

For Jeanette

My mother was rarely on time. When this inevitably happened, my patiently waiting father would refer to her as the late Mrs. Morrow. April – and now it's November. I guess he's been waiting a while now. I think one reason that Jeanette was so often late was she loved to make a big entrance. Never one to slip in quietly, her characteristic line was "Here I Am". And indeed she is.

At my wedding, Jeanette stepped forward and said "I just have a short speech" and unfurled a long, long scroll of blank paper. Jeanette wouldn't want a long speech, and doesn't need one. She would have no patience for a litany of achievements, credentials, chronology. We all carry our own Jeanette in our hearts, where laughter collides abruptly with love. To tell all the Jeanette stories would take a lifetime. To explain where it all came from impossible.

She was irrepressible. She knew who she was and gave the gift of herself without hesitation to family and everyone she encountered, trusting that it would be received with the same delight with which it was offered. She flourished in the surround of people. As one astute soul remarked shortly after meeting her: "She don't know no strangers."

It was the love of people of every stripe that brought her to be in the crowd in this city to hear Martin Luther King speak of his dream. She spent her life living that dream of justice, of all people gathered in, valued solely by their character.

Jeanette's love for her children was as constant and unquestioned as gravity. She was audibly proud of us, and empowered us to follow our dreams – no matter how impractical – and had plenty of advice about how we could make a million dollars in the process. Most of all she wanted for us to build a lifetime love, as she had. And to bring back grandchildren. The grandchildren Todd and Sug brought back were Jeanette's jewels – as delighted with her as she was with them. They called her Grommet and filled her life with a collection of plush frogs.

In another city – Manhattan – in another crowd marching for a better world, she approached total strangers on the sidewalk saying "I'm doing this for my grandchildren – and do you think that son of mine over there would give me grandchildren?" Yes, Mom -- through the miracle that is Deborah -- Noah and Martha, and great-grandsons too.

Her last word to me was spoken in wonder and utter delight, a benediction that I had, somehow, succeeded. It was the loving nickname my grandson Matthew christened me with: Papou.

Jeanette gave herself vividly, irrepressibly, to us all, cutting out little sparkling stars from the fabric of her days until she had given all of herself away, until what was left was a lacework of selvedge. She stayed to the end of the party, and passed on the laughter for us to take home. May her name be a blessing.