**EULOGY FOR ESTHER KELMAN, Oct. 1, 2013; 29 Tishrei 5774**

**Written by her loving son, Stuart.**

There is a custom I learned that in Jerusalem, when one gives a eulogy, one speaks directly to the individual – not in third person, but in 2nd person. So, mom – I want to talk to you.

Mom, I love you. Each time that I’d visit you at L’Chaim House in Marin, where you lived for the past 7 years, I’d say: I love you – and you world respond back - I love *you*. This is one of the two phrases that were you. I love you. I think I learned to say this from dad cause those would be his words to you as he kissed you whenever he left the house – and before he kissed the mezuzah. Even on the Monday of his death, he went out early while you were still asleep and didn’t want to disturb you – and left you one of his famous notes on the table – it said simply: I love you. I always had the sense that he said this often – and every time was as fresh as the first. Maybe it’s fresh cause we never know whether this will be the last time we say it or not. And just two weeks ago, we said it to each other for the final time but I continued to say it each day that I was with you. I love you.

Mom – there is an often-repeated phrase in our tradition, *ayshet chayil*, a woman of valor. Truthfully, I have never used it in a eulogy (even though it’s the most popular) because it seemed trite and over-used. That is, until now. Mom – you forced me to think hard about the term. *Ayshet* – a woman; *chayil* – of valor –or strength (like *chayal*-soldier) – maybe that’s why I never used it because of the military overtones. And then I thought about you – cause you had strength so strong, that few recognized it for what it was, because you kept it hidden – just like your name, Esther (from the word *nistar*, which means hidden). And maybe like that other queen, under your crown laid a hidden strength so powerful that it could only come out in subtle, hidden ways. A strength just like Bubby, your mother possessed. Your strength and courage, though, was coupled with sweetness and elegance. Maybe that coupling of meaning is what the term *chayil* really means. Not brute force, but and ability to use strength and valor in powerful but hidden and sweet ways. That, was your *neshama*, your soul. That was you.

Here in your second home, Rodeph Sholom, you combined those traits and for 32 years, served as the Executive Director. I’ve always said that I can not fathom how you did it – you knew everyone by name, you nurtured rabbis, cantors, principals, presidents, future rabbis, future cantors, future educators, future congregational presidents – for 32 years. You knew everyone then in the congregation of 750 households. And I remember the High Holidays – and the seating charts: this person has to sit next to this person; under no circumstance put so-and-so near so-and-so; this person likes a window seat; this person needs to be in the sanctuary and not downstairs!! I still can’t understand how you kept all this in your mind – without a computer! But you were the consummate professional. Quiet strength with sweetness and elegance.

When Moses dies, the Torah says *v’neesaf el amav* – he was gathered to his people –and you, mom – are *in* a lot of people. When Patti and I were young, you and dad taught us:

that study was essential, and you were thrilled when we both pursued graduate degrees:

that Camp Ramah and Hebrew High were places we had to go – even at great financial sacrifice

You taught us to challenge the commonplace – and to make our world just a little bit better

You taught us to be concerned with others – and to care and to volunteer

to work hard and to dream

to love music – and while it was dad who really wanted me to play an instrument, you were the one to make sure I’d practice

You certainly taught us the value of family. Ben, she loved you dearly and spoke of you often. Those Sunday gatherings with Bubby each week (almost)!

You taught us to love Israel and even travelled there in 1968

You taught us (or at least tried to teach me) to give short speeches!

You taught us to work *b’nistar*, behind the scenes

You taught us modesty and humility

And you taught us to love

And you did all this by being who you were – by your actions.

There have been hard times – when your two brothers, Abe and Sam, and three sisters-in-law, Lil, Sophie and Frances, passed away, and when dad and Patti died. But throughout, you remained strong – especially in your belief that family was primary.

Vicky and I and your grandchildren, Navah, Ari, Etan, Elana and Yoni – and their spouses, Michael, Eva, Ali, Adam and Julie, and your 10 great-grandchildren are beneficiaries of your love. Your nieces and nephews, Ronnie, Wayne, Jane, Bruce, Joan, Elaine and Robert (who are here today) and their spouses and their children love you deeply – and stayed in touch, as did all your friends who are here today along with some of my teachers. So many people whose lives you have touched.

These last few years in CA were difficult – so I think we all need to focus our energies on remembering and telling each other stories of the earlier 90 years!

Even when speech eluded you and you searched for a name or a word, you looked us all in the eye and bonded. Your eyes said everything. Your *neshama* came through your eyes. Carl, your hospice nurse for only these last 5 months came into your room just last Tuesday – and called me afterwards to tell me about you. Right in the middle of the conversation, he started crying. Such was the impact you had even though a verbal conversation was never shared with him. We joked that he was supposed to be the doing the consoling – but our roles were reversed! But that was the effect you have had on your family, your friends, on strangers and on the community – on each and every one of us here. You are in us.

You left this world on Simchat Torah and on the cusp of Shabbat, and as I just learned, the yahrtzeit of Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev. How fitting. A day of Torah, a day of rest and a day in memory of a fabulous rebbe.

Thank you – gracious lady that you are. Thank you. That, was your second phrase that you contined to utter. Those words were the words so deeply engraved on your heart and in your *neshama*, that they were the last words you uttered. When Lita and Vicky came to give you a bit of ice cream on Monday last, even though you couldn’t swallow, you managed to say: Thank You. If only we could learn from you.

One of your favorite people was our friend Debbie Friedman. And one of your favorite songs began: *lechi lach* – to a land that I will show you, to a place you do not know. And there is another song that is also appropriate for this moment: it’s from *Tefilat Haderech*: - and begins: May you be blessed as you go on your way. *Tzaytech leshalom* – go on your journey in peace knowing that you now reside in us.

Mom - I love you – and thank you.