

Angie

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My Aunt Angie unexpectedly passed away this week after a brief illness. We are still in shock. She kept herself quite busy - it seemed so sudden.

Sorting through the memories, I can say that it was a privilege and an honor to accompany Angie and my cousin Mark on a trip to Hawaii in May. She wanted to go 'one last time' to the place that gave her so much joy and happiness throughout the years. She generously offered to pay my way - so that she'd have 2 'chaperones,' her son and nephew, to join her on our tropical adventures.

It was the trip of a lifetime. Not only were we able to travel all over Oahu, beholding all its magical splendor and beauty - but we each had the opportunity to reconnect in the best of all possible ways. We never missed happy hour at the hotel bar every night, where we'd sort through all the photos we'd taken, recall our shared experiences and plan what we'd do the next day.

My cousin Mark and I were very close when we were younger - like brothers. And though time has a way of dissolving those bonds, we were able to reconnect as though we hadn't missed a day. We are very much alike, he and I; we wear our hearts on our sleeves. He is a great man and a wonderful human being. I am so grateful to have had this quality time with him.

The trip to Hawaii also gave me the chance to spread some of my mother's ashes in her favourite spots: Hanauma Bay, Blowhole, and Waikiki beach. Was it surprising that in each location there was a sea turtle to make an appearance just at the moment the wind took her ashes? No.

Angela and my mother Mary Jo had very different personalities - but they were both deeply spiritual in ways that go beyond any traditional religion. They loved their children fiercely, were slow to anger, but could cut you to the quick if you crossed them; they suffered no fools. They each made their way in the world with unbounded confidence and cut a path straight and true to what they believed - right to the very end.

Angie loved live music and I will miss catching crappy cover bands on Saturday afternoons

with her. Ok, they weren't all that bad. Most were. But I was there for her company, that's for certain.

Angie drank bourbon and coke - well bourbon, because "You don't need top shelf liquor if you're going to mix it with soda."

She and Mark's sister Sarah (my other beloved cousin), took me out for my birthday in October. We had lost our cat Lily, and as I related the tale and my sadness over the situation, she was understandably empathetic - as an animal lover she understood, but more than that - she truly knew what the loss of Lily meant, in a way that many people couldn't comprehend. It meant a lot to me. And I'll never forget when we parted that evening - she said of Lily: 'This story isn't over.'

And she was right. We found Lily just a few weeks later. Only then did she send me not one, but two birthday cards. She was late in sending them. Had she been waiting for Lily to return? I'm not sure, but it seemed so.

I'll always remember standing on a beach at the North shore on our first day in Hawaii, mesmerized, as mighty waves crashed with booming fury against the jagged lava rock, the white frothy foam of the ocean splashing salty mist and sand into my face. Angie and I had walked quite a ways from the car to get to that spot on the shoreline, and she found a bench and sat down to rest. 'You go on,' she said. 'I'll watch you from here.'

I stopped to get a picture of us first and then walked out to meet the waves. When I got to the water's edge and felt the cool ocean breeze in my hair, I looked back at Angie and waved. Her arm went up and I didn't have to see her face to know she was smiling.

Farewell, my dear aunt.