

Lois Brandow. In her younger days some of her uncles referred to her as “kalter grin leber”, which translated from the Yiddish means “cold, green liver”, a colorful term for someone who is cool, calm and collected. She was also called “The Deb” for her seeming sophistication. Other, different qualities emerged as her life went on, as many of us in this room can attest to. We came to know Lois as down to earth, affectionate and as caring as anyone we’d ever met.

Although her mother modeled a spontaneous life of moving from place to place and job to job, Lois opted for a stable career. When she was a student at Ryder College, the first person in her family to attend college, her anatomy and physiology teacher encouraged her to consider becoming a physician, because he saw her passion and skill for the medical field. Perhaps because it was not common at that time for women to enter medical school, she remained with her studies to become a medical transcriptionist.

Her worldview was shaped by early losses and trauma. Her father, Albert Schnee, died of spinal meningitis when she was just six months old. She carried vivid memories of losing her younger sister, Millie, on the beach in Atlantic City, when Millie was left in her care, though thankfully Millie was eventually found. One of Lois’ closest friends was killed in a plane crash en route to her honeymoon. And my brother, Roy, had to spend most of his first year of life in the hospital getting numerous operations with uncertain outcomes at a time when the family had no health insurance coverage.

These experiences left her with a sense that the world was an unpredictable and unsafe place, so she needed to keep her family safe from danger and she had to be financially prepared for unexpected crises.

When Roy turned 18 and the Vietnam War was raging, she sent him off to the draft board with X-rays of his esophagus to convince them he was not eligible, even though all they wanted was for him to fill out a simple form. When my father was unable to hold down a job, she took on primary responsibility for supporting our family of four, making sure that not only were our basic needs met, but that there was extra for luxuries like summer camp, braces, and music lessons. At the age of 75, she taught herself how to use a computer so she could keep up with the technology of the times and continue to earn a living typing for doctors.

While she may have seemed demure to some, she was not shy about going after what she wanted. When they decided to move out of Mt. Airy, she and my father went for a drive in various suburban neighborhoods. She found a street she liked in Elkins Park, a street with about 7 duplex houses, across from an athletic field. She got hold of a Montgomery County phone book starting with the “A”s, read each address until she found someone who lived on that street. She called the number and said, “Someone told me you might be thinking of selling your house...” to which the voice on the

other end replied, "Well, yes, we are, but how did you know?" And that's how we moved to High School Rd. Lucky for her the selling family was named Bernstein and not Zimmerman.

At age 49 she was called to a life transformation, deciding she did not want to spend the next 25 years as she'd spent the previous 25. She left her long-term stressful job, ended her marriage, and thoroughly enjoyed her new found independence. Subsequently, she opened her heart again to love, and found a wonderful partner in Vincent Zalenski, who danced with her, cared for her, and whose easygoing nature provided a perfect counterbalance to her tendency towards worry. She was Vince's steadfast caretaker in the difficult last 2 years of his life, and was determined not to require anyone else to do the same for her. However, the universe had other plans, and she has faced these last 2 ½ years with as much grace and courage as is humanly possible.

So who have we lost this week?

Some have lost a close friend who was a good listener, generous with her time, her advice and her possessions, who would do anything for us and who always stayed in touch. There are people in this room, like Shirley and Eleanor and Loretta, who have been friends with my mother for many decades, and that is a tribute to her constancy and quality as a friend.

Elliot and Jenna have lost a loving grandmother, who so enjoyed that role that she later became a surrogate grandma to the babies of her neighbors, Serena and Stuart Davis.

Roy and I have lost a loyal mother who was always there for us with love and support, even when we did things that were hard for her to accept, even when we didn't reach out to her as much as she might have wanted.

Millie has lost her only sister, a sister who refused to consider moving to where I live when she first got sick, saying, "I can't leave Aunt Millie, I want to be here for her if she needs me."

Much gratitude is owed to my Aunt Millie, who for two years drove my mother to hundreds of doctor's appointments, ran errands, and for the past 7 months covered the night shift so we wouldn't have to place mom in a nursing home; to my mother's home health aide and companion, Winsome Grant, who provided companionship, humor, excellent care and encouragement for the past two years;

and to the Abington Hospital Hospice staff who guided us through the process of her last months of life.

After becoming disabled, my mother did everything possible to improve her condition. About 7 months ago she was ready to stop, to move on to the next phase of her journey. That phase took much longer than she'd hoped or expected,

but she has reached her destination at last. Let us remember that as we grieve her loss and are filled with our love for her. She asked that this story be read at her funeral:

“I am standing upon the seashore. A ship at my side spreads her white sails to the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean. She is an object of beauty and strength, and I stand and watch her until at length she is only a speck of white cloud just where the sea and sky meet and mingle with each other. Then someone at my side exclaims, “There! She’s gone.”

Gone where? Gone from my sight – that is all. She is just as large in hull and mast and spar as she was when she left my side, and just as able to bear her load of living freight to the place of her destination. Her diminished size is in me, not in her.

And just at the moment when someone at my side says, “She’s gone,” there are other eyes watching for her coming, and other voices ready to take up the glad shout, “There she comes!”

And that is dying.