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Dear Carolyn:

I did mean to get a letter off to you before your Ethiopian adventure, and you may not have forwarding arranged. I'm not sure I'm up to the timeless prose I should therefore write. I'm a bit rusty in my days of retirement. It's lovely to have so much good news on so many of your fronts, projects perking, kids doing well.

My parents did get here for a week in early September, and it was wonderful. Dad was more present than I'd seen him in a couple of years. His appetite was back, and he and Mother swam every day in lovely warm weather. We didn't have people in, but Dad hosted Helen's 77th birthday dinner at the Woodstone Inn with Avis and her new friend, Leah, Margaret Edgar, and Judy Baca, whom Mother and Dad had never met. Lib and Dave drove them up and hung around for a couple of days before they went back to Seattle to see their daughter, Alison, and then they came back for a day and night before leaving on the 14th. At six a.m. on the 14th Mother woke me to say Dad needed a doctor. We later discovered at the hospital that he'd had a heart attack and then a stroke. Lib went with him on the emergency boat, and Dave and Mother followed by car on the ferry. He was in the little Saanich Hospital about which Mother can't say enough good things. When he hadn't recovered consciousness on the 17th, Mother asked to have him taken off life support, and he died on the 20th. As I kept my mother company, I believed her when she said she'd already done a lot of her grieving for Dad in the hard last couple of years he'd had, and she was simply glad that he'd worked hard to get well enough for the trip and to enjoy it. She was afraid of just the sort of stroke he had where in an American hospital he might have lingered on in a vegetable state for weeks or months. He was 88, just six weeks short of their 65th wedding anniversary. They all left on the 25th with his ashes, met my brother (whom Dad had just seen on the way here) and his wife, two grandchildren and their partners in northern California to scatter the ashes in the river where we all had learned to swim and fish. He didn't want any kind of service. I was worried that the tide of sympathy at Channing House would be too much for Mother, but her friends have been helpful instead, being sure she had company at meals, offering practical help. And of course, Lib and Dave are right there. Dave had already taken over Dad's finances months ago, and Lib is very good at helping Mother with everything else. I suppose the one useful thing about the last couple of years is that Mother is relieved of her dread and the heavy responsibility of caring for Dad, and I think she will make a good life for herself. If she had died first, my father would have turned his face to the wall.

After they all left, Helen and I were exhausted, and we simply treated ourselves as invalids for about a week.

This last weekend we were scheduled to go to Saltspring to stay with Liz Armour and to have dinner with Tiff and Bill and Beth and

Susan's. Tiff and I are opening the Vancouver International Writers' Festival with a staged conversation on the 20th. Liz's mother died the weekend before, but she said we were to come anyway. With anyone else I would have canceled, but Liz and I are close enough that I wanted to be with her. We had a quiet day before a difficult evening. Tiff is at the end of a national tour and is taking a bit of childish room for himself. "I can't go on stage with you. You're too thin!" We didn't make much headway in what we're going to talk about, but I trust the actor in Tiff will take over on the night, and it will be all right. I think Tiff is uneasy about the preponderance of gays in the audience, that my activist record will make him look bad in comparison. I did what reassurance I could. I am fond of Tiff and admire his work, but I do get impatient with his self indulgence. Ah, well...

We are still swimming, wondering each day if it is our last. The pool is down to 70 degrees, about as cold as we can manage, and we can't swim long at that temperature, but each day we can does our spirits good. We won't go to the desert this winter. We'll probably spend a week in February visiting Mother.

Have marvelous adventures.

Love,

Jane