**Bill Blatt’s Eulogy for Mavis Blatt**

**January 4, 2023**

My mother taught me.

Mom was born in London in 1938. Her earliest memories were of the Blitz and she experienced real deprivation during and after the war. She was grateful for how far she’d come and all the experiences she had throughout her life. When I came to her with the stresses of growing up and living life, she sympathized but also reminded me “This too shall pass.” And whenever something really bad was happening like Covid and American politics over the last six years, she’d happily discuss the situation but often ended by saying “at least they’re not dropping bombs on our heads.” I don’t know many people who could say that and back it up with their personal experience but Mom could.

As a young adult, my mother left England and everything she’d ever known for a new life in Canada and ultimately the United States. In doing so, this working class girl from London escaped the class system of England and eventually met and married a Jewish research scientist from the Bronx and they both found the love of their life. Mom said that when she left England, she never wanted to be cold or damp again and she lived the last third of her life in a lovely house here in Tucson. By making sure I knew her story, my mother taught me to be brave.

Public schooling ended for Mom when she was 16. She didn’t drop out or graduate early, that’s just when school ended. She was not expected to go to university and began working right away. But many years later when I was about 7, Mom started night school at the local community college. She didn’t need a degree, she wanted one. I remember her taking computer programming and bringing home piles of punch cards and green and white striped paper that stretched all the way down the hall from my bedroom to the kitchen. School wasn’t always easy and she struggled with some classes (especially algebra) but she stuck with it. When she graduated from Northern Essex Community College with an Associate in Science, she became the first person in her entire family ever to receive a college degree. Dad had a PhD but Mom had just as much to do with giving me a love and an appreciation for education.

I grew up just north of Boston but I don’t have a Boston accent. I never did because every time I said something that verged into “pahk ya cahr” territory, my mother said “Stop! Say that again.” Even with that training, she sometimes told young me “You speak American. I speak English.” I think she was kidding but I’m still not 100% sure. When I was in high school, I did stage crew and the drama teacher frequently asked me to take on one-line parts in plays. I once asked her why she asked me and not any of the other tech crew and she told me “You have excellent diction.” I relayed that to Mom and I think that was one of her proudest days. My mother taught me how to speak.

Mom came from a very working class background and most of her male relatives were carpenters and coal miners. Mom made sure I had respect for people no matter their job or station in life and she also made sure I knew I deserved respect as well, even as a kid. She herself was sometimes treated as less than when working as a secretary and she was called some vicious names when she moved in with Dad before they were married. She knew how ridiculous that was and made sure I never fell into that kind of thinking. I remember one time when my parents and I were shopping for a couch in Phoenix in the 1980s. Mom asked the salesman a question about the sleeper sofa and he started his answer with “Well, little lady…” I saw Mom bristle but she waited until he was done before replying “Well, little man…” and informing him we’d buy the couch elsewhere. Mom taught me about respect, both to give it and to expect it in return.

Mom had an extremely dry sense of humor and it often took people a while to know when she was kidding. To me, she was one of the funniest people I’ve ever met. She sounded very proper but she could be bawdy too. When Rob and I had only been together a few months, we were having dinner at my parents’ house. Dad was talking about a secretary of his that was generally incompetent and he mused “I don’t know why I kept her around so long. “ Without missing a beat, Mom replied “It’s because she had big boobs.” Rob laughed so hard I thought he might pass out and from then on, he and Mom were buddies and co-conspirators.

Mom had incredible timing too. When I asked to have a sip of her drink as a kid, she’d inevitably wait until the glass touched my lips and I tipped it back before dryly stating “No backwash please.” More often than not, I’d end up spitting the drink back into her cup or dribbling it down my shirt as I tried to stifle my laughter. A raised eyebrow from her was enough to make me giggle and whenever I did something she felt to be uncouth, I’d hear “I hope you wouldn’t do that in front of the Queen.” Mom taught me there was humor in almost every situation and how much joy there can be found in making other people laugh.

Rob and I try to model our marriage on Mom and Dad’s marriage. Something I said in my wedding speech in 2010, repeated in Dad’s eulogy in 2014 and want to say again now: My parents were married for over 40 years and right to the end, they still loved each other, they still liked each other and they still talked to each other. Mom and Dad were a unit but they also still each maintained their own identity and interests. And they respected one another – I never heard either of them disparage the other to anyone, in any circumstance. That’s what I want and that’s what Mom and Dad taught me a marriage should look like.

Every election when I was growing up, I heard Mom say “I waited seven years to become a citizen and be able to vote in this country. If I had to go through that, you’d better vote.” I still hear her voice saying that during every election and I vote every time because she taught me that.

All women are strong because they have to be and my mother had an iron will. If I dared to insinuate she couldn’t do something, she would immediately respond “Is that a challenge?” and immediately tackle whatever it was, usually successfully. A larger example of her strength was the way she took care of my dad’s mother Clara at the end of her life, her own mother Dolly at the end of her life and my father at the end of his life. At the end of her own life, Mom insisted that she wanted to remain in her house and not move to assisted living, a nursing home or even the hospital. With the help of her doctors and especially her caregiver Zorka, we were able to fulfill her final wish. By all rights, she should not have lived as long as she did and a nurse even commented last week that the only thing keeping her alive was her will. I think she wanted to be with us for Hanukkah and Christmas and indeed she was. I don’t know that she always thought of herself as strong but my mother taught me what strength really looks like.

I love you, I admire you and I miss you Mom.