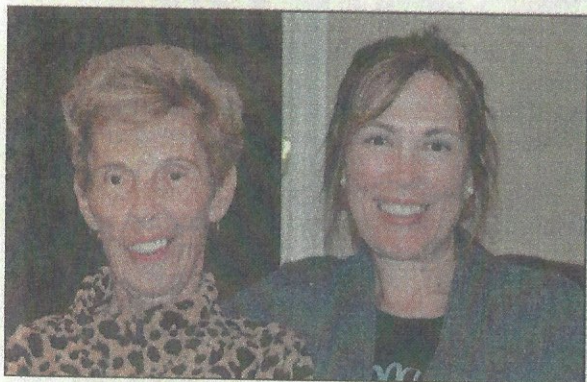


Mother's Day a reminder of recent loss



Carmela Sarnese Lazarovich and daughter Catherine Laughlin in 2012. SERGIO LAZAROVICH

By Catherine Laughlin
FOR THE INQUIRER

Even though I'm the mother of four wonderful kids, this year I will hate Mother's Day.

I will also hate my oldest son's graduation from graduate school later this month, and his brother's birthday in June. I will hate summer barbecues, trips to the beach, and shopping at Macy's, my mother's favorite store.

The mere thought of eventual Thanksgivings and Christmases translate into great gloom, too.

That's because they won't include

my mom, Carmela Sarnese Lazarovich, who, on April 20, while I held her hand in the smoky predawn, died at 83.

A few months ago, I told family and friends that my naturally effervescent and bubbly mother seemed "off." She'd become sluggish and lethargic. Usually the life of the party, she'd curtailed socializing, stopped volunteering at Holy Redeemer Hospital, and seemed to sleep more than normal.

One Sunday, she arrived at our home for dinner not wearing her pink

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ESSAY

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There's a sweetness to every day — even at 5:30 a.m.



ESSAY

Sense of loss and appreciation

MOTHER'S DAY from C1
lipstick, a no-no for her. Her heart-shaped face had lost its beam. Her pantsuits drooped on her body like flung laundry.

My mother, who could be gentle, yet willful, dismissed any idea that her body might be sick. She'd grown up scrappy, with little medical attention. She'd always prided herself on being "as healthy as a horse." It's a virus, she told me. "All I need is some rest and a few Tylenols."

On Feb. 26, when the ER doctor quietly explained they'd discovered a mass behind my mother's abdomen, the tiled floor floated like a tartan blanket. I composed myself by leaning against the wall. Outside my mom's room, I wept quietly, overwhelmed with fear and uncertainty.

After a brief hospital stay, I brought my mother home with me while she underwent outpatient treatments. Despite a good oncology team, the disease jeered: Too far gone, her body weakened and deteriorated daily.

While lying on the hospital bed in my family room, she re-

sounded the deeper, heavier wounds that lay within her tiny body like submerged boulders, those that psychologists call the fallout from early trauma and shame.

Staring at the ceiling, she'd have long heart-to-hearts with me about the family that had de-

serted her so many decades earlier: a mother, who had died too young; a father, who abandoned her to the Catholic orphanage. There was the sister, who had died years before my mother knew her. There was the

brother, who had come to visit her once in the orphanage — and who she would see just once more, when she was 60 years old, but only offered pleasantries, no kindred relationship.

Undeniably, her grief surrounding her first family was numbed with the joy she felt when she became a mother herself.

It took my growing beyond the selfish domain of youth and becoming a mother myself to completely comprehend the financial sacrifices she organized for my education and the personal time she relinquished to be a

stay-at-home mom, even though she had loved working.

"Growing up," she once confided in me, "I was always in someone's way. I knew when I had you, I was going to put you on a pedestal."

I think about my mom most at night when the day's clamor winds down, allowing myself to see her while she rocked on my porch, wearing her wide crooked smile and another new pair of sunglasses while drinking a beer.

People mean well when they say my mother is at peace and with my father who died 13 years ago. But with her death, I've now become a midlife orphan, a label that makes me feel childlike and insecure.

Society expects adults to deal with the natural order of losing the woman who hemmed my jeans, bought my tap shoes, and patiently waited for me past curfew. If only it were that simple.

This year, I will begin Mother's Day with a walk with my dogs, remembering the constancy my mother faithfully delivered, now broken by death. I will cling to my husband and my kids and remember that life is for the living.

Most important, I will remind myself of a bond that I was so blessed to share.

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