

21 October 1977

Dear Harold and Lil:

As she had hoped, Jenifer died peacefully early last wednesday afternoon, Oct. 19th.

It was rather like a light being turned off. She had been pain-free nearly all the time for several weeks and was quite comfortable, serene and calm as always. She knew, of course, that her lungs were filling up with fluid and could overwhelm her at any time. Oxygen helped to keep her more comfortable, and she had even resumed eating a bit here and there during the last week or so.

I had given her the few bites she'd take for lunch, watched her drink most of a small tumbler of apple juice and was reading as she went readily to sleep. I heard a small sound of choking, and by the time I could get to her, only a few feet, she already was in a coma. The nurses pumped out her throat, but her pulse and respiration faded rapidly and in an hour were gone.

I stuck around, waiting for the doctor to come and write up his final report, then cleaned out our things and came home to write her obit, which I took into San Francisco that night to the relevant agencies and papers. Today I went with her body to the crematorium at San Rafael. Her ashes will be blended later with mine and together we'll return to the Pacific. She wanted no funeral, of course. If you wish to, you can send a small contribution in memoriam to Hospice of Marin, P.O. Box 72, Kentfield, Calif. 94904.

The Hospice people made the difference between utter horror and a bearable experience for everyone concerned with many periods of beauty and serenity. She was smiling and joking even in her last moments of consciousness. She never complained, humbling and astounding everyone who took care of her with her calm resolve to remain herself. She succeeded. Her face was still that of a young woman, perhaps 30 years younger than her 65 years.

Some day when I have a bit more time available I shall tell you some interesting things about her, things no one here knows and which made her the person she was. In the meantime I have a lot of loose ends to tie up, including sorting out the mess that has accumulated at 35 Castle Rock in more than six months of neglect. Eventually I hope to make a trip east, but can't now predict when.

Meanwhile, many heartfelt thanks for your kindnesses and considerateness during these past months. They're over now; a beautiful life has ended fittingly and I can no more fail to face the future than she did. She taught me well, as always.

Best to you both, and with every certainty I can include her wishes with mine.

  
jdw