

Hi everyone. Thank you so much for being here. My name is Jennifer Wielgus, and Amelia Gaza was my great aunt. To me, she's Auntie Mick. I'm the eldest daughter of her nephew George, and although I grew up here, I have lived in the Philadelphia area with my husband J-P for the past 20 years – much to Auntie Mickey's chagrin; she would always kind of yell at us, "I'm selfish! I want you to move back here!" because that's really what she was all about: family, being together, enjoying life and each other.

I don't know about you, but *I'm* feeling pretty selfish at this moment, wishing Auntie Mickey could have stayed with us down *here* for many more years. She was a fixture on the sidelines at sporting events for me and my sisters, Kate and Andrea – and then their kids, Michaela, Avery, and Jackson – and in the audience at church and school performances and ceremonies, and it's really hard to believe that one of my biggest fans won't be there next spring to see me accept my graduate school diploma, or to watch her great-great nieces and nephew play another season of soccer, baseball, or volleyball. In her last days, Auntie Mick expressed a sense of unfinished business, saying she couldn't go because she still needed to watch this family grow.

Auntie Mickey brought our family all together one last time in early July when she treated us to a Cubs game in a luxury suite, which is typical of her -- she really didn't "play small" in anything she did -- and the other day, I noticed that I had started a thank you card to send her to express my gratitude for giving us that experience. I addressed the envelope but didn't get a chance to write the message. And I brought it here today because if there's anything I want to get across to you, and to God, it's how tremendously grateful I am that I had the one-and-only Auntie Mick in my life.

There were so many extraordinary experiences that my sisters and I were exposed to over the years *because* of Auntie Mick – and in that sentence I have to also mention my Aunt Barb. There were so many cherished memories that Mickey and Barb created for us, from trips to the Santa's Village amusement park to back-to-school shopping sprees to meals at fun or fancy restaurants (why am I thinking of the Rainforest Cafe?) to painstakingly planned Christmas Eve celebrations where both Mickey and Barb worked themselves weary behind the scenes to make everything sparkle on the surface. Truly, holidays with Auntie Mick always felt magical, whether I was an 8- or 9-year-old kid unwrapping a pair

of purple corduroys that were...8 or 9 sizes too big...or a middle-aged woman sitting at the dessert table curiously eyeing the raspberry pie that seemed to appear in the spread every year despite no one ever eating any of it.

Those are some family inside jokes, and honestly, now that I am a grown-up and an aunt myself, I understand how hard it is to buy clothes for kids that aren't yours and keep track of what everybody likes to eat! So, Auntie Mick, if you're listening, I get it!

When I think about all the reasons I'm thankful for my Auntie Mick, I think about who she was as a person and the impact that person had on me and all the women in our family. This was a strong, fierce, confident woman who was not afraid to approach life head-on, to take the gifts that God gave her -- the intelligence, the infectious energy, the athleticism, the passion, the determination, the work ethic, the leadership skills, the moral compass, and the humongous heart -- and go out there and use them. She believed that life was for living, and, seizing every opportunity on the path toward pursuing her goals, she created a full and fulfilling life for herself. And when that life didn't include children of her own, she devoted herself to other people's children -- cheering us on and lifting us up. What a gift for us girls to have a role model like that!

Auntie Mick was my cheerleader through some really difficult challenges and transitions in my life, and she wasn't afraid to give me tough love at times. I remember her saying to me, "I don't understand why you're so anxious and worried. You have so much going for you!" and "It makes me so mad that you don't feel confident!" And *that* was the essence of Auntie Mickey. She was not one to hold back, in her words or her actions. She was not one to get stuck on reasons why *not* to do something or to waste time doubting her abilities or second-guessing her instincts. She was on this Earth to live, to mix it up, to make the most of her time with the people she loved, and do it all with gusto. She wanted to see everyone else live that way. And I am so grateful that I had someone like that in my life who believed in me when I didn't believe in myself, pushed me hard to see myself the way she saw me, and was literally moved to anger by the idea of anyone hiding their light, succumbing to doubt and fear, and reaching their final moments with regret for everything they were too afraid to do or say...

Auntie Mick went to heaven still wanting to wring more out of life, which is so typical of her. That inexhaustible spirit was a gift from God, and it's her gift to us. To celebrate her life is to take what we have and go take on the world, like she did, making a mark in our own special, unique way.