

At a barbecue last summer I was asked a rather peculiar question.  
"What was it like growing up as Mrs. Kenner's son?"  
She was my best friend's best friend. Loyal and steadfast.  
And it did take me a long time to learn that powerful lesson.  
She was strong willed, protective, an authentic balance of stubborn and strict, bright and playful.  
My work ethic and my passion come from my Mom.  
And I was rewarded with her joy, her pride, her resounding applause.  
There was magic for potential in each human being, in each day and many days felt like Christmas Eve.  
She taught me early on that one of the keys to happiness is...When you put others needs before your own, it is truly in giving that we receive.  
An infinite well of resource and guidance, I relied on her. And it was never too much.  
After being ensnared in a Buddy Kenner-like web of trouble, Junior Year of college, my Mom stepped up to the Disciplinary Board for a friend and me.  
He told me something that night I'll never forget.  
"Your mom is an angel."

You knew her in the classroom, at Pasta Night, Drama Club, Special Olympics.  
You knew her at the pool, on the beach, in church.  
You knew her at Fain 3 Cancer Center.

Her goal was to always put on a bright color, a great piece of jewelry, to look people in the eye, to use good manners, to smile...  
She walked the walk, she lived like the inspirational banners that adorned the bright walls of Room 4.  
She lovingly saw possibilities in every field trip, every circle in the sand, every Scattergories game, holiday songs, nights out for pizza with ice cream sundaes, every grandchild, niece, nephew, student and family member.

She chose Grace as her confirmation name and lived by that code. Her philosophy was radiant.  
A legacy of love.  
She believed mutual accountability was the key to promote effort and respect. She had very high expectations. Coasting, mediocrity, was not something she accepted.  
She was the woman always looking for the teachable moment.  
To give them. And to receive them.

Because she knew at a young age what she wanted to do, she was able to live her dream. The deeper she got into her long flowing career, the more it reinforced the idea she was where she supposed to be.

The rewards she found in teaching were small moments loaded with power and inspiration.

The summer she prepared for her 23<sup>rd</sup> year, she made a home visit to introduce herself to a new student and his family. Arriving at his address, she realized it was a shelter for homeless women and their children.

She was put into the lives of her students for a special reason. It was her job to create a home in the classroom.

But...Mom could be intense.

Mrs. Pat would tell her, "Mrs. Kenner, lighten up! It's Christmas!"

Mom would say, "Mrs. Pat, we have to hold on! They go wild at Christmas!"

It was the children who held the most important role in strengthening her skills as a lifelong learner.

The kids reinforced her desire to push for inclusivity and understanding.

By witnessing how they and their families made difficult decisions through hardships and limitations, challenges and setbacks, mom learned to remember the faces of the children. Her moral compass was governed by the children.

...After her diagnosis...Mom was scared.

Her surgeon took her by the hand and told her a story.

His father came to Rhode Island from Pakistan and wanted to go fishing. That was the thing he did with his dad when he was little. Unfortunately his dad got sick and passed away before they had the chance. He told Mom he beat himself up over it.

"I want you to learn from this," he told Mom. "Do not spend a moment of your healing trying to change the past because you're going to sabotage your future."

He gave Mom the greatest gift of her healing.

For the next four years, Mom constantly said, "Yes." She lived for the moment.

She chose to do the right thing for the right reasons with the information she had and committed. She pushed herself seven more minutes, seven more weeks, seven more months.

After a particularly heartbreaking CT scan, one of the many detours she was asked to take, Mom asked, "How will I know to trust myself? How will I know if I'm strong enough?"

Her doctor's right hand woman put her arms around her and said, "You've lived your life as an intuitive person, intelligent, thoughtful and optimistic."

Mom's cancer was in her gut. And she was being asked to listen to her gut instincts. In the face of adversity, her spirit shined, empathetic and tough.

She was flexible, tried new perspectives. She never lost hope. Made opportunities to find heart rocks in the sand and the littlest of tulips pushing out to the sun.

She never stopped asking questions. Satiating that vibrant thirst to learn and understand.

One day, a CNA giving her an EKG, apologized for the cold wires. Mom took the time to ask her where she got her certification. She answered, "In high school, Davies Vocational High."

Mom said to her, "Gosh, you must really be a hard worker."

Light beamed across her face.

She said, "Thank you. I am. People teased me when I went to a vocational school, but I had a job the day I graduated high school. I knew I wouldn't get a chance to go to college."

The Monday after Mom's graduation, the School Department called.

"Can we count on you for the fall?" They asked.

"Yes, you can absolutely count on me for the fall."

She fulfilled that promise with such new meaning considering dad's diagnosis, his accident and her own complicated illness...

His eyes would light up when she was in the room. She was royalty.

...My Dad.

...Now my Mom.

Swans.

...We ran a triangle. Mom was our point.

Living proof that faith does matter, Mom let others carry her when she needed to be carried.

After a lifetime of working with the handicapped and elderly, working for the disenfranchised, Mom's cancer gave her the clarity that helped validate her core beliefs.

People are good.

Mom found her joy and happiness in the joy and happiness of others.

When you take the time to make deep, meaningful connections, those threads remain, stretch and thrive to unbeknownst corners of faith.

So, to honor Mom, I want to thank you.

My grandmother taught my Mom that, "the more people who love a child, the better."

By being All In, you added profound comfort to her, dad, our entire family, and myself.

I am so proud to know that my Mom was a woman the community rallied behind. Cheering for her accomplishments and healing, you nourished her with daily visits, leas of orchids, origami cranes, hand made cards, gift boxes, songs and signs on our lawn.

You never stopped being present with us, witnessing, participating, expressing and sharing love, encouragement, insight and calm. You have been true competitors, warriors and winners, from whom Mom carried your kindness, your prayers and

friendship. With the endless strength and hope you provided, Mom continued to experience compassion, laughter and the thrills of building new memories.

From the bottom of my heart, please know your efforts made a positive impact on the direction of our lives.

I am beyond grateful, I am forever a better person because each of you were willing to learn...from...my...Mom, to bring those great lessons back into our lives, our home and our souls.

- 1) Treat others the way you want to be treated.
- 2) If you give respect, you get respect.
- 3) Kindness matters.

There is no more Maureen Kenner.

Where will we find that spark, that encouragement, that excitement, that bond, that love?

We deserve to be comforted. We deserve to find peace.

We actively participated. We showed up, we learned, we adapted.

We opened ourselves up to heartache. We experienced life. We have been on a search for hope in a world often filled with fear and uncertainty.

And there has been so much color. We will have our traditions and our rituals.

I feel profoundly sad.

What's going to happen now to 401-273-8466?

What's going to happen to 39 Fosdyke Street?

I wish I could say, "Why me?" Or, "It's not fair." But I am now somehow the strongest version of myself so, "Let Me Be Brave In My Attempt."

What more can I ask for from my parent's story?

Mom was a teacher. Mom was a student. She loved life.

And she loved spending the beauty of a changing season with all of you.

As a team...I am so proud my mom switched me with Baby Boy Santorro at birth.

I hope you remember Mom was in your face, brazen and persistent, joyful and curious, laughing, free spirited. Virtuous. She never stopped.

It is okay to laugh. To totally laugh. And to cry too.

I hope you remember she was there for you, that she gave up her lunch break to walk you to the library, that she attended your play with chemotherapy on. She was there when you came back to Vartan on Field Day with your High School diploma, when you called from Fort Smith, Arkansas to announce your newborn son. When you think of Mom, may you continue to be inspired to do something for someone else.

Let that spirit grow. Let it make a difference.

You are capable.

You are already a success story.

Hard work really does pay off. There is Room For Grace.