

A Eulogy for Kathleen De Martini - May 29, 2007

My mom was easy to love. She was really caring, fun and a great storyteller. Most people here probably liked her from the moment they met her. For me, it was an acquired taste. Took about eighteen years.

My mom was not much for blending, and as a kid that's all you want. Blend mom. Please, blend.

In the fourth grade Santa Clause came to our grade school. I was laughing and entertained right along with everyone else. Then the person sitting next to me said, hey that Santa is a woman. I'm thinking no way. Santa's got deep voice. And a beard. Then the person sitting next to me said, hey that's your mom. I'm thinking no way. Of course, when Santa sat on my lap and asked me if I had been a good boy that year, I knew it was in fact, my mom. I think I was red in the face for a month.

My mom taught Catechism about the same time. I was going to Catholic school, but she taught catechism to the kids who went to public school. Many these kids were my friends. And many of them I thought were verging on criminal, at least to the extent that fifth graders at that time could be criminal. They'd spit, swear and maybe steal candy from time to time. Some of them may be here today so watch your purses. I don't know if they loved Jesus, but they loved my mom. Even the worse of them. She told stories, the same way Jesus told parables and kept these kids wildly entertained. Unfortunately, most of these stories revolved around my brother and me. There was a moral to every story, of course, but they often involved things you just didn't want to get out. But every weekend on the basketball court I could count on hearing my deepest, darkest secrets retold and revealed. Mortifying.

My mom was a complicated person. She was a party girl, but she was also partial to Baltimore Catechism. Which is pretty strict doctrine if you aren't familiar with it. She could be pretty scary. Especially if you were little boy. When I got in trouble, she'd raise

her voice and call me by my entire name. Garey Virgil De Martini. Media does that for killers these days. My mom invented it. I still tremble when I think of that voice.

The worse thing I ever did, I didn't do, and it tells you a lot about my mom. One day Bob and I were playing at the park, while my mom was visiting with a friend. After a time, she asked one of her friend's sons to drive by the park and pick us up, and bring us back to her. Well, we didn't know this guy. Bob of course, got in his car and went with him. Against my objections. He was a stranger, and we weren't supposed to accept rides from strangers. When Bob got to the house, he told my mom that I had wanted to stay behind and play. So to show me, she stayed longer with her friend than she would have normally. About two hours later she picked me up at the park, very much prepared to yell at me. But she saw that I was crying and had been crying the whole time because I thought Bob had been kidnapped. I thought he was dead and I was in big trouble. Of course I wasn't, and I think she spent years trying to make it up to me.

So my mom wasn't a blender. And for a kid that can be tough. But as I got older, I began to appreciate her vitality, love for life, interest in people and outrageous humor and behavior. All the things that meant she could never just blend.

I loved my mom and dad all along. They really were caring and wonderful role models, and were very loving parents. But I think through college I didn't want to be seen in public with them. Just wasn't cool. Kind of normal I guess. But I'm glad that stage passes. I've loved my time with them. When I lived in the South Bay, we had dinner weekly. And it was usually a highlight of my week. I missed those dinners when I moved back to Marin.

These past two years, as my mom's health declined, I called her pretty much every night on my way home from work. She was always fun to talk to. And her love and support always came through, no matter how bad the cell phone connection.

In recent months, my mom wasn't able to be all that she had been. Pretty much sedentary, and challenged by the simple act of breathing. But her spirit was as fierce as ever. Early

in her last week in the hospital they put her on a ventilator. It was a horrible thing. And it prevented her from talking, something she very much resented.

At one point she was shaking her fist at my dad, brother and me and we were thinking “what have we done?!” Once the ventilator came off and she was able to talk a little, she explained she was shaking her fist in defiance of her situation, ala Rosie the Riveter, in reference to a card she had received from a friend.

Later that week, even as her voice weakened, she was still amazingly expressive and engaged. I saw her wake up one night in her hospital bed and look out her room towards the nurses’ desk where a couple of nurses were talking. Clearly, my mom wanted to know what was going on and wanted in on the conversation.

I remember near the end telling her that I was sorry that she had to go through all of this, and she just smiled and shrugged her shoulders as if to say “What are you going to do?”

I’d like to thank the medical staff who took care of my mom all of these years, friends and family who have always loved her and delighted in her spirit, Maria, my wife of almost four years, who finally put my mother out of the match-making business, and has been a great comfort to me these past weeks. I’d also like to thank my brother Bob, who has been great at making sense of medical reports, providing us with interpretation and guidance on many fronts. And my dad, who was a great husband and father always, and a wonderful caretaker for my mom since that first diagnosis all those years ago. And of course, I’d like to thank my mom for being my mom. An extraordinary individual. Someone who didn’t blend. Someone who always stood out, wonderfully.

You may have noticed my mom loved being Irish. One of her favorite Irish sayings, and actually one of mine, goes like this: As you are, so once was I. As I am, so you will be. I’m afraid mom, none of us will ever be able to be as you were. You were someone very, very special. Truly, one of a kind. We love you, and we will miss you.