

Note of a mad girl #20: Gone Mom

Mom loved her name Leonilla. She also loved her daily crossword puzzles.

And Mom was fine and happy at 100 and 6 months. Every day for the past few years the nurses, her friends at the Manor and a plethora of family members walked into her small cubby of a room to laugh and reminisce about their lives. When they left her room each felt loved . And lighter.

But mom wasn't fine nor happy when she hit 100 and 7 months. So, she decided to dedicate her last month to actively dying. She spoke of seeing her mom, our Dad, our sister Pam, our brother Kevin, aunt Marg/her sister (who died a few months prior at 104), and all her Penn, Pennsylvania friends and family that she inevitably outlasted.

I would panic back here in Texas about her condition and would race to the airline website for another quick trip back home. I'd walk in breathless from the drive through two Pittsburgh tunnels and awful traffic on the Parkway to find her happily finishing her third piece of pizza.

One day while I was lounging in a fold up deck chair she asked me if I was waiting for her to die. I had been staring at her while she napped and guess I stared her awake. I said, "might happen". She laughed.

But this story is about my final visit. When I raced through the automatic doors and past the sign in desk I yelled to the desk lady "my mom is dying, and I don't have time to sign in".

Finding mom with her eyes closed, mouth ajar, hair matted down, and not moving was indeed a shock. In all the years I've been with my mom I've never seen her static.

Nurses Tammy and Crystal literally dragged in a huge electric recliner so I could sit and sleep next to mom for what I hoped was a lengthy stay. They were definitely "Team Lee".

My brother Jeff and I sat vigil while I stroked my mom's head. Jeff reluctantly left at 9:00 p.m. and at 9:20 mom died at 100, 8 months.

I found the male nurse outside the room and told him I think my mother died. I also asked him if he smelled a skunk. It was really strong and pretty odd. He said everyone was trying to find the culprit. It lasted for about 5 minutes.

And then it hit me. We called my sister Pam "Skunky". My religious ideas are complex but somehow knowing that Pam came to walk mom to the light, to the door, up the escalator to her family and friends greatly comforted me .

And mom and Aunt Marg would have laughed. Hysterically.