

"You have excelled them all"

Two women died in February. I was deeply saddened at the death of each, but also grateful I and my family had the chance to know them and enjoy their rich contributions to our lives.

My mother, Jennie Moratto Azevedo, died in Santa Rosa at 88 years, two months and 14 days on February 15. I've known at least 40 years her strong wish to live independently. She did not want to be forced to live in someone else's home, or a nursing home. She managed it on her terms up to the last three days, which were spent in a hospital. Though her family looked on with fear and trepidation, she also managed to drive to church and shopping almost to the last, and without accident. The Lord must have been keeping a close eye indeed.

The other death was that of a dear Jewish lady who was celebrated in a half page story in the Examiner at age 95 as San Francisco's oldest volunteer. Freda Mimrane was a retired professor of Linguistics at Dominican College in San Rafael, and a survivor of the Holocaust. She also survived the collapse of her Marina apartment in the 1989 earthquake. She was an indomitable woman. She took up the study of Russian at 95. My daughter Joan got to know her while trading some services for German lessons. When Freda died, less than a month short of her 98th birthday, on February 22, it was as if Joan had lost two grandmothers on two successive February Saturdays.

Though I did not get to know her well, having known Freda was an experience which will enrich the rest of my daughter's life.

Though one was Catholic, the other Jewish, they shared something besides their common loving concern for my daughter. At each funeral, Christian and Jewish, a portion of chapter 31 of Proverbs was read, the one that includes "She reaches out her hands to the poor, and extends her arms to the needy... She opens her mouth in wisdom... Many are the women of proven worth, but you have excelled them all." The ancient words still sparkled with life.

When she left us, my mother left behind a practical demonstration of her love for her family that I will appreciate to the day I in turn must depart. A little notebook titled "What my Family should know", written in the meticulous handwriting I've envied all my life, spelled out what might have taken us months to gather. It told the location of her will. It told of the cemetery plot, bought years ago. It spelled out her affiliations, and so helped with accurate information for the obituary. She told us which funeral home to deal with. No surprise, but good to know.

She told us how to divide up her possessions. She wanted it done as fairly and evenly as possible. I received back some gifts I sent from Europe 45 years ago, the Bavarian china, the Hummel figurines.

My mother was the last survivor of an entire generation of her family. Nine brothers and sisters died earlier, some by accident, some by illness. One died at eight months, one at 14, one at 20, one at 30, one at 49, two at 56. Only three qualified as senior citizens. Now they're together once again.