

Sally Ann Ginsberg Abraham

October 26, 2015

Sally Ann Abraham, 76, passed away peacefully on October 26, 2015 surrounded by her loving family, after a courageous four year battle with brain cancer. Sally was born on July 5, 1939 in Beacon, New York to Goldie and Julius Ginsberg.

Throughout her life, Sally was known for her passionate pursuit of education for both herself and others. She had an insatiable appetite for literature, reading and annotating hundreds of books every year. During her last year of life she read 30 novels.

Sally received a B.A. from Mount Holyoke College in 1961, and a Masters from Columbia University in 1968. She was a strong proponent of women's education, serving as Chairman of Fundraising for her class at Mount Holyoke. In that capacity, she helped her class earn numerous honors including the Sphinx, Pegasus, Lion and Griffin Awards.

A long time resident of Highland Park, Sally was a beloved and devoted English teacher at Central Middle School in Glencoe from 1979 to 1995. Upon her retirement, she began her own tutoring business specializing in college prep and placement. She worked with hundreds of students from the North Shore, many of whom she had taught in their earlier years.

Sally also was involved during the inception of Young Chicago Authors, an organization dedicated to helping at risk youth to express themselves through creative writing.

Sally's adventurous spirit brought great pleasure to the love of her life, Gershen Abraham, to whom she was happily married for 53 years. Upon his retirement, she surprised him with a climbing trip to Mount Everest and later to Mount Kilimanjaro. They continued to fill their lives with fascinating world travel ranging from climbing an active volcano in Chile to trips including Papua New Guinea, Myanmar, Mali, and Timbuktu. She supported Gersh's love of his alma mater Dartmouth College. She built a second home near the school in rural New Hampshire. They spent many years there hiking, enjoying nature and developing an extraordinary garden filled with magical flowers. Sally also established a scholarship fund in their family name at the university.

Sally will be missed by many. She is survived by her husband, Gershen, children, Marcelle (Robert) Frey and David (Susan) Abraham, her grandchildren Ayanna and Ella Frey, Joshua, Jeffrey and Leila Abraham.

Tributes/Eulogies to Sally from Family and Friends

Gersh Abraham:

I was on the Mt. Holyoke College campus on a Friday evening in October 1957 looking for a date to take to a Dartmouth-Yale football game on Saturday. I walked into Buckland Hall and ran into a beautiful young lady holding a calculus book. I asked her with some trepidation, "What are you doing with the calculus book?" She responded, "I am looking for some assistance from some classmates as I don't have the background to succeed in the course". I told her I would be willing to help her as I was an engineering student. I did and she seemed to really begin to grasp the subject matter. As she didn't have a date for the weekend, she accompanied me and sat in the rain during the game.

We were married four year later after she graduated.

Here we are celebrating her life which fortunately for me has included me 58 years later.

I would like to share some of Sally's outstanding life accomplishments:

Her commitment to family was overwhelming:

1. She was the major care giver for her parents during their old age. She managed her father's life in a nursing home for 10 years after he had a debilitating stroke. Marcelle and David remember vividly visiting him every week with Sally. He was watching baseball and they played gin. It just became part of how they spent time with their grandfather. Her mother moved in with us after the stroke. Sally welcomed her and made her an integral part of our household. The kids spent many evenings enjoying TV with her, Carol Burnett and Sonny and Cher. Marcelle tells me that Sally used it as a teaching opportunity and would tell her to wisely choose a husband that treats your mother the same way he would treat his.
2. After one of our children had a serious illness, she gave up pursuit of a Doctorate at Columbia University in order to focus on our child's health. The goal of achieving the doctorate had been important to her and she had professors in two departments fighting for her commitment.
3. She was a driving force behind my success during my business career.
 - a. We had an ideal life in a small community in New Jersey when a wonderful opportunity to relocate to Chicago was offered to me. It took her about five seconds to say, "Let's go for it."
 - b. Several years later when I had lost my job and was going through a difficult time, she came home one afternoon and told me she had bought

me a Mazda RX-7 sports car. I asked her how could she do that with our income in jeopardy? Her response was, "I have confidence in you." She was right.

c. At my retirement dinner she announced that she had two gifts for me: A trek to the Everest Base Camp and that she had established a scholarship in our name at Dartmouth College, my alma mater.

Sally's career was committed to teaching and preparing young people to optimize their confidence:

1. She taught for many years in the Glencoe Jr. High School system. Her main focus was

on developing students writing skills. I believe the school was ranked number one in the state in the writing skills category. Her motivational skills in the classroom were unique and outstanding. She liked to take on the difficult students and find a way to inspire them. Earlier this week, the parent of three children Sally taught, who then became a dear friend, stopped by and reminisced about the first time she met Sally and how her classroom transported students. It made her want to go back to eighth grade and learn all over again. She told me one of her sons has pursued a career in education as a result of his experiences in the classroom with Sally. She said, "You have no idea how big her Ripple Effect really is." Over the years prior students have called Sally many years after high school or college for assistance in completing an important document.

2. After retiring from public school teaching, she started a college preparation business. She helped students get ready for ACT and SAT exams, identify potential colleges, and worked on their college entrance essays. It was successful in more ways than simply pushing for incremental increases in scores. She treated the kids like they were her own. I often would come home and find one of them in the refrigerator, and when they needed her late into the night she was there for them. I can recall one student who came to her with little academic confidence. She helped him to believe in himself, increase his ACT score from 15 to 27, earn a partial college scholarship and today is pursuing a successful business career.

Sally loved to travel to the most interesting and out of place places in the world. She would come up with an idea and present it to me. My response was usually, "Why would you want to go there?" Regardless of her reason and most of them were good, we would go and upon our return I would tell her I think I had a better time than she. A few examples:

1. Communist Yugoslavia during Tito's reign.
2. Myanmar when it was a severe dictatorship
3. Papua New Guinea to see an undeveloped society.
4. Mali to experience how a struggling African country survives. The high point of that trip was visiting Timbuktu. I remember a lot of sand.

5. Chile. The highlight of this trip was climbing an active snow covered volcano. We plodded for hours through heavy snow well behind the young people 40 years younger than us and had a chance to look into the crater. We made a rapid decent sitting on leather pads, and flying down the mountain. We were welcomed with cheers by our young fellow trekers.

Sally loved flowers and to garden. She would spend 8 to 12 hours a day in our new Hampshire garden cultivating, hauling rocks, and planting. Ultimately she was told by her orthopedic doctor to stop hauling heavy rocks and using a wheel barrow. I don't think that stopped her. The local garden club loved to come and view her garden. We put just a few examples in the tribute program we created for her.

During the four years since Sally was diagnosed with an incurable brain tumor, she has maintained a positive attitude and has always greeted friends, acquaintances and others with a big beautiful smile. She has never complained. I know she has impressed many with the way in which she has dealt with her illness. The phone rang on Wednesday afternoon and it was the Dartmouth College football coach. Over the years, he got to know her. He deeply appreciated her support of the team and often told her of his admiration for her approach to her illness. He plans to honor her at the Dartmouth Harvard game this weekend. Something I know she would love. And, as always, because it's about Sally, it will have the ripple effect.

Jackie Glanz

How do you say good bye to your best friend? After Gersh called me with the sad news of Sally's death, my mind was flooded with so many memories. We had an enduring friendship of sixty six years. We had supported, listened, empathized, advised, cherished and loved one another. We shared sorrow, joy and happiness. The constant in our friendship had been trust, love and laughter. From giggling girls in the 5th grade to my last visit with Sally in New Hampshire, we always laughed. She had a great laugh! Sally had to survive how boy crazy I was. Whom I was in love with, whom I thought I loved and whom I liked. Such sweet memories of our gang: "The Silence Teens", (it was the '50's) our dances for the talent shows; from practicing in Sally's basement the Charleston to Salome; the Rec: (Sally was the best ball player) she could outrun the boys. Memorial Park: Sally and I in matching bathing suits, shopping in downtown Paterson; the Fair Lawn Jewish Center; hanging out at Gorlins in Radburn because I had a crush on the soda jerk, Richie. Who could forget our shock hearing about Gwen's sexual adventures. She was the experienced one; we were clueless. From going to Sally's Bat Mitzvah, to

celebrating many birthdays, anniversaries and family occasions. We were always there for each other.

Sally was voted "Most Likely to Succeed", class of '57 Fair Lawn High School. She succeeded on all levels going to Mt. Holyoke, her college of choice. But her greatest success was falling in love and choosing Gersh for a husband. She was his cheerleader, supported him in all ways so he could reach his career goals. On return, these past four years there was no better, more loving caregiver than Gersh. Sally was so lucky to have Gersh and she knew it.

Sally was a devoted loving daughter facing the challenges of taking care of her father after he suffered a debilitating stroke. She also took care of her mother when she was stricken with cancer.

Her greatest joy and success would have to be her family: Marcelle, Robert, David, Susan and her grandchildren whom she adored. So much love, pride in whom they are, as well as their accomplishments.

Smart, sassy, fun loving with a sense of adventure, that was our Sally. How she loved planning and going on their many adventure trips.

Sally and I taught school together in the early 60's in Fair Lawn. Later on I went into business and Sally continued with her career in education. She was an outstanding gifted teacher. She truly loved challenging her students and was so proud of their achievements and success.

I have a wonderful memory of the loving, caring, generous, thoughtful person Sally was. I was a young widow, 48 years old, feeling my life was over, sad, depressed, lonely and miserable. Sally comes to visit with her welcoming smile, a hug, compassion and understanding. She brought me a gift, a gorgeous caftan robe which I still have. Sally said, "One day you will wear this and have a new life just as rewarding as the one you had before only different." She was right but it was Sally's caring and love that gave me the support and encouragement I needed. We lived far apart, through all these years we kept in touch.

New Hampshire and their beautiful home and garden was a special place for Sally and Gersh. So many wonderful visits, just hanging out, reading our favorite books, long discussions, enjoying the beauty of nature on their deck, long walks, gardening, flower arranging, shopping, movies, visiting with family and friends. Sally was a gracious hostess, you always felt welcome in her home. She was a great cook, had that flair, never used a recipe. We had so much fun!

When I set out to write this eulogy I looked for a poem I had written for Sally's 70th birthday. Of course I couldn't find it. But I did find a card with a message from Sally sent to me 25 years ago. I quote, "In life it's not where you go, it's who you go with. That's us on the cover. Have

suitcase will travel. May we travel a long, long time together in the future as we have done in the past. You are a most special person in my life so let's join hands and grow old together.

Love, Sally

With much love and very special wishes for hugs, kisses and lot's of great times."

There were many great times, but I wanted more. Sally's love of life, her spirit, bravery was an inspiration to who knew her. I will miss my pal Sal.

Good by, Sally, forever in my heart. I love you. October 30, 2015

David:

Senior year in college I shared an answering machine with a roommate. First one home listened to both of our messages. Just before graduation, after listening to my messages for a year, my roommate said to me, "I'm pretty sure if I asked your mom who is smarter, David Abraham or Steven Hawking, she would pick David Abraham." He was right.

Belief. My mom was a believer. More than anything, she believed in the very act of believing. As I grew up, what I came to realize, is that I didn't need to be as smart as Steven Hawking for my mom to be right. She knew in her bones that people are better when they know people believe in them. So that is what she did.

Many of you may not know this but when Marcelle was finishing high school she tried to invent the concept of the gap year before there was such a thing as the gap year. Sally, ever focussed on education, and ever the believer, managed to convince Marcelle to apply to 20 colleges even when she wasn't planning on going. This was before the common ap, so there was a lot of typing involved. In the end, Marcelle came around and thanks to our mom she had college choices.

My mom also once told me a story about sitting around in the Central School teacher's lounge on the last day of school. Teachers were talking about difficult students they were hoping not to have assigned to their classrooms the following year. Mom told me she didn't speak up. Why? "Because struggling students need a teacher who focuses on what they are doing right instead of what they are doing wrong. I know how to do that," she explained.

Any time I faced a challenge, pitching a little league baseball game, taking a test in school, heading off to college, going out on my own in business, there were always doubts to overcome. But I could always picture my mom's knowing look and smile that said "you've got this".

When my mom got sick, she never stopped believing, against all the odds. She willed herself to 4 wonderful years (with a major assist from my dad. Thanks dad)... She willed herself to 4 wonderful years that she shared with grace and good cheer with those dear to her. She never stopped making new friends and loved to report to me about a new friend she had dinner with at the Mather and something special about their life. Last week, she told her doctor that she believed she had another 10 years in her. That was Sally to a T.

So look around everybody. This room is full of people who Sally believed in. Thanks mom for believing in me and all the people you loved and cared about. We are all lucky for it.

Marcelle:

Hi. For as long as I can remember I have thought of my mom as this giant brainiac. That is what defined her to me. I think almost every one who knew my mom, recognized how wicked smart she was. But, what none of us could have known, as true character is so often revealed in times of crisis, was that what she was really made of through-and-through was courage. In so many societies, courage is viewed as one of the most important virtues a person can possess. And, to me, my mom became the most virtuous person I have ever met because no one could be braver than she in the way she faced her illness.

I found this quote that I think expresses perfectly her approach to every aspect of her illness and life over the past four years: "Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgement that something else is more important than fear."

One of the things my mom loved to tell me growing up is how as a child, for fun, she memorized the dictionary word-for-word. And she got quite far in the alphabet — like to J.

I remember watching her being wheeled down the hall coming towards me after her first surgery and could see she was talking to herself and when she got close enough realized she was reciting words and definitions, running through the alphabet. She was laying on the gurney full of joy because that part of her brain was left intact. And, in that moment, her intellect, which she valued greatly, was more important than "did you get the cancer out?"

Soon after she returned home, we were talking on the phone and she said Rabbi Moffic had come to visit and he told her a story about teaching his two young children to swim. In the process, they learned to float but the act of swimming is so different from floating. Swimming is skill while

floating is really all about faith. From that moment, my mom chose to float. And, because of that so could we.

Several years ago, my sister in law, Sue, told me her friend saw my mom and said, "It's just so sad" and she was taken aback because as odd as it was we did not perceive her or her condition as sad. When people asked after her, we told them she was great because that is what she believed. If you took what you saw on face value you saw a person that had been diminished but if you met her in the place that she was existing then you realized she was still finding joy in every small thing she accomplished and experienced. That was the smile everyone talks about, a smile from the inside out. She was transformed as well as transformative to those around her.

Literature played a huge role in my mom's life. She was always reading and annotating the books only for her personal pursuit of knowledge. As compromised as her brain was, she never let go of that. My dad estimates she read 30 novels last year. The last one, just a few weeks ago was entitled "When Nietzsche Wept." On a good day, I really don't know anyone that would attempt to read a book with Nietzsche in the title. My husband Robert visited her two weeks ago. When he came home he said, she acts like all she has is a common cold. It's extraordinary.

Last week, we all hung out in her room. We played a simple game together matching ice cream cards and she enjoyed it. When we got through the entire deck I said don't let anyone tell you your not all there, and she laughed. She couldn't talk that much but she was still synthesizing everything around her. My brother, who was across the room, was talking about Joshua going apple picking and then she made a joke connecting some random thing to Steve Jobs. At first, we thought she was talking nonsense. But, after a pause realized it was a reference to the word Apple. It was actually subtle and smart. Her mind was still ahead of ours.

Always the consummate teacher, my mom knew, that until she took her very last breath, life was more important than fear. She chose life for herself and everyone around her.

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