

Dear Zion Lutheran Congregates,

How do I begin to express the overwhelming gratitude I have for all of you. I have always been a fan of this small but mighty group, telling all of my friends that “this church is the embodiment of what a church should be, walking the talk, not just showing up once a week for a few songs, a sermon and communion.

This was always apparent to me, but never so much when me and my mother needed help, and all those days leading up to her passing.

When I moved down to BL to be able to help my mom through radiation, and the care that that entailed, you all rallied. A Meal Train was set up (thank you LouAnn), a stream of visitors began, and there was even coordination between members to give me the occasional break for a weekend getaway.

When my moms health continued to fail, her wish was to be able to stay in her home, and we tried, with all of your help, to make this work. The prayer chains, the cards, the visits, and the love continued to pour out, along with choreographed visits so she was rarely alone. And she delighted in these visits.

It was always hard to leave my moms house, especially in these later years. I used to joke with Aileen and Rick that Mom always chose the Island and her church over her Georgia family. It was true, but I knew why and I was glad that she had found the perfect place to grow old, independently yet supported. Mom was fiercely independent, and it meant everything to her to be able to stay there for what amounted to her last years, save two weeks or so. Calls from Chaplain Liz almost everyday to and from work, and the fun dinners with her and Ed. Rick and Aileen, how special and genuine their relationship with mom was, spending almost every Sunday with her, doing puzzles, drinking Prosecco, and just enjoying each other’s company. The visits from Pastor Rudy, and Iliana. Susan stopping in and making sure that things that got difficult for Mom towards the end got taken care of, simple things like putting the trash and recycleables out. I watched the service on my iPad every Sunday, and that blown kiss was everything to me. I have lots of screenshots of those. I also took a last picture with mom on almost every visit, a selfie and then one of her, standing at her back door, waving. These are all precious memories now.

I am convinced that Mom had a plan, and she followed it through, as she has always done. On my last stay with her we had a particularly wonderful day. She was feeling great, so we decided to go out to a late lunch. We went to Wallys, but they were closed for Christmas decorating. It was too late for Scojos as they were closing soon. Then we tried the LBI Porch, which normally would have been open but was closed for some reason. We were pretty much cracking up each time we tried to go somewhere and found the “Closed” sign posted. So I decided to take her to How You Brewin, so off we went. Mom must have stared at that menu board for 15 minutes trying to make up her mind, deciding, then changing her mind. More cracking up. It was just that kind of day at this point. We had a great lunch, got some “fancy” coffees and split a dessert. I expected her to be tired at this point, so when we got in the car I was surprised at her saying “where else can we go, I’m not ready to go home yet”. So off we went to Reynolds, hoping that their Christmas stuff was out. Well, boy was it. We walked through Reynolds, room by room, wide eyed and delighted at all the Christmas things. You would have thought we were at MOMA. It was such a fun and special day. When we got home, later that night she said to me “I just want to make it to Christmas.” I didn’t give that comment much thought. We had already put the plan in place for her to come to live with me in Georgia, so I said “Of course you are going to make it to Christmas, and we are all so so excited that you will be spending it with us”.

I didn’t’ give it another thought. Mom made it to Georgia, exclaiming” Chris I made it! I’m in Georgia!” We had wonderful dinners all together, played games, did some puzzles, she got lots and lots of hugs

from her only grandson, Jake, who she adored, and the feeling was mutual. I made plans to take her to my book club to meet my book club friends, I made plans to take her to work to meet my work friends, we were going to go to Scottsdale Farms (Atlantas version of Reynolds) All "after the holidays".

We had a wonderful Christmas eve; we watched the service on my Ipad. We opened presents on Christmas day. She became unresponsive the day after Christmas and passed peacefully two days later.

There it was. She made it to Christmas. So as painful it is to be without her, I know it is what she wanted, and I look forward to when I can look back at all of the memories and not have it be so painful. I know that she is still looking over me, and I find comfort in that.

And of course the love and support has continued to flow from you all, and I thank you for that as well. I don't feel quite the orphan (can you BE an orphan at my age? I don't know, but that's how I feel).

Thank you, thank you, thank you. For loving my mother. For being there for her all along, and for including me in that when that became a need. There are no sufficient words for my gratitude.

I look forward to seeing you all for her Memorial Service which will be held on September 19th at 11am at Zion Lutheran Church, with a light lunch served in the Fellowship immediately afterwards. I would appreciate RSVP's to me at Christine-austin@hotmail.com or text me to 678-332-4434 so I can plan accordingly. Also, in lieu of flowers please consider a donation in my moms name to Friends of Barnegat Lighthouse State Park, as that was a favorite place for my mom.

All The Best,

Christine Austin