

Vignettes Concerning Shelly

In this second part of my ***Ode to a Great Lady***, you will find 27 short vignettes – each presenting an event or series of events, or describing a behavior, or indicating an interest – that catch the essence of what an extraordinary person Shelly was. A few assume you are familiar with a detail from [Shelly's Timeline \(Part I\)](#). But all essentially stand on their own. I could have written many more; but I believe these are more than enough to transmit to those of you who knew her, as well as to those who didn't, an appreciation for the great lady that was my wife.

Each of the entries on the Contents Table below is a link to the corresponding vignette. Hit the **Back** icon in your browser to return to this page.

[Taking Charge](#)

[Rescuing her Dad](#)

[A Superlative Mother](#)

[And a Fantastic Wife](#)

[A Homemaker in an Extraordinary Sense](#)

[Catering to our Sons' Friends](#)

[Log Cabins in the Mountains](#)

[A Volkswagen in Jerusalem](#)

[Outstanding Hostess](#)

[Unbounded Generosity](#)

[Strolling to Happiness](#)

[Lodge Parents](#)

[Dramamine](#)

[The Smile that Lit up my Life](#)

[Extraordinarily Capable](#)

[Semi-Annual Clothing Hunt](#)

[Making Stuff for Others](#)

[Eye Candy at the Lake](#)

[She Shall Overcome](#)

[Shelly's Culinary Delights](#)

[Never Cross](#)

[Always Thinking of Others](#)

[The Hand at the Helm](#)

[Shelly's Point](#)

[Compassion at Casey House](#)

[Selfless](#)

[Going Gently into that Good Night](#)

Taking Charge. The role Shelly played as a teenager in her family's dynamics was truly astounding. At age 16, she rented an apartment, moved her gravely ill mother and older, troubled brother to it. She managed the finances, health care and household arrangements for the three of them. She did this on her own initiative and with virtually no assistance from any adult. Not only was her compassion on display, but also her strength, courage and capability.

[Back to Page 1](#)

Rescuing her Dad. During her mother's illness, Shelly's father, Sam, offered no support of any kind. He remained estranged from the family. But Shelly never gave up on him. She would visit him once each month and pretend that they had a normal relationship. Later, after Shelly's mother died, and after we left New York, Sam came to visit us with increasing frequency. Ultimately, he became a regular part of our lives and proved to be a good grandfather to our sons. Shelly's unwillingness to cast him aside because of his irresponsible behavior, and her kindness to him, eventually elicited the goodness in him that was obscured by his ill-suited role as a husband. Her compassion, foresight and understanding rescued her father and enabled him to flourish in the role of grandfather.

[Back to Page 1](#)

A Superlative Mother. Shelly wrote the book on mothering. Of course, she bestowed unlimited love on our two sons. But she also schooled them in self-reliance and human relations. By the time they were teens, she had taught them how to cook, how to do their laundry and how to be considerate of one another. She never took sides between them, encouraged them to develop their own interests and attended all sporting and artistic activities in which they participated at school or clubs. Kenny and David are kind, capable and caring adults because they had a role model to emulate; a role model who taught them how to live.

[Back to Page 1](#)

And a Fantastic Wife. Shelly routinely put my needs ahead of her own. Even in the depths of her illness, she was concerned about the toll that events were taking on me. She expressed worry that I wasn't eating well or getting enough exercise. How poignant! At the time her own life was severely threatened, she was worried about the quality of mine. It tears my heart out to think about it, but more than anyone, I was the recipient of Shelly's boundless love, compassion and empathy. I was a lucky man for more than 50 years. In fact, Shelly was an ideal companion: supportive of my career goals; tolerant of my obsessive interests in politics and sports; an amazing organizer of – and my teacher in – household affairs; the initiator of most of our plans, trips and social engagements; faithful, beautiful, caring and a great lover.

[Back to Page 1](#)

A Homemaker in an Extraordinary Sense. Shelly had an innate sense of beauty, elegance and grace. From our first apartment in Cambridge, to our homes in Adelphi, Silver Spring and Rockville, and our lake house in western Maryland, Shelly created a home environment – both through her decorations and the lovely and loving ambient tone, which she established – that

was comfortable, safe, inviting, warm and unbelievably well-equipped. My sons and I treasured – and still treasure – the homes that Shelly established. Because of her, for us, there really is no place like home. [Back to Page 1](#)

Catering to our Sons' Friends. Shelly liked a neat and orderly home, a pristine yard, and peace and quiet generally. But our Silver Spring home was centrally located in the neighborhood and our back yard often played host to our pre-pubescent sons and their friends – gatherings which often spilled over into our kitchen. Frequently neighbors would remark to me that their children reported to them that "Mrs. Lipsman was the nicest woman in the neighborhood and that she gave them the best chocolate chip cookies." [Back to Page 1](#)

Log Cabins in the Mountains. Shelly, I and our young sons took a vacation every summer in the mountains of West Virginia or western Maryland. Typically we rented a cabin in one of the rustic W. Va. state parks. Naturally, we all enjoyed a week of bracing fresh air, spectacular scenery and invigorating hiking. But, although the scenery, nature, weather and environment were spectacularly beautiful, the living accommodations were primitive compared to the environment Shelly had created for us back home. Nevertheless, Shelly managed to manufacture (quickly) accoutrements and touches (using things she brought from home or items she purchased locally) that afforded us some familiarity and much convenience. Using her creativity and imagination, Shelly produced an environment in which we felt comfortable, safe and homey. No matter where we were, if Shelly was there, it felt like home. [Back to Page 1](#)

A Volkswagen in Jerusalem. During our sabbatical year living in Jerusalem (1975-1976), we bought a VW beetle. It was tiny, but more importantly, it was a stick shift. Shelly and I learned to drive a stick just before we left for Israel. (We took lessons, anticipating that the car we would buy in Jerusalem might not be an automatic.) Let us say it was a challenge for us, especially for Shelly. And Jerusalem is as hilly as San Francisco – if not more so. Yet, Shelly – motion sickness notwithstanding – successfully navigated the dangerously hilly streets of Jerusalem like a champion. There were a few moments when, stopped, awaiting a traffic light change on a severe uphill incline, Shelly felt that the car was going to careen backwards downhill before she got the clutch engaged – but it never happened. And in her traditional cheerful and upbeat style, she confessed to me that there were times that she felt proud and happy to be able to scoot around the hills of Jerusalem in her miniscule VW beetle.

[Back to Page 1](#)

Outstanding Hostess. I've explained how Shelly made life comfortable and pleasant for me and my children. Therefore, it is not surprising that she was an outstanding hostess. Aside from the fact that she was a great cook, a perfect host and a meticulous and prescient event planner, she had a graciousness and charm that made guests feel welcome, appreciated and eager to return. She thoroughly enjoyed hosting – especially annual holiday events (Passover Seder, Yom Kippur

break-the-fast, Independence Day barbeque and of course birthdays and anniversaries). How lucky my children, grandchildren and I were to experience her graciousness regularly. Other family, friends and business acquaintances were equally lucky, but only on a sporadic basis. And if you were fortunate enough to receive a weekend invitation – to our townhome or our lake house – then you might have thought you stumbled into the Ritz or the Garden of Eden.

[Back to Page 1](#)

Unbounded Generosity. Shelly was extremely generous to her family and friends. Money of course – e.g., if a grandchild needed a laptop and her parents were tapped out that month, grandma to the rescue. But she was also generous with her time, her things and her wisdom. If a friend needed advice, a relative needed a recommendation or a neighbor needed an implement, then Shelly to the rescue without fail. Her selflessness, humility, generosity and graciousness were always on display.

[Back to Page 1](#)

Strolling to Happiness. When her granddaughters were roughly ages 3 and 1, our daughter-in-law Julee was working and Shelly took care of her little girls regularly. Shelly bought a double-stroller and would push the two girls uphill, about a mile, to a bagel shop that Hannah (the three-year old) particularly favored. It was quite a hike to get there and back, but Shelly viewed it as the high point of her week. Sacrificing for her children and grandchildren came naturally to Shelly. This minor example is indicative of how Shelly would always place the needs of a loved one ahead of her own. The amazing thing is that she often did likewise for extended family, friends, and co-workers.

[Back to Page 1](#)

Lodge Parents. Shelly didn't invent the concept, but she perfected it. During the winter holidays at our western Maryland home, our children and grandchildren would go skiing. Shelly and my roles were to establish a home base in the ski lodge, replete with food, drink, electronic games, books and warmers. All the skiers knew that anytime they needed a break, sustenance and comfort awaited them in the lodge. Shelly loved seeing her progeny enjoying themselves in the winter wonderland and especially treasured the delightful stories the kids told of their adventures on the mountain.

[Back to Page 1](#)

Dramamine. Shelly was prone to motion sickness – riding in planes, cars and boats generally rendered her nauseous. (Trains were OK as long as she faced forward; and cars were OK if she was the driver.) Shelly did a minimum of flying, and when she did, she coped by taking Dramamine. But boats were a special problem. All the kids and grandkids loved to go boating on Deep Creek Lake when we were at our western Maryland home. And Shelly loved to be with them and watch them enjoy tubing or just jumping in the lake. So she always went along, and of course took Dramamine. But the drug often made her loopy, so she usually took a partial dose. Sometimes it was less than completely effective, but Shelly would not let that interfere with her powerful desire to share the fun and frolic with her progeny on the lake. [Back to Page 1](#)

The Smile that Lit up my Life. If you've read some of the other material on this site, or you've looked at Shelly's picture, or you knew her, than you know that she had the most beautiful and ingratiating smile. As was said by so many, "Shelly's smile can light up a room." How blessed I was that I got to experience that smile on a daily basis for more than 55 years! Throughout her illness, Shelly continued to favor me, indeed all her visitors, with her gorgeous smile – no matter how badly she was feeling. In this regard, I recommend to the reader the last paragraph of the contribution by cousin Ann on the testimonials page. [Back to Page 1](#)

Extraordinarily Capable. My home life has been ridiculously easy. When I retired, I learned why. Shelly decided to school me in what it required to establish and maintain the stylish, remarkably comfortable, well-equipped and functional homes that we enjoyed. Who knew that: mattress and box spring covers had to be changed and laundered periodically; the furnace humidifier and outside hose faucets had to be adjusted seasonally; windows didn't wash themselves; bills didn't get automatically paid on time; furnaces and air conditioners had to be serviced semi-annually; and so on. Who knew! Shelly was monumentally well-organized, conscientious, thorough and reliable. Moreover, she never complained about the chores, nor bragged about the spectacular condition of her homes. It is a challenge for me to maintain her incredibly high standards. Thank God she gave me the tools to try. It's a holy obligation for me – one which I promised her I would fulfill – to keep up her homes in the condition in which she left them. [Back to Page 1](#)

Semi-Annual Clothing Hunt. Twice a year, religiously, Shelly took her grandchildren on an all-day shopping spree. She used to do this with our young sons and she saw no reason not to continue the tradition with her grandchildren. Shelly took great pride in these outings and she enjoyed seeing the fruits of the day's activities all year long. It was also traditional that at the end of a shopping day, the children would model their new apparel for their parents and grandpa. Shelly converted what is often seen as an expensive, burdensome chore into a virtual holiday event for the whole family. [Back to Page 1](#)

Making Stuff for Others. Shelly was always knitting, sewing, quilting or otherwise creating clothing, accessories or adornments for others – both family and friends. In particular, she quilted blankets for the grandchildren of our dear friends the Eigs, did needlework for neighbors, and made wall adornments for our grandchildren. Just to illustrate, perhaps her most extraordinary effort in this regard was when she quilted four large, elaborately designed handbags for the members of her lunch group (the Lee Ladies). Each was different from the others and all took months to construct. It was Shelly's unique way of expressing gratitude to her lunch buddies for providing her with camaraderie and friendship over many years. [Back to Page 1](#)

Eye Candy at the Lake. Shelly's taste for elegance and grace was well known. She always described this side of her nature by saying, "I have to surround myself with eye candy." Nowhere did she express herself in this regard with more panache and style than in her furnishing and decoration of our lake home in McHenry, MD. Previously owned vacation homes generally sell furnished and our purchase was no exception. After the purchase, my sons and I remarked that the place was move-in ready. To which Shelly replied, "Are you kidding!" Shelly moved into the condo in June 2007 and spent the next three months pursuing a complete makeover. The result was spectacular. The rooms were decorated with special touches that reflected the occupants. (Shelly and I had a bedroom, as did each son and his wife and there was a bedroom for the grandkids.) In addition, summer and winter sports scenes (boating, skiing, sledding, cycling, and more) appeared in novel and striking ways. And everywhere there were little touches of elegance. Finally, the place was extremely well-equipped – no matter what size Allen wrench you needed, it was there. Those of us in close proximity to Shelly Lipsman were blessed to live in her personal universe, in which we were planets comfortably gliding by in the luxurious and interesting orbits that she created for us. [Back to Page 1](#)

She Shall Overcome. Shelly had the misfortune to break her leg when she slipped on black ice in the winter of 2002. The accident required two surgeries and nearly two years of rehabilitation. It was months until Shelly could walk again – albeit with a marked limp. Shelly was determined to eliminate the limp and return her leg to normal use. This required a dedication to her rehabilitation that was amazing. Every day without fail, Shelly drove herself to the maximum in her exercise program in order to overcome the distortions in her leg. She persevered even when the advances were minimal or non-existent. But she stayed with it and eventually achieved total success. As I have demonstrated, Shelly was kind, sweet, sympathetic and generous. But she also had a steely determination and desire to achieve – as was reflected in this episode. [Back to Page 1](#)

Shelly's Culinary Delights. Shelly was a phenomenal cook. Her holiday dinners were legendary. She had many special recipes that delighted me and the boys; these would continue as favorites for the entire family over the years. But the two dishes that husband, kids and grandkids always clamored for were her chicken soup and her chocolate chip cookies. Both were elaborate recipes involving many ingredients, several special steps and a fair amount of time and energy to prepare. But they were scrumptious. She could have cut corners and prepared them in less time, with less effort. But she knew how much her family enjoyed the real thing; and nothing gave her more pleasure than pleasing her family. All of us sorely miss Shelly's culinary treats. [Back to Page 1](#)

Never Cross. Like anyone, Shelly had encounters with co-workers or acquaintances during which the other person behaved badly. I am thinking of instances that she told me about: her

supervisor at work criticized her unfairly; a supposed dear friend chastised her for using a competitor's business services; a co-worker subverted Shelly's work output; a family member breached a confidence. In every case, Shelly unfailingly sought evidence that something might have interfered with the offender's reasoning. With rare exception (confined to two members of my extended family), Shelly never castigated her tormentors or attributed foul motives or innate badness to the people who tossed harm in her direction. [Back to Page 1](#)

Always Thinking of Others. One time, when Shelly was in Mr. Marriott's office, he introduced her to Joe Gibbs, then the coach of the Washington Redskins. They had a pleasant exchange, which Shelly concluded by asking Mr. Gibbs if he would write a personal note to her husband who was (is) a huge Redskins fan. Gibbs was kind enough to do so. The incident reflects how Shelly was always thinking of others. [Back to Page 1](#)

The Hand at the Helm. Speaking of Mr. Marriott, Shelly would tell you that she succeeded in the computer training of every single Marriott senior executive – except for Mr. Marriott himself. He just couldn't get the hang of it. It was clear to me – from Shelly's narration of her efforts with him – that, as smart and driven as Bill Marriott was – computers were beyond his ability to master. Not so with Shelly. She attributed his failure to a not completely minor hand disability from which he suffered. This was absolutely typical of Shelly – attributing the best to people, never denigrating their abilities or proclivities. [Back to Page 1](#)

Shelly's Point. About a mile from our condo in Deep Creek is a spot known as "the Point"; a spot many consider the most beautiful on the lake. During her sojourns at the lake, Shelly would walk from our condo to the Point almost every day – the "hike" was her daily exercise. Shelly loved that spot. We must have a hundred photos of the lake and mountain that Shelly took at the Point. When I go by it now, I call it *Shelly's Point*. Just being there gave her so much pleasure. It's a simple thing, but illustrative of how Shelly enjoyed natural beauty and always sought to infuse her life with beauty, elegance and grace. [Back to Page 1](#)

Compassion at Casey House. Shelly spent two weeks at Casey House, the in-house facility of Montgomery Hospice. During this period, after she stopped the chemo treatments, she grew weaker and she was visibly failing. Our dear and lifelong friends, Dave and Sharon Eig, came from Allentown Pennsylvania to see Shelly for the last time. The four of us spent a couple hours together. When Dave and Sharon left, Shelly turned to me and said, "That must have been hard for them." [Back to Page 1](#)

Selfless. From the moment of her diagnosis until the end (three months and four days), I ceased all of my activities and devoted 24/7 to her care. I can't tell you how many times during this period Shelly expressed her concern to me that I was straining my health. Can you imagine that!

In the face of her own fatal illness, she was thinking of my needs. How could God take away from the world such a magnificent creature?

[Back to Page 1](#)

Going Gently into that Good Night. Shelly approached her death in a remarkably calm and understated manner. In the days following diagnosis (mid-April), she had many poignant conversations with me and my sons – and with a few close friends and family on the phone. After that, Shelly behaved in an extraordinarily calm fashion, like a person who had to undergo an unpleasant experience and was intent on getting through it with as little discomfort and drama as possible.

She knew from the first what fate had in store. She also knew that her affairs were in perfect order; that she had trained her sons and her husband to take care of themselves, that the finances of the family – thanks to her remarkable financial and planning skills – were totally arranged and easily picked up by us; and, more than anything, that she had lived a good life and left a legacy of objects and relationships that would bear testimony to the remarkable person that she was.

During her stay at Casey House, she was interviewed by one of the social workers. Shelly calmly recanted some of the highlights of her life, how pleased she was with her children and grandchildren, how many wonderful things she and I had done together and how she had no regrets. Unbeknownst to them, I recorded the conversation. It is a recording that, along with the memory of my beautiful, kind and loving wife, I shall treasure until the day I die.

[Back to Page 1](#)