

## Pearl's story

Pearl Sobel (née Schwartz) was born and raised in New York City. She lived with her mother, father and two sisters in an apartment with a shared bathroom on the Lower East Side. Pearl worked as a dental hygienist, before marrying Daniel Sobel in her 30s. Devoted to her husband and marriage, Pearl was also a committed mother, raising three sons and a daughter.

Pearl's daughter, Janet Goldman, remembers picnics and sunrises and games outdoors – Pearl loved nature. Their house was the one that the neighborhood kids wanted to come to because it was so much fun. Pearl loved being a mom. She could be tough – she had high expectations for her children, and no tolerance for them not doing the right thing. She raised her children in a conservative Jewish home, went to synagogue regularly, and observed the Jewish holidays and traditions. She had a strong commitment to moral values.

After her children were grown, she and her husband moved to Florida. Unfortunately, he died of a heart attack at age 61. Pearl remained in bed for several days after, devastated by the loss. But Pearl was a tough person. She was also a practical person. She was accepting of things as they were. She stayed in Florida, where she loved the warmth and the water, and from there continued planning the yearly family reunion—“Sobelfest”— that she and her husband had started years before. She liked being independent and was “always game” for the next adventure, including going on her son's family hiking and camping trip when she was in her 80s. She had no fear. She loved life.

At age 96, Pearl moved to Maryland to be near Janet. She continued to be physically active, and resisted using a walker until she knew she needed it to keep moving. Even in her late 90s, she continued to be who she always had been, gracious, polite, and regularly looking for ways to be helpful to neighbors and family.

At age 99, Pearl began having memory problems. She was embarrassed when she would arrange to meet someone and forget to go. She tried to find work-arounds, writing notes to herself and putting them about her room. She also began suffering health issues, eventually leading to an emergency surgery. Although the surgery was successful, her doctor warned her family that she might be nearing the end of her life. Janet, who was familiar with hospice, had honest discussions with her mother. She explained that enrolling in hospice did not mean that you were about to die, but that instead it would provide access to professional support and helpful services that could be used for many months. When Pearl agreed to hospice care, she turned to Janet to help her select a hospice organization. They used several

criteria, including the availability of Jewish support. They wanted to choose a hospice that understands the importance of spiritual care and has experience with Jewish tradition.

Janet is thankful for the many different ways that Montgomery Hospice supported her mother, and her whole family, during the six months that her mother was a patient. She describes the social worker as “warm, wonderful, comfortable,” someone who listened calmly, offered up help and information but never intruded. She tells how her mother found great pleasure in the chaplain visits. The chaplain would ask Pearl questions about herself and her life, and would listen carefully to the responses, with a genuine caring. Pearl found comfort in the chaplain praying and singing with her.

Janet did not think that her mother would be interested in volunteers but they became an important part of her mother’s life. Although Janet tried to visit almost every day, she was also balancing a part-time physical therapist practice. Knowing that her mother had friendly volunteers visiting gave Janet peace of mind. She was amazed at how patient and kind the volunteers were. Pearl would say, “I had the most lovely guest with me today.” The volunteer and Pearl would talk, or sit quietly. They would look through photo albums together. Their time with Pearl allowed her to review her life and to tell the story of her childhood, her marriage and her family. She relished being able to describe her life to people who had never heard the stories before.

As Pearl neared the end, she told Janet “When I die, don’t be sad. I’ve had a long and wonderful life.” Pearl and her children had many honest conversations, Pearl sharing, “I want to be buried next to your father.” Janet credits Montgomery Hospice for allowing her to step away from caregiving, so that her time with Pearl was as mother and daughter together. Pearl was able to continue to do things for her family who visited regularly, putting out placemats, offering cookies and tea. Because so much was taken care of, they could sit together and chat. Pearl Sobel died on October 13, 2014 at the age of 101. According to Janet, “Hospice is a positive/heartening story. Because we all die. Montgomery Hospice allowed us to acknowledge what was happening, and make the most of the time. Otherwise we would have pushed it aside. I was able to have real conversations with my mother. I was able to say goodbye, with peace of mind then and now. That time I spent with her was a gift.”

*More from Pearl's daughter, Janet:*

*One day in October, my mother told me she was feeling tired. I suggested she might feel better if we took a little walk. She said all she wanted to do was sleep. I was upset to see that she hadn't eaten lunch and I encouraged her to eat.*

*The hospice chaplain, who was also visiting at the time, looked me straight in the eyes, and told me to "listen."*

*"Listen to what your mother is telling you. You need to let your mom rest."*

*She told me so gently and clearly, that I couldn't help but understand.*

*The next day, when my mother again mentioned how tired she was, I told her, "Mom, you're such a high-energy person. If you feel that all you want to do is sleep then maybe you are tired and you want to rest. It is okay to rest."*

*My mother took my hands, looked at me and said, "Thank you for understanding."*

*She died three days later.*

*I will always be grateful for this chaplain sharing her wisdom and education, allowing me to connect so deeply with my mother all the way to the end.*