



## Lillian Kitza

March 8, 1926 - November 6, 2019

My mother, Sophie, had three younger sisters: Elizabeth, known as Betty; Lillian, whom we called Lilly; and the youngest, Violet, who sometimes went as Penny. They had all predeceased Lilly who finally had her marching orders into eternity on November 6, 2019 at the age of 93.

Lilly had been a vivacious, dark-haired beauty. As a young woman, she had plenty of attention from interested young men, but one special beau, Andy, made her eyes sparkle, whose name never failed to elicit a smile from her. Even though he felt the same about her, they never married. He, at last, found someone else. Some ten years afterwards, I had popped in to visit Lilly on my way home from college classes, and there sat Andy in her kitchen with his three small children, while his wife was at a local hospital, having just had their fourth child. Later, I asked her why she and Andy had never "tied the knot," and she replied that it was out of consideration for her mother, whom she loved dearly. She explained that since Grandma was widowed and Andy's mom was too, they would have had to live together and she was very sure that the four of them would not have lived compatibly. Lilly never did marry. The irony was that Lilly loved children. Whenever her married sisters needed her, she was right there after work helping them with whatever they needed. We nieces and nephews never thought of Auntie Lilly as a babysitter. Instead, she was the beloved aunt who took us on trips to Belle Isle for carriage rides, to the beach swimming, and on over-nighters at her place to just hang out and have fun, eat scrambled eggs with ketchup and watch Grandma make pierogi.

She would show us girls her latest new outfit, let us color at the kitchen table while she made beautiful pencil sketches of family and movie stars, and take us down the street to the New Palace Bakery in Hamtramck for some delicious sweet treat after shopping. It was always pleasant and always fun. Lilly's way was to always make the other person feel special and affirmed. Whenever she saw a baby, she would stop to visit with the mother and never failed to make a fuss over the child, eliciting smiles.

Later in life, when her sister Betty's daughter, Karen, married, it happened that the family lived down the street from her. Lilly, by then, had retired from her job at the Farm Crest Bakery; she was in her 70's. But being low-income and needing a car, she obtained a job at Burlington Coat Factory. However, this did not detract from her attention to Kathy's two children, Karen and Michael. Since Kathy and her husband worked full-time, Lilly had the children in for meals, went to their school functions, and sewed them beautiful Halloween costumes. She bought them toys and beautiful clothes and very often took them with her wherever she went on the weekends. They were the bright lights of her life.

When Kathy, her sixteen-year-old daughter, Karen, and ten-year-old son, Michael, along with Kathy's sister, Janice, were coming home from a family reunion, they were involved in a head-on collision, which killed Kathy and Karen immediately, and caused serious closed-head injuries to Janice and Michael who were in the back seat. Lilly was drowned in sorrow, but never failed to visit and support the two who lived. She went into a deep depression. It was then that I believe her downward spiral into Alzheimer's began. Still, when my mother, Sophie lost my dad, Joe, Lilly and Violet would be there to take her on outings regularly. After Sophie died, and Violet needed company because of serious health problems, Lilly devoted herself to her sister daily. Lilly never stopped giving. She would regularly invite a friend who was hard-up financially to stay at her place for the day so that the woman could do her laundry at Lilly's place and then she would take the woman out and treat her to dinner. Her kindness and charity were unending.

In 2004, while on a visit to my favorite aunt, Lilly asked me to check her math in the checkbook and to assure her that her meds were correct. Later that evening she called me no less than seven times in a row to assure herself that she was handling something properly. I could see that she needed to leave her beautiful place with the manicured lawns and delightful flowerbeds and live in a community that would support her and relieve her of stress. I began to take her to doctors' appointments and she was informed that she had Alzheimer's and that she needed to find an assisted-living place. Absolutely no one could convince her to move. She was a determined woman, some might say stubborn, who was used to making her own decisions. She was intelligent and hard-working. She loved her small home and lovely yard, her friendly neighbors. Why give it all up to live in a studio apartment?

I prayed about this and my prayer was answered. I took her to visit one of her very best friends, Betty, (not her older sister who had already passed away) at an independent living place called Madonna Villa. Betty and Lilly had worked at Farm Crest Bakery together as young women and had never given up their friendship. They were like sisters. When Betty had been hospitalized, Lilly went to her home with her permission and cleaned the whole place so that it sparkled. Lilly confided to me that she had found money stashed away there between newspapers, in the vacuum cleaner and in other odd places. Always honorable, Lilly gave the monetary findings to another neighbor for safe-keeping.

So seeing Betty daily was the key to convincing Lilly to move to Madonna Villa, as it was called then. She would go where her best friend was. I became her Power of Attorney at that point and made sure that she sold her place for a fair price, got rid of her excess, and moved her into a compact studio apartment there. Once a week we would go shopping, to the movies, or to get her hair done. Her laundry would go home with me and return freshly cleaned and pressed. She had nothing to do but sit with her friends and watch TV or participate in provided entertainment. Her meals were served in the dining

room with many friends around her. Although it was not easy for the once vibrant woman to lapse into this dull routine, she managed it by being helpful and friendly to everyone there. The management was super good about letting me put in a twelve-by five foot flower garden outside her room which she managed well each summer for about three years. Then, as her dementia progressed, she forgot to water it. Her houseplants withered. The sweet white kitty cat we obtained for her and who was her delight passed away under the bed, which was no doubt for the best, because twice she had flushed the cat litter down the toilet, flooding her apartment. She became unkempt and would not let the aides I hired bathe her. She was deteriorating even farther and needed more care. Perhaps I let her live there in independent living longer than I should have, but I knew that a move to a nursing home would be more suffering for her, because of the total lack of freedom, and I was right. The next move proved to be no more than a prison.

On the advice of some caring nuns, I placed Lilly in a certain nursing home. It was a mistake. Because of the home's inability to handle dementia patients, she was placed on a hard chair by the nurses' station from morning 'til bedtime, all alone. In the meantime, for a rest for a few days, I went to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan where we have a cottage, pondering where else I could put her. Then I received a phone call from a hospital, asking why I wasn't there to care for my aunt. I had no knowledge of her being there! Turns out, she was leaving the dining hall and had somehow tripped and fell face-first right onto the hard tiled floor. An eight-hour drive later found me gasping in horror at her bedside. There she was, with two black eyes, a huge knob on her forehead and a fractured neck! The nursing home hadn't even bothered to call me.

The social worker at the hospital gave me a short list of other nursing homes to choose from and told me I had two hours before she would be discharged and transferred to one of them. What to do?! I said a brief prayer and then dialed the first two on the list. No availability. Then, I remembered that my mother, Sophie, had always said playfully, "If I ever have to go to a nursing

home, take me to St. Anthony's. I got in the car, drove directly there, felt completely at home and welcome, and a place was available, so that became home for Lilly for the next five years.

When she was first there, she was ambulatory, with a fractured neck that required her to sit in one place quietly. It was difficult, for her and for the staff. She wanted to get up and walk around and she couldn't understand why she shouldn't. I suggested naively that they tie her into her wheelchair as a reminder, but that is forbidden by law. So, she spent many weeks in the nurses' station until she healed. For the next two years, her ability to speak was limited to three sentences: "I want to go back to where I used to be;" "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen;" and "Love you." Then her ability to speak at all was muted, except when she was shocked, like the time I took her to the window to show her the heavy snow and creeping traffic, and she leaned upon the cold marble window sill and cried out: "Oh, my gosh, it's freezing cold!" and jerked her arms away! A perfectly rational, grammatical response.

I began to wonder how it felt to have this type of suffering, although it was very obvious to all who saw her teasing eyes and smiling face that her good cheer was not dimmed. Once, when an aide was pulling her away from another resident who was being transported to the hospital, a second aide chided: "No, leave her alone. She's bringing him comfort." And even though her power of speech was reduced to almost nothing, she still smiled and sang the same little tune to aides and hospice workers and, until she became unable to walk, stood up and did the little dance steps that she became famous for.

In 2017, she developed a serious bone infection in her leg. Medicaid would not keep her at the hospital until it was healed, so she was sent back to St. Anthony's and the staff had the pitiful job of putting a port into her arm so her antibiotics could be given her. It took the whole staff to hold her down and she screamed bloody murder while they inserted it. The minute they walked away, she pulled it out. This occurred at least six days in a row and the staff and Lilly

were becoming frazzled. I called my son, Philip, who happens to be not only her co-guardian, but a physician and sought his advice. "Mom, "he said, "with the severity of the infection, she'd probably die without it." So, I stood outside the door, listening to the brouhaha in her room one more time. The staff left. She immediately yanked the port out again, even though they had taped and wrapped it securely. "O.K.," I told myself. "This is it! No more torture for that poor woman." Then, I enrolled her in hospice, waiting for the inevitable. Now travel about six months down the road to the nursing home dining room, where I sat watching her eat her lunch. In strolled a handsome young man who asked me if I were Lilly's relative. When I told him I was her guardian and niece, he replied: "Well, I'm Dr. XXX, and every time I come into this building, I stop by to see Lilly, even though she is not my patient. You can't help but like her! She's such a neat person." He continued, "Do you know your aunt is a miracle lady?" When I looked puzzled, he continued, "Anyone else with an infection like that would have soon died, but she healed instead!"

Yes, God knew exactly when He wanted Lilly home. Last Wednesday, she had completed her life's journey, dying peacefully in her sleep. As I entered the doors of St. Anthony that morning, two members of the staff were there to greet me. Among other thoughts they shared with me, one said, "Lilly was a kind and loving person, and all of us will miss her...a lot!" The other one concluded, "Yes, Lilly was ....LOVE! The word hung in the air, like a beautiful melody. And when I entered her room and saw her lying on her bed, I knew that she was now happy, in the arms of the One Who will continue to love her for all eternity and suffering will touch her no more.

Good-bye, Auntie Lilly, until we meet again! Thanks for all the love you gave me. Mary Ann

Funeral service Monday, November 25th at 11:00am at White Chapel Cemetery, 621 W. Long Lake Rd., Troy.

Memorial contributions may be sent to Unbound, A Non-Profit for Children, 1 Elmwood Ave., Kansas City, KS 66103



# Cemetery Details

## White Chapel Memorial Cemetery

621 W. Long Lake Road  
Troy, MI 48098

# Previous Events

## Funeral Service

NOV 25. 11:00 AM (ET)

White Chapel Memorial Cemetery - Cremation  
621 W. Long Lake Road  
Troy, MI 48098