

Eulogies for Naomi M. Gordon (July 25, 1930 – September 25, 2022)  
Read on September 29, 2022, by:

Andrew Gordon (son)

Jennifer Stein, Megumi Gordon, Melissa Gordon, Conna Kelleher  
(grandchildren; read by Melissa)

William Gordon (son)

Betsy Gordon (daughter)

## **Andrew Gordon Eulogy**

Thank you all for coming to honor the memory of our mother. My sister Betsy and brother Bill want to give special thanks to Rabbi Suzie Jacobson and all at Temple Israel, and to our extraordinary caregivers, Aicha and Najat. We are so fortunate that you gave such compassionate care to Mom, and we are so grateful. We also beyond grateful to the wonderful people at HSL Hospice. We don't know how Mom, or us children, would have managed without you. You made our Mom's last months as comfortable and free of pain, physical or mental, as possible. Even so, certainly the last 18 months were hard for her, and for us. We thank the many people here, or watching online, who visited or sent cards. We read those to her over and over once she could no longer do that herself.

Today, however, we all want to talk about our mother over the first 91 years of her life, full of vitality in so many ways. Henry Bolter has just given you a sense of her extraordinary professional persona. My Mom's grandchildren, and my brother and sister, will give you a picture of her life with a more immediate circle of family and friends.

In my few minutes, let me tell you of her commitment to family writ large, extending over many generations and decades, both preceding her life and outliving her. Growing up Mom had a large family nearby, in Lynn and in Haverhill, especially on her mother's side. My maternal grandmother was one of seven children. Five of them made their way to the United States from Latvia, between about 1910 and 1920. My grandmother, Naomi's mom, and her mother came later than the others, as refugees after the first world war. So there were many cousins, and for decades Mom, and later us children, joined their annual gatherings. Mom loved them and she was very proud of the varied paths her generation forged in this country. She was very sad when a few years ago she became the last surviving cousin of her generation.

But two of her maternal uncles, born Shmuel and Avram, did not come to the United States. For three decades, the American family had no word of them, and assumed they had died, during WWI or the Russian Revolution. Their absence left a large hole in the family, including for Naomi.

Fast forward to 1947. Naomi was 17. Through a Yiddish newspaper in NY, a man now named Charles Rosoff reached the family. They learned he was the long-lost Shmuel. He had spent World War II in exile in Colombia. He was returning to France, where his two young adult children had remained. Mom described this uncle in an essay as "a vegetarian, music lover, knowledgeable about everything". He had a joyful reunion with his now elderly and ailing mother, Naomi's grandmother, his four siblings include my grandmother, and many nephews, and nieces, including Naomi (though some were upset he was neither religious nor a Zionist). He was also full of promises—he'd go back to Europe and track down my maternal

*grandfather's* brother, who the family hoped (and later happily learned) had survived WWII. But they never heard from Charles Rosoff again.

Fast forward 21 more years, to the spring of 1968. Mom and my father were planning a family trip to Europe with us children. The Rosoff visit of 1947 had stayed with Mom. Charles had told the family he had a son, Charles Junior. As much as George (of "Curious George") was curious, Naomi was determined. She managed to get an address for a Charles Rosoff Jr. from the French consulate in Boston. She sent him a letter. He wrote back. Yes, he was the son of Charles Sr. He and his wife would love to see us. What an amazing moment that was for our mother. She was thrilled. So were we. "We have French cousins!" How cool. The visit to Paris was magical. There was some sadness, for we learned that Charles Jr's sister had only recently died. Genia had been in the French resistance, captured and sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp. She had a gift for languages and had worked as one of the very first simultaneous interpreters, at Nuremburg and in the UN. We later did meet her daughter Sonia and Sonia's family and remain close with all the Rosoff family. Who may be viewing now.

Our mother's determination gave such a great gift to many cousins in this country, and our family in France: the gift of a lifelong and continuing connection of past, present, and future generations. And it was a gift to Mom as well. This was so evident in the joy she expressed at knowing and spending time with this new family.

Had Naomi died 4 years ago, the story would end here. But in 2019, through the magic of DNA, one of our American cousins was contacted by Alexander and Michael Daniel in Russia. It turns out they were descendants of the other of my mother's two lost uncles: my grandma's immediate older brother, Avram. He had not died in World War I. He had joined revolutionary politics in Russia. He too, like Shmuel, had changed his name, in his case to Mark Daniel. Daniel was a writer. So was his son Yuli Daniel. He was one of two writers jailed by Brezhnev after a famous show trial in the 1960s. His grandson and great grandson, Alexander and Michael, had contacted us. They might be watching today. Mark Daniel's great-great granddaughter, the generation of my grandchildren, is a college student in Moscow. After the connection was made, she flew here to visit. Mom hosted an amazing and joyful "reunion" with her. Just two days ago, Michael Daniel sent us condolences and a recording of a 2019 Skype meeting between my Mom, cousin Rachel, and he and his family. The joy in Mom's voice and face leaps out of the screen.

I am telling you all this in part simply because it is a rich family history. Troublemaking (and getting in trouble) seems to be a family business, starting with mom's uncles, Charles Senior and Mark Daniel. Today, some of their descendants are part of the dissident organization, Memorial. Some have left Russia. Their email signatures condemn the war on Ukraine. So once again, refugees. A century after Naomi's mother and father were refugees of a different war.

But I tell this story today not so much as a history lesson, but rather to convey how much Mom cherished and was devoted to not just discovering but sustaining her larger family. They made her the person she became. They, including others I've not had time to introduce, were a source of her own commitment to social justice and a righteous life. She has passed on this spirit to us, her children, and her grandchildren.

Thank you, mom.

## **Memories of Grandma: Jennifer, Megumi, Melissa, Conna**

Good morning. I am Melissa Gordon, one of Naomi's 4 granddaughters.

I've known I wanted to have a part in delivering the grandchildren's eulogy for a long time. We've had months to prepare and write it, and even some guidance from Naomi herself a while ago: she said "Remember that it's a eulogy—you're supposed to say nice things," as if we could think of anything but nice things to say about her. We cannot. Still, it has been daunting to try to pull together in an illustrative and meaningful way our thoughts about the huge and beautiful presence our grandmother has had in all of our lives. For me personally, my mom was sick with cancer until her death when I was seven, and grandma played an indelible role in my life as she filled in as a mom in many ways, with a caring blend of companionship, authority, and affection.

Even though she was the self-described "grandma no" alongside our "grandpa yes," she was always loving, told us she was proud of us, and cuddled with us when she made us into a bulkie roll in bed when we were little. We did not actually understand what a bulkie roll was at the time, but we remember loving the game of her pretending to roll and knead us as the dough, put us in the oven of a blanket, and then devour us in a hug when we finished "baking."

We granddaughters have reflected and we came up with some of the things we love about grandma, memories of the times we've spent together, and her hallmark values that will endure with us. Though I'm devastated that the time has come to do so, I'm lucky to get to share a sliver of those thoughts with you all today, about our amazing, beloved grandma, Naomi.

Grandma was enthusiastically engaged in education, both ours and hers. She gave us books as gifts, sent us poems and newspaper clippings, and edited our essays. She took us back-to-school shopping for outfits and supplies, and brought us to art museums, plays, and the movies. She visited our classrooms, watched our presentations, and attended our graduations. The summer highlight for Meg & Jennifer growing up was going to the New England Mobile Book Fair and spending hours walking the aisles, choosing that summer's haul of books. Conna remembers her 8th birthday when Grandma came into her class and read a book to everyone as a special birthday treat. The biggest literary gift grandma gave me was probably the first Harry Potter book, before it was famous, and then taking me to a book signing with the author! She picked me up from school in Rhode Island once a week, every year until I could drive, *and* she joined a monthly mother-daughter book club with me from 5th grade through high school, which was all treasured time together. Meg remembers when Grandma observed a business school class in which the case was the Metropolitan Opera's decision to broadcast performances in movie theaters. Possibly because she was the only one in the 90-person class to have actually attended an opera, or more likely because she spoke declaratively and passionately, her comments received an extended applause.

Our grandma impressed us with her commitment to her continued learning and seeking new challenges. She attended seminars, was in multiple book clubs, played tennis and bridge, and organized and participated in TILLI, the lifelong learning courses here at Temple Israel. She read voraciously, followed the news, and always engaged us in conversation about what she was learning and what was happening in the world. For a while she tackled yearly birthday challenges, like swimming to the second point in Eastman, hiking the steep route to Cole Pond, and taking the family white water rafting. She kept pace with evolving technology, as she wanted to be a part of progress. She emailed adroitly, if overly-succinctly, and got an iPhone and used it to call, facetime, check email, text, and take photos; but she avoided the GPS as much as possible because she couldn't stand the twists and turns "the lady" would take her on.

We have each found ourselves bragging about the way our grandma stayed current and active, and about her professional endeavors or latest volunteer commitment. For Jennifer, it has been special to realize over the years that there were points of connection between her work experiences and Grandma's many years as an educator in Brookline. Through volunteering, Grandma learned new sex ed and about reproductive rights at Planned Parenthood; she worked against racialized voter suppression by calling and writing postcards to get out the vote; and she visited and formed a relationship with an inmate at a nearby women's prison. And these are just a few of the ways in which she stayed involved and gave back.

We have all been struck by Naomi's independence and verve for travel. As Conna put it: "even as she got old, grandma still wanted to travel and try new things. When most people's lives start to become boring, grandma's just became more interesting." Following decades of traveling the country and the world with Grandpa, she continued to travel intrepidly after he passed away. Just three years ago, Naomi rallied an adventurous group of women—including Betsy & Joan—to take a trip to Cuba to visit Meg. Grandma did not shy away from a challenge: Cuban salsa class in thick island air? No problem. Grandma stood front & center, eyes fixated on the teacher's feet, determined to study her way to rhythm. She showed us that exploring the world can be a pursuit we take with us throughout our lives. Grandma's excursions also included visiting her children and grandchildren in various places, and more recently, delighting in visits to her great-grandchildren, Mia, Kaya, and Rio. Over the years, she's driven around Massachusetts to attend Conna's plays, soccer games, and crew races, and during covid, she made frequent drives across the river to have lunch in Conna's backyard, developing a particular fondness for Chipotle burritos once Conna introduced them to her.

Jennifer cherishes the memories of Grandma's annual trips to Arizona to escape the cold New England winter. When she arrived, she would *want* to take a taxi from the airport, and once took an Uber to meet Jennifer for lunch near her work. Jennifer's colleague's surprised reaction made her feel guilty for not picking grandma up, except that Grandma *wanted* to be independent and was proud of doing it alone. Grandma also visited Megumi in Miami in 2019 to spend time

with newborn Rio, and despite being 89, she was the one introducing Meg to Trader Joe's meal hacks. As mothers themselves, Jennifer and Meg discovered a new point of connection with Grandma, who could conjure clear memories of her own transition into motherhood. Grandma spotted differences and would remark that parenting today seemed harder in many ways. She was always our cheerleader and our number one ally.

Many of *my* memories are of time spent with Grandma in New England, including some activities we all experienced with her at some point. She's welcomed my friends and me for relaxing summer weekends in New Hampshire, celebrated with the family on Thanksgiving and Passover, and hosted birthday parties for me at Brookhouse— always bringing her signature shrimp cocktail hors d'oeuvres. She spent some, but not too much time, listening about my angst-ridden decisions, supporting me with her pragmatic wisdom, but not indulging me in endless iterations. Now that I've moved to California and don't yet have a Jewish community, I am realizing how much of my Jewish home in Boston was grandma, who shared many of the traditions that are why I feel culturally Jewish. One of my most cherished recent memories with her is her first time baking challah on Christmas 2020. After careful quarantine, I stayed at her place for a few days, we watched a TV series together, shared meals and quiet time, and, though elaborate cooking projects weren't her go-to, embarked on a daylong challah-baking journey. We filled the dough-rising wait time with a walk in the cold, in the park across the street, me holding her arm as we navigated the slushy ice and sang 'take me out to the ball game' in our terrible singing voices. The golden, braided challah was delicious and we were both proud of what we had baked—not bulkie rolls, but still ending with a big, warm hug.

We each love our grandma Naomi so, so much. I take immense solace in the fact that a few years ago, she expressed the sentiment that: “Whenever I die from here on in it is not tragic. I feel this keenly. I certainly could have worried less and nagged my husband and children less, but I have no powerful regrets. All the big life choices I made I'm happy with. I sort of lucked out when you think of it.” I also have no powerful regrets with you, grandma. I relished every moment I had with you, and I love and am so grateful for the relationship we had. You are one of the best people each of us will ever know, and we're so fortunate to have had you fully present in our lives, over so many stages of life. We will miss you, and we will never forget you, and all you taught us. We love you so much!

## **William Gordon Eulogy**

Greetings. Thank you for being here. What an honor to be standing before you to speak about my best friend Naomi who coincidentally is my mother.

No matter what each of our roles are in Naomi's life—wife, child, grandchild, friend, colleague, boss, supervisee, aunt, sister-in-law, mother-in-law, cousin. The one thing that unifies us is that she was a friend to all who knew her. Through her tact, intelligence, humor, listening skills and values, her gravitational pull was towards friendship for all who knew her.

There are numerous examples of how Naomi's did this. Let's start with the obvious her lifelong friends and relatives—young and old who have been such constants throughout her life and especially the past few years and so clearly broken hearted to see Naomi—our rock, (my rock) develop cracks and slowly erode.

When my mother was 36 her best friend and college roommate Greta passed away, she stepped in and played a huge role in caring for my non-biological cousins, the 3 Arbetter girls, with whom she developed lifelong bonds. Later and more personally, she visited me weekly over an 18-year period, first to help care for my dying wife, her beloved daughter-in-law Marcy, and eventually, to help me bring up Melissa. We consulted as thoughtful and concerned equals about everything, especially Melissa's schooling. Though she divulged her grandmotherishness when it came to swimwear. Naomi's words to me about these acts of giving were "that is what a mother and friend does. There is nothing to think about. It is an honor." Naomi was working full time while doing this.

There are my mother's friends by definition— many of whom are here today. I am quite sure—their unanimous comment would be that she never stopped engaging in intellectual pursuits and actively doing things she was passionate about. That she kept the conversation alive and current. Not just about the past or the latest achievements of the kids or grandkids.

There are the bonds she has with her grandchildren, which so clearly have been evidenced today and that reach deeply into the friend zone.

Professionally Naomi reached several generations of educators in Brookline. The cards and email testimonials that have been coming in over the past 18 months from former colleagues have been amazing. "Friendship" was always a theme in these correspondences. Henry's words covered the rest.

Temple Israel in recent years became a second home. I would meet congregants and staff and hear about the way she artfully navigated board meetings, spearheaded several social justice

initiatives and the Temple Israel Life-Long Learning Initiative. The feedback being what a wonderful person she was, her timely use of humor, her deft touch in giving feedback that might contradict others—and how they came to view her as a friend—above all else.

So how did she do it? It was not hypnosis. ***The core of Naomi is that she was never stuck in her generational world view*** (Repeat). As she grew older—she drew from her experience, but also always stayed current. In her own words, “I am most fortunate to see the world from the perspective of my children, grandchildren and great grandchildren”. This goes beyond her family. A few days ago, Tamar, an Israeli cousin of Rachele’s who my mother met on a trip to Israel in 2019, wrote “I met her on that one trip, but she left a strong impression on me, so open and communitive as if we were almost the same age”. Sound familiar?

After my dad passed away my mother had a bounty of free time as she no longer was a caring for him. She did not go the bridge route (although she did play). She wanted to volunteer and do meaningful work. She tried several things and fired them as they were not impactful enough. Planned Parenthood met her standards. There was a rigorous training program. She was by far the oldest volunteer by 50 years. During the training period she asked Melissa “what does queer mean” and “do you know what pronouns are?” We laugh—but here is an 88-year-old woman wanting to learn, open to what was happening several generations down and trying to expand and understand the world.

Beyond her generational nimbleness my mother had another quality that broke down role barriers. My Aunt Marcia captured it in a note to my mother just a few weeks ago. She wrote “I could talk to you about anything, always knowing you would keep what was important and throw away what was unimportant”. The ability to do this—with her family, colleagues, friends, fellow congregants, people in all walks of her life -- I believe is what drew us in and made her such an amazing friend. She stripped away the “noise in the room” (that is a quote from Alex Cora—the Red Sox manager...by the way) and would zero in on what was important.

The trip to Israel in 2019 mentioned earlier embodied so many of these themes. My mother made that trip so she could meet Rachele’s relatives near Haifa. To know Rachele, one had to know her Israeli family. What an expression of friendship. It was convenient that my mom also had Petra on her bucket list and set off for Jordan alone after our time in Israel. Her thirst to do everything was a wonder. When we were in Israel, we palled around with no limitations—starting with dinner with relatives the day we arrived after she hadn’t slept the entire flight. We explored for hours the amazing ruins of Beit She’an, and had many meals with friends & relatives, including the newly found Russian relatives Andy mentioned. She was always ready at the agreed upon time.

There was one magical day that had no agenda and was just me & her. We went to the Wailing Wall. While walking through the old city to get there she took over negotiations for scarves. I was paying too much. Once there, it was insane with numerous Bat Mitzvah's as it was school break. I asked, "are you moved". She immediately replied, "I don't like that the woman and men are not together and why is the woman's section so much smaller"? Next stop City of David, a world of underground tunnels, rooms and piping that was in biblical times a city and water system. Modern Jerusalem was built on top of this. Intrepid as always, Naomi explored it all. By far the oldest and most inquisitive person. She adored it. What a fantastic travel companion—but more importantly—age did not mater. My mother was living true to her words spoken to my sister-in-law a few years prior, "I am not going to live my life as a widow". My mother blossomed beyond the full-grown flower she already was in her later years.

When Naomi was in her early 80's I get a call:

"Billy, Bruce Springsteen is coming to Boston. I would like to go. Would you come with me?"  
I was surprised..."

Mom, I didn't know you were a fan—why do you want to go?"

Mom: "Three reasons. 1. He is really sexy (my father was alive at time). 2. I like some of his music. 3. I have heard a lot about him and want to see what all the fuss is about."

I think now we are getting somewhere. Sexy? Like his music? "What is all the fuss about".  
There you go.

The next day "Mom the tickets are \$250 each" Mom "that is ridiculous we are not going." End of story

One year later—The phone rings. "Billy, Bruce Springsteen is coming to the TD Garden in a few months. Want to go?"

Billy: "We have been down this road before—the tickets will still be a lot."

Mom: "Well, it is a no then."

Billy: "Mom, come on you want to go, let's just do it." She relents.

We went to the concert. Talk about generational leap frogging.

It was great—She drank Jack Daniels (her favorite) with our new buddies in the nosebleed section. Stood most of the time and swayed to the music. The next day she called to thank me and reported she could not get to sleep until 3:00 because she was so wired. She got it and loved it! Whether it be social justice, bible study, a new important book, politics or contemporary music—she wanted to understand. No wonder everyone wants to be her friend. Appropriately and in closing, I would like to share words from, of course, Bruce Springsteen from a recent documentary. My mother was not a poet, but if she was, I could imagine her writing this. It is so Naomi and I believe indeed would have been her parting message to us all. Plus, how cool to think of my mother and Bruce as connected! I bet he would have been honored.

Age brings perspective  
in the fine clarity one gets at midnight

on the tracks looking into the lights of an oncoming train.

It dawns on you rather quickly...  
there's only so much time left.

Only so many star-filled nights,  
snowfalls...

brisk fall afternoons,  
rainy midsummer days.

So how you conduct yourself  
and do your work matters.

How you treat your friends,  
your family, your lover.

On good days, a blessing falls over you.

It wraps its arms around you, and you're free and deeply in and of this world.

That's your reward: being here.

That's what gets you up  
the next morning...

a new chance to receive that benediction.

While you're buttering your toast, getting dressed or driving home from work,

you stumble into those moments

when you can feel the hand of God gently rest upon your shoulder.

And you realize how lucky you are.

Lucky to be alive,

lucky to be breathing in this world of beauty, horror and hope.

Because this is what there is: a chance.

A world where it's lucky to love,  
lucky to be loved.

So you go until it fills you,

until the sweat, blood and hard tears make sense.

You go until the light from the fading distant stars

fall at your feet.

Go, and may God bless you.

## **Betsy Gordon Eulogy**

**To Mom.**

### ***A SAFE INNER HARBOR.***

You gave us the ocean  
Vast, mysterious  
Your arms carried us  
Your smiling energy  
Made walks along the shores playful  
Your deep passion for life, a beacon.

In anticipation and wonder  
We floated in that space between the waves.  
Anticipating. Wondering.  
But waves could be daunting.  
Would you carry us when the waves threatened?  
No. You knew we could carry ourselves.

Waves keep coming.  
Some overwhelm, some comfort.  
Some surprise; some humbling.  
Some enrage, and some leave us with unanswerable questions.

You are the oceans strength  
Given freely to us forever  
The waves of life are ceaseless, powerful  
But You have given us our safe inner harbor

Thank you, Mom.