**To Mom with Love**

I want to thank everyone who offered their thoughts and prayers. If you know my sister or me then you already know my mom. She is all that I am, all that I will be and more. It will be nearly impossible for me to quantify the gravity of our loss or heaven’s gain in these next few moments. My mother’s story is awe inspiring and I’ve always been amazed by her strength, resolve and unwavering courage even until the end.

In the gospels of the Bible, Ephesians 6, verses 1 and 2. It says: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honour thy father and mother that your days may be long in the land." She especially reminded me of these words whenever I would disobey her or my dad. I will do my best to honor my mom with these words that I’d like to share with you.

My mom was a very spiritual woman and she emphasized the importance of God to us every day. She made sure that my sister and I went to church when we were growing up so that we would have a moral compass & build up our own faith. She would quote Proverbs 22 often (especially recently as a grandmother) and say: “Train up a child in the way they should go, and when they are old, they will not depart from it.” Well mom, I stayed the course.

My mom or “Myrna” as she was lovingly known was a trailblazer. When she came to New York from Barbados in 1972 she did so with a vision for a better life for herself and for her family. I often wonder at the strength it must have taken as the oldest of 11 to move to a place that she did not know but to chase her dreams. She paved the way for my dad, her parents, and her brothers and sisters to follow her. In 1975, my parents married, had my sister that same year and then me in 1977.

In her life, she was selfless. Always putting others needs before her own desires. I am so grateful for all of the sacrifices that she made to make sure that we had. My father told me that he still does not know how my mother was able to raise us, take his meager paycheck and make it stretch each month, pay the bills, save some, give him an “allowance” and send money back down to Barbados for her family. A miracle worker indeed. We never went without. And we learned how to save and practice good money management from her. She was a bank auditor and had a degree in accounting after all.

She created a loving home for us. Singing and dancing were always encouraged. Mummy also loved to cook as many people will tell you. If you ever came to my parents’ house you were offered a meal and a drink. That was the rule. As kids she would make whole pots of rice and chicken, and corned beef sandwiches, for my dad’s cricket team. Then pack us and the food up in an old 1972 Datsun and drive to Brooklyn from Long Island telling us to hold the pots to keep them from spilling. The CouCou she would make on Saturdays (which is the Barbados national dish) was a treat! When I lived in Philadelphia I would drive back home 2 hours one-way just for some. A pre-requisite for my marriage was that my wife Shaunté learned how to make it from my mom! It was that good. Through all the cooking and feeding people she would make sure to be the last to eat. Our friends were welcome at our house for parties, sleepovers, or even just after school because she figured she would rather us be home, where she could watch us than running the streets or out “galivanting” as she would say. Even when we snuck out or had friends over without her being home, she knew. My mother always made sure that we were taken care of first. She didn’t even want me to fly to Boston to see her in the hospital, because she did not want me to worry. Always trying to protect me till the end.

A lot of people don’t know how much fun my mom was. She was hilarious. We took a family trip to California in 1989. My parents decided to drive from Los Angeles to San Francisco alongside the coast on Route 1. My dad wanted to take a break from driving so he asked my mom to take over. Reluctantly, she obliged but was white-knuckling the steering wheel the whole time. We came upon a construction zone in the road and my mom looked at the upcoming sign and asked: “D-I-P, what does D-I-P mean? And in unison my dad, sister and I exclaimed “DIP, mummy DIP!” The car then dipped down and up again as we rode through the patch in the road. We still laugh about that to this day. Also, part of her unintentional humor were the many Bajan proverbs that she would share depending on the occasion.

Here are a few (I would be remiss if I did not speak these in her authentic bajan accent):

**“De sea ain't got nuh back door”:** Meaning the ocean is not that safe a place and to take every precaution necessary. I fell in a pool in Florida once when I was 6 and forever after that when I went swimming, this is what she would remind me.

**“Don't rush de brush and throw away de paint”:** Meaning: Do not allow haste to create problems for you.

**“Don' leh nuhbody rub stuff in you mout and tell yuh it’s pudding”.**Meaning:Don't let anyone do or say anything harmful or insulting, under the guise that they are being nice. (There is another version of this saying but well, you get the point).

**“Give jack he jacket”**. Meaning: Give credit where credit is due.

**“I going to pack up my Georgie Bundle”** – Meaning to take her possessions and go.

**“Hard ears yuh won’t hear, but ya guh feel”:** Meaning: If you do not take heed to good advice, you will feel the negative effects of it.

**“Monkey see, monkey do”:** Which means do not imitate your friend’s bad behavior.

**“When yuh en' got horse, ride cow”:** Meaning for you to utilize whatever resources you have available.

**“Wha' sweeten goat mout does bun he tail”:** Meaning:A source of great pleasure may turn out to be a problem later on.

**“Ya like monkey handling gun”** Meaning if you were a novice or inexperienced at something.

And my personal favorite: If I asked her for money she would exclaim: “**Do I look like I does guh pun the toilet and mek the money?”**

Even her grandchildren remember her saying: “**Too far east is west.”** Meaning to avoid the extremes. Maintain your perspective. Everything in moderation. My mother had a way with words.

She also always mispronounced words or used them in the wrong context. Calling herself “Miss Mal-A-Prop”. When we corrected her she would say **“WHA UM IS?” Well whatever, you know what I mean!**

My mom was compassionate and she would do anything for close friends and her family. She made sure that my cousin, Andre, came to live with us and go to Westbury High School so that he could have better opportunities for himself. She helped many of her own cousins come to the US, live with us for a while and get settled. When our neighbor’s house caught fire, they told me that before they could even ask, my mom had rooms and beds made. With sheets and towels laid out for them so they could spend the night and not have to go to a hotel. Everyone remembers my mom as loving and welcoming. She made you feel like family. Even if you just met her. That was the kind of person she was.

I am happy and find comfort that in these last few years she was able to retire after a long career as a bank auditor, finally see me get married & give her two granddaughters - Naomi and Crisette, watch her grandsons GJ, Amari, and Elijah graduate from high school, celebrate her 45th wedding anniversary this past February, commemorate my sister getting her PhD from Harvard University, move into her new house and become a college professor. I would like to say thank you to my dad for being by her side every day and each step of the way during this journey. And also say thank you to my sister Michelle for being our “rock”. Even with a full plate, in school, with her kids, life and work she still managed to take care of our mum as she battled the disease. I thank God for her. She made sure that my mom was not alone when she transitioned. We were hopeful that she would beat the disease but she fought as hard and as long as any brave warrior could. Her last text message to me read: “My children and grandchildren are my reason for living. I love you all.”

And so, today we come to say goodbye to my mom’s body but not her spirit. We come to say farewell to her mind but not her dreams. We come to mourn her voice but not her messages. We come to let go of her hands but not her good works. And we will miss her heart but not her love for it will always be with us. One of her favorite songs was “To Sir with Love” from the 1967 Sidney Poitier film of the same name. In fact, she named one of the toy poodles that we got for her when she started her chemo “Lulu” after the singer. Her coworkers at the main post office in Bridgetown nicknamed her because she was the only woman – and chief -- stamp seller in 1968. It’s where she met my dad. I think these lyrics are so appropriate right now.

*‘The time has come for closing books and long last looks must end  
And as I leave I know that I am leaving my best friend  
A friend who taught me right from wrong and weak from strong  
That's a lot to learn, but what can I give you in return?*

*If you wanted the moon I would try to make a start  
But I, would rather you let me give my heart.*

*'To Mom, With Love'*