When aunty Evelyn, my Nana’s little sister, passed away - Nana told me that when the time comes she wants me to speak at her funeral. My heart dropped.

It wasn’t the thought of her passing that weighed on me; I’ve been preparing for that for many years. It was the idea that I could somehow do justice to the person Nana was to everyone who gathers to bid her farewell.

Writing this has been very hard, and whenever I would fumble, I found myself asking - *why would Nana burden me with such a difficult task?*

Fortunately, in trying to answer this question, I found Nana left lots of breadcrumbs for me to find along the way in her words and writing. Nana never shied away from sharing her thoughts with the world, and did so in sermons, articles and even radio broadcasts. But more than anything, I associate her with letters to the editor.

If she were to answer my question, I imagine it would have come in the form of such a letter, and would have sounded something like this:

*Dear sir-*

Life, as I’ve often mused, is rather like sitting behind the curtain in the women’s section of shul. You never quite see the whole picture, and you can’t help but feel you’re missing out on something important.

Facing death is no different. I keep telling my grandson that I’ve had a wonderful life, but a horrible death - to which he inevitably replies, “*better than the alternative*”. This might be true, but I’ve never died before; It might be wonderful, and in fact, I look forward to finding out. I know this is hard for him to hear, but I have found that trying to find something good and positive out of something sad is always a comforting exercise, and I want him to find this out for himself.

As he sits down to write what, I am sure, is the hardest thing he has ever written; he will inevitably go back to my own writings. I always considered my words the best part of me, and my grandson will undoubtedly search for himself in them. As he rereads my parting words to my beloved husband, he will remember just how happy I was in life, and how loved I always felt.

My husband was always a feet-on-the-ground person, looking things straight in the eye, seeing the truth. I was the poet, the dreamer, the romantic. He made sure we did all the sensible things, and I showed him how to touch the stars. My grandson is more like me, looking further out at what could be, or should be, rather than what is - but he often struggles to look past the curtain, and see the whole picture.

When my husband died, I would think about the future, and the awful realisation that I would never again know the magic of the love of that one special person. Never is such a long time. But I refuse to go quietly into that twilight. There are mountains to climb, songs to sing, battles to be fought.

My grandson will struggle with the idea of never talking to me again. He often told me that I was his only true sounding board. He probably thinks the person he needs to talk to the most at a time like this, is the one person he can no longer reach. But looking back at the first few months of my widowhood, the words which helped me see past the curtain were not from family, poets or rabbis, but from a little old lady my husband used to take to a day centre for the elderly. She offered her sympathy, and spoke of him with great affection; how kind he was, and always with a smile. Then she thanked me. I didn’t understand what she meant. “What for?”, I enquired. She replied, “If you had not been the woman you are, he could not have been the wonderful man he was”.

When I die, I said, I’ll take her words with me as a reference. I hope my grandson reads those words and feels the same way about my impact on him. I hope my presence, my words and most of all, my questions, helped him become a person who can see past the curtain and see the whole picture.

As this is my last letter, please allow me this last opportunity to leave you with a parting thought on curtains at shul. If the reason for the curtain is men who cannot look at a woman without thinking lewd thoughts, then surely it is the men who should be put behind a curtain? Is this not a terrible insult to our men?

When I was young, I was not particularly attractive. Now that I am old, even less so. I am short, fat and ugly, with buck teeth and bandy legs. If there is any man who is distracted from his prayers by the sight of me, psychiatric help is available under the National Health Service.

Yours sincerely,

Renee Bravo