

## HESPED FOR KERRYNN BAKER, 16 March 2016

When KerryNN gave her stupendously brave speech at Gabe's engagement she practised it on me several times so that she could drain herself of the emotion. I've only had one chance of reading mine to her and I don't think I'm ready to get through it - but I'll do my best (and if I fall asleep or slur it's because I'm on sedatives, which are on steady tap from my father). You'll have to excuse me that I have my back to KerryNN but she has heard this eulogy a few days ago. I was given the stamp of approval through her smiles, though she did warn me that she was undeserving of my words and that it was too long. I haven't changed any of the praise but I've cut the words in half, and it's still too long. So bear with me but brevity feels like an injustice to our darling KerryNN:

Nine months ago on a Thursday night KerryNN and I were eating dinner at one of our favourite haunts, Ilona Staller. It was part of our privileged life, meeting an array of interesting overseas visitors. This time it was dinner with Sergio Della Pergola, the world's foremost Jewish demographer whose job it is to count every Jew and project how many of us would exist in the future. I never bothered to ask how he accounted for the randomness of life - the calculus that can reduce his figures by a singular one - an infinite one - simply because life catches a person out with unexpected happenings. It was a

fascinating dinner, full of laughter and lively conversation, and also my favourite pasta which is a permanent item on the cash register. Kerryn indulged herself with chips and later that night woke groaning to regret her choice of fatty food. Only in the morning did she admit to me she'd been kept up the night before by similar discomfort.

It was from such delights - a charmed life of exciting encounters, travels, dinners, augmented by anticipation of a summer of planned trips to Rwanda and Zanzibar - that prompted Kerryn to check in with a doctor. The doctors were quick to make the diagnosis and by Monday we got the ominous call as Kerryn was exiting what was to become our second home at Cabrini hospital. 'Come immediately to our office,' she was told, X-rays at hand. Pause. 'And can you bring your husband Mark with you.'

We met outside the clinic and and walked through the doors in a numb state, aware that Kerryn's self-diagnosis of gallstones was more malevolent than anything we could imagine. The doctor broke the news gently with the quizzical words, Linitis Plastica, quickly adding 'And don't ask any questions that you don't want the answers to.'

That in itself was the answer we dreaded most and what followed was a string of phone calls and appointments which landed us in this surreal world that literally turned our lives upside down. The images of that week will always stay with us - poor Gabe, our older son, who believed that by sheer will

and love he could fix things and to his credit, his outpouring of tears was almost enough to convince the doctors to alter their diagnosis. Rachel who was the only one living with us in Aroona at the time, in the midst of exams, lifting our spirits with her can-do anything hands - cooking, shopping, comforting. And Sarah, who walked in the house from work and expressed the the only words that could adequately sum up our feelings. Falling into Kerryn's arms, our doctor intern cried, 'What the fuck!'

Indeed, that word was used more than once, not as an obscenity, not as an accusation with an accusing or belligerent finger held up, for Kerryn never once let go of her equanimity or expressed anger, but something deeper, an acknowledgment of the bewildering mystery of life.

In one such moment when Kerryn was violently vomiting, she was leaning forward on a hospital bed, her back being gently stroked by a nurse who despite her experience on the oncology ward felt a surplus of empathy for Kerryn's suffering. Soothing her patient lovingly, she whispered gently to Kerryn the only words she could offer in the face of the futility of medicinal healing. 'We have to pray together,' she said. 'Do you pray?' Kerryn mid-vomit played along. 'Yes. Sometimes I pray.' And in perfect poise that ruptured our image of Kerryn's gentle manner, added: 'And sometimes I just say Fuck.'

That's right. Like Primo Levi in the camps who

acknowledged that ordinary language like hunger and cold no longer made sense to the suffering, Kerryn had to reach deep into a jarring vocabulary to articulate something that expressed our entry into a parallel planet of anguish and apocalyptic eruptions. For our idyllic world was spinning out of control at rapid pace. From that healthy meal on Carlisle Street - not just a meal - from a healthy and vibrant life of work as a family counsellor and doctor, of travel, as an engaged mother, sister, daughter in law, auntie, friend - Kerryn found herself gripped by a dybbuk that was taking over her body. Within days of the diagnosis, she could no longer lift her left leg. After one of a battery of tests on a Friday she insisted to the nurse that she would have to leave early because she had her regular Friday night blow dry at Hollywood Cutters. She made it on time, but as I watched her in the maze of mirrors, I saw her writhe in pain. Where was this monstrous alien coming from and what was it doing to her?

The weeks ahead that culminated in her first chemotherapy, felt like a war, a metaphor that often accompanies cancer with its reference to patients as warriors and treatments as second and third line battle positions. That day, two weeks after the era that divided time into BC - Before Cancer - to AC - After Cancer - we brought Kerryn home. The family troops all did their bit. Ann came in with supermarket trolleys of fattening food, delivered lovingly to rescue Kerryn. The entrance to our

home that greeted us was a shrine of flowers fit for Princess Diana. Baskets of food and kugelhoff were left at the door. We settled Kerryn on the couch to watch Masterchef and within an hour the toxic fluids erupted. Sarah with her medical training came to the rescue, washing towels and helping Kerryn through the throes of nausea. A flash of memory struck me that moment, one of many moments of history repeating itself. Kerryn had been an intern when her own mother was suffering cancer. She had injected her mother with morphine, a fateful act which impacted to some measure on Kerryn's career choices. I vowed that I would never let Sarah be Kerryn's doctor - only her daughter - but not before we let Sarah clean up the mess.

My job came at 3 am, the fulfilment of a craving for something totally unprecedented that could only be got from the supermarket. Teddy Bear Biscuits. The cravings recalled an earlier time, when Kerryn, pregnant with Gabe in Jerusalem, sent me on regular missions for blintzes, the best of which came from the terrace of the King David hotel. The mission accomplished yielded nothing more appetising than an ear Kerryn nibbled on, the rest of the teddy bear left forlornly on a plate while we rushed Kerryn to ER to cope with dehydration, nausea and the creeping tumour; well, not creeping - it was more like a rearguard blitz that took at least ten days to quash.

After the seventh day on the fourth floor of Cabrini hospital

we were transferred to the remarkable Prahran palliative hospice - on the surface, a cosy B & B populated by angelic legions. 'We're not ready,' I wanted to scream. That was when I had my first death nightmare, sleeping in a low pull out sofa alongside Kerryn. In my dream, I was driving in the dark to Norwood Rd, our first marital home. From behind the front door, near the piano that Kerryn had bought though no one really played it, there was a shadowy intruder. I woke shouting for help in the hospital, my heart racing from the terror of the figure that could only be the angel of death, and woke Kerryn who in her traditional role, comforted me when it was I who was supposed to comfort Kerryn.

That night someone died in the adjacent room, and we sat with the door sealed, our heads bowed and ears capped against the sounds of death - the ziplock bag, the muttering of prayers. It was no dream but a premonition of how our time would inexorably end, as it did literally yesterday, when me and my kids wrapped Kerryn up in a traumatic image that will never leave us.

It took Kerryn another 8 months to have her first death dream. Though I often saw her agitated at night, she woke one night in a sweat. It was after Gabe's engagement party, in the lead-up to the race to get to the chuppa. She was crying.

Marky, she said. I dreamed we were at the airport at the gate ready to go overseas to America. Just as the gate opened I turned but it wasn't your face anymore. It was my father

Paul. By the time the doors closed I realised I didn't have insurance. I panicked. I would never be able to get back to you. Days later she had another dream - she was on a train searching for her real father. Rachel was with her and they were being assaulted by a gang of rogues. One of the men unmasked himself behind a white veil. Kerryn was alone to fight the angel. She woke before the train reached its destination, terrified, unable to find her father. Days before her death she would say to me, don't worry, I'm only going to America - you will find me.

When Kerryn got home after ten days in that first month, alive, though surely a contender for the Guinness book of records for answering all those loving text messages, she was offered all sorts of services from the Palliative care team. Never one to give up a deal, she accepted the offer of a biographer. The biographer would come for 6 sessions, write her life, and then compile it into a book.

I was skeptical from the outset, and made sure that the sessions were conducted in my study next to copies of *The Fiftieth Gate*. I think I was jealous - who was this stranger who would write my wife's life?

Despite the most professional and compassionate efforts of the biographer, it was a disaster. Kerryn spent the first session answering one question - when were you born, and just cried and cried. She spent the second session talking about her parents, and barely got past pronouncing their names Sally

and Paul. By the third she was despairing. My life is so boring, she would plead, there's nothing to say.

And yet - Kerry's life was the stuff of high tragedy, a life so worth telling that the Shakespearean dramatics of it concealed from her the ability to speak of its significance and enduring impact.

Kerry was born on 27 October 1960 into a new decade, the hippy era, but she was more of a 70s and 80s child in her dance style which I could never match. Her favourite film which she watched several times in the last months was *The Big Chill*, for it had all the ingredients for her - an opening scene with a funeral, a reunion of friends, lives full of unfulfilled promise, and more important than anything - great music. When I asked her what she wanted for her funeral she said a song.

A niggun you mean.

No, a song.

And she hummed it for me.

*You can't always get what you want.*

Kerry at the end of her life didn't get what she wanted, a yearning repeated from an earlier stage of her youth. For this is the theme of her story - what she didn't get in her life she dedicated herself to giving to others, mostly our children but also me. For a long time, she never spoke about her childhood - it was too painful, and for many it made her a closed book. Only with her cancer, and as a reaction to the silence that



shrouded the divorce of her parents Sally and Paul, and the early losses of her youth, did she talk - publicly proclaiming at Gabe's engagement the difficulties of her adolescence.

The memories of her family home in Miliara Grove with Ann, Bradley and Glenn were filled with happy stories - Kerryn recently reminded Bradley that despite the layers of bitterness that later overlaid their childhood, she remembers good times - Bradley pushing her on a swing in the park, triggering in him a deep love which had him calling his sister my angel in her final months; with Ann, her protector who would always carry her younger sister if she was upset — and of course with their baby brother Glenn. Yet those halcyon years where they worked in Fairways on Elizabeth St selling jeans, where marred by a bitter divorce that in Kerryn's public words, made the War of the Roses look like a Garden party.

Let me say something at this point about me and Kerryn because it is part of the first act of her life. If family ties and the same school weren't enough to link us in Grade 2, our classroom teacher might have sealed the deal. In the battle for pushy interventionist parents, of which Sally and my mother Genia were bantam weight matches, my mother got in first and refused my placement in Kerryn's class with Mrs Yaxley, or Yackabom as we called her. That set off a domino effect where Kerryn went through a different trail of desks and to this day earned the distinction of being able to cite by rote Mrs Fuzy's catechisms about the Renaissance and weather systems.

It was only in Form 12, as we called it then, that fate reunited us in Nana Newman's biology class, again because of the intervention of my mother who insisted that a boy with half a brain must be educated in the sciences. Kerryn, was naturally gifted at these things, annoyed by my prankishness, and to my everlasting pride proved that in an era of gender discrimination girls at Scopus could show their mettle by topping HSC general maths. This of course marks the cerebral divide in my family - Kerryn balanced between left and right, and me fuzzy in some other spaced out zone.

Another moment of union took place in a photograph that Kerryn's school friend Dianne recently brought us. We were visiting Mt Martha in 1977 and sharing a beach towel. I would like to tell my kids that this was the moment of adolescent passion but the reason I had forgotten that moment with Kerryn is that my eyes were fixated on the white bikini of another girl who I fancied at the time. After that, we parted ways - Kerryn starting medicine at Melbourne University, and me off for a year to Yeshiva where my hair was shorn, but grew back to Afro length in the second half of the year after I rebelled and became a Habo boy like her father.

I still recall Kerryn visiting Israel on Academy, the shorter version of the gap year away, and meeting her in a large hall. I approached her with interest - more than just the curiosity of a school reunion. There was something enigmatic about Kerryn even before she started wearing her modest outfits of every

shade and cut of black - I associated her at the time with two of the books we had read in the same English class - The French Lieutenants Woman, and Marion from the Go-Between, women who harboured secrets and deep-seated, exotic, almost erotic mystery. This was around the time when I was discovering my own black box of secrets as a second generation Holocaust survivor - a collective story of myths and legends. Her black box of secrets were personal, visceral, something that she found difficult sharing with anyone.

For in addition to the divorce that had so embittered her life, her mother Sally had contracted breast cancer, a tumour that thankfully is totally unrelated to the randomness of Kerryn's illness. This was the era when cancer was a secret disease, unspoken about. It was an awkward and foreign scene I encountered - something that our gorgeous Ralph and nurturing Tami had known from the outset but which for me was hard to decipher. Who was this Mr Young who had married Sally and was constantly baking apple cakes? Why didn't anyone talk about the divorce? How was this woman living with cancer? Was she wearing a wig or was it her real hair?

In one of the many ironies, the man who supplied Kerryn with a wig before her first chemo had not only provided the same service for Kerryn's Mum, but had even dated her once.

I met Kerryn again at a party I gatecrashed, and though my ego likes to say it was she who chased me, it was I who was

smitten by her wit, her intelligence, and a poetic side whose output is lost somewhere in a drawer I am determined to uncover. We moved from friendship to love as her mother's illness progressed.

There are so many memories I would like to recall - the late nights on Fitzroy street talking over pizza, parking the car on St Kilda beach and listening to cassette tapes of Steven Bishop singing Never Letting Go which I played to her only yesterday, and Jim Croce's Time in a Bottle - how I wish I could get hold of that magic bottle now - and most vividly, racing passionately up a stairwell to the emergency fire exit in the penthouse where I crept past her mother's sick bed into Kerry's bedroom. Kerry's Buba, a fierce matriarch, was kept in the dark about many things, including the premarital holiday we took to Noosa, allegedly with her girlfriends.

Like her parents, we never formally proposed, I remember sitting in a car outside Edinburgh and it was just decided. We went into my parent's bedroom and told them, and they were delighted not only that Kerry was to be their daughter in law, but that I was marrying into a fine family. As for me, the son in law, I know that Sally loved me, but she didn't quite know what to make of her daughter marrying an Arts student with a miniature crocheted kippa who dreamed of making aliyah. With her powers, she convinced me to see a psychologist - not as therapy, but with someone who might convince me to pursue a more practical career. I obliged for one semester out

of obedience and a measure of self doubt, until I abandoned the experimental rats and returned to my set vocation.

Sally fought to make it to our chuppa in November 1982 but ended up in hospital soon after and almost died, only to recover by the sheer force of her will to make it months later to the birth of her first grandchild, Elliot. The story is legendary - she was here for the Friday night shalom zachor serving bobbies, but by the bris she was in hospital and died soon after.

Eleven months later Paul, newly married, strong, with a deep voice that could scare his beloved Carlton players to kick winning goals, had a mild heart attack. He recovered from the elective surgery but after our first visit to the hospital we were called back to be told that he had bled internally and died. Within the space of a year of mourning, Kerry, Ann, Brad and Glenn were orphaned.

Glenn was tossed from house to house - cared for by Ann and Ralph who parented him lovingly. When finally time permitted Kerry to take a break from her final year of med - we went on our dream honeymoon with a chaperone - Glenn. Glenn proved to be great company through Vienna where we will always remember asking the waitress what Speck is, to which we were told as though we were unwelcome Jews who had wandered back to reclaim the city, Speck is Speck. Glenn, 8 years younger than me, also trained me for my UMAT test for entry into university, using his logical powers on the back

of a Euro train to help me understand what happens if X sits next to Y in a rowboat and Z sits two seats across, who is sitting in the middle seat?

We returned from that trip for the continuation of a Machievallian drama - a fight over a will that I'd prefer not to talk about now, but which formed so much of the drama of Kerryn's life. The result was a prolonged court case of QC's, but our real shield then, as always, was Ann - fierce and protective of Kerryn, and Ralph, whose bond with Kerryn is so deep that we have spent many conversations on the phone crying in inappropriate places such as the Coles supermarket. I know, and you know, that Kerryn and I are forever grateful for your mature protection, and for introducing us in our Oxford days to the concept of a fax machine, which could only be found in a postoffice in far away Reading.

I'm not sure exactly where this long first Act ends - in a courtroom drama, in the loss of two parents - but Victor Hugo would have made much of it in the Wein version of *Les Misérables*.

I am only partially going to credit myself with Act 2 - the redemption of Kerryn, who in her own right became an accomplished doctor, yet was still locked in an unresolved drama. The key to our escape was to find refuge in another world. That world was fuelled by 1980s fantasies screened on our television sets such as *The Jewel in the Crown*, from which we named our family company Mayapore because it sounded

so exotic, and Brideshead Revisited. Guilt ridden Catholics we weren't, but when faced with the choice of universities, we opted not for America but for Sebastian's Oxford playground, which is maybe the source of the teddy bear fixation. I went ahead for a term whose name didn't appear in my shtetl lexicon - Michaelmas - and left Kerry for a semester at Caulfield hospital where she formed that special bond with my mother. Every lunch, she would go there and smoke cigarettes, or inhale hers passively, and at night she slept in Edinburgh in my brother Johnny's room, perhaps fulfilling my mother's dream of a doctor in the house.

I was only reminded of that episode by Kerry recently, for one of the terrors I've had of losing Kerry, is that I have delegated my memory to her much sharper mind. She is constantly reminding me of events I have forgotten, which I must now scribble down, such as the photographs on our wedding day being ruined and having to pose in full regalia the next day, or the 21st surprise party I organised for her on the banks of the Yarra. Amongst the 60s floral wallpaper in our family kitchen, my mother and Kerry formed a bond which only strengthened through time, and though my mother will always say that a mother-in-law can never replace a mother, my mother was more than a mother-in-law and Kerry more than a daughter. One can only weep at the tragic loss of my mother, a theme repeated from her own childhood, who though supported by Johnny and Anita whom she loves

and love her, has lost - in her words - her best friend and lifeline to old age.

Act 2 opens on the train to Oxford, our first view of the spires and the Sheldonian Theatre, our entry into our new home at Wolfson college. Kerryen enrolled at Lincoln College and took up a research position at the Radcliffe infirmary, writing a paper with a distinguished scientist on inflammatory bowel disease. She was rewarded with a research trip to Basle, which I thought I deserved because it was the site of the first Zionist congress, and then she took an even better trip with our new found Canadian friends on a cordon bleu cooking class in Paris well before reality TV chefs become the rage. The lifelong friendship was recently reciprocated when our friends the Fish's visited us and were blown away by how Melbourne breakfast culinary skills outdo bad Parisian coffee.

It was a crazy time for us, a mad hatters tea party from a period novel - punting on the Isis, dressing for drunken balls, Shakespeare performances in the college gardens, starring our Shylock friend Mark then Philips now Brozel, and trips to northern England where the colours of our school pencils dazzled us in their reflection between water and sky. During those times, we travelled extensively to London where we scoured the Camden Lock markets for furniture, even though we didn't have a permanent residence, and then further afield with Kerryen's best friends, Buba and Zaida.

A cruise to the Baltic states was cancelled because of the



hazards of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, so we substituted it for a holiday to Marbella, where a band of Basque terrorists decided to blow up our hotel, sending my dad into a pre 9/11 frenzy that landed us in the safer zone of Monte Carlo and Lake Lugano. Apparently Mark Brozel, who shared a room with us, recalls me and Kerryn having our one and only fight, though I do recall that in our early years of marriage Kerryn would often use her foot to kick me under the table, until she either tired of training me, or my behaviour changed, or she just got used to the man she married.

We actually contemplated a life in idyllic Oxford, where we would send our unborn children to the prestigious Dragon School, Oxfords answer to Eton, before ideology beckoned and we set off with our newly conceived son to fulfil the dream of a different aliyah. I always like to tell my kids that we look back on those travels as landmark chapters in the story of our lives - without them our life story would be one flat line.

So our next chapter was Israel, Rehov Shahar adjacent to a wadi that overlooks the Hebrew University where I would walk each day to research my doctorate. Kerryn had many talents, but an agility for language was not one of them and for all the years we spent in Israel she never did her Scopus Hebrew teachers proud. I remember us spending many nights watching Dallas on TV, and LA Law, making new friends, and Kerryn rushing to sew a dressing gown in time for Gabe's birth, prompting my mother to kvell her refrain – 'What can't

our Kerrnyu do!’

I can’t keep you here with every detail of our lives, but while the sum of a life is all of its parts, it is the overall effect that I want to convey of a period lasting decades of significant transitions.

Gabe’s birth was in Jerusalem’s oldest hospital, Misgav Ladakh, where my mother ran up and down the stone corridors declaiming in a Hebrew she learned in a DP camp in Germany, *Lesavta me-Oystrelia yesb neched*, ‘the Buba from Australia has a grandson,’ to which the nurses lallallallad in celebration.

The lure of family ties, and a job for me, ended our aliyah dash, and we returned home to Norwood Rd, where over the next five years Kerryn gave birth to our golden Sarah, who resembles her mother in more ways than one. My mother will always remind us that as tough as Sarah is, she was always a Mummy’s girl, and cost her a fortune when she was whisked away on a holiday to Surfers, but took every opportunity while Buba went for a smoke on the balcony to call home and cry, ‘I want my Mummy, I want my Mummy.’ Sarah, for all her passion and zeal, not only resembles Kerryn, but still cries for her mother all the time.

Then there is Rachel, our chandelier, pragmatic, present, social in life and on social media, capable, health conscious, and always our moondust baby with a maturity beyond her years, who played their song to Kerryn in her last hours, Close

to You, hoping she could still hear it.

How blessed we are to have three children who care for each other, and who we trust to make decisions that will lead them on exciting adventures.

Then there was the transition to a different kind of work - from a hiatus as a doctor, Kerryn retrained as a family therapist and went on to work at the Alma Rd clinic. Kerryn increasingly developed an interest in couples therapy and attachment theory, and spent many nights trying to explain to me and our kids what it all meant, though it was clear she could lay claim to being the primary attachment for all three of our kids. It was very hard for her to give up this work - and her patients wrote her the most loving notes about how she had transformed their lives. There was a period of two days recently when former patients kept popping out of nowhere, like TV plants for a commercial to express gratitude. They would reveal themselves to me and the kids, saying your mother is the best, and as our kids will attest, she must have been for Kerryn had patience - infinite patience especially for listening and for old people, and a wisdom that could cut through a person's life with deep empathy.

Our holidays also transitioned in these decades - from Club Med to our annual retreats to Noosa, which climaxed on New Years Day when we celebrated Rachel's birthday by enlisting all the kids on the beach to make her a giant sand cake. While there were always more places to travel to -

Kerryn always wanted to go to Japan - we were more than satisfied with our journeys to fill a myriad of bucket lists - the mohitas and salsa dancing in Cuba, the trips to India north and south, the safaris to Kenya where Kerryn broke her foot and almost drowned in the waters of Llamu. Skiing holidays to Vermont where we almost lost Sarah on a chairlift in the fog of night; a trek through the Moroccan desert where Rachel celebrated her birthday in a tent with the best present of all - a Fredo Frog and a can of coke; trips to Vietnam where I got drunk one night on a bus, New Zealand adventures where we crazily went canalling, very sunburned summers on the Gutman's boat on the Hawkesbury, and more recently a trip to St Petersburg and Sweden where Kerryn fell in love with the stylish fashion of the tall Viking men. We stayed up all night to watch the same white nights that Dostoevsky and Nabokov must have witnessed, and ate food in a restaurant named for Pushkin. These holidays - excursions to every part of the world - were so special to us - and formed peak landmarks in our life where Kerryn always returned with a wooden tchotchke - a souvenir that frustrated me because it always extended our time in the customs line on our return home. At Positano we made friends with a new honeymoon couple who turned out to be Katie Lowe from Scandal, and recently I took Kerryn to the holiday of holiday destinations - Auschwitz with our friends, where we stood in all the spots that generations of Bakers have claimed as their memorial of

resilient survival.

But in recent times our travel became more purposeful, and Kerryn became an indispensable part of our university student trips to sites of trauma, replacing our beach holidays. Over the course of several years we took students to South Africa and Rwanda, Europe to study the Holocaust, and Israel and Palestine to solve the conflict, an item that is high up on my bucket list. The students all turned to Kerryn for psychological guidance as they navigated their way through these conflict zones. On our last trip to Europe the students formed a train of honour and lifted Kerryn like a bride into the elevator as a gesture of gratitude and affection. In the message book they wrote for her, they thanked her for being the figure of motherly love they all needed. I know that I could never do these trips without her support and feel so gratified that our paths over time intersected, and that our professional interests dovetailed so perfectly.

Religion was also a marker of transition. While Kerryn did spend a day or two toying with religious observance after Year 10 Counterpoint, she came from a secular traditional home. At first when we had kids I would stay at home on my own on Shabbes while she would take them to Prahran market on a merry go round. You can guess whose practices were more exciting for the kids. It was only after our second trip to Israel in 1995 that things began to change. Kerryn out of her own volition enrolled in a Beit Midrash for women and the two of

us shared Talmud classes at our apartment which had once belonged to the first Sephardi Chief rabbi of Israel. One festival our friend, who was later tragically killed in a car accident, encouraged Kerryn to get an aliyah from the Torah. She was reluctant; it felt strange but she went along and from thereon embraced Orthodox feminism. Returning home a year later to more conservative circles at Mizrachi, she found herself at the centre of a storm dancing with a Torah on Simchat Torah only to have it wrested from her arm by a panicked rabbi like a Cossack from the Ukraine. From there we shared the journey through our religious evolution - she always rescuing me from my extreme tendencies, anchoring me and always giggling with the Tamirs at the charlatan rabbis who managed to twist an ancient text into a lewd sexual innuendo. She knew better - and I have to say, that my mother was right that Kerryn has always been the one who saved me from myself.

It was from there that we together found peace and a community home at Shira, though Kerryn never relinquished the hat from her Mizrachi days. For ten years Kerryn made her famous cholnt there, delivering it herself, and helping many people through a crisis in her discreet way. Shira was our shared venture, a coming together of 30 plus years of marriage to discover deep meaning and common values. Kerryn's new found skill at leyning extended to Purim and Simchat Torah, where she chanted the last portion of the

Torah, VeZot Habracha, *This is the Blessing*, and while the Torah was rolled back, I would take up on the first portion of Bereishit, which I had only merited because my mother, like all her other school interventions, demanded for me because it contained the seminal story of creation.

And so our stories were joined in the scroll of life, from beginning to end, and climaxed one year when Shira honoured us with the role of Bride and Groom of the Torah. Thirty years after our marriage we unpacked our wedding gear stored in boxes on top of a cupboard. The wedding dress fit with some effort; sadly had we done it recently the white gown would have been oversized. I still wore pyjamas under my itchy suit and together we mock married each other again before the Torah.

There are so many other things I could list here in this Act - not just transformations, but friendships that stretch back a long way, of steadfastness, loyalty and also fluidity. My kids like to say that I went through two phases Mark 1 and Mark 2 - but Kerryn all along was the rock and anchor for our family, managing the kids, being there for them always, as a sister, sister in law and as a daughter in law. I could read you Kerryn's CV but that wouldn't do justice to the way life is lived - the flesh and blood moments of a life. Perhaps Andre Shwartz Bart had it right that the only way we can memorialise a person is to say their name over and over - to see in the repetition of the name the choreography of a whole

life, lived moment by moment. *Yisgadai*. Kerry *Veysikdadab*. Kerry. *Shmei*. Kerry.

Which leads me to Act 3 of Kerry's life, an unexpected dark curtain that suddenly descended on our lives, giving her a wristband, with its in-built internet code, that turned her into Patient 1232983. Perhaps more than any time this was the moment when the story of Kerry revealed itself, when the threads of her life came together. How I wish they could have found other ways to express themselves, ways that would have found meaning through the routines of a life lived for another 30 or 40 years to allow us to reap the naches of becoming grandparents. If there is one silver lining, as Kerry said, she can safely delete the Lumosity app from her iPhone, though her daily crosswords and Sudoku puzzles have continued with more consistency than anything else, her head bent over the kitchen table in flowing hair, then flowing wig, then cancer cap.

How blessed have our years been. That is our consolation. When Kerry cried tears for her unwritten life what she couldn't see was that in her narrative was a story of love and relationships, of dedication and service. And if there is one value we must cherish, it's not the ambition driven by ego, the things we do, but it's the grace, the *chen*, the *eidelkeit* or delicacy, the humility, the patience for people, the listening ear, the wise tongue, the mediator, the love she elicited from her family, the overwhelming sense of grief that she has



generated in this community, a steady outpouring of love.

There is a torn family scattered across this cemetery - her father Paul on one end far away, her mother at the entrance with Buba Esther and Zaida Moishe, and now Kerryn here with us. You were always a peacemaker Kerryn, and in your middle place of eternal rest where I shall one day lie alongside you in the position of our bed - me to the right, you to the left - you will continue after death to bring reconciliation to our shattered souls.

We talked a lot about death during the past months. We were on the same page. Don't go looking for me on a ouija board, she told our kids in her last hours. For me and Kerryn, the afterlife has only one address. It resides in the souls of the living and will cradle Kerryn deep inside each of us. As she said to each of us in her final words of consolation, 'Don't worry, I will always be inside you.' Kerryn will be watching over our every simcha because the doors of our souls will never shut her out. She will soar as high as we allow her to ascend. That is the most powerful afterlife I can imagine, or at least its the only one I can believe in. Kerryn is listening to every word - I am listening to her voice now and I know what she is thinking. Why do I deserve this love? I'm so sorry, she is saying for making you - my children and husband - suffer, when we should be begging forgiveness from you.

And then there is that other thing. Last year she was initiated into the Buchenwald club, transcending her prewar

Flinders Lane origins to make it to the Holocaust survivor club. She as much as anyone absorbed the lessons of my family who she adored. She almost singlehandedly organised the 70th<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ball, and learned the lesson that the boys taught - trauma does not silence you but we dance through it. I have repeatedly told my kids that. As Gabe before his engagement lay on our bed holding his mother, he said, I'll never be happy again, I'll never dance again. And Kerryyn said, you will. Dad will show you how and you did and you will one day soon on your wedding, as will your sisters.

Kerryyn used to say, I don't believe there is only one person you are destined to marry but she never regretted marrying me - I think - and she was certainly more than happy to count Gabi as a new daughter and repeatedly expressed confidence in the choices that Sarah and Rachel will one day make. For more than anything, she loved her kids. It became a refrain. The kids would say, I love you Mum and she would answer, I love you more. She meant it because her love was boundless and she wanted you all to know not only how she loved you, but that her love will sustain you forever. Those were her last words, and even when she was unconscious, her eyes would sparkle with a tear when we flooded her with expressions of our devotion to her. She never wanted any of you to build a tombstone of rock for her but a living fluid monument that would become our lives. And our lives, she knew would be a dance. How fitting that for Gabe and Gabi's wedding she

wanted Buba and Zaida to dance Rock around the Clock. There is no year to that clock, there is just the endless turning of the clock around and around, in a circle dance, where the seasons come and go, and we're lost, all of us, in a circle game of time.

There is an astonishing line at the end of one of my favourite Holocaust memoirs, *Fatelessness* by Imre Kertesz, where after everything he endured upon returning home he expresses nostalgia for the camps. I shall never be nostalgic for the things Kerryen endured - not the pain, the constant discomfort in her stomach, the existential angst that she suffered, the fear of the operations, but one thing I will forever remember and long for. Cancer, for one day only, is a gift. The taste of black milk gives you the gift of living life to its fullest because you know it will one day be robbed from you, it restores the buried layers of love that are encrusted in the routines of a marriage and life, it forces you to confront one another with honesty and to admit to the question that Tevye asks Golde in *Fiddler on the Roof* - Do you Love Me? It would help if we could all ask that question of one another without the shadow of death hanging above us, but cancer forces an honest and truthful answer. And if you're lucky enough to know that after 25 years, in our case 32 years, there is love, then the ability to put everything aside and just be present - to say Omm as I have recently learned through yoga with my children - that is the most sublime gift you can have.

But for now, we must be gravediggers, cartographers of Kerry's soul travelling the orbits of our journeys with her. Our hearts are heavy but our hearts, as Kerry showed us, are infinite, and they will awaken our stifled souls to choose life. We have grieved a lot, but you know, you can't always get what you want - and in life, let's admit it, we had a lot. Not quite the number of verses of Dayenu we all yearn to sing, but so many measures of satisfaction we can count. For me and Kerry, 32 wonderful years, for the kids a lifetime of love to set you up as the most wonderful adults, a sister who adored her, a brother who regards her an angel, another brother whose whole world is shattered yet has the comfort of twins and a barmitzvah we will celebrate this year, in-laws and nieces and nephews who adored her and shared their secrets with her. And you - our friends - our dear dear friends who have nurtured us, dined with us, holidayed with us, lived life to the fullest with us, schmoozed and laughed hysterically with us, offered expert medical counsel at any hour of the night - you know who you are - you are our blessing.

No, You can't always get what you want, and you can't always finish what you start, but I want us to know that there is nothing piteous about Kerry's life or ours. We are amongst the blessed and let this blessing sustain us, *sheheyanu* and let it bring us life - *vekimanu* - and hold us together - on this day, on this present sublime moment that is a time for tears.

For too many months, I have been holding onto the plaits of

hair cut off from Kerryyn after her first chemo. Now I must pay heed to my own words and not turn her into a material monument. Like in Paul Celan's poem Todesfuge, I must return to the grave that which belongs to my wife, and begin the process of growing accustomed to an empty pillow, and a life filled with the spirit of one who we will all bear in our living souls for the remainder of our finite days.