

## Beauty, Loyalty, Courage

Beauty. Dona Irvin came into my life when she was already past 70. I was courting her daughter, so what I first saw in Dona was her beauty. I had not yet heard the refrain that became the title of her second book, "I hope I look that good when I'm that old." But I knew the proverb that advises the young man to regard his beloved's mother if he wants to know how she will look a few years down the road, and I can testify that Dona at 70 was truly gorgeous.

Loyalty. When I look back at Dona and Frank's role in our lives in the 1990s, I see loyalty. For Nell and me, and for our extended family, they provided a net of affection and spiritual support that made a difference in every crisis. The glue that held that spiritual net together was Dona's sheer force of loyalty and will. There was no room to doubt that someone cared about us – not merely about her daughter but also about everyone her daughter loved.

Courage. Dona and Frank had the courage to strike out for an unknown future in California, to bring two children into an uncertain world, to forge ahead after the tragic death of her son. But today we all think of the courage with which she faced the end, from the first symptoms of her circulatory problems in the late 1990s, to her last moments of consciousness in 2009. She was always eager to plan how she could make the best use of the energies left to her. She never, never whined. At the end, she told Frank that she did not want to die. Coming from Dona, these were not words of despair. They were another expression of her inextinguishable willingness to make the best of whatever life brought.