

The Lives They Loved, *New York Times*, December 2015

In Memory of Michael May Lanning
August 25, 2938 - September 15, 2015

by Rebecca Lanning

Every December, my mother mailed over 250 holiday cards. My sister Carrie would help her create a collage of pictures taken over the year. Shots of her and Dad, the grandkids, their rescue cat, Isabel, with the kinked tail. She sent the cards, along with personal notes, to everyone she knew, and every year her list grew. The cards were her trademark. Her way of staying connected. People looked forward to receiving Mom's cards, kept them on their refrigerators, talked about them long into the new year. Whenever I was out with Mom, people would approach us. "How is Tate's T-ball season going?" "That Rose sure has grown!" "When did Hannah get her braces off?" It was as if, by virtue of receiving Mom's cards, the recipients were part of our family.

Mom died of ovarian cancer on September 15. She was 77. It has been three months since her death, and the sympathy cards are still pouring in. Every week, when I visit Dad, I marvel at the growing mountain of cards on the window seat. Cards from old neighbors, friends from elementary school, the kind stylist who shaved Mom's head when the chemo kicked in. I read each one and think of the person who sent it, someone who cared enough about Mom to express their sympathy in Mom's favorite currency: the card.

According to her wishes, Mom was cremated. Her ashes weighed 6.2 pounds. At last check, the stack of sympathy cards weighed over 12 pounds.