

For Nelee by Joseph Lowery

I'm Joe Lowery, Nelee's son-in-law married to her daughter Debra. Debra and I will be celebrating our 29th wedding anniversary next month, so I've known Nelee for over 30 years. After I passed the initial hurdles of what school did you go to and why didn't you go to graduate school, Nelee was incredibly open to me and I often felt that she was the mother I wish I still had around. And it wasn't just me – Valerie, Gavin's daughter, remembers how welcoming she was to her as a teenager after Gavin and Nelee were married. Nelee continued to extend her graciousness through the generations and recently addressed Valerie's step-daughter's Jewish School class about her experiences as a hidden child.

One of Nelee's most endearing qualities was her strong connection to her roots. Here's just one example. For many years, every holiday season, Jenny would go on the hunt for a *buche de noel* (a yule log cake) to help her mother celebrate the holidays of her youth and, from the very first time, Nelee would taste it and declare 'NO Buche', meaning she didn't think it was authentically French. She did it so many times, it's become a saying in the family – any time someone tastes a much-anticipated dish and it's not prepared exactly right, they yell "NO Buche".

Nelee was a bit of a nightowl, but one who needed a nap. Often when Debra, Margot and I were visiting from NY, I would stay up to read. Everyone else but Nelee and I had gone to bed – in fact, about 11, Nelee was routinely asleep on the couch. Suddenly she would start talking, without even getting up or opening her eyes, relating today's events, asking me a question about my work or talking about a stranger she had met that day. Inevitably, she would start weaving this amazing web of intricate connections as she described each person she had encountered in detail – what they did, what school they went to and, most importantly their friends and family.

Then she would launch into a detailed description of those friends or family members: their heritage, education, work, and connections to other people – whom she also started describing. Nelee could easily talk for 45 minutes or more about the people in her life and the people in their lives, and so on, all with complete authority. Just as she had suddenly started, she'd stop say, "Time for bed." And then go off to take her late evening shower.

After she left, I would sit there dumbfounded, amazed at her grasp of details and story-weaving abilities, my mind bursting as I tried to keep all of the information straight. But for Nelee, it was easy. She believed in the family of man. She extended her love and support throughout her network of friends and family of friends, reaching out to help whomever she could – because other friends and family of friends had helped her, her sister, and her family in the most dire of times.

Nelee was connected to all of us here. From immediate family, to close friends, to neighbors on the Stanford campus, to colleagues at the University, to friends in San Francisco, Sacramento, Texas, D.C., New York, London, Paris, Bordeaux – a truly global network. Nelee's connections do not just span the world, they also span generations. Her influence and life resonate in those of her students, her children, her grandchildren, and, I'm sure, her grandchildren's children to come.

We're all Nelee's family – and we will never forget her.