

Eulogy
Maureen Stern
May 22, 2009

Maureen Stern was born 70 years ago, the eldest of six siblings. She grew up in South Africa and when she was 16, she went away to Switzerland for finishing school. She was a brilliant intellect, speaking English, Hebrew, French, German and some Italian. Her thesis at the university was a bibliography of South African Jewry, which is still used as a resource today. When she was 12 years old, she had met Peter Stern at a party at her cousin Susan's house in Capetown and they had been childhood friends. By 1958, both Peter and Maureen had returned to South Africa and they met again on the beach. Peter invited himself along to babysit with her that evening. He was amazed at the huge library at her home and even more amazed that not only had she read every book, but could remember the author and publisher. A couple of weeks later, Peter proposed. Maureen was the love of Peter's life, and her devotion to him was unconditional. She enjoyed the good times with him and stood by him during the hard times. Next January would have been their 50th wedding anniversary.

Maureen was completely devoted to her sons, Raymond, Brian, Michael (of blessed memory) and Steven. She was an amazing mother. No matter where they lived, she made sure her boys felt safe in their home, with the family around the dinner table, protected from the outside world. Later, she devoted herself to her daughters-in-law and her grandchildren. She wanted to make sure all her grandchildren knew her and even spent as much time as she could in Israel so that she could become part of their lives.

After the children were grown, Maureen went back to her career life. She was a real

Renaissance woman, working as a librarian, a travel agent, an assistant to an attorney and a database developer. She loved to travel; she would start planning her next trip before she even got home. She had the temperament of a pioneer – strong, assertive, determined. Perhaps if she had lived in another generation, she might have followed in the footsteps of Golda Meir or Margaret Thatcher. She had the wits, the character, the poise.

Maureen had a great capacity to connect with others in a way that was sincere and profound. She allowed others to connect to her as well and was loved by everyone. Her home was always open to family who confided in her and trusted her wisdom. She was the keeper of the family lore and history, both on her side and Peter's. She was a passionate Zionist and had a strong commitment to Jewish tradition. Her seders and holiday dinners were treasured by her extended family.

Maureen was the Queen, always elegant and put together. She was a great shopper and always had a box of shoes in the back of the car. In her calm, elegant way, she was able to adjust to everything that was thrown at her. She and her family made dramatic moves together, from Capetown to Johannesburg to Israel to Oshkosh, Wisconsin, to Great Neck, New York and then here to San Diego. It was traumatic for her to leave South Africa and then to leave Israel. When Peter schlepped her to Oshkosh, she adapted and kept her wry sense of humor. The greatest sadness of her life was the untimely loss of her son, Michael. His death was always uppermost in her thoughts, but she wouldn't allow her own sorrow to spoil the mood for anyone else. Her commitment to life was so strong that she wanted to share it fully with those around her, particularly in others'

happinesses. Even in these last few days at the end of her life, Maureen's primary concern was in making sure her family was taken care of, well fed and warm enough. She wanted you always to feel protected and safe.

Our tradition tells that our great teacher Moses, at the very end of his life, climbed up Mt. Nebo and gazed out at the Promised Land, the land he had worked for forty years to have the privilege to see, but which he would not be able to enter. It is a bittersweet view and the most human view in the world. We all have our Mt. Nebo, the moment in which we know that we will not be allowed to go any further and in which we can gaze out from afar at what we have toiled to accomplish.

What Maureen most desired to accomplish in her life was the founding of a dynasty, children and grandchildren around the table. She wanted you all to grow up to be decent human beings and she was proud that you are. She saw the potential in each one of her children and grandchildren and had faith that that potential would continue to come to fruition. She understood that we exist for the world, not the other way around. She learned from her children not to worry about what other people think. When you live, she told me, really live, not just exist, you have something to contribute to this world.

Maureen Stern gazed out at her life and although she was sad to be taken away so soon, she was grateful and peaceful. And just like the Israelites moving on into the Land of Israel, those of us who knew and loved Maureen will have to continue our journey without her guidance and love. And yet, of course, that guidance and love will in fact always be with you. When you reach out to your family in devotion, when you really

live your precious life, when you rise gracefully above the obstacles before you, Maureen will be with you. Zecher tzadik livrachah. The memory of the righteous is a blessing. May the memory of Maureen Stern be a blessing for you always. Amen.