don't know about you, but I don't further assurance that they are all together. Thank you for coming here to celebrate the end and the beginning of my Aunt Jo's life.