

The Genuine Jean



**A Collection Of Songs, Poems, and Prose
By
Jean Kammen Halpern
1941 - 2025**

A Day of Celebration for Jean

You all know that Jean was truly a remarkable woman who cherished life and lived it to the fullest. She overcame an enormous disability and went on to live an interesting and productive life. Jean loved books and could devour a 300-page novel in one sitting. She loved writing and you will discover in this book, how accomplished she was. She loved folk music, and wrote lyrics to songs which she set to other people's music because music composition was not one of her many talents. Some of those songs are included in this book. She was also bi-lingual and even moonlighted for a short time as a translator.

Teaching was her biggest passion, and by all definitions she was a Master Teacher. In fact, she was awarded the prestigious designation of "Teacher of Excellence," by the New York State English Council. A very high honor. Constantly taking every opportunity to improve her skills, she spent many summer vacations attending classes, seminars, and doing research. She also loved to travel, often combining travel with the opportunity to hone her teaching skills. She participated in many extracurricular activities, from working on curriculum development to coaching her school's award-winning Academic team. There were no funds for academic competitions, only for "real" sports, so she coached the team, without pay, out of her love of teaching.

To my mind, the most important measure of a teacher's success, is the success of their students. It was not an infrequent event for an ex-student to come up to her in a public place and say something like, "Thank you, you had a major impact on my life. Because of you I am now a teacher – lawyer – engineer - doctor ..." A few of her students stayed in touch with her over the years, even visiting with her whenever they could. One ex-student is here with us today another, who could not be here, wrote me the following:

"I cannot attend but I would love to receive a copy of Jean's Songs/Poems by email. Jean was a phenomenal woman, teacher, and friend."

I could talk forever about her teaching accomplishments, but here is a short summary.

She received many awards and recognitions. She developed and taught a life skills lesson set that she squeezed into the required curriculum. Her goal was to provide her students with the tools for life after school, like how to search for a job and how to make budgets for housing, food, and savings. When I saw what she was doing I was not only impressed but wondered why these skills weren't universally taught. When her school implemented a program of electives, she taught courses in science fiction, witchcraft, and ethical dilemmas. Jean used ethical decision-making to introduce her students to critical thinking and debate. It was one of her favorite teaching tools. She spent a full summer at Harvard studying how to teach ethics to her students.

After she retired, she developed and held seminars in teaching skills and ethical dilemmas. Believe it or not she also snuck in a seminar on Palm Reading. She served as a Docent at the Yonkers Museum and volunteered in many local organizations. If you went to the Hastings Farmers Market on a Saturday, you would have seen her because she worked there as a volunteer from its first day until she was no longer able.

Jean loved her family and extended family with the same passion she had for her teaching. The last thing she wanted was for anyone to grieve her passing. In the time before the tragedy of her dementia, she often told me that she didn't want us to be sad at her passing. Easy to say, hard to do. "What I want Steve, is for you and the rest of my friends and family to celebrate my life. A party might be nice. Yes, that's it. I want a party no shiva - a party. I want everyone to celebrate and be happy to have known me." So here we are to do exactly what Jean wished. Eat, listen to some music, share stories, have fun, and get to know one another. --- Steve

About This Book

Spread throughout the book are pictures; sometimes they relate to the words on the page they share, and sometimes they are simply there to fill empty space — and because I like them.

At the end of the book (Page 2-13), I have included a poem, about Jean, written by her best friend Suzy, who was a source of support and love to Jean and I as we struggled with Jean's dementia.

Steve



Flying High

Touring San Francisco with Jenny and Mike. Our friend Mike is Jenny's Uncle

Section 1

Selected Songs & Poems

THE GENUINE JEAN

I've got artificial shoulders, I've got artificial knees,
I've got artificial hair, and it's waving in the breeze.
I've got artificial fingers and they tickle peachy keen,
But don't forget you're giggling with the genuine Jean.
Yes, don't forget you're giggling with the genuine Jean.

I've got artificial boobies, I've got artificial lips,
I think that you just pinched one of my artificial hips.
Got an artificial waistline that belongs upon a teen,
But don't forget you're spooning with the genuine Jean.
Yes, but don't forget you're spooning with the genuine Jean.

I've got artificial hearing; I've got artificial eyes,
What else is artificial might come as a surprise.
Be cautious of my tongue, my dear, you don't know where it's been,
But don't forget you're talking with the genuine Jean.
Yes, but don't forget you're talking with the genuine Jean.

I'm a body full of artifice, but give a dog a bone—
I'm the genuine article. I know my mind and it's my own!



SOMEBODY SPECIAL

Somebody special is waiting to sing me his song,
I've been waiting for that special somebody all my life long.
Perhaps he will come tomorrow,
Or perhaps it won't be for a year,
But someday I'll hear him tenderly
Singing into my ear.

Somebody special wants to sing me a song,
I've been waiting for that special somebody all my life long.
Perhaps it won't be for a very long time,
Or perhaps it will happen tomorrow,
But someday I'll hear that song whispered into my ear.

Somebody special can hear my life's resumé
I've been waiting for that special somebody many a day,
Perhaps it won't be for a very long time,
Or perhaps it will happen tomorrow,
But someday someone will listen to what I will say.

Somebody special wants to give me a voice,
Somebody wants to have me desire that choice,
Perhaps it won't be for a very long time,
Or perhaps it will happen tomorrow,

That somebody special is waiting to have me rejoice.

A SONG OF GOOD WISHES

May your prayers all be answered, your dreams forever new.
May your pleasures be plenty and your troubles short and few.
May your friends all be faithful, your lovers ever true,
May you revel in good wishes like this song I wrote for you.

May you revel in good wishes like this song I wrote for you.

Happy birthday, my dear friend.



LAURA THE LUMP

He called me his sugar lump when we were wed,
“I’ll love you forever.” That’s what he said.
I told him I’d follow wherever he led,
And then we went off to bed.

Now I’m Laura the lump in the President’s bed.
I know I’m intelligent, pretty, well-read,
But my spouse says whatever comes into his head—
I’m Laura, the lump in his bed.

I’m Laura, the lump in the president’s bed.
I have to say sometimes I wish he were dead—
I’d like to slap him right upside his head—
A thump from the lump in his bed!

Repeat second verse.

YOU’RE FUCKIN’ LUCKY TO GET THIS

O let’s declare a holiday; Glenn’s left his life of crime:
He’s handed in his book report—though not on time.

Make Wednesday a school holiday. Everybody heed it,
For Glenn’s reported on his book, although he didn’t read it.

Let’s have a national holiday! O hell, why try to fight it.
Glenn’s handed in his book report, although he didn’t write it.

So this is Fuckin’-lucky Day. On the calendar you’ll find it.
Glenn’s handed in his book report. At least he signed it.

So bring on drums and trumpets. O loudly sing his name.
After eleven years of school Glenn has learned how to sign his name!

TIRES ON THE HIGHWAYS

(Tune—The Banks are Made of Marble)

Mrs. Diamond's on her terrace,
Martini glass in hand.
Her eyes look out on silver waves
Upon her golden sand.
Mrs. Stone sits on her front door stoop
In hopes to catch a breeze,
She flaps her housedress up and down
Between her tired knees.

Oh the rich, they rest on beaches
Lulled by waves that wash their shore,
But tires on the highways
Are the oceans of the poor.

Mrs. Diamond's in her usual box
That faces center stage.
She soothes her soul with music
As she follows printed page.
Mrs. Stone's out on the rooftop,
O listen as she sings
While hanging up the washing
Mid the rush of pigeon wings.

The rich, they go to operas,
And charity balls galore,
The screams of fire sirens
Are the music of the poor.

Mrs. Diamond clips her coupons
On her visits to the bank.
She pays no taxes on the wealth
The president to thank
Mrs. Stone pays off the minimum
On her credit card—
That nineteen percent interest rate
It sure does make it hard.

The rich tot up their dividends
Behind their oaken door.
Seven bucks an hour
Are the wages of the poor.

Note: Written in 2003 and the minimum wage is now \$7.25

I LOOKED IN THE MIRROR

I looked in the mirror, and what did I see,
a tall young lady looking out at me,
a tall young lady with curly black hair
when just a year ago a little girl was there
when just a year ago a little girl was there

I looked in the mirror, and what did I see,
a happy young mother looking out at me,
a happy young mother with a toddler by the hand,
where just a week ago a maiden did stand.
where just a week ago a maiden did stand.

I looked in the mirror, and what did I see,
a middle-aged woman looking out at me,
a middle-aged woman with grey in her hair,
when just an hour ago a young mother was there.
when just an hour ago a young mother was there.

I looked in the mirror, and what did I see,
grey-haired stranger looking back at me,
a grey-haired stranger with wrinkles in her faces,
when just a minute ago a child was in her place.
when just a minute ago a child was in her place.

I looked in the mirror, and what did see,
a tall young lady looking out at me,
a tall young lady with curly black hair,
when just a while ago a little girl was there.
when just a while ago a little girl was there.



FULL CIRCLE COME AT LAST

You look at me, so very old, or so I seem to you.
and yet, when all the story's told, you'll know it isn't true.
for you can't know, at your age, what I have learned at last:
 my child, I am your future
 and youth, you are my past
 and youth, you are my past

You know no one has ever felt the way you feel today,
and yet when all the cards are dealt, the words that you will say
were the very words I've spoken when time did not run fast:
 my child, I am your future,
 young woman, you're my past
 young woman, you're my past

And when you speak to your own kids when you are homeward bound
You will be hearing my own voice: familiar is the sound.
For all of us must travel the way my parents passed.
 My parents, you've a future--full circle come at last
 My child, you are my future--full circle come at last.



Jean & Ruth
Circa 1945

THE RABBIT SONG

Two little hangers hung in the closet looking as neat as you please,
When you come back from your week in the country, hangers are up to your knees

Chorus:

Cause you leave them (it) alone and they breed, you leave them alone and they breed.

Two little rabbits alone in the hutch, looking so fluffy and cute,
When you come back from your week in the country, too many rabbits to shoot.

One little tissue is under the bed as innocent as a white mouse,
When you come back from your week in the country, kleenex will fill up your house.

Two little papers hid under the blotter you know what happens next
When you come back from your week in the country, papers will cover your desk.

One little dust ball avoided your eye when you were sweeping the floor,
When you come back from your week in the country, there are 10,000 or more.

One little teacup was left in the dishpan, and as quick as a wink,
When you get back from your week in the country, dishes will fill up your sink.

One pair of underpants went down the chute, followed by one pair of socks,
but when you get back from your week in the country, laundry will fill up the box

Two little paperclips tucked in the compartment neatly inside the drawer,
but when you get back from your week in the country paperclips cover the floor.

Now this song started as just a small chorus, it shouldn't have been very long, but then
it turned up at a weekend at Pinewoods
a seemingly unending song.



PROOF

He's says he's smarter than I am;
It's true, it's plain to see.
The proof is that I married him
And he married me.



40th BIRTHDAY SONG

I won't leave no children to carry on my name,
and when I go to work each day, I leave it just the same,
I don't believe I have a chance for immortality,
so when I'm gone, how will you remember me?

Will I have done well in your eyes?
or will I be that foolish soul with all my dreams disguised?
I won't have fame or fortune, it's pretty plain to see,
so when I'm gone, will you remember me?

You know, I care how others see me in this life,
and when they do not like me, it cuts just like a knife,
but others cannot live my life; it must be lived by me,
so when I'm gone, will you remember me?

Now I may touch a life or so before I take my rest,
for when I think about it, I've tried to do my best.
and if I make my lifetime like a green and growing tree
then when I'm gone, will you remember me?

HARVEST SONG

Oh, the Timmys and the Tommys and the Tammys and the Tonys,
The Ruthies and Rashidas, Latoyas and the Kims,
The Michaels and Marias, the Ginnys and the Joanies,
The Alis and the Alices, the Jennies and the Jims...

I meet so many people that I taught throughout the years,
They're fathers, mothers, doctors, bankers, playwrights, engineers,
They're raising loving children. Oh, how can I explain
How much I love the harvest of this rich and wholesome grain?

Oh, the Marys and the Monicas, the Marthas and the Minnies
The Jeffs and the Jerushas, the Samanthas and the Seans,
The Blisses and the Brendas and the Rohans and the Vinnies
The Davids and Doriads, the Donalds and the Dawns,

I meet so many people that I taught throughout the years,
They're aunts and uncles, social workers, teachers, volunteers,
They're good and caring people. Oh, how can I explain
How much I love the harvest of this rich and wholesome grain?

FAWN RIDGE

When the last piece of dirt is paved over,
When the last green tree is cut down,
When the last bit of country is ended,
Subsumed into one giant town,
When our knowledge of nature is kindled
By the names of communities where
The names are all that remain of the beauty
That drew people to settle out there,
Then we'll all go to nature museums
To hear birdsong that they have piped in.
We'll go into the room with the picture of flowers
and swift simulation of wind on the skin.
Perhaps, if we pay enough money,
We'll be granted a glimpse of blue sky,
And the sweet, pungent odor of earth damp with rain
To come trickling in, as we die.

EACH DAY IS A DIAMOND

Each day is a diamond
Set in the day before
Reflecting all the brilliance
Of the present's core
And if the day's a good one
The colors show up more
Each day is a diamond
Set in the day before.

If you do a good deed today
Its worth increases more....



THINGS WILL GET BETTER

For the times so bad you can't even eat chocolate,
So sad you don't know how you'll get along,
For the terrible times that all people enter
Take comfort in singing this song:

Chorus:

It happens to everyone, things will get better,
Times will improve just as people say,
It happens to all of us, times will be good again,
Things will get better, but just not today.

Your face is a mess and the prom is tomorrow,
Your date looks away when you pass in the hall
Everything round you is darkness and sorrow,
You can't even begin to imagine next fall.

Chorus:

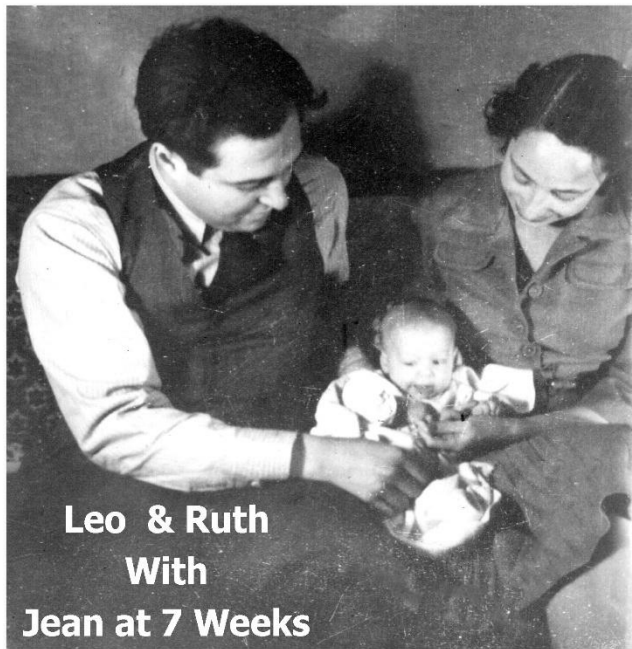
WRINKLE IN TIME

I look at my mouth and I see my mother;
My mouth has got lined like hers.
I look at my eyes and I see my father,
My eyes have grown tired like his.

What wrinkle in time,
What wormhole in space
Have transferred their features
Onto my face?
How has it happened? Life's devious schemes
Have conspired with the future to hide all my dreams.

I look at my face and I see my parents,
Their faults and good humor conjoined.
I look at my face and I see the long lessons
Made me what I am today...

What wrinkle in time,
What wormhole in space
Have the parent and child
Combined in one place?
How has it happened? Life's devious schemes
And hard work have let me own most of my dreams.



**Leo & Ruth
With
Jean at 7 Weeks**

RETIREMENT SONG I

I will miss you all:
I will your sleepy faces over steaming cups of brew:
I will miss you all in the morning--
I've had coffee with my husband less often than with you.

I will miss you all,
Miss those who came for coffee and those who went for beer.
I will miss you all in the afternoon--
You're the ones who made it bearable to come to work in here.

I shall miss the interesting conversations
With all you lovely folks,
Even miss the bitching and the moaning,
And the swift snort of laughter at the terrible jokes.

I will miss you all--
Your intense concern for people, your capacity for play.
I will miss you all more than I can ever tell you.
I will miss you all
But not enough
To stay



RETIREMENT SONG, II

These are the good times:
Pension from the job that pays,
Time to walk in pleasant ways,
Happy in the spendthrift days,
These are the best of times.

These are the best of times of us, the happily retired,
There's time to spend and time to take with travel, books, and song.
There's time to plant a garden, with luck, to watch it flourish,
Time to help our children's children grow up and be strong.

These are the good times:
Pensioned from the job that pays,
Time to walk in pleasant ways,
Happy in the spendthrift days,
These are the best of times.

These are the best of times for us as we are growing older.
Our minds are clear. Our bodies--well, they are not yet frail.
We've cash enough to keep us warm and friends for conversation:
So many blessings to be counted, they would weigh a bale.
(Our lives so full of blessings they'd spill over from a pail.)

These are the good times:
Pensioned from the job that pays,
Time to walk in pleasant ways,
Happy in the spendthrift days,
These are the best of times.



ROAD KILL RESTAURANT

Come on to dinner at the Road Kill Restaurant.
What shall we eat?
Squashed opossum? Mangled muskrat?
Mystery meat?
It ain't pretty—you can't plan;
Gotta get it while you can.
The variety's the nicest,
And you sure can't beat the prices.

Come on to dinner at the Road Kill Restaurant
The food's so fine.
Frazzled pheasant. Bumpered venison.
What kind of wine
Go good with run-over rabbit?
With Ford-grilled cow?
What do you serve with skewered skunk?
Can you get it, anyhow?

Come on to dinner at the Road Kill Restaurant,
Come one and all!
We don't know what you'll get—
We haven't found it yet,
But you'll have a ball...
Well, looky, looky here —
I think that WE'VE GOT DEER!
Dinner bell's call.



TIME TO WASTE

when I was 10--first summer that I remember clearly,
June stretched ahead, a green mountain meadow studded with Queen Anne's lace,

and the days, they were long, and the weeks had no ending,
there were swimming holes and fireflies all over the place.

and I still remember what I did when I was 10--
I wonder if I'll ever have such time to waste again.

when I was 20 and working at my first job in the city
I measured seasons in terms of hot and cold--
the rumble of the subways is what I most remember
from those first fledgling years when nobody was old.

and a week was shorter than a day when I was 10--
I wonder if I'll ever have such time to waste again.

when in my forties the children were all away at college--
I foresaw a time when I could do just as I pleased--
I could hear the willows rustle; there was sunshine in the valley,
and the days flew by like milkweed on a cool autumn breeze.

and a month was shorter than a day when I was 10--
I wonder if I'll ever have such time to waste again.

now I'm 60, and who knows what the busy years will bring me--
I can't be sure of one more decade all healthy and complete,
and the seasons rush by like a child's turning pinwheel,
melting winter's icy snow with autumn's golden heat.

and a year goes by faster than a day when I was 10--
I wonder if I'll ever have such time to waste again.
can't anybody tell me what I really want to know--
if we reach a second childhood, does time begin to slow--
when we reach a second childhood, does time begin to slow?



I DON'T NEED HELP TO FORGET

There are medicines that I can take
For every conceivable ache,
I've got pills for my plumbing and pills for my heart,
Pills for my bones so they won't fall apart.
But there's one pill that I'm not on yet,
And I never will be, you can bet:
It's this new pill they make
That I won't have to take,
It's the pill to help you forget.

Chorus:

I don't need help to forget,
No, I don't need help to forget.
Forgetting is one thing I do on my own.
I don't need help to forget.

I've forgotten where I put my money;
Forgotten where I put my purse.
I've met an old flame
And forgotten his name.
This forgetting can be such a curse.
I've forgotten to bring in the poodle.
Forgotten to turn the lights out.
Got into a fight
(It just happened last night.) with my husband last night
I've forgotten what it was about.

Chorus:

I've forgotten to look at my emails,
Forgotten to return that call.
I've started to roam
With the cell phone at home
Now I can't be contacted at all.

Chorus:

Forgotten to look at my emails,
Forgotten to call back the boss,
I've started to roam and forgot to call home
Leaving everyone there at a loss.
I've forgotten to check on my money—
I'm usually not such a jerk,
But my balance was blank at the First National Bank—
I guess I've forgotten to work.



ELEVATOR MUSIC

Elevator music...
Elevator music playing everywhere;
Elevator music...
Elevator music playing all the time.

It doesn't elevate my heart,
Elevate my mind,
Elevate my soul; It doesn't elevate me.
It doesn't elevate my heart,
Elevate my mind,

Elevate my soul; It doesn't elevate me.

SICK SONG

I've been doin' drugs for the past two weeks;
My body is stiff and it's sore.
My eyes look like a used powder puff.
My nose feels like I've been breathin' snuff.
My bed is a beach and what's within reach
Is the flotsam washed up on the shore.
I'm in pain...

And I wake up at night in a dream-induced fright.
My body's as hot as dung starting to rot.
My heat feels as large as an old garbage barge,
So, I reach for the bottle again..

I've been doin' drugs for the past two weeks—
Elixirs and pills and much more.
There's Comtrex and Contac and Coricidin,
Nyquil and Tranquil and Bayer aspirin;
There's nose drops and throat sprays and throat drops and nose sprays
And kleenex all over the floor,
And my love has just walked out the door
For some more.

JOURNEY'S END

It's not the journey's end, but the journey
That tempts me from my fireside in winter
To see snow piled up n branches and wild rabbits by the brook,
To hear the crystal music of the sea.
It's not the journey's end, but the journey
That draws me from the mountain top in summer,
To see saguaro cactus in the early morning light,
To hear the thrushes singing in the brush.

It's those green-arched road that are calling,
Not the castles in the distance that I want to see.
Like a wanderer, a gypsy I go ever on and on:
It's the journey that's fascinating me.

It's not the journey's end, but the journey
That pulls me from my cabin porch in autumn
To see golden leaves on grapevines and pumpkins piled in heaps;
To smell the spicy smoke of burning leaves.
It's not the journey's end, but the journey,
The brings me from my garden in the springtime
To see blizzards of pear-blossoms swirling round the emerald lawn,
To feel the wind's announcement that the winter's almost gone,
To smell the earth awakening, to hear the robin's song—
O, it's journeying—that's where I want to be.
It's the journey that's fascinating me.



With Leslie and Alesia

AT THIS POINT WHAT YOU SEE IS WHAT YOU GET

I could pack for Paris with the bags under my eyes,
At this point, when I get a second glance, it comes as a nice surprise,
But I'm not heading for the surgeon's knife—At least not yet:

Chorus:

So, at this point, what you see is what you get.
at this point, what you see is what you get.

The last time I got a haircut, the clippings were streaked with grey,
Which ruined what otherwise would have been a perfectly beautiful day.
But I'm not dyeing the grey in my hair—at least not yet:

Cho.

So, at this point, what you see is what you get.
at this point, what you see is what you get.

My husband and I had a wee discussion about who should make a call.
It's not that I got the message wrong—I didn't remember the thing at all,

But I'm not headed to the funny farm, at least not yet...

Chorus:

I'M TOO YOUNG TO BE SO OLD

Caught a glimpse of my face in a window.
Where did that stranger come from?
I've passed the best years of my life, I'm told;
I'm too young to be so old.

Seems like I just went out shopping,
Of a sudden my hair's turned to gray..
I've passed the best years of my life, I'm told;
I'm too young to be so old.

How did I get to be sixty, when inside I'm still 23?
When did I start to look like my mama?
Last time I looked, I was me.

When did I start to move slowly,
When inside I'm still dancing free?
I'm past the best years of my life, I'm told;
I'm too young to be so old.

I've passed the best years of my life, they say,
I'm too young to look this way.

Section 2

Selected Stories & Essays

A Solicitation for the Medusa Fund

O, would Someone the giftie gi'e us/ To see ourselves as others see us.

In spite of many opinions to the contrary, she thought of herself as sweet, kind, gentle. Well, she had always tried to be so. When she was ill, and lying in her narrow white-painted brass bed, she did not complain, not even inwardly. She bore the regimen of broths and blancmanges with stolidity. However, her condition worsened, and she was taken to the hospital with a raging fever. After a lengthy time when everything had been tried and nothing worked, she was finally treated with experimental drugs and lived. Letiticia's husband and few friends were cheered.

She was conscious for the first time in a week. The nurse, who had entered to check her condition laid a cool hand on the high forehead, murmured "Thank God. The fever seems to have broken," as Letiticia opened her eyes. They stared at each other. In an instant the nurse turned to black granite, each wrinkle of her uniform perfectly sculpted in the smooth black stone, her hand outstretched, her brow furrowed with concern...she was beautiful. Letiticia screamed.

An orderly came rushing in, his belly shaking. "What's the trouble?" he gasped, looking at her, and she saw the horror in his eyes as he saw the nurse statue, just before he, too, became a study in sandstone, lumpy and coarse.

Letiticia closed her eyes and sighed. She permitted just the faintest trace of irritation to penetrate her consciousness. All that noise, and still no one to attend to her needs. She was hungry; she felt grimy; she needed to take care of unmentionable bodily functions. Opening her eyes once more, she observed the two statues, shuddered, and rang for help. The summons took quite a while to be answered, the regular nurse being immobile next to her bed. When someone finally entered, she asked with her eyes closed, what he saw. An awed, "Merciful heavens!" answered her question adequately.

The next few weeks brought chaos to Letiticia Burrow's formerly quiet existence. First there was the unseemly publicity, with the reporters rampaging through the hospital and screaming for interviews. However, a reporter who sneaked into the room in the middle of the night startled her out of a sound sleep. They found the poorly formed mica statue flaking next to her hospital bed the next morning and the reporters abruptly stopped coming.

Letiticia wondered if her eyes looked different than they had formerly. Her blonde hair had darkened to mouse brown, her fair skin was now crepey, but she had secretly always thought her eyes to be her finest feature. Although set a bit

too close together for true beauty, they were a bright and steady blue, fringed with long dark lashes. Letitia longed for a mirror, but, for obvious reasons, she was afraid to look at one.

At first, she enjoyed the undeniable power. Letitia had only to flutter her eyelashes for the room to empty. However, it suddenly occurred to her that power worked in two directions--people could leave her totally alone—so she began to adapt her life to live within her suddenly altered circumstances. She grew accustomed to a leper's life—hospital personnel ringing a bell when they approached to do the many hospital tasks so that she could close her eyes before they entered.

Exhaustive testing proved fruitless, eliciting neither cause nor cure. The doctors finally decided to devise a pair of glasses that would permit her to see while blocking the world from the sharp arrows of her deadly gaze, and in this they at length succeeded. Her new glasses had thick coke-bottle lenses, much as cataract patients used to wear. They narrowed her vision a bit, but she could see well enough to do what she needed to function reasonably well.

She returned home to her husband, George, who now had to exercise the greatest caution in their now most unequal relationship. At first, they tried living normally, but after a close call, when she removed her glasses to snuggle her kitten, they thought it expedient to take precautions. The kitten statue, of light gray calcite, was decorative, true, but not much substitute for the real thing.

George was wonderfully supportive at the beginning, when there was still some hope. They resorted to the expediency of his remaining at work until dark. When he returned, they would dine by candlelight, the flame reflections flickering off her faceted lenses, lie down in darkness, when they were so inclined, and then George would retire to another room, from which he would leave in the morning. Letitia would remain in bed until she heard the key in the door when he left.

Although the settlement of the lawsuit filed against the hospital rendered the Burrows family exceedingly well off, the money was not a substitute for the full and frank enjoyment of his wife. George's absences became longer, his returns later, until one day he did not return at all.

Visits from her three friends, frequent at first, became noticeably shorter and fewer. Sarah, Violet, and Rosemary did not feel comfortable with a person who literally embodied the danger in the phrase "If looks could kill", for Letitia had been known to be spiteful. The kitten had been an accident. The impudent delivery boy who demanded a tip for his rude and dilatory service was not. Letitia used the pink granite statue as a doorstop. For a brief moment she entertained a hope that the doorstop might inspire a vogue for similar statues, much as the first lawn jockey must have done. However, soon even she recognized that however angry parents might become with their teenage sons, those parents were not ready to get rid of their descendants permanently. At any

rate, after Sarah made what even she, upon reflection had to admit was a foolish bid at their weekly bridge game, and Letiticia reached up to remove her glasses to stare stonily at her, the three old friends began to beg off from invitations.

It was after the bridge party that the headaches began. She would retire to a darkened room for hours, but they only grew worse. Increasingly strong anodynes had no effect. Finally, she returned to the hospital that had administered the experimental drugs.

There had been changes over the ten months since Letiticia had been discharged. Her settlement had drained the hospital coffers of many pretty pennies, which caused severe cuts in services such as the maintenance of hospital records. The experimental drugs clearly hadn't worked, and the experimenters had quickly been fired. So, when Letiticia entered complaining of extreme headaches, most of the personnel were new.

Dr. Goodman flipped his mirrored reflector over his left eye. "Let's have a look at those pretty eyes," he said, ignoring her protests as he removed her glasses and bent over her face.

There is a remarkable group of life-sized statues in the Cleveland, Ohio, Museum of Modern Art and Design. One is a nurse carved in black granite, as well as a sandstone statue of a round-bellied man wearing what seems to be an orderly's uniform. There also used to be a mica statue—at least that's what the sign in the vacant place states—but it was sent for repairs some time ago, and has not yet been returned. A marvelous reproduction of a delivery boy carved from pink granite, hand outstretched for a tip, stands by the exhibition room door. There's a wonderful little statue of a kitten carved out of light gray calcite, which is said to help us remember the state of perfection. This kitten, curled as though it is about to snuggle into its owner's arms, seems perfection itself.

The most remarkable grouping in the collection, however, is of a doctor looking into the eyes of a woman through a refracting mirror. The doctor is carved of silver-gray lepidolite with a pinkish cast. She, naturally, is reflected in the mirror. The rosy hue of the stone is accentuated by the reflection off the female statue, which is made of flawed rose quartz. The statue of the woman would be very beautiful, were it not for the strange and magical flaw: a heart of polished obsidian, the reflection of which dulls the figure from within.

The sidebars note that the collection is a gift of George Burrows of Cincinnati, Ohio. No one in Cleveland, however, knows who he is, or why he would have chosen Cleveland, such a long distance away from Cincinnati, to be the recipient of such generosity. Though the sculptors are neither named nor even known, the exhibition is always well attended, and there is talk in town of soliciting contributions for a George Burrows art scholarship to be given to the high school graduate with the highest average in art.

So far, however, the scholarship is just talk, and it will take years to for it to be funded.

He Never Answers Me

What do you think of that huge canoe with square white things hung from tall skinned trees in the middle that is going up-river? My husband, Ragonnawy, his two brothers, Chief Leesenston, and three other men have decided to see what it is and if the creatures on it are people. They are like people in shape from what I was able to see. Are any of the three your husbands? Do you think they are people, my sisters?

I keep telling Ragonnawy to keep careful watch on the creatures. "Nothing good comes from such an enormous canoe," I keep telling him. He will want one, just as he wanted the turkey feathers to make his mantle. Those skinned trees are hard to make, and how many deer must you kill for me to skin to make those great white things hanging from them? (I know he would want those same white things, even if they don't actually do anything. All he has to do is kill the deer. All the rest of the work falls to us women after he lugs them home. Do those men ever think how much work it is to jerk that much meat? How difficult it is to tan all those hides? How often we prick our fingers slivering those bone needles?) Did you ever ask your husbands about such things? "Do you ever think of all the work you make for us?" I ask him, but he never answers me.

They are going tomorrow morning. Ragonnawy wants me to bake some new corn bread just in case the creatures eat as we do. All the men are going to dress up in their finest skins and feather mantles (you get only one chance to make a good first impression) and bring tobacco and cornbread to see what there is to see. I ask, "Why do you want to go out there? What do you expect to accomplish?" (My sisters, let me tell you, the men don't know how much work is involved in making a loaf of cornbread. How long it takes to dry and shuck the corn and then to grind it fine enough to bake.) But he never answers me. I tell you, my sisters, this will only bring us more work.

What did your husbands say about the men on the big canoe? When he came back, Ragonnawy told me that the creatures are men. He said they have hairy faces and eyes of many colors, and wear coverings of material like fine birch bark, not of deerskin or bearskin. They are coming to our village tomorrow. Ragonnawy is out hunting fowl even now, and we are to kill two dogs to increase the stew. I take it that all of us are to make a great feast and entertain them with songs and dances.

I keep saying, "Why do they want to come out here? What do they expect to accomplish? What do you expect to accomplish? Do we have so much maize that we can just give it away?" But he never answers me; he just laughs and tells me to find the fattest dog we have. The men want to be friends with the white-skins, why I do not know. I tell you, my sisters, no good can come of this.

There is one reason, however, why we might want to be friends with these men. The white-skins bought some oysters from us, which we had really meant as a gift. (Did you bring them anything?) Ragonnawwy brought me a great handful of beads, which were among the items the white-skins gave for the oysters. The beads are so pretty! Such colors they have—blue like the sky, and red as the berries and green as the summer leaves—not just purple and white like those we make from the river shells. But still, a handful of beads, pretty as they are, are they worth all plucking of pigeons and skinning of dogs? I ask him, but he never answers me. I tell you, my sisters, no good can come of this.

Did you hear? Only three days after the feast, the white-skins sent a small canoe upriver. Ragonnawwy was with a group the chief sent to attack them and one white skin died. I ask Ragonnawwy, “Why attack the white skins? Weren’t you being eager to make friends with them only two days ago?” I ask him, but he never answers me. I tell you, my sisters, no good can come of this.

“O, you say the chief told them to find out if they could be killed as we can; he wants to know if the hairy-faces are truly men as we are” Thank you, my sister.

Last night I asked Ragonnawwy what we expected to accomplish by this violence, but he never answers me. I tell you, my sisters, no good can come of this.

Don’t you love these moccasins I beaded for our child that is to come? O, you say today the big canoe went away. Well, no more beads, I guess. I don’t think that it’s the last of them, though. I believe they’ll be back. I asked Ragonnawwy what he thinks, and what he’s going to do with the big heavy axe he traded for those two beaver skins that I was going to use for our child’s blanket. I asked him, but he never answered me. I tell you, my sisters, no good can come of this.

Anthropological Observation, or How to Win the Battle of the Bedsheets

The bed is usually covered by a bottom sheet, a top sheet and two blankets. The bottom blanket can be explained only in terms of an emotional attachment. This tattered, threadbare blue rag, its bindings long vanished, its ends unraveling, is his blankie; there is no other reason for a solvent, sane person to countenance it. The top one is white and whole and fresh and at this point, three times as thick as the bottom blanket. Perhaps in ten years the white one will become the blankie and the new one will be blue.

She is usually asleep an hour before he comes to bed. His directions for going to bed follow: 1) Turn on the light. 2) Take the top blanket and throw your half on her. 3) Get into bed and read until she wakes up. 4) Say goodnight and turn off the light. 5) Groan pitifully when she turns on her light to read until she can fall asleep again.

When she does fall asleep again, the room is dark and quiet. Two hours later she gets up to go to the bathroom. Upon returning, she discovers that he has stolen most of her half of the sheet. He has wrapped himself in it, leaving just enough sheet to cover half of her. She tries to retrieve her pitiful moiety in the following ways: 1) Tugs, which are totally unsuccessful. 2) Moans, meant to wake him up and induce guilt, also without results. Kicking him mildly, with the intention of dislodging him just enough to make him let go of her half of the sheet, which sometimes works. However, the best way is to struggle with the sheet until he gets up to go to the bathroom. Then a quick snatch retrieves her sheet, and she falls asleep—until he returns and takes back the blanket he had thrown on top of her, as well as most of her sheet.

Naturally, this wakes her up again and the only way to get back to sleep is to regain the sheet. She attempts the aforementioned ploys, which do not work, and then tries the most insidious tactic of all—the dreaded snuggle. This involves pinioning him around the chest with one arm, and spooning his legs. The idea is to make him turn around to hold her, at which point she seizes the sheet and the blanket and, victorious, wraps them, mummy-like around herself. He either continues the holding or takes only his fair share of the sheet and blanket and creates a mummy of himself. In any case she wins, for either way, she is warm.

Tomorrow I shall begin observations of the morning meal, known as breakfast.

FIRST LESSON

Spring, 1967. For the past year and a half I'd been working as a secretary in the sales office of a market research firm. I'd been promised a raise of \$25 a week, and they only came up with \$15. That was Friday

On Sunday I began to look in the want ads, and saw an intriguing looking ad for "College Grads – Any Major". It was for the New York City Intensive Teacher Training Program (ITTP), which was a way of recruiting teachers during the last teacher shortage, made easier for the city by the fact that teaching was considered an essential service, and qualified the lucky male for a draft deferral. If you hadn't majored in education, but had eighteen credits in a subject area, the city would give you education credits in one summer, give you a job, and, if you survived the year, would waive the student teaching requirement. Sounded like a pretty good deal—teachers only worked from nine to three, and they got all that vacation, and a college grad had to earn more than a secretary, right? I made a phone call, brought in my transcript, got accepted into the program. The next Friday I resigned.

That summer was spent at NYU's uptown campus, where the one useful class was "Methods of Teaching English" taught by Bill Dunne, Chairman of the English Department of JHS 117 in the Bronx. A group of us had gotten friendly—Handsome Harry, Tall John, Idealistic Mickey, and Pretty Ginny. We hung out together, griped about the boring reading, and the heat. We idolized Mr. Dunne, who seemed to know everything about how to teach a class. At the end we all signed up to teach in the Bronx, because we all wanted to teach in Mr. Dunne's school.

About a hundred of us were in this hot, smelly school auditorium, listening as the schools were named, together with the number of positions open. Junior High School 117 had only one position. Intermediate School 22 had six openings. Now here we are, five people all with degrees, and does it occur to any one of us to ask "Why are there six openings in one department in one school?" It does not. We all looked at each other, said, "Oh. boy, we can stay together!" We signed up as a body. The sixth person was another guy from our class, a guy named Bruce, who had mumbled about connections that would get him the coveted place at JHS 117. We weren't friends.

Two days before school opened we all trooped into the office of the school, where Principal Solomon assigned us to our classes. Harry, Mickey and I got eighth grade, Ginny got seventh, and John got sixth. We went home to prepare for the opening day of school which turned out to be a teachers' strike. After the strike ended three days later, I faced my first day at IS 22. When my class exploded into the room that first day, I'd had a total of 20 minutes experience in front of a classroom one hot summer day, with my methods teacher and nineteen other aspiring (and perspiring) teachers looking on from the back of the room.

In addition to my lack of experience, the school was terrible, the kind of school where you were considered a successful teacher if you kept your students in the classroom. Actually that was a lot harder than it sounds. Each classroom had two doors. In an earlier, more decorous time, a new class would enter through the front door while the old class would exit through the back one. Now each door was an opening for the students to escape or for intruders to enter. Since there was an extra teacher's heavy wooden desk in my room, I took the easy way out, put it in front of the rear door, and prayed that the front door continued to lock. That worked, and thus I only had to worry about the confusion in my own room, rather than what was taking place in the hall.

I spent the first month of school trying everything I could think of to survive. Since my role model was Miss Dove, I firmly believed that one had to have a modicum of quiet to teach. Thus, much of my time was spent trying to achieve that quiet long enough to give directions. Nothing I tried worked. My routine was to come home after a day at school, cry, take a nap, cook dinner, correct the few papers the kids had handed in, plan for the next day, and fall asleep. On Fridays the group of us would pile into Tall John's light blue Beetle and hit the West End Bar for an hour or three of medicinal commiseration.

Two techniques I tried were mildly successful: "Now let's be absolutely silent for two minutes," which didn't actually work, but did have a calming effect. The second was the stare, a flat, dead-pan, what-rock-did-you-crawl-from-under look, which I'd practiced all summer, and I had that weapon down. It worked better than anything else, and I began to get a bit of order—not all the time, and not every day—but enough of the time so that I could occasionally give a set of directions.

On the day the principal observed me for the first time, I succeeded in teaching a poem, "The Lady," by Elizabeth Coatsworth. The lesson went well. The kids learned some vocabulary and rhyme scheme and were able to talk about the experience of the poem's lady with enough understanding that they were able to relate it to their own lives. Not too shabby for a complete novice. I received a decent report.

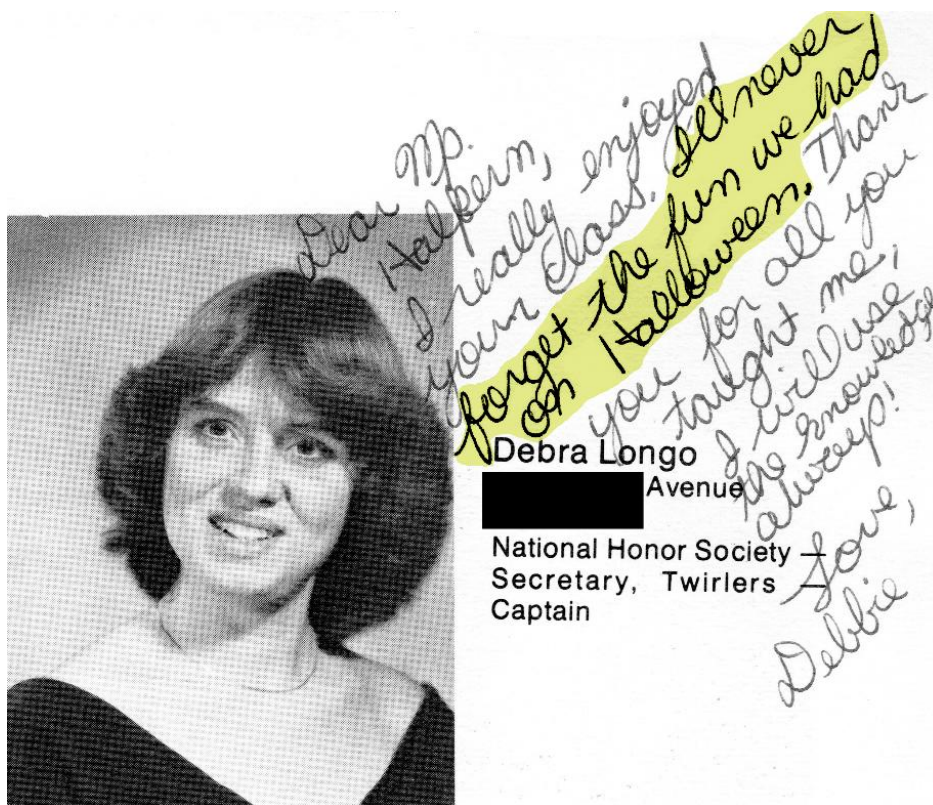
During this turmoil I was waiting to hear the results of a job interview I had had with Riegel Textiles. My qualifications were that the man who would be my boss liked my soft voice and thought I was pretty, but I could have learned the work quickly enough. The job would have paid close to twice what I was making as a teacher. (I also would not have had to time my bathroom needs to my preparation and lunch periods, and I would have been working with people whose anger was not consistently expressed by the continual use of the word "fuck".)

Riegel Textiles had yet to finalize the offer, however, and it was October 31. I had come across Ray Bradbury's "The October Game". In the story, there is a Halloween party during which the children play a game called The Witch Is Dead. The game takes place in a dark basement room; the children pass around objects that they can't see and are told that they are witch's body parts.

I went all out in my preparation. The class arrived to find four chairs on newspapers. I got four volunteers, blindfolded them and covered their clothing with newspapers. Then I held up a pumpkin. "The witch is dead and here is her head," I intoned. The children passed the "head" down the line...and so on with her hair (spaghetti) and her eyes (peeled grapes) and her teeth (candy corn). But when I got to "The witch torn apart and this is her heart" and held up a calf's heart by a ventricle, the gasp from the audience and the scream of the first person to touch the heart absolutely electrified the students. After the volunteers had removed their blindfolds and had washed their hands, I turned out the lights. The kids sat silent in the darkened room while I read the story. The final words "And then, some idiot turned on the lights," coincided with the ringing of the ending bell, and my students left, slightly stunned. I got homework from nearly all of them the next day.

That was my first experience with having a group of twenty-five people absolutely in my power through sheer interest in finding out what would happen next. It was a high beyond any I had ever experienced, and I wanted it again.

A week later—a week in which class returned to its normal dispiriting routine—Riegel offered me the job. The company had moved too slowly, though. I had actually taught a class, and I was hooked. I turned down the corporate world and went happily, if myopically, into the poorly paid, very satisfying world of academia.



Recovery

Addictions happen in odd ways. When I was about six, I looked through Mom's desk drawers and found two brand-new children's books: "Look what I found!" I cried happily. "Can I have them?"

My mother, thoughtfully, and a bit grudgingly said, "Well... I guess so." Joyously, I seized the books, took them back to my room, and devoured them. Thus began my addiction. Of course, I wouldn't have characterized my obsession with books in exactly that way, then. It seemed so innocent.

Until I was ten, I routinely got lost in books, as I read fairy tales, Greek myths, the orange-covered Bobbs-Merrill biographies like *Bird Girl Sacagawea* and *Dolly Madison, Quaker Girl*. But as I got older, I learned that books had a strange, malignant power over me.

In the fourth grade, everyone was reading *The Blue Pearl*, and the temptation just not to return it was very strong. I realized I'd have been the last one to have signed it out, so the book police would have known right where to come. I thought about it, though. Hard. Addiction was beginning its hold upon my soul.

That summer on a visit to New England, we stopped at the Alcott house. In a very rare moment of greed, I begged for two books instead of the one I'd been promised. My parents remained firm, and all my pleading didn't move them. I know that if I could have figured how to hide it in the waist of my jeans that second book would have been mine. I would have been a ten-year-old thief if it hadn't been for Dad's protective hand holding mine as we left the gift shop. I sulked the rest of the day. Addiction's tendrils were working their way into my moral fiber.

I didn't realize what was happening...At 15 I used to be able to pass a bookstore. By 20, I couldn't. Within five short years, proclivity had morphed into full-fledged addiction. I had to go to the bookstores, especially the used bookstores, where out-of-print books are cheap and plentiful. I couldn't just take them or leave them anymore. All I could do is take them, more than I could ever read, desperately afraid I'd have to go to bed at night without anything.

Sadly, when you're addicted to books, you don't think too much about consequences. All you know is you want 'em, you'll find 'em, you'll do anything to get 'em, and then what do you have? Piles and piles and PILES of 'em.

Book addicts shouldn't marry each other. My marriage seemed like a good idea at the time. There was the love, of course, and the prospect of letting someone into my life who had new and different books, but again, I didn't think about consequences. I just thought about getting more books—not about what we were going to do with them.

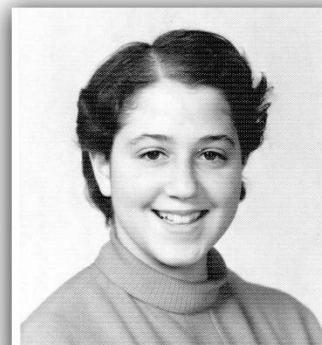
Books take over your physical space. There are two kinds of books in my collection—those I’ve read, and those I’m going to read—maybe—someday. I have to be able to find them, which means I need to put them in some kind of order. I keep track of mine by category. Old children’s books read, on one shelf, unread on another. Cookbooks, ditto. Fiction by author. History by century. Porn on the bottom shelf behind my husband’s collection of Pogo books, because both categories begin with P.

Because both of us read science fiction, those books are stacked in piles, kind of by author, but not really, because we want to spend our lives reading, not shelving. I never offer to lend one, and pray that no one asks to borrow one, because that means I’d have to find the damn book, and there would go the rest of the week.

On the outside, our house looks normal, if a bit unkempt. No one passing would guess at the semi-chaos that reigns within. All our many, many, many bookshelves are now filled two deep. We can’t invite people over anymore unless we’ve known them a very long time and they’ll be prepared for piles of books stacked on every available surface. We’re not the Collier brothers—yet—but we could get there. It’s a pretty short trip.

There is hope, however. Before I retired, I had three books going at a time—one on the dining-room table, another in the bathroom, and a third next to my bed. Since I retired, it’s down to the one by the bed. Finally, I’m beginning to get a handle my addiction.

I can say now, with some truth, that I’m a recovering bookaholic. I can pass a new bookstore without a second look. If a friend—a good friend—pulls at my hand and reasons with me softly but firmly, I can pass a used bookstore, a garage sale, or even a library fund-raiser. Now, instead of acquiring, I’m trying to de-accession. So—take my book. Please? Please! (NOTE: When reading aloud give a book to someone in the audience.)



She's my friend

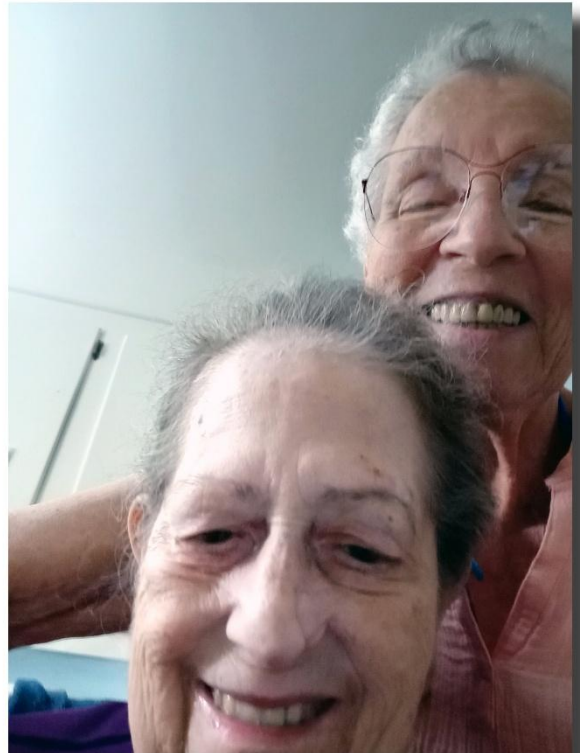
for Jean

and doesn't remember
that New Year's Eve we laughed 'til two,
the folk festival when we sang
ballads the entire drive home,
those afternoons we played cribbage,
the word for her favorite cookie.
The names of her niece and grandniece
lie "on the tip of her tongue."

Her husband does all the cooking now.
She can't remember book titles,
transfixed, she watches TV re-runs
and occasionally forgets to use her cane.
There will come a time she'll forget
language, and later, how to eat.

As she loses herself,
she may not recognize me
but I know her and
will never lose that memory.

By Suzy Lamson



Her Last Written Words



“He says I should write something every day.
But I don’t know what to say.”