

JILL ARNA KOTOVSKY

Jill Arna Kotovsky, 59, was born severely developmentally disabled to Dee Cohn-Kotovsky and Irwin Kotovsky. Jill passed away peacefully in California on May 20, 2023, joining her adoring and endlessly devoted mother, Dee Cohn-Cartiff; tender loving sister, Karen Kotovsky; dedicated and doting grandparents, Ethel and Henry Cohn; kind and steadfast father figure, Herb Cartiff; unwaveringly supportive Aunt Lois and Uncle Joe Lebovitz; and beloved grandmother Dorothy (Jacob) Kotovsky. She is survived by her loyal brother, Wayne Saks.

Ironically, Arna means in Hebrew "mountain of strength," which Jill possessed and also required during her lifetime. Jill loved music, dances, and her visits to church and temple. Savoring food was her great pleasure. She enjoyed people, and had a keen understanding of humor, love, loss, fun, learning, pride, dignity, disappointment, respect, and gratitude, although she could not necessarily verbalize those feelings. Jewish tradition teaches us of our obligation to ensure access for all people and to facilitate the full participation for individuals with disabilities in family, religious, and community life. Judaism as well as other religions, cares deeply about advocating for the rights of people with disabilities. It teaches us the responsibility of "being involved" and creating a loving life full of happiness, joy, inclusiveness, and success.

Dee gave Jill life and then despite enormous adversity, heroically engineered the best possible life for her daughter in Pittsburgh and eventually in California. It was at St. Peters, through Autism-Pittsburgh established in 1966, where Jill first experienced community support and education. Jill's first experience of residency at a group home was at the pioneering Idlewood home of Pittsburgh established in 1975. Dee along with her son, Wayne, secured environments offering a sense of belonging, family, love, hope, and promise. It was the friendship with Monty Hall of Beverly Hills, California, that enriched the trajectory of Jill's journey by leading her to Esperance, a group home in Clovis, California (also Malibu) that became Jill's safe haven for the next 27 years. The Esperance mission statement — "Hope with the expectation for success" — was the perfect fit!

One of the great concerns for parents of special needs children is the safety and care of their child once the parents are gone. When Dee passed away unexpectedly some 17 years prior to Jill's passing, Dee's lifelong dedication to establish and ensure the continued care and safety for Jill carried on. Like others with disabilities, Jill's life required a village not for the faint of heart. The Esperance staff reflected the beauty of mankind with selfless caring individuals doing the hard work that made Jill's life whole, including creating an extension of her nurturing family. The village grew, encompassing social workers, teachers, housemates, houseparents, van drivers, day program clients and staff, doctors, nurses, physical therapists, and the community itself. Later at Aspen House, the experience of her extended family was much the same.

Other village members included loving cousins, aunts, uncles, the Sheila and Buz Reicher family; including Pam Reicher-Levy; her niece, Rachel; and the decades of commitment to legal family advocacy of her conservator and lawyer, David Fisher of Beverly Hills. David's astute legal prowess paved the way for safety and justice for Jill, and, as a result, for other developmentally disabled people without the benefit of family advocates. Jill along with her sister, Karen, rests on either side of their beloved mother, Dee, in the beauty of upstate New York Horizon View Cemetery.

Jill leaves a legacy of opportunity for those who knew her to recognize the potential for selfless good in those who participated in her life, as well as every individual's right to reach their optimal level of well-being. "People should not simply be remembered for their limits and disabilities but rather the lessons of the gifts and blessings they inherently provided us with while being part of our journey.

May Jill's memory be a source of inspiration." PJC

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