

## 2011...A Challenging Year with Reminders of Family, Health and Aging



In the inevitable flow of time, every family experiences the same cycle of life. In 2011 we were treated to so much which is good and wonderful. Anja Rose, born in March is Grandchild number 8. She is a spectacular addition to our exquisite group of progeny who will carry our own lives forward after we're gone. Although it's extraordinarily ego-centric for adults to project themselves and their mortality into the lives of their children...and their children...and in our case (as Great Grand Parents) their children, we do it anyway. And we should. Like our worst fears...our best hopes are seldom realized in a single lifetime. Our

children, with or without our participation add their own footsteps to that journey, ours...as well as theirs. I believe this is the continuum of life, set in motion by ancestors and sustained by descendants.

During any lifetime, pleasure and pain are inescapable partners. 2011 offered ample quantities of both. Birth, illness and loss combined to provide emotional push and pull for us during the year. In a way, the events of happiness were made even more special by the sadness of the other. It's unfortunate that we often need the contrast of what is painful to remind us of the value of what is pure pleasure...but that's just the way it is. In retrospect, I see my own experience with cancer as a rude intrusion on a work schedule too busy for one more focus. It invaded my life during months of daily treatments like a heavily armed occupying army, leaving no options for either ignoring or denying its existence. And now...on the other side of the first phase of this experience, we are treated to the anticipation of 5 to 7 years of follow up. And yet, compared to other family health related events in 2011...I am the lucky one.

In 2011 my Brother Jay...a CPA and our accountant/financial advisor was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. He's now retired and doing well. It's an early diagnosis. I am so impressed with his courageous *don't worry be happy attitude*. He has always been this way. We're enjoying and appreciating him more than ever. He's older by one year, but to me his easy demeanor and wisdom are timeless and steadfast. Like me he has lived a worker bee life, raised a family and revels in his grandchildren who he refers to as *beautiful*. I believe they inherited that from him.



Then there is my Sister Chippy, (naked innocence in 1945)...the quintessential *tough broad*. And I mean that in the most respectful and loving way. Her challenges over the past two years have been extreme and continue to do their best to beat her. But, they can't. No matter the outcome, this woman warrior will win. Among the inspirational figures in my life...she ranks at the top of the list. She will love you unconditionally forever or kick your butt if you bug her or her family in any way. There is no middle ground. Stay on her good side and you'll be rewarded with undying loyalty and the best cooking this side of the known universe. Screw up and get a taste of 1940's pugilism...*Brooklyn style*. If you're reading this...take a moment, close your eyes, *think Chippy*, rev up your most positive energy...and fire it her way.

As I write this we're making arrangements for my Mom's funeral gathering. At age 90, after a too long struggle, she passed away on January 15<sup>th</sup>. Her passing was quiet and in the loving company of two sons. My brothers Joe & Pete, who cared for her the past 3 1/2 years in their own home as did my brother Sal for years before that.



During a recent visit, even with the best care possible, it was clear my Mom was suffering. At some point in the so called evolution of modern society, my hope is we will devolve away from government jurisdiction and religious imperatives over end of life options. Only we as individuals own our lives. We're certainly held responsible as we live them. That should be true as they come to an end. Aside from the final bureaucracy and after death ritual, there is no government or religious presence at the bedside attending to the day to day realities of serious illness and dying. The loving care provided by my brothers in a home environment is increasingly unavailable in these times. Even the best institution's can be overwhelmed, understaffed and under qualified to administer this most difficult work in a consistently humane and individual way. Thank you again Joe and Pete and Sal for your extraordinary dedication to Mom's comfort and special needs.



I've written this commentary, memorial and celebration of 2011 as much to update and share this information with others...as to flagellate my point of view, and also...to say the words to myself. It's therapeutic and an announcement to so many including family, friends, clients and colleagues, some of whom have known only snippets of 2011's story. Our appreciation for the support and affection we've received from so many is beyond measure. As we continue this journey in 2012...I am closing my eyes, and blasting you all with the most positive energy I can. It's downright atomic. I hope it contributes to your comfort, pleasure and well being in this New Year and beyond.

HUGE HUG's...Jack (& Chippy, 1949)