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## When We Buried You, Rosi

Jewish ritual, natural burial, and a life-changing funeral

Posted on [July 20, 2016](#) by [Aurora Wells \(Blog Writer, SevenPonds\)](#)

*This is the story of Judy Vasos, as told by Aurora Wells...*



Rosi Mosbacher

Of those bizarre and wonderful adventures we shared in Mexico, you would always tell me to *write about it*.

Simply, *write about it*.

Like the day I met you — my wedding to your son. My own mother was too sick to attend. And there you were, in all your European elegance, so different from my Midwest roots. You must have noticed I was tied up with my guests, because you marched right up to me and placed a plate piled high with hors d'oeuvres in my hand. *Eat*, you said. Just “eat.”

I knew right then, standing in my wedding dress, that you were going to impact my life forever. So spirited in your kindness —

so direct with your love.

Later I would learn that your cousin was made to pin the Star of David to her wedding dress. And the incredible loss shadowing your history makes the bravery of your generous spirit shine that much more brightly.

*“Later I would learn that your cousin was made to pin the Star of David to her wedding dress.”*

So I'm *writing*, Rosi. I'm writing you a letter to tell you it was perfect: laying you to rest next to your beloved Alexander. We did everything just as you would have wanted.

Before we buried you, your body was cleansed. Women from the Vaad of Queens performed the *Taharah* — the sacred rites of washing and purifying your body to the recitation of age-old prayers and Psalms. Your body was then wrapped in a traditional white shroud. A member of the Vaad explained how this important Jewish ceremony repeats the reverent ritual of cleansing a newborn child. She referred to a teaching from Ecclesiastes: “As she came, so should she go.”

The women then placed you in a plain pine casket with several holes in the bottom to hasten the body's return to the earth: “For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.” She told us of the longstanding Jewish emphasis on natural burial. Jews believe that the spirit's return to heaven is dependent on the body's return to the earth.

Before we buried you, I shared with the twenty-two present my cherished vintage photographs of you from Germany, Amsterdam and New York. A few from our vacations in Mexico, too.

*“Catholics, we leave the body in broad daylight to be lowered without witness. A rouged corpse sleeping on sateen six feet under.”*

Before we buried you, we recited the Mourner's Kaddish.

Before we buried you, I had never shoveled dirt into an open grave.

Catholics, we leave the body in broad daylight to be lowered without witness. A rouged corpse sleeping on sateen six feet

under.

But the rabbi instructed us to twist the shovel so the sharp end faced us — a symbol of how our world was turned upside down by your death. After one shovel of dirt in the inverted position, we were to turn it back proper, a gesture illustrating our willingness to go on with life despite our sorrow. Instead of handing the shovel off when we finished, he asked us to return it to the mound of dirt, and thus not “pass on our sorrow” to one another.

We each quietly and sometimes tearfully took our turn. When I rotated the blade forward for my second shovel and felt the weight of the earth lift at my fingertips, I truly understood you were returning to the elements. And while I missed you fiercely (and always will), the beauty of this natural process moved me. *Of course, I thought. This is what death should look like.*

*“Of course, I thought. This is what death should look like.”*

The rabbi then told us to gather around as the gravediggers buried your casket below. This was the hardest part; for with each heave of earth, we could see less and less of the pine box in which you lay. I knew that once you were covered entirely, your body would truly begin its return. With permission from the rabbi and encouragement from your sons, I dropped a beautiful, blue, heart-shaped stone into your grave to impart a symbol of our deep love to the earth.

I want you to know, Rosi, that this experience has led to an investigation of natural burial options for myself.

Do you remember the time in Mexico I asked what you thought might happen when we die? You said you think it’s possible we ascend to the clouds, and tilted back your sun hat.

When we buried you, great flocks of birds shot through the sky in elegant V’s — one after another. A body of wings in the shape of a single feather, floating across the heavens.

When we buried you, Rosi...

With love,

— Judy

*Not to be missed: Next week's [Opening our Hearts](#) will be a special presentation of Rosi's family and the Holocaust through old photographs and translated historical documents.*



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#### 2 Responses to *When We Buried You, Rosi*



**wendy eppinger** says:

May 28, 2011 at 8:57 am

The beautiful written piece "When we buried you Rosie" touched my heart. The piece was lyrical in rhythm combining different times in a half century; both horrid events of the past with Rosie's long and beautiful life and her interesting involvement with her daughter in law.... I commend you for enriching our life in this way.

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**Francie Sloan** says:

June 5, 2011 at 6:56 am

Rosi was so fortunate to have you in her life, Judy (and I know you feel the same about her). You have used your talents to share her story with compassion and creativity.

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