

Dear Florence:

I paid a shiva call today to Robert and Judy. While the occasion was so very, very sad, it was good that we could experience a reunion and invoke some very happy memories (Elise and Gascon walked in towards the end of our visit).

That was the easy part. This letter is the truly hard part. How is it possible adequately to console a loving mother over the depth of a son? (And David was widely acknowledged as lovable, so I can imagine the depth of your feelings towards him).

I remember (vaguely) baby-sitting for Judy and David when I was a college student. At the time I believe you lived in Washington Hts (or was it Riverdale?) and I had not seen or heard much from him in the course of the years except for a brief encounter at the 50th yahrzeit of our grandfather (incidentally: tonight and tomorrow are his 54th yahrzeit!). A few months ago, however, I was pleasantly surprised to receive an email from him, one in which he revealed some very serious religious stirrings. His questions were real, not artificial or simple-minded at all; they testified to a growing spiritual sensitivity that I had not suspected from my very superficial acquaintance with him. I marveled then, and I do now, at how much he had grown intellectually and spiritually. I wonder how he would have turned out had the Angel of Death not poked his crooked nose into his affairs and prematurely snuffed out his life.

But such questions are fundamentally unanswerable. The conjecture reveals more about us than about him. And his demise has to be faced with an appreciation of who he was, what he was, how he had ultimately turned his life around quite heroically, and not only what he might have been or become.

Florence, you have every reason to be proud of him, even as you have every reason to mourn for him. I understand - -and got the impression from my all too short encounter with him that he was a warm, decent, loving and honorable person. That cannot be said of so many others without sacrificing one's integrity, or at least accuracy.

I feel for you, Florence, as does Mindy, and all that we can do is express the hope that your remaining children and grandchildren make you happy and proud.

In the language of our tradition, may you be consoled amongst all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem and may the Almighty grant you a return to health and vigor.

With all my love,  
Norman