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Dear Carolyn:

It was lovely to get your long, newsy letter. I'm glad you've been enjoying work, have a book in the wings, and are about to enjoy children and grandchild, and, yes, I wish, too, distances weren't so great. Though I wouldn't wish a book tour on my worst enemy, it is often the way I see far flung friends, and I'm grateful for that.

For me these last months have been a hard, deliberate one foot in front of the other. I went to California in April to sit by the side of my dying mother who was lucid but nearly silent, content to have family around visiting with each other, a great grandchild playing on the floor. My brother and sister were both there, my sister staying for the last two months of Mother's life. The three of us managed to do a lot of the decision making and sorting while we were together, but it still left my sister with a hard job at the end. It helped me to see Mother well tended, not suffering. I don't know how I could have coped again with the kind of suffering Helen went through the last six weeks of her life, images still far too much in the foreground of my memory where there should be instead, and will be, 45 years of lovely life. Mother died on May 8th. I don't much take that in and perhaps I won't have to, she so much more lodged in my thoughts than in my life these many years.

There is a lot to keep me occupied, the chores of settling Helen's estate, sorting through papers, disposing of personal belongings, a great deal of mail. And I don't grieve alone in this community nor in the wider world of our friends and family. There was a wonderful memorial for her right after she died, and in late May, when her sister and niece could be here, we put her ashes in the graveyard, right next to Hoppy. It's still difficult when people come for the first time, Helen's absence newly palpable, I still uncertain in habits of living alone, entertaining alone. But I'm glad of people just the same, who are my best distraction from becalmed sadness. I think grief is probably like cronic low grade pain, something you don't get over but get used to.

I stayed with various people while Helen was in hospital, Joan and Ann among them. I hadn't seen much of them in the last few years, and it was good to touch base with them again. They invited themselves over here for Mother's Day in honor of that hilarious dinner we had in Toronto those years ago when you and I had just come back from a Writers' Union meeting. Both of them are retired now. Ann is finishing a biography of Yeats' wife, George. Joan guiltily uses the internet mostly to find new recipes, and I try to persuade her that retirement is precisely that kind of pleasure, leaving the world's measuring sticks behind. They are still doing a lot of traveling, and they have two houses, one in Deep Cove on Vancouver Island, one on Salt Spring which has a pool. They make a habit of putting house guests in one house while they stay in the other.

Because feeding myself is a dull business, I often have local friends for dinner or go out, something we were out of the habit of in the last year of Helen's life. I'm getting to know some of the younger

crew, quite a community of lesbians and watch the complications of their love lives, the problems of their work lives with affectionate detachment. And I see a lot of the young families who bring their children to the pool to swim. Sometimes I have dinner with the other neighborhood widows, and I like them but I don't share preoccupations with pets, their solution to the need to be needed and to loneliness. I was too firmly raised by a mother who said, "You can bring home any stray you want as long as it's human," a dictum Helen wasn't all that enthusiastic about!

I have friends' visits dotted through the summer, maybe even Peggy and Graeme on their way back from bird watching in the north. Last summer I trained two young brothers who live just across the road to clean the pool, and this summer they are actually old enough to do a fair job of it. They come every morning to open it up and clean it once a week. Their chatter and clowning is as welcome to me as their help. And they charm my visitors as well.

Having neglected my own health for some time, I've now had a complete assessment of my arthritis and am grateful to have any joint replacements ruled out because my lower back is too bad to make any but limited walking impossible; so I'm doing what exercises might help, using a cane and a walker and simply hoping to stay physically independent as long as I can. I can still swim, and that's a great pleasure.

People keep asking me if I'll go back to writing. I have no interest in anything but occasional essays, mainly asked for, mainly political. I'm appalled the by new common law legislation, supported by so many people, which outs all of Canada and promises to be a burden to any but those who don't really need help. After 30 years of relative privacy, we have invited the government back into our bedrooms thinking it will make us more acceptable.

I wonder what your reservations are about working with Bondar. Rumor has it she is one of us.

Well, this is how I am, heart-broken, dogged, awkward, but willing to make what use of the time I can find.

Love,

Jane