

Sarah Kreider's eulogy for Elizabeth Kreider, July 28, 2024

Years ago my mom and I listened to Alice Walker speak on her book, "In Search of Our Mother's' Gardens." The title intrigued me, and I imagine it intrigued my mom as well. We both knew our relationship was strained and we yearned for a stronger one. Years later our relationship evolved into one of the closest I've ever known.

My mom had a strong will that made it hard for us to get along when I was younger. My grandmother described her as "independent as a hog on ice." She showed incredible determination in everything she put her mind to, and determination is the personality trait that stands out for me most about her. There are so many examples of her determination throughout her life... When she was a little girl she was given an ice cream cone to stop a tantrum. Determined to make the point how mad she was, she let it slowly drip down her hand without eating a bite. When she was a new mother in the 1970s, searching for her first home, a real estate agent refused to show homes in Park hill, an early aspiration of an integrated neighborhood, to a young white couple. My mom fired that agent and found someone else who helped my mom find her dream home in the diverse neighborhood she was hoping for. My mom wasn't able to teach French when my brother and I were growing up. She hated that there was no such thing as part time teaching and no childcare that could have allowed her the ability to work full time. She struggled with her identity as a woman, obligated to stay home with her children, with the burning desire to work. She was able to find her voice by writing two children's books and occasional articles for the Denver Post. She also helped create after school programs at my elementary school and took weekly Spanish classes. After a gang shooting and a summer of violence in Parkhill she helped created a grass-roots communication system and organized community building activities in the neighborhood. In the early 1990s she received Parkhill's Babbs community service award for her efforts.

My mom went to college at a time when it was expected of women to skip college altogether or to marry upon graduation. My mom was determined that that wouldn't be her case. She wanted to find love, but was passionate about learning and finding her individual place in the world. Her Russian history professor in college picked up on her intelligence and drive and invited her to apply to work for the CIA. Fortunately she didn't pursue it, but I loved imagining her as a secret operator—in a sexy black dress with a long cigarette holder (which by the way is what my dad first saw of her and was instantly captivated by). Her senior year of college her efforts in school were rewarded when she was invited to join Mortarboard, a national honor society for women seniors that recognizes their achievement in scholarship, leadership and service. After college she studied French at McGill University in Canada and then at the Sorbonne in France.

Subsequently she received a Master's of French and Education from Case Western University.... She went on to teach French at Shaker Heights high school in Ohio... After her first year of teaching she bought herself one of her life's most prized possession's: a ten piece silver place setting. She grew up without indoor plumbing and had never owned anything as precious as that silver. I remember watching my dad and her take meticulous care of it. They washed and dried each piece by hand, and made sure each one went back into its proper place. It's as though every time they used them they were honoring the joy that independence brought my mom.

When my mom was in her 60s, after her career teaching French at Overland High School, she received a Master's of Creative Writing from CU Boulder. She returned to the theme of finding balance between work and life. Here is an excerpt from one of her essays... "I feel most fully me when I am working because when I work I feel creative, and working then means Life. What happens when I don't work, then? When is not working OK? If I don't work, will my creativity survive? Feminists have battled fiercely to be valued for *doing*, not just being. I have been coming to the truth of *being*, not just doing. I discovered this truth as I wrote a poem this semester, 'A Poem in Praise of Myself.' More accurately, I discovered what I have known all along—that being, 'just' being, is the hardest and most fulfilling task of them all."

Here is my mom's poem,

A Poem in Praise of Myself

I woke a certain day past noon
to a meadow deep in bloom and ringed
with peaks of presence: flower, stone, sky.

I woke to see a child
 weeping turning lost
 on the edge of being.

She took my hand, and I gathered her.

I will dance with you, I said, and new
music rang out rushing
silver down slopes of scree
and lifting us.

 She rose
apart—so soon consoled.

It was I, a woman

awakened, who needed her
who made myself whole.

I opened my arms.
She returned and we danced
in descending day. I heard myself singing
and saying what I knew:
Child we are *I am*.

After my mom received her degree from the University of Colorado, she started to slow down, spent more time reflecting, and enjoying herself even though she wasn't working full time. And we grew closer. We walked often, we bird watched and we found so much joy in parenting and grandparenting together. When she was seventy-nine she invited me to go on a mother-daughter trip with her. I was so tickled and excited about taking a trip alone with my mom. We decided on France together and had a delightful time. She meticulously planned the trip so we could visit places where she spent time as a student in Paris and after so many years she still had the very confusing Paris subway system memorized. After Paris we visited the Chartres Cathedral. We walked the same labyrinth that my mom had walked in the 1950s during a walking pilgrimage she made from Paris to Chartres. The look of reverence on her face was probably the same one she had years ago. We rented a car and drove to Britany and Normandy and had funny misunderstandings about directions from French people. The night before my dad's tragic accident we got lost on the way to visit the Normandy beaches. My mom momentarily experienced anxiety in not knowing where we were, and mentioned how stressed out my dad would be without a road map. But the two of us got caught up with the joy of the warm golden glow the setting sun was casting on the farmland all around us.

Life changed drastically with the sudden death of my dad. When we first heard the news my mom cried, "My life partner is gone. My life is over." But Liz Kreider marched on and she continued to find joy in life. She went on many trips, including her 80th birthday celebration in New Hampshire where she canoed and swam in a lake with loons. She went on a bird watching trip to Panama where she was stung by a killer bee and tolerated the pain so she could go on a bird watching tour. In Brazil she climbed to the top of a watch tower. She visited Japan with Christopher and my nephew Jyana. In 2020 she survived a traumatic brain injury, and that didn't stop her determination to continue to find meaning in life. She picked up painting, created a Parkinson's support group and spent lots of fun times with friends and family. She led a long and meaningful life.

I had the opportunity to get to know my mom's metaphorical garden very well. It was both meticulously designed and free flowing. Full of roses, peonies, black eyed Susans, strawberries, birds and joy. Her garden lives on in me, and I will take good care of it.