

She was Dorothy, Dotsie, Dottie, Doe to her friends, sisters, with the title Aunt preceding, to her many nieces and nephews; Myrtle, Myrt, Mabel, Magnolia, or any name that started with an M to her husband (or Dorothy when he was annoyed), Mom to her children, Grammie to Katie, Lexy and Andrew and to herself, Darth, as in ‘Come on Darth’, ‘Let’s go Darth’.

There was a family photo taken sometime in the mid-80s—maybe you all might remember it sitting on top of the piano in the old living room: all of us siblings, and Dad rather awkwardly arranged in kind of a circle with Mom at the center with her always magnificent smile. She was truly the center of our family.

We like to think of her life in 4 parts

Part 1: Early Dorothy: She was Baltimore born and raised, the youngest of 5. Her father, Harry Herondorf, had a shoe repair business in the main floor of their home. Her mother Ida worked as a seamstress in a factory. The top floor of their home they rented out. By her account it was a happy childhood in a diverse neighborhood (the Greek family across the street with whom she and her sister Alyce would often spend Christmas), Black families, Italian families, other ethnicities. I do remember she kept pictures from her high school days—often posing next to a guy, so she was clearly popular (unless it was always the same guy). After high school, she found work as a secretary at a family business selling furniture and appliances where her sister Dinah worked. She quickly caught the eye of the owner, who encouraged his son to date her. However, Mom did not want her sister to know that she was dating Dad, so on their dates, Dad’s friend Gilbert would pick her up, with Dad hiding in the back seat.

Part 2: Dorothy and Herbert (the ‘good years’) And so began her 61 year adventure with Herbert, or Hugh as Mom affectionately called him, most of it on 3421 Janellen Drive which became her artistic expression. As mom’s taste evolved, we had at least 3-4 house décor makeovers, starting with traditional furniture and décor, but changing with each redo. Flower power reigned in the 60’s : blue flower wallpaper in Fran’s room; couches in the living room with big orange and yellow flowers, green flowered wallpaper in the kitchen and yellow paint or wallpaper in almost every room. Mom’s taste continually evolved , and in the end, everything ended up some sort of beige. Good thing we were in the furniture business!

In the early days before us children took up her most of her time, she painted abstract canvases which decorated our home. She and Fran painted the concrete floor of the porch with bold colors as she did with the mailbox. There were chotchkes, posters, small sculptures, pottery from various trips overseas with Dad, all thoughtfully displayed, creating a space that was alive. She enjoyed gardening—there was always the spring rituals of planting impatiens in the carport planters; magnolias and geraniums in the big black pots. She loved dogwood trees—we had three in the front and one in the back of the house.

Her artistic expression also took the form of table displays which grew more elaborate as the years progressed. The Thanksgiving table was her pride and joy: flowers, gourds, pinecones, greenery, and even insects (dead of course). Margie has since drawn inspiration from those table displays for her beautiful Thanksgiving table (minus the insects).

Mom herself was a great seamstress and sewed clothes for us when we were young. She created some great Halloween costumes—there exist a photo of Margie (age 4-5?) as Little Miss Muffet (with a puzzled expression as if to say why am I in this costume?) and I remember she made me an angel costume circa 3rd grade. She sewed matching dresses for Margie and me for Hank's Bar Mitzvah. She was always ready with her needle and thread to hem/alter any items we requested—given who her daughters were, much shortening was required. She embraced the current fashions—wore her hair teased and pulled back in the 60's, permed it (happily briefly) in the early 70's, then it was the 'Dorothy Hamill' in the later 70's, and then mixing it up between very short and less short-- and was always thoughtful and artful on how she presented herself—she was a master at accessories. No trip was too trivial for her to not look her best—even trips to the Giant. And she expected the same from us. She was also a dedicated shopper for herself and her children and hunted down any bargains, sifting through reams of dreck to find the pearls. I still get compliments on items that she bought me years ago.

Mom was more of the 'fix-it' person in the home, being very practical and hands-on (Dad's domestic skills peaked at making instant coffee and disposing of rodents when necessary.) Mom tolerated all the family pets: the dogs (many of them), gerbils, turtles, fish, chicks and ducks (no geese). I think she liked the dogs, as long as they didn't dig in her garden, but less enthusiastic about the other critters, especially when the gerbils got loose in the basement!! She was also clever and resourceful. When Margie and Fran each had a thief stealing their desert from their lunch bag in elementary school, Mom sprinkled black pepper on their deserts and the problem was solved.

Even she would agree that cooking was not her creative expression—at least not initially. It didn't help matters that she had to cook for a diverse and specific set of tastes (i.e. picky eaters). But she persevered. We could all agree on iceberg lettuce salads, juicy hamburgers on the old charcoal grill, and on Sundays, Chef Boyardee pizza. However, in keeping up with the times, she did become adept with chicken dishes, and later fish, when the dietary advice of the 70s discouraged red meat; lemon chicken was a staple of the Friday night Shabbos dinners. And, as Katie reminded me recently, in later years she made a great split pea soup.

Baking, however, did inspire Mom, and lucky for us. From the mondel bread to cookies, brownies and cakes, we always had goodies in the house. Mom's chocolate chocolate chip cake was a special treat, and our friends were always happy when it was in the cake plate on the kitchen countertop.

Dad caught the travel bug while he was stationed in Germany during WWII, starting with the their honeymoon (Mom's first trip out of the country) which included Cuba, and several other Caribbean Islands. Mom loyally accompanied him on trips to many places both foreign and domestic including Europe, South America, Southeast Asia, Russia, most US states, and Canada, to name a few. In 1981, Dad took Mom to China for her 50th birthday present (not clear as to who the present was for). The trip, as it turns out made a huge impression on her, visiting a place so different from what she knew. Her reddish hair attracted a lot of attention from locals who were still adjusting to seeing tourists after years of being closed to tourism. We still can remember some of the stories from that trip, like sleeping under Dad's raincoat when the linens were questionable, or keeping the suitcases zipped up to keep unwelcome creatures out. Mom,

again, resourceful and creative in making do with what she had. Fran, who traveled with my parents on several trips remembers the following stories:

- 1) Mom was a trooper. Never complained about anything Dad wanted to do or go to. One night, when they were in Vietnam, mom was sound asleep after a long day of touring. Dad and Fran were both still up and he was getting ready to go to bed. Instead of looking in the suitcase for his pjs, he wakes mom up to get his pjs, which were sitting right on top of the suitcase (which was open). She gets his pjs, gives them to him, not a word, and then promptly goes back to sleep.
- 2) When they were in the Galapagos Islands, their guide got all excited when she noticed 2 small red birds mating. If you blinked, you would have missed it. The next time the guide pointed out any little red birds, mom's comment was another LRB. . Whenever Fran sees an LRB, she always think of mom: Mom was clearly not an birder.

Other highlights: Dad got mom to ride on a camel, and an elephant, and had her pose with a snake around her neck, as well as with lonesome George (a giant tortoise in the Galapagos).

Mom was very progressive and forward thinking. She was a lifelong Democrat, often at odds with Dad. She embraced the Women's Liberation Movement of the late 60s-70s and was insistent that her daughters have independent careers. When Fran was contemplating her career direction, it was Mom that suggested she check out epidemiology. Mom also inspired Margie to become a nurse. But Women's Liberation stopped at the door of 3421 Janellen Dr, where the only people doing chores were the women/girls of the household.

She was very free with her opinions, with regards to our fashions (that does not look good on you), hair (you should wear your hair like so-and-so) boyfriends/girlfriends (not shy about delivering the occasional 'thumbs down') and our respective homes (decorating advice and thoughts on how to clean, as well as administering the 'dust' test, on our furniture)

She was unfailingly prompt and got annoyed when we were not ready to go at the designated time on a family outing. She considered tardiness as rudeness. When having gatherings at her home, she would give chronic late-comers a starting time at least a half-hour early.

She was very warm, charming and engaging She had a wide circle of friends—there were always people dropping by. She welcomed new people into her home (our friends, new family members, later on Dad's caregivers) and always took an interest in them, zeroing in, asking questions about who they were, what their interests were. She had a warm smile for all the cashiers at the Giant, and for her 'boyfriend' at the Deli counter. She loved to entertain-parties, cook-outs in the backyard. She once planned a children's birthday party for Margie where everyone had to make their own hat, and organized bean bag tosses and other games. There were New Years parties for their friends, where things occasionally got, ahem, a little raucous.

She was also very supportive to her friends and family when times were difficult for them, visiting them when they were sick, doing errands for them and even offering her home as a safe space for anyone she knew in distress.

Part 3. Dorothy and Herbert: the-not-so-good years. In 1997, Dad had a stroke, and Mom's life changed in a second. Over the next 18 years, Dad gradually declined physically to being wheelchair bound and needing 24/7 care by the end of his life. More challenging, his mental health deteriorated: he was frustrated, angry and irrational. It became hard to spend much time with him. Mom's world shrank to being his primary caregiver, gradually she let slide her roles as mother, grandmother, sister, friend. Her home gradually transformed into a nursing home for Dad. The stress of caring for him, the tension between wanting to be the 'good wife' and the resentment at feeling tethered to Dad at the expense of her own personal life grew too great, and eventually broke her apart. In May, 2015, with much resistance from Mom, we moved Dad to an assisted living facility, where he died 6 months later.

Part 4: Dorothy solo—her nesting years: Mom got some very helpful therapy at Shepard Pratt, and then transitioned to assisted living, first at Sunrise, then later at Springwell. The first few months were very difficult—angry phone calls declaring that she was not staying there, demanding to return to her house, refusing to unpack her belongings, sitting in the dark. But gradually she settled in, and we believe she appreciated the rest, the freedom from the heavy burden of responsibility she had for Dad, being able to cocoon in her own little world. In her later years, as her memory faded, she actually appeared happy. She had no recollection of the difficult years with Dad. Even though she preferred to spend most of her time in her room, she was always happy to have visitors and talk to you on the phone. When on the phone or during a visit, she would always let us know how much she loved us. She was still charming with staff—one of her care workers told Margie that Mom was one of her favorites-- and was flirtatious if there were men around. Her favorite phrase was 'All's well'. Even as her memory and her vocabulary shrank, she still found ways to express humor. When we would call, and ask her who she talking to, she would cheekily say 'You'. During a recent visit with Hank, Ann and Katie, when being reminded that Dad had died, she eplied "Then all is NOT well" with a bit of a smile. There was rarely a phone call we had where she would not say something that would crack us up. The old Dorothy would also occasionally show up, whether it was telling Margie to use a coaster for her glass on a surface that did not require one, telling Fran her hair did not look good or telling me to straighten my socks.

At this point, I would like to take the time to thank Springwell for Mom's excellent care all these years; in particular, Christy Miller, the memory care manager there. And most especially, we would like to thank Ann Shofer—she was our eyes and ears on the ground for my sisters and me. She arranged and took Mom to all the doctor's and dentist's appointments, arranged hairdresser appointments, made sure her nails were trimmed, went shopping for clothes and supplies for her, and when supplies went missing, replenished them. Ann always made herself available even as she had her own very full life.

Mom's cognitive decline had been gradual all these years, but she was in remarkably good physical shape—she would have occasional episodes that would land her in the hospital but, against all odds, she would recover. We thought she would go on indefinitely. We like to believe she sensed the accelerating turmoil in the world and she thought to herself: 'Come on, Darth; enough already; time to leave.' She was practical that way.

She was used to hearing us blow kisses over the phone. So Mom, if you're listening, here's a last kiss for you.