

Remembering

One minute she was there and the next, she was forever gone... Her funeral was a true celebration of family, words, music and friends.

Losing my Mom

A love story of sorts

By Mable Hastings

On November 18, my Mom Clarissa Davis, in her 90th year departed from this world, leaving my siblings and me behind. One minute she was there and the next, she was forever gone.

In the past week I have reflected a lot on this entire experience and thought I'd write about it, as it might help someone else who has gone through or who will one day go through this painful experience. From birth through my childhood years, my Mom was my caregiver, making sure I was fed, clothed, that my health needs were met and that I got an education.

I remember those years as my believing firmly that this was her sole duty in life - to take care of me, and my seven siblings to the best of her ability. We were poor and had little, but somehow she got us through to adulthood, a little bent and bruised maybe, but still in tact. When I was older and had children, my Mom became a caregiver to them; babysitting whenever called upon. She taught my kids so much and it took no time at all before they adored her and she, them. She was there for birthdays, school plays, graduations, to listen with a sympathetic ear when there were rough patches, and to give a word or two of advice. I realize that this was true for each of my siblings and their children as well.

As Mom grew older, her needs began to surface. Her body tired and sometimes failing, she began to deteriorate physically. She went from being active and implicated in our lives to needing us to be more active and implicated in hers. Roles reversed and we became the caregivers.

Eventually, a few months ago, her needs were greater than our ability, so she moved permanently into the Manoir Lac Brome, a full care facility for seniors. This was hard for all of us but we did it together with our Mom and it remained a priority for us to be "with" her as much and as often as possible. We had to make the transition less painful and to keep her knowing that she had NOT been abandoned.

It is the last few months of her life that I have reflected on the most this



MABLE HASTINGS
Clarissa Davis

past week; the week we said good-bye. In bringing her the yarn and needles she had many times requested, we watched her knit pair after pair of mittens and scarves; filling drawers. She just wanted to be productive and busy even as her health prevented her from walking without the aid of a walker; her hands still were able to "do" something. Doing made her feel proud and good inside. "Doing" gave her purpose.

Mom was always afraid of dying; afraid of the unknown. She was afraid of leaving and I believe the fear of the pain that death might bring was difficult for her to face.

A few months ago however, while in the hospital she had an experience that she spoke about often. She said that during the time when she was not expected to pull through a severe heart issue, she had experienced what it might be like to leave her body and that it was like a warm light that was not scary at all. She said that it was the gathering of us, her children that brought her back. From that day forward she said she was no longer afraid to die.

Many things happened in the last months of her life. She began to make more friends at the Manoir and talked to people more than she had. She got close to the caregivers there and developed a love for "her girls" that she referred to as angels.

She wanted my brother who lives in Alberta to visit and he did in September spending a wonderful ten days with she and the family making memories, taking photos and having fun. Mom would ask my sister and me to sing to her and

she even got up one afternoon taking my sister's hands to dance.

Friends she had not seen for a long time stopped by in the weeks before her death to visit. We took her out and she spent time at places she'd missed going to in her hometown since she'd moved in, like the Reilly House. Little did we know, Mom was saying her goodbyes. Did she know? I ask myself this often and I am not sure that she was conscious of it, but that is what was happening. She was happy, she looked great and she seemed to be feeling better.

On that November morning, she got up and dressed for breakfast. She put on her jewellery and did her hair. She went down and ate while visiting with all she met. It was a day like any other, or so it seemed. Returning to her room, she put on her music and started to knit yet another mitten. Shortly thereafter, with a smile on her beautiful face, Mom suffered a cardiac trauma and died quickly surrounded by her angels at the Manoir.

What ensued could best be described as a beautiful farewell. The siblings all gathered quickly in her room with grandchildren coming in from local

towns, as well as Montreal and Sherbrooke. Surrounding her bed, holding her hands, we shared prayers and music and spent hours saying our goodbyes. Her soft white hair, her loving hands and her quiet heart now resting, she left us, just like that and we were, for the first time, without her.

Her funeral was a true celebration of family, words, music and friends. Mom may have had the means of a pauper, but she was sent off like a queen from the opening song to the ray of sunshine bursting through the clouds at the gravesite. Just like her, it came and warmed our hearts and bodies and then disappeared somewhere beyond our sight.

No lessons here or lectures to offer - only a thought. If I'd known how little time I had, I would have stayed for supper that Monday that I visited prior to her death like she asked me to. Sometimes life and all its priorities gain some real perspective when you long for a familiar hand to hold and the face of someone who loved you unconditionally, only to know that you won't get a second chance.

Letter

DEAR EDITOR:

Permit me to comment on a remark made by the Chairman of the Eastern Townships School Board, Mike Murray, in the Dec. 7 article "Bill proposes to abolish school board elections."

He said: "I suspect the minister is still suffering from lack of understanding how public education works."

The Minister understands very well. Let's analyze.

On Dec. 4, Education Minister François Blais tabled parent-friendly Bill 86, which scraps province-wide school elections, and gives more school decision-making power to parents, teachers, principals and support staff.

Moreover, as promised, the bill has granted "formal rights" that should please the English-speaking community, in particular, because they satisfy constitution minority-language education rights. This comes in the form of an option for parents to have elections for the new councils' community reps.

Initial reaction to the bill has been mixed. Predictably, the Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA), is against it. It claims it's unconstitutional, and is planning to go to the Supreme Court of Canada.

However, so far, it seems the French Central Parents' Committees (CPC) and French principals' association are on board.

Furthermore, consider the CTV Montreal poll, which asked on Dec. 4: "Are school boards important to you?"

According to 1455 voters, the answer on Saturday Dec. 5 at 5:27 p.m.

was "No - 69 per cent."

No question, the Bill will need some fine-tuning. Besides the government hearings, which will, undoubtedly, feature various groups, the CPCs of all school boards will meet to discuss the elements and make recommendations.

Meanwhile, the president of the QESBA, Jennifer Maccarone, and former long-time president, and present executive director of the QESBA, Marcus Tabachnick, were featured in an op-ed and article, respectively, in the Dec. 3 edition of the *Montreal Gazette*.

Both Maccarone and Tabachnick have taken the wrong approach in criticizing a majority government, led by Premier Couillard, who promised in January, to make education a priority in 2015 by revamping the system aimed at student success.

Lastly, the QESBA, which is always looking for relevance, is now for the first time in its 17-year history, claiming the organization is linked to "student success." That is not so.

Its raison d'être is to take care of its "valued clients" - school boards and commissioners. That's all.

The English community should now focus on sharpening this piece of innovative education legislation, which is expected to kick-in around October 2016.

Bill 86 is a gift that modernizes and democratizes Quebec's public school system, and is aimed directly to improve student achievement.

CHRIS EUSTACE

Retired teacher and unsuccessful candidate for chair of the LBPSB in Nov. 2014

THE RECORD

1195 Galt East, Sherbrooke, Quebec J1G 1Y7
 FAX: 819-821-3179
 E-MAIL: newsroom@sherbrookerecord.com
 WEBSITE: www.sherbrookerecord.com

SHARON McCULLY PUBLISHER (819) 569-9511
 JOHN EDWARDS NEWS EDITOR (819) 569-6345
 STEPHEN BLAKE CORRESP. EDITOR (819) 569-6345
 SERGE GAGNON CHIEF PRESSMAN (819) 569-9931

DEPARTMENTS

ACCOUNTING (819) 569-9511
 ADVERTISING (819) 569-9525
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KNOWLTON OFFICE

5B VICTORIA STREET, KNOWLTON, QUEBEC, J0E 1V0
 TEL: (450) 242-1188 FAX: (450) 243-5155

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