



*Singular  
Endings*

*10/27/30 - 08/31/06*

*Janet Kuypers*

*writings about the passing  
of Lucille Ann Kuypers*

*happy 76<sup>th</sup> birthday, mom*

# *table of contents*

Coping With Her Leaving .....	3
Letting Tim Tick By .....	4
The Power To Tell Her/The Power To See Her .....	5
Soaring So High .....	8
The Good Ones .....	10
It Must Have Been On Sale .....	12
Knelt and Cried .....	13
Were Not Making Any M ore Appointments .....	16
Where The Blackberries Came From .....	17
Even Though I Didn't See It.....	18
Clouds Over Blue Sky's.....	19
It Hurts In The Bones .....	20
Wanting To Touch a Corpse.....	22
More Painful To Experience .....	24
Harder to Burn .....	25
Where Else Would I Be .....	26
Making The Bed.....	28
Cardboard Bending At WalMart .....	30
flowers on the Tables.....	33
Wesring Her Jewelry .....	34
Story Telling .....	35
A Little Angel Inside .....	40
Just Let Her Rest .....	42

## *Coping With Her Leaving*

09/01/06 #1

I've had to be the calm one  
all this time

my brother told my husband  
he was proud of how strong I was

well, I can't be sobbing  
while telling the news

when talking to people now  
we'd have to remind ourselves  
at that least she's not in pain now

we all knew her death was coming  
we just didn't know when

and I stifle my tears  
and I stifle my pain

and now I've just made myself  
numb  
I mean, what other choice did I  
have?

and this is what I do now  
and there's nothing else I can do

I have to hold it in  
because I don't want to let go

I go through waves now,  
usually in public

where the tears well up  
and I want to let go

but I say to myself  
you can't do that

not here

not now

## *Letting Time Tick By*

09/01/06 #2

we left for O'hare airport early  
went through my automatic check-in  
sent my luggage off to be X-rayed

now, I had to get an earlier flight  
to see my father  
because my mother died

and although I paid coach  
they gave me first class  
so I could grieve with my family

lucky me, first class  
now I can drink through my depression  
for free

so after I dropped off my luggage  
I walked past the curling security line  
for no-line first class security

so now I'm sitting here at gate K8  
for almost two hours  
waiting for time to tick by

lucky me  
letting time tick by  
living

# *The Power To Tell Her/The Power To See Her*

09/01/06 #3

## *"The Power To Tell Her"*

when Dave died  
a man I had dated for a year and a half

I was stuck on the other side of the country  
and couldn't go to his services

couldn't see him laying in his coffin  
so that I could really say good bye

and knowing my mother was dying  
I had already cried so much  
that I almost shut down  
when I heard that she died

my father called to tell me  
and he couldn't even talk  
so I heard the news over the phone  
from a friend of his

it was my job to tell  
my brothers and sisters  
but I couldn't get through to one sister  
who was closest to mom

my oldest sister offered to tell her,  
to have her paged,  
to break the news to her

and I thought, wait, dad told me to do this  
I should be doing this

but then I thought  
I don't think I have to power to tell her

I don't think I could be prepared  
for her falling apart at work  
I just didn't know if I could do that to her

so, I said, okay, you can tell her

I heard from them after the fact  
that my older sister was crying  
to the switchboard operator  
before she could reach my sister

that probably expedited  
getting them connected

so now we're all flying across the country  
to have another impromptu  
family reunion  
to help my father cope  
with being a widower

###

*"The Power To See Her"*

my mother is being cremated  
she said she didn't want a service  
even though her grieving family might need one

but I just talked to my sisters  
they said they got through to dad  
and he's waiting for us at his home  
across the country

well, of course we'd be there

but my sister told me  
they're waiting with my mother's body  
so we can see her before cremation

because, you know,  
we might want to see her

and I didn't want to tell my one sister  
because I couldn't be prepared for the crying  
but

but I never thought  
about seeing my mother dead  
before she was cremated

but I will cry now  
the ocean levels will rise  
my tears will start hurricanes

here in south west Florida  
where my mother  
lies waiting for us

###

I was so angry  
that I never saw Dave in his coffin  
because I needed  
some kind of closure

and my sisters tell me  
"you don't have to see her  
if you don't want  
that's your decision"

and  
and while my mother was still alive  
and I still had my flight to see her

my father said I'd be shocked  
when I saw her  
that she's so thin

so  
so a part of me doesn't know  
if I can see my mother dead

but I think of the closure  
I've needed  
for years after Dave's death  
... it has been over eight years now

so  
so a part of me doesn't know  
how I couldn't see my mother  
one more time

###

so I have to see her  
and we tried to decide  
what she should wear for the viewing

which is what she will wear  
when she is burned

and I struggle with this  
because I could keep the dress we chose  
and a memento of my mother

but we chose the dress she wore  
to my wedding

that her body will spend its last moments on earth  
in the dress she wore to my wedding

everyone told her  
how beautiful she looked in that dress  
at my wedding

I have a photo framed from my wedding  
of dad kissing mom  
in that dress  
that she looked so lovely in

in a photo  
where her beauty is captured forever

so  
so it seems beautiful  
it seems painfully beautiful  
that she wears the dress  
she wore to my wedding  
before she leaves us forever  
so it seems fitting  
that,  
like at my wedding  
she wears the dress  
she looked so eternally beautiful in

## *Soaring So High*

09/01/06 #4

I'm in a first class airplane seat  
flying to see my family now

the seats are roomier  
and embroidered on the fake leather  
on the seat in front of me, it reads  
FASTEN SEAT BELTS WHILE SEATED

and I got a full meal  
while on the flight  
and the flight attendants  
were very attentive

I'm going to Florida now  
to see my family there  
because my mother just died there  
only about twenty seven hours ago

and I'm sitting here in first class  
with these embroidered seats  
with the full courses and friendly service  
reminding me of when  
we first went to Florida  
thirty years ago

I was a little kid  
so the seats were big  
and back in the day  
they always fed you meals in the sky  
and the stewardesses were  
that much more attentive

and now I remember  
my first trip to Florida  
where at Disney World I was afraid  
to go into the dark tunnel for  
"It's a Small World"  
and I was afraid to go  
into the dark room  
for the "Space Tunnel"  
roller coaster ride  
so they sat me with dad  
so I'd be too afraid to cry

and I remember being so little  
on our first trip to Florida  
that I saw mom and dad  
watching Connors and McEnroe  
play tennis on tv  
and I thought Connors  
was President Carter



I remember flying to Vegas  
with my parents and my sister  
when mom told me to sit by dad  
so, like my construction worker father  
I could marvel at all of the concrete  
at Hoover Dam Below

once we took a small flight  
across Florida  
to the town my parents now live in  
I don't know, a DC 10, a DC 3  
and we actually shared a long bench  
for our seats for our flight  
to where they'd one day call home

I'm flying in an airplane now  
and it makes me think  
of flying with my parents

and now I'm flying to Florida  
to meet my sisters, to see my father  
because my mother has passed

so now I sit in this big airplane seat  
look out the window  
at the clouds below

it's a wondrous thing  
getting so far  
soaring so high

but right now, all I'm filled with  
are memories of flights with my mother  
when we were soaring so high

## *The Good Ones*

09/02/06 #3

I'm back in Florida now,  
near my mother's house  
where everyone on these little streets  
knows everyone's name  
and everyone likes my mom  
because she's such a sweet woman  
and every time I walk down the streets here now  
it seems that over half of the people I run into  
have to stop to tell me they are sorry about my mom

and you get used to hearing that  
I mean,  
not that it doesn't mean anything  
or anything  
but everyone is sorry she's gone

but one woman hugged me  
and said  
"they always take the good ones"

and that's when I started to react  
that's when I was just about ready to cry  
because yes,  
they do always take the good ones  
and it made me that much more sad  
and it made me that much more angry  
to know the injustice of it all  
and to know there was nothing I could do

she didn't smoke  
she took care of her husband  
and her five children  
she was so sweet  
and tried to make everyone  
as content as they could possibly be  
she followed her husband's lead

in doing what he wanted  
and kept track of finances  
so that she could afford a good education  
for her children

her husband  
seemed violent in his children's eyes  
he drank too much  
and she stood by his side  
and kept things together

and she fought with breast cancer  
then had cervical cancer  
and she fought those cancer attacks  
and won

you'd think she had gone through enough  
for crimes she didn't commit  
but, you know, cancer doesn't fight fair  
so later cancer struck back by not attacking an organ  
but all of her blood instead

I know she's a strong woman  
but how could any one woman  
fight every cell coarsing through her body

so yeah, it's unfair  
it's completely wrong  
I want to kill someone for doing this to her  
someone has to be held accountable  
because it makes no sense  
that she has to fight a battle  
she can't win

and she's one of the good ones  
and she really shouldn't have been taken  
I hate them for taking her  
and I hate them for leaving us to grieve this way  
I don't care who you are  
but I hate you

## *It Must Have Been On Sale*

09/03/06 #2

it's only me and my husband in our house  
and I go to Sam's to purchase  
twenty packs of paper towels  
you know, because buying in bulk  
is supposed to be a better deal  
so I'll have the bottom of the kitchen pantry  
lined with rolls and rolls of paper towels

you know, I might have a lot to clean up  
in the next year  
have to be prepared, I guess

and I'm sure I get that from my mother  
my sister and I laughed  
when we were in the house alone once  
and we had a craving for ice cream  
so we said, hey, we should look in  
the deep freeze  
they have this huge freezer in the basement  
and we go there  
and there are tons of two gallon containers  
of pistachio spumoni  
I guess my mother likes pistachio spumoni  
because there's a ton of it  
it must have been on sale  
so we shrug our shoulders and laugh  
and try pistachio spumoni  
for probably the only time in our lives

so now that mom has passed  
and we have to go through her house  
to try to clean things up for dad  
to organize things, to throw things away  
we find on one of the shelves  
in one of the pantries  
spray can after spray can  
of Easy On Heavy Duty Speed Starch

(like my 75 year-old mother  
ever needed to speed starch  
fifty loads of dress clothes for dad)

so I take a starch can back with me,  
my sister takes a starch can back with her  
so at least if I have tons of shampoo  
and vats of laundry detergent  
and Oxy Clean tubs to clean the house,  
at least I can be well-pressed for anything

## *Knelt and Cried*

09/03/06 #3

I was in the minivan  
or whatever the Hell you call  
dad's new car, driven only 930 miles  
dad driving, sister in the front seat  
me and brother in the back seats  
my husband behind me in the far back seat  
and I waited at my father's house for a while  
so we could go to my mother's services  
well, they weren't services  
she didn't want that  
but dad thought the kids would want  
to see my mother  
before she was cremated  
so there we were, the family  
in ties  
in black dresses  
sitting and waiting  
in our little hearse  
to drive us to Fuller Funeral Home

for our final visit

we were in the car  
and my husband in the far back seat  
and he knew I was sad  
he sensed I was crying  
while the hearse took us to the funeral parlour  
and he reached his hand forward  
to take my hand  
to touch my shoulder,  
to something

and I couldn't see his face  
but his hand  
was a grave consolation  
as our hearse rolled on  
to our chance to say farewell

I was trying not to cry  
in the ride in the hearse  
to the funeral parlour  
I've been a good Marine  
I've been trained to not cry  
but I couldn't help the tears  
at that point  
and I did my best to stifle them  
so no one would consider my sniffing  
and no one would question  
my faltering emotions

we had to take two separate cars  
and we arrived  
and we were greeted when we entered  
and we asked where to go  
and they pointed the way  
to lead us in the right direction

and I think we were all afraid  
to go into that room

to see her

well, I can't speak for anyone else  
I know I was afraid  
afraid of what I'd see  
afraid of

afraid of I don't know what  
afraid of seeing how she looked  
afraid of the finality of it all

just afraid

so, I'm the littlest one  
of course I let everyone else go in before me  
they're supposed to want to see her more

that's what I hear

and we walked in  
and there were many seats  
and you could see her face,  
asleep,  
peeking out of the coffin in the distance  
and we all just instinctively sat down

dad finally walked to her  
and knelt before her coffin

we watched him  
watch her  
pray for her  
talk to her

I don't know what he was communicating  
with her  
he was with her  
and we all wanted that with her  
one more time  
one sister went next,  
knelt  
cried  
then a brother  
then another brother  
and I watched a procession of family members  
all older than me  
all apparently more important than me  
all with more history with her than me  
and

and my husband asked  
if I wanted him to go with me  
when I walked up to see my mother  
and I thought,  
no,  
I need to do this on my own

I finally walked up to her  
knelt before her  
and looked at her  
in the dress she wore to my wedding  
and thought she looked so beautiful  
she looked so peaceful

she looked like she was sleeping  
  
and I hadn't seen her that peaceful  
in a long time  
every time I came to visit her  
since the disease started  
she always looked tired  
when she was awake  
otherwise she was asleep  
and looked fitful in her rest

I looked at her eyebrows  
they were penciled in very nicely  
and I looked down at her nails  
and they were long,  
every nicely painted

and the earrings we picked for her to wear  
were so dainty  
and so lovely  
and the dress was so nice  
and she looked so peaceful

and that's all I could keep thinking  
that she looked so well rested  
that she was just taking a good nap  
and she would be just fine

she had to be

###

I looked at my mother  
one last time  
these were my final words to her face  
this would be the last time I saw her

make it good, girl  
you're the one with the words  
tell her what you mean  
in fifty words or less  
that's how these services go, don't they?

and I told her that I loved her  
and I told her that I hope  
that I carry on any of her kindness  
because that's they way she'll live on  
because the world is filled with people who aren't nice  
who aren't kind  
and losing her  
makes the world a worse place

people have told me that I am kind  
that I am nice  
and I only hope I can do you justice  
that I can somehow make this world a better place

like you did

I only hope that I can do the world justice  
because the world needs you now, mom  
and you had to leave us

so what do we do now

before I left her  
that first time

I started to run my hands along my chest  
into a cross  
because I wanted all of the spirits to know  
that you are there  
and that you are to be welcomed  
because you are blessed  
even if it's only from the likes of me

## *We're Not Making Any More Appointments*

09/04/06 #2

“I never thought that your mom  
was really sick, it never occurred to me  
that your mother was dying.  
I saw her getting more and more sick,  
but I didn't think that meant anything...  
You dad was taking your mom to the doctor  
and he wanted someone to go with him,  
she needed help walking,  
getting to the office,  
so my wife went with them.  
They went to the doctor,  
and they checked on your mother,  
and they said,  
“We're not making any more appointments.”  
And...  
And that's when it hit me,  
even the doctors knew  
she was near the end.”



## *Where the Blackberries Came From*

09/04/06 #3

At the parent's house  
they had blackberries left over  
they're my favorite fruit, you know  
and when they reminded me  
there were still blackberries in the refrigerator  
I found them  
and snarfed maybe over half of them down

and then I realized  
that carton of blackberries  
that label I saw  
and read  
was from the blackberries  
my mom was adding  
to her champagne

she added them to her champagne  
and the champagne  
wasn't champagne she liked  
Cooks, or something like that  
so I hear she ate the blackberries  
out of her glass  
so her blackberries  
were soaked in cheap champagne

but she was eating

that's what I hear

but I was snarfing blackberries  
from the carton of blackberries  
my mother was eating from  
the night before she died

---

and I stared at the label  
on that carton  
wondering if she looked at that carton  
or if dad pulled the blackberries out  
for my mother's champagne  
for her to eat

but  
that was irrelevant  
because she ate from these  
and I was eating from them  
like they were my favorite fruit  
and nothing else in the world mattered

## *Even Though I Didn't See It*

09/04/06 #4

I've been walking around here  
in this mobile home park  
and I was told that for days  
the flag at the base of the park here  
was at half mast  
for my mother's death

of course, once they told me  
the flag was back up

I thought the flag should only be  
lowered like that  
for someone in the military  
or some high-ranking government official  
but

but at least they did that for my mother  
even though it was only for days  
and even though I didn't see it

## *Clouds Over Blue Sky's*

09/04/06 #5

I've been at my mother's home  
for a few days now  
and I've noticed  
that even at different times of year  
I've been in this hurricane-prone town  
in the summer, the fall,  
the winter, the spring  
but I've noticed  
that although it may be cloudy  
for a day or two  
the sky is sunny  
that the skies are always blue  
where my mother lives

But I've been here now  
to my mother's home  
to put her life in order  
after her death  
and I've noticed  
that now,  
at Blue Sky's Mobile Home Estates  
the sky has always been cloudy

we'd look and occasionally find  
minute patches of blue  
among the dark gray clouds  
but the sky has been cloudy gray

it can't help it

*It Hurts in the Bones*

09/05/06 #2

“I didn’t realize  
how much pain she was in

she got out of the house one day  
and I did gardening her for,  
she told me what weeds needed to be pulled  
as she sat in the chair  
in front of the house

she’d try to pull a weed up  
if it was right by her chair

but she did that sparingly  
and when I saw her,  
I’d say,  
mom, tell me what to do  
and I’ll do it

she needed to go inside again  
after a short while  
and I think that was the most movement  
she did for the rest of her life

I’d try to get her out of the house  
you know, just to walk  
maybe to the next house and back  
and she’d always say no

and she looked like her neck hurt,  
her back hurt  
so I’d ask if I could rub her neck or back

and she’d say no,

then she’d say  
that wouldn’t help

and then she’d say  
it hurts down in the bones

and we read this is one of the stages  
of this disease

and I don’t know what it feels like  
to hurt in your bones  
something deeper than  
deep muscle pain

I  
I can’t imagine it  
I can’t imagine what it feels like

I think my mom  
wouldn’t let on  
about how much pain she was in

When the doctors told mom  
she had six months to a year with this disease  
my sister said to mom,  
your father  
    (our grandfather)  
had cancer  
and the doctors said he had  
six months to live.  
how long did he live?  
and mom replied,  
six years.  
so she tried to tell her  
that we Bakutis are stong folk  
and she can be okay if she fights

but I think mom was in so much pain  
that she made a decision right then and there  
that she didn't want that pain  
deep down in her bones any more  
and decided to let her enemy win.

we keep saying to people that it's better  
that she's not suffering any more

emotionally, for us, we wish she was here

but we don't want her to feel that pain anymore  
and we keep telling everyone  
that this is for the best.”

## *Wanting to Touch a Corpse*

09/05/06 #3

I'm the youngest child in the family  
and I wasn't as close to mom as the other daughters  
so after dad called to tell me mom died  
and I told the rest of my siblings  
my older two sisters rescheduled their flight  
so they could see dad that night

I had already rescheduled my plane ticket  
for the next morning  
first hoping I'd be there in time to see mom  
before she died  
so I wasn't going to pay a ton to change my ticket again  
so I went to dad the next day

and mom didn't want any services  
she didn't want anyone to see her dead like that  
especially if she was getting more and more sick  
before she died  
so we held no public services for mom  
but we held a small service for only the family

it was hard for me to agree  
that for this service, and for her cremation  
she should wear the dress she wore to my wedding  
and the remains of that dress  
would be mingled with her ashes forever  
but I agreed that this could be a way to connect us

we entered the room  
here her body lay  
all stopped at the other end of the room  
all I think too afraid to make the first steps  
to see her laying in a coffin  
and see her for the last time

dad finally walked to her and knelt before her  
cried  
what am I saying, we all cried

I waited for everyone else to see her  
to have a moment with mom, kneel before her  
before I went to her on my own  
and when I knelt before her  
and tried to think of what my family said,  
about how thin she looked, how her skin hung  
before she died

but she looked so peaceful there, relaxed  
free from pain and dressed like an angel  
for her private farewell  
she just looked asleep, like I had often seen her  
in her final months, but this time was no longer  
sleeping to avoid the pain, she found another way out

unlike the many times I had seen her sleeping when sick  
she looked free of pain, free of the battle, at peace  
and I didn't want to stop looking at her

when she knew she was dying, I wrote her a letter  
telling her that I just wanted to be able to  
put my arms around her and hold her for a very long time  
to show her that I loved her,  
and that she meant that much to me  
and it was like a part of me was unable to believe

she was dead  
and I wanted to touch her hand, touch her cheek  
just make some sort of contact with her once more  
but  
but I knew I wouldn't be able to cope  
with feeling her cold dead skin

and my family would be shocked and mortified  
if I touched my mother, I knew I couldn't do it  
I saw the skin on her arms, the fingernails they painted  
so she would look pretty for us, to ease our burden  
when seeing our mother for the last time  
and knew it wasn't the skin of my living mother

I had to let her go, even if I couldn't help  
but keep crying

## *More Painful to Experience*

09/06/06 #1

people will think it will get easier  
you know, time heals all wounds  
or some nonsense like that

I don't know, maybe you'll cry less  
but I think the pain is still there  
and you'll never be able to shake it

but it's been eight years  
since the last time I encountered  
and unjust death like this

and you're right, I cry less now  
from that first death  
but it's still extremely wrong that it happened

and it's still extremely painful  
no matter how I appear to react now

I never saw the first death  
in his coffin  
but this time I saw the death, the coffin

and I'm trying to figure out  
which is more painful to experience  
it doesn't matter if it's eight years ago

or now



*Harder To Burn* 09/06/06 #2

you know, you hear of goth teenagers  
liking the idea of posters of caskets  
or you see come Halloween  
props of caskets at trick stores  
and tacky novelty shops  
or Hell, my husband even saved  
a casket-shaped “Black Death” vodka bottle case

it’s funny, caskets

imagine Son of Svengouli  
coming out of a casket  
to introduce another B horror movie  
(or was it Elvira  
that came out of a casket?)  
and hey, didn’t one of those tacky tv shows  
I don’t know, The Munsters, I’m not sure  
didn’t a show like that have someone  
who was a vampire that slept in a coffin?

ah, the humor  
of a carton for carrying a dead body

right now, all I can think of  
is the cardboard-based casket  
we chose for viewing my mother  
before she was cremated  
yes, there was a wood finish  
possibly a veneer  
but you don’t spend for a quality casket  
for a cremation,  
I mean, a better wood  
is harder to burn

so settle for cardboard

ah, think of the novelty to caskets  
when you’re forced to deal with them  
so concretely, so practically, so literally  
think of the novelty

## *Where Else Would I Be*

09/08/06 #1

mom was in her second round of chemo  
and the hospital was 55 miles away

so I couldn't visit daily,  
only weekly

so I'd call every day  
to see how she was doing

and one day  
I called in the afternoon

and she answered,  
in a panicked voice

it sounded like she was crying,  
and she said to me in a rushed tone,

"Call back in an hour"  
I said okay, and she hung up the phone

my husband was home from work early  
so he saw me in a panic from the call

we even drew a bath for me  
to try to calm me down

and I told him what she said,  
what she sounded like

and he tried to think  
of every possibility

of why she sounded that way: maybe  
she heard that her sister, my Aunt Sally died,

maybe she  
maybe she got bad news about her health

but he tried to prepare me  
for whatever mom was going to say

when I called her back

I kept checking the clock  
and after almost exactly an hour, I called

mom sounded fine,  
and before she explained anything to me,

she said,  
"I'm glad you called me back"

of course I'd call back —  
what else could I do?

and I responded in shock,  
why wouldn't I call her back?

I wanted to know what the problem was  
and she told me

she had a bad reaction  
to the medication they just gave her

and her teeth were chattering  
and she couldn't speak

so the nurses were coming  
to give her something for the side effects

so she was fine  
and I had nothing to worry about

###

mom was doing well  
for having only so many months to live

we had high hopes for her  
and thought she could beat the odds,

doctors said two to six  
months, but maybe up to a year

and she was almost in remission  
from the first round if chemo

so we were sure she could survive  
for over a year if she wanted to

and so I planned a trip  
to see my parents at their home in Florida

my oldest sister planned to visit  
one month later

we had all these great plans

but dad called, less than a week  
before I was flying to see them

said mom's not doing well  
I should change my flight, come earlier

lucky me, hurricane Ernesto  
was coming, I mean, it is hurricane season

so I scheduled my flight  
for the first day the airlines would let me

my mom died  
while that hurricane was coming through

when violence was supposed to hit  
our shores, our home, bring destruction

but the hurricane  
didn't touch shore, so we were safe

well, even though my mom died  
they were as safe as they could be

and all of the brothers and sisters  
rushed to my mom and dad's home,

too say good bye to mom  
to be there for dad

and all of the neighbors  
kept seeing us there, giving condolences

and most of them said to us,  
it's good that you could be here

and our response is always,  
where else would we be

I stayed longer  
to help my dad function

without mom

and still, people see me and say  
it's good that you could stay here

and my response is always,  
where else would I be

*Making the Bed* 09/08/06 #2

so I'm staying in the house with dad now  
for maybe two weeks, to make sure he's okay  
to make sure he's not alone  
the first eighteen days  
after mom died

and I remember, because the bed  
in the kid's room,  
when the door was open,  
faced the entranceway to their house  
so anyone coming over  
would see if our bed was made or not

so it's a rule at this house,  
make you bed before you leave your room  
every morning  
you know, so the house doesn't look so messy

so it's my second day here with dad alone  
and I make my bed, and I'm sure  
he doesn't really care, but  
it's something you really should do here

even if mom isn't around to tell me anymore

and I remembered this morning  
that mom would always make their bed  
after dad left in the morning  
she had a system down  
for making their king sized bed

but as they got older, dad had trouble  
sleeping on his back all night  
so at a local rummage sale, mom bought  
one of those twin-sized hospital beds  
where you can control the inclination  
of your back for a restful night's sleep  
you know, so dad could sleep

sitting up a bit more, and mom  
could still rest on the twin-sized bed  
right next to him

so, when dad was walking though the house today  
I asked him,  
I know mom usually does this,  
but would you want your bed made?

and he walked into his bedroom with me,  
showed how he has an egg carton mattress  
under his sheets on his hospital bed,  
and said that the fitted sheets often pull  
out from the top of the bed, you know,  
probably because the bed is always inclined  
when he sleeps

so we lifted both fitted sheet corners  
on his bed  
and pulled the egg carton pad up  
as high as we could  
then put the sheet back on

then dad said,  
you don't have to do much more,  
if you want to pull the sheets and blankets up,  
that's your call

and he walked out of his bedroom  
and I started to pull the sheets up  
on his side of the bed,  
noticed that they tugged on mom's twin bed  
at his bed side

then I pulled the blanket up  
and had to walk around  
to mom's side of the bed  
the left side, the same way  
I sleep with my husband  
to pull the blankets up evenly,  
to fix her two pillows  
resting on her side of the bed

and

---

and I know he can't be alone  
and I know he'd never want to  
remove mom's twin bed,  
or even remove mom's pillows  
from her side of the bed  
but  
but it's just hard  
to see so many reminders of mom's existence  
in places you wouldn't expect to look

excuse me,  
I have to dry my tears now

## *Cardboard Bending At WalMart*

09/08/06 #3

I'm with my dad now, for a few weeks  
helping him adjust to mom passing  
he's learned how to make the coffee  
he's learned how to use the dishwasher  
he says he's learned how to wash clothes  
though I haven't seen him wash clothes yet

and he's started going to WalMart now  
because they have a good price  
on the cans of chicken broth  
he drinks every night  
instead of having another  
Grand Suzette liquor drink  
before he goes to bed

okay, sometimes he has two cans of soup  
before he goes to bed

you see, he opens the can of soup  
and pours half of it into an insulated  
plastic cup  
and heats that cup in the microwave  
for three minutes thirty-three seconds  
(it's easier to press 333 for the time)  
then he takes out the hot soup,  
and pours the remaining unheated soup  
into the plastic cup  
so it's the correct temperature

(don't ask,  
this is just how he does it)

and we're used to visiting him  
and when he wants to have a glass of soup  
we open a can for him,  
pour half of it into a glass,  
heat it, add the cold soup  
and bring him his drink

well, he's learned to go to WalMart now  
especially because they supply  
free electric carts  
for those who don't want to walk through  
the labyrinth of aisles in the SuperStore

well, he's learned to go to WalMart now  
because they have the cheapest prices  
for cans of soup

###

I remember going to WalMart with mom  
for soup for dad  
and she'd find the lowest price  
and the stock boys would leave opened boxes  
for 18 packs  
or 24 packs  
of soup en masse  
and we'd but one opened cardboard box,  
maybe two  
so that dad wouldn't have to worry  
about running out of his soup

###

So were were at WalMart  
dad in his slow-moving little electric cart  
me slowing down my pace to stay with him  
it was a SuperStore, so I got tomatoes  
and Mike's Hard Lemonade  
and Saltines for dad there

and we passed the pasta aisle,  
and dad hates pasta with a passion,  
but I said that mom used to have flavored  
packs of pasta  
that could be prepared ready-made  
for a meal  
so I ran down the aisle  
to look for what mom always bought

they didn't have it  
I searched  
so I had to settle for something close  
to what she always had

###

we got to the soup aisle for dad  
he picked out one that he remembered drinking  
I think it was a more expensive soup  
and then I pulled out the cheapest soup,  
remembering the label  
and said  
I think this is the one you have at home

he agreed  
and there was one opened cardboard box  
left of his soup of choice  
like I did in the past with mom,  
I tried to see if I could lift the box  
to put the whole box in our cart  
    his electric cart and chair  
    that was so hot  
    because it was outside  
    in the Florida sun  
but the box started to buckle  
when I tried to pick it up,  
and a can or two tipped over

I realized then  
I couldn't do things like I did before  
and moved all of his cans  
one by one into his cart  
before we could pay and go home



## *Flowers on the Tables*

*09/09/06 #1*

“It’s funny, every year  
me and Janet host the hot dog dinner  
every Labor Day,  
and Janet said to me,  
this is the first year  
there were no flowers on the tables.  
Your mother, every year,  
would take flowers from bushes,  
red centers, real pretty,  
and place them in water at all the tables  
for people when they came to eat.  
This is the first year  
there were no flowers on the tables.”

*Wearing Her Jewelry* 09/09/06 #2

So I'm here in Florida now  
with dad, while he settles in  
to life without mom  
and I put on jewelry for dinner tonight  
put on the only ring  
I wear on my middle right finger now  
mom's huge blue topaz  
she gave me when she decided to  
stop the leukemia treatment

and it made me think  
of what jewelry I wore  
to her private services

you see, we had to sift through  
her costume jewelry  
once I got to Florida  
to pick and choose through what we wanted  
I didn't want her watches

(I have too much of a love affair  
with my Tag Heuer, sorry)

and I didn't want most  
of her clip on earrings  
(she never wanted pierced earrings,  
she hated the idea)

but one pair of earring she ordered  
was pretty, and simple  
they were a pair of earrings she ordered  
when she found out she was sick

it was what she bought  
when she felt bad  
the she was struck with cancer again

and the earrings didn't come in the mail  
so she was going to reorder them  
but said to my sister,  
oh,

get the earrings as pierced  
and keep them for yourself

but when they got back to her town  
her clip on earrings were there  
waiting for her anyway

so these earrings were ones she bought  
because she felt bad  
because she was sick  
and had to face cancer again

so I kept those earrings

I picked something else to keep  
a silver chain, with a pendant  
of mock diamond studs  
in a heart shape  
there were two pieces of glass  
in the center of this heart  
locking in a few loose  
mock diamond studs  
that could move around  
within the heart

and I thought it was uncanny  
that I owned a silver ring  
with a silver circle  
and there were two pieces of glass  
in the center of this circle  
locking in a few loose  
mock diamond studs  
that could move around  
within the circle in my ring

and so I picked only a select few pieces  
of my mother's jewelry to keep

and when we were going  
to my mother's private services  
my sister asked me,  
"are you wearing that  
heart-shaped necklace  
of mom's?"

I only showed her the jewelry on my neck  
and didn't say a word

I know, there are only a few pieces I keep  
but I wear them like tombstones  
and I shouldn't need words  
to explain that

*Story Telling*

09/09/06 #3

Your see, my mom, eleven years ago  
had breast cancer  
and the three girls  
flew to visit her at her home  
across the country  
and mom felt bad  
that shouldn't make our trip better  
because she just found out  
she had cervical cancer too

but we couldn't have come  
at a better time  
and she had procedures  
she had surgeries  
and she had a radical hysterectomy  
and then the cancer was gone  
she was in the clear

so for a decade  
she went to the doctor  
and they found no cancer in her  
and all seemed well  
she had beaten  
a killer

###

when I was almost killed  
in a car accident  
and I had head trauma  
    no fractured bones,  
    except my skull  
they never told me  
    just my family  
    but not me, the patient  
that I'm expected  
to have a seizure  
within six months of my accident

I had a grand mal seizure  
seven months after  
I was almost killed

no one explained to me  
what was happening  
and I had to figure it out  
as I went along

###

well, a decade after  
her bouts with cancer  
she went to the doctor again,  
had a fever, felt tired  
and they said,  
well, it's funny,  
you've got all the symptoms  
and most women who have had  
as much cancer in their history  
as you've had  
well, you're likely to have  
leukemia

###

well, she did

###

and when she found out  
at her home in south west Florida  
she traveled to  
University of Chicago Hospital  
(they're a good hospital, you know)  
and she got prepped for chemo  
was in the hospital shorter than me  
(damnit, I shouldn't be  
so self-centered that way)  
and had chemo  
lost her hair  
(with her new crew cut,  
as her hair grew back  
she looked just like her brother,  
Uncle Pete, from this army photos)  
and the doctors said she was in remission

now, this leukemia is a tricky thing  
cancer of the blood  
versus cancer of an organ  
it was easier when you could  
just remove an organ  
and leave it at that  
but this was cancer in her blood  
and the cancer crept into her bone marrow  
and they had to periodically  
drill into her hip bone  
for a bone marrow biopsy  
to see if there was any cancer  
in her bone marrow

fun job,  
drilling into her hip bone

you wonder why there are so many  
hip replacement surgeries now  
well, look at how doctors test now

a little bone pulled here,  
a little bone pulled there

well anyway, the doctors said  
she was in remission  
(happy happy, joy joy)  
but because this cancer-of-the-blood thing  
was tricky  
they're going to give her  
another round of chemo  
just to be on the safe side  
because you know, if people  
don't go through this extra round  
of chemo  
the leukemia is more likely  
to come back

so mom took the chemo  
and she recovered  
at my sister's house  
until she was well enough  
to go back home  
and recoup in her own home

I visited her in her recoup time  
just shy of my parent's fifty sixth  
wedding anniversary

bought the cologne dad would give mom  
for their anniversary  
while I was visiting

she hoped that when her hair grew back  
after the chemo  
it would grow back curly  
and it was  
she was so used to having a hairdresser  
style her hair into a bee hive  
and she'd have to sleep on her nose  
to keep her hair style in place  
until her next hairdresser appointment

so her hair was curling now  
she bought curling hair gel  
she wore a little white hat  
    (we always could pull off  
    looking good in hats)  
and curled the ends  
    of her new short hair  
around her little cap

she looked so cute

mom would work in the mornings  
run errands, get groceries  
and by lunchtime she'd be tired  
so she'd watch her soap operas

but who can blame her,  
she's still recovering  
from all the chemo Hell  
she went through

all of her neighbors said,  
it's amazing how well she's doing  
after all she's gone through

and they were right

###

a month after I left from visiting  
mom started to feel tired,  
feverish  
so dad took her to the doctor  
and they said,  
Silly us,  
she wasn't in remission

they wanted to put her  
    in hospice care immediately  
and she looked at dad,  
and they both instantly agreed  
they're not giving up that easily  
so back to the University of Chicago hospitals

more chemo for mom  
a different chemical this time  
so she won't lose her hair  
but after she went through the chemo again  
they found no change in her condition

and then they said,  
"you've got two choices:  
because you're immune to chemo now  
you can go for experimental treatments,  
or you can decide to stop treatment"

she said,  
"I don't want hospitals anymore"  
so she made her choice

and the doctors said  
she had two to six months to live  
maybe as long as a year  
and I said to her  
as she was getting platelets  
at the Hospital,  
"When your father had cancer,  
doctors gave him six months to live.  
How long did he live?"  
and she said  
six years  
so this was something  
she could beat  
we Bakutis come from a strong stock  
we can do anything

I know we can

###

well, I don't think she wanted to fight  
I think the pain in her bones  
was too strong  
and I think she was tired  
of fighting a battle  
she couldn't win  
so she let it take over

they said two to six months  
and she lived just shy of three

she struggled through it all  
not telling us about her pain

just taking her medicine,  
so to speak  
and hoping everything would just kill her  
and get it over with

and

and I think emotionally  
she made the choice  
despite us

###

and now I sit and write this story  
and my father is sleeping  
in front of the tv  
in his lounge chair next to me  
    he says it's more comfortable there  
    to fall asleep  
and I'm listening to his breathing  
while he sleeps  
and I hear him panting  
every thirty seconds  
while he sleeps  
like he's having nightmares  
about it all still

and as I tell this story  
there's still a panic in the air  
even while we sleep

## *A Little Angel Inside*

09/11/06 #3

it seems strange,  
that on the day the towers fell five years ago  
where every television station and newspaper  
is praising our resolve for all of the death  
that has been forced upon us  
well, it seems strange  
that this is the day the death certificates  
became available from Fuller Funeral Home  
and this is the day we pick up my mother's ashes

seems eerily strange

my sister is holding some ashes  
to be made into a diamond from mom  
so they came to us with a small container for her  
and a larger cardboard box of all of mom

and Kristina from Fuller Funeral Home  
even handed me a small maroon bag  
tied tightly shut  
and she whispered to me,  
"these are your mother's earrings"

I knew the dress we chose for her  
the dress she wore to my wedding  
would be burned with her in her cremation  
but it never occurred to me  
that the earring would survive

and here they are,  
in a little velour bag for me

like how people try to keep something  
from the fall of the World Trade centers  
who lived through that horrendous day  
well, I think, maybe this is what I'll keep



if anyone argue about them  
I'll say,  
I lost her dress  
from my wedding  
for the cremation  
so these earrings are a gift to me now  
sorry

I know, they're clip-on earrings  
and they're not real diamonds  
but they are three pretty little stones  
today, tomorrow and forever  
and they look so dainty and delicate  
and they're a good way for me to remember her

when we left Fuller Funeral Home today  
dad carried the paperwork, the death certificates  
and I carried mom with us  
in her little containers  
and I think I held that little red bag  
like there was a little angel inside  
and I had to be delicate  
to make sure nothing happened to it  
because I was it's keeper now  
I'll treat it well  
and treasure it always  
I promise

## *Just Let Her Rest*

09/11/06 #4

it was heavy  
heavy the way I felt  
after I let the news sink in  
that my mother died

my sister told me  
to take mom's ashes

ashes of her coffin,  
and ashes of the dress  
she wore to my wedding

the ashes were so heavy

so we were at Fuller Funeral Home today  
and we asked if the ashes were ready

they brought mom to us  
a smaller container,  
a larger container  
sealed tightly

along with all the necessary paperwork  
to prove that yes,  
these are my mother's ashes  
this is really it

and I carried mom out to the car  
with my dad  
so we could bring mom home  
one more time

mom sat in my lap at first,  
then at my feet  
for a safer journey

she's resting on my bed right now  
all tightly wrapped up  
like she was covered, in a blanket  
because she used to get cold

there are a few polyester/  
cotton button-down tops  
we keep in the hallway closet  
you know, for additional warmth  
for mom

we kept them in the closet still  
because the kids visit  
and I've even been wearing one of them  
because I get cold  
in the air conditioning  
in the afternoons here

we keep some of these things around  
like her crocheted blankets  
because she'd get cold sometimes

and maybe I can think  
she's resting now on my bed  
her ashes in plastic  
like a blanket around her  
to keep her warm  
and to keep her together

###

I probably sound delirious  
talking this way  
but saying these things  
makes it easier to handle right now

I don't want to think  
that my mother's remains  
are now only ashes  
in a plastic bag  
closed with a little white twist-tie  
in a cardboard box  
on top of my bed

I don't want to think of it that way  
really

I'd rather think  
she's resting now  
before I bring her back  
to where she used to live

she's my mom  
I even just had to put her  
under the blankets  
you know, with a little room at the top  
her her head  
wherever it may be

I even had to put my arms around her  
like I wanted to do  
while she was still alive,  
dying  
so I even put my arms around her  
and cried

so give her a rest  
she's needed it for so long  
just let her rest

# children churches & daddies



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