



FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH

“The Holidays Will Not Be The Same”

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It's beginning to look a lot like...(insert most appropriate religious or secular holiday). Yes, the thermometer in H-Town this fine December afternoon registered a brisk 76 degrees. Restless kids prepared for a few weeks out of school (and far too much SpongeBob SquarePants on TV). My favorite greasy spoon, Bellaire Broiler Burger, is fixin' (that's proper grammar in Texas) to roll back their holiday prices to the day they first opened in 1972. (Nothing like a 75 cent chili cheeseburger/hot dog combo...better known as the number 6.) And 14-month old Zoe Brounes is excited about her first annual holiday season trip to visit Mommy's family in Florida. Sadly, this trip will not be like the others and we will all feel a tremendous void during the stay. Late last month, we said goodbye to Grandma Libby Hachenburg, Barb's mom, who passed away just one day shy of her 81st birthday.

Helen Libby Sandman Hachenburg died on November 27, 2011, a mere two months after being diagnosed with lung cancer. We learned of her illness on our oldest daughter's fifth birthday when she called to offer good wishes. She spoke of her doctor's report in the most matter of fact of terms, as if she had just learned she had a common cold. But that's the way Libby was....she never dwelled on herself and didn't want to burden others with any of her issues. In that call and the ones that took place in the following days, she talked of plans for the upcoming Jewish holidays and began thinking about her Thanksgiving menu, the holiday that she proudly hosted each year. This year the family would gather at Libby's oldest son's house, but she would still be doing much of the heavy lifting when it came to food preparation. (At least, that was the plan.)

The diagnosis was almost an after-thought because Libby was strong, strong-willed, and well-prepared to lick this thing. The Weinstein (her mom's family) women have a history of enjoying long generations; in recent years, Libby had been the primary caregiver and constant companion for her 99 year old aunt who died just short of that 100 milestone. Sadly, Libby's decline was rapid and she never really had a fighting chance. She suffered a collapsed lung that made her too weak for certain necessary treatments. She was unable to eat or drink much and the lack of nourishment complicated matters further. Ultimately the doctors suggested the family attempt to make her as comfortable as possible...and that's what they did as she moved into hospice for the final days of her life. Each of her children had the opportunity to sit with her and visit, share stories about days long passed, talk about current events and the daily headlines that Libby so enjoyed to follow. Her three kids were by her side at the very end. They comforted each other through their sadness, and enjoyed much-needed laughter about cherished memories of life in the Hachenburg household. They experienced a closeness that was testament to the job she had done as a mother.

WHO NEEDS GOOGLE?

Libby was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, but moved to Miramar, Florida as a young mother with her husband, Walter, where they raised three children. She and Walter were both dancers, having met as instructors in a New York studio, and they shared that passion throughout their 42 years together. (Fortunately, my wife didn't inherit that zest for dancing.) Libby was a true intellectual, knowledgeable about virtually every topic. She read multiple books a week (and I'm not talking Dr. Seuss) and various news magazines to keep up with current affairs. She watched nightly news programs and felt that she had lost a close friend when Tim Russert died in 2008. My wife says that her mom was "Google before there was Google," and was always her first phone call when she needed information about some crucial topic. Libby was an avid

Jeopardy watcher and could have bankrupted Alex Trubek if ever chosen to be a contestant on the show (unless the topic was Rock and Roll music). She also knew her way around a mah jong table (another trait she failed to pass down to the next generation).

Because of her personal thirst for knowledge, she placed considerable importance on the value of education and all three of her children hold graduate degrees. She bemoaned the Florida public school system because she always believed her kids were not properly taught geography, a fact confirmed recently when one of them (who shall remain nameless) asked her where in Africa one could find Guyana. (Upon hearing the story, I “googled” Guyana only to learn that it is actually located in South America...apparently the Texas public school system is not much better when it comes to geography.) Libby was so very proud of her daughter’s accomplishments in the legal profession (there must not have been questions about geography on the Texas bar), though it was the confidence instilled in her at a young age by her mom as well as the feeling that women can accomplish anything in this country that contributed so much to that success.

A SPECIAL GRANDMOTHERLY BOND

Libby brought out the intellectual side in Emmy and their conversations often consisted of school recaps and lessons learned. Each year, Libby would move into her son’s house (where we stay) for those days we are in town to make of the most of our short time together. Emmy and Libby would read together nightly during these visits and we planned to bring Emmy’s “Bob” (early reader) books to Florida where, under Libby’s tutelage, they undoubtedly would have completed the initial series and started the next (which is far better than Emmy’s typical obsession about the plight of Plankton as he tried to steal the Crusty Crab formula). Libby came to Houston for a prior birthday celebration and the two spent evenings together pouring over everything Sandra Boynton and Eric Carle ever wrote (two authors Libby may have not known much about before that trip). Undoubtedly Zoe soon would have been the beneficiary of this special time as well as she now counts Boynton and Carle among her favorite writers. Emmy felt challenged during their visits and was so sad to learn that she and Grandma Libby will not be reading together during this upcoming trip. She does promise to read her Bob books for the rest of the family and knows that her grandma will be listening.

Emmy has been eager to teach her sister about their grandmother. She shows Zoe pictures from photo albums and reminisces about past trips and times spent together. She takes great comfort in knowing that Grandma Libby will be reunited with Grandpa Walter in heaven. Though he had died before she was born, Emmy has learned a great many things about him and is excited that the couple soon will once again be dancing together (though Emmy herself is not much of a dancer). She also hopes that Libby will meet Pop (my dad) who we believe has become very good friends with Walter as the two care for Max (the cat), Flo (the dog), and Lukey (the fish) who all reside together in heaven as well. Mainly Emmy is happy that Grandma Libby is no longer sick and is able to do all of the activities she once enjoyed without the pain that had taken over her body. She knows that her grandmother can still listen to her when she reads and will follow her progress in school (and may even enjoy an occasional SpongeBob episode while looking down on the family).

Yes, this holiday trip to Florida will be different (and difficult) indeed, but the quality time spent with family will ease the loss. We will hear new stories about fun times from years passed and the sibling “rivalries” she refereed. There will be laughter and sadness, moments of reflection, new memories created. The closeness of family will again represent a tribute to Helen Libby Sandman Hachenburg: beloved wife, sister, mother, grandmother, aunt, niece, and cousin. Libby Hachenburg: dancer, intellectual, avid reader, friend. She will be deeply missed.

FOR WHAT IT'S WORTH is a publication of Brounes & Associates focusing on not much of anything other than personal anecdotes, musings, and mindless thoughts about life. Please call Ron at 713-962-9986 (ron@ronbrounes.com) for questions and/or comments, and check out www.ronbrounes.com for earlier issues and for financially-oriented pieces. Emmy and Zoe's family wishes to thank our extended family and dear friends for their support and warm wishes during this time.