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## PREFACE

The poems collected in this book are by a woman who more than anything loved language. My mother, Maeve Butler Beck, loved the sounds of words in all their permutations—their eccentric origins, possibilities, and reverberations. She sensed the world around her in musical language: The song of the thrush, the dip, dip of a paddle in water, and souging of wind in balsam branches were a sacred language she understood in a visceral way.

Maeve was somewhat shy, more at ease playing word games, singing, or quoting a line of poetry than engaging in small talk. She liked people who made her think and laugh, and would hone in on someone who was sad or bereft to share her laughter with them. She was ill-at-ease at gatherings of high society and loathed having to shop for clothes, but she loved playing practical jokes, traveling, carrying out seasonal rituals, and inspiring young people to learn about the wonders of the world around them.

As a young woman Maeve envisioned a career as a published writer and a teacher of literature. But like her friends she got married two years after college, shortly before her husband went off to war. Seven years later she had three children and was “immersed,” she wrote in a letter, in the “turmoil of the mop and the broom.”

Her greatest source of anxiety after I, her second child, was born was whether she could be a good mother and also stay true to herself as a writer. That anxiety never went away but she came up with strategies to deal with it, one of which was to write the poems in this collection.

In her first decade of motherhood Maeve devised ways of weaving her writing into the silent spaces when my father was at work and my brother and I were either taking naps or in

nursery school. As we got older those spaces shrank. By the time I was a teenager she had little privacy or time for herself.

The crossroads in our lives was the winter I turned fifteen and got my driver's license. I was fledging, either gone from the house or shut in my room, not interested in sharing my life with anyone but my friends. My mother's strategy for worrying about me and dealing with my rebellions was to confront them in her own vernacular: When I went out in the evening she did not lecture me before I left or sit up waiting for my return. Instead, when I came home I found a poem on the back of a chair, on the stairs, on the edge of the sink in our bathroom, or slipped under my bedroom door. If the poem was gone the next morning Mom knew I was home safely.

I call these creations of Maeve's "Home" poems, since no matter how far afield the subject of the poem might stray it was ultimately about my leaving and returning home. She did not, for the most part, make drafts or copies of these poems, and with only a couple of exceptions she did not date them or give them titles.

Home poems were written in motley forms of poetry that combined absurdity, beauty, news, and whimsy. In the midst of their lyricism they might also make reference to places, people, homework, chores to do, current events, and when the car would or would not be available. Home poems were often funny, designed to catch my attention or bring up important topics in a roundabout way. They were also a vehicle by which my mother demonstrated the nuances of language, rhythm, and line in formal metric poetry. If I was unaware of her subtle teaching she did not let that stop her, since the poems were as much for her survival as my enjoyment and edification.

Writing Home poems was an oasis in my mother's day—a savored moment in the evening when she could sit down and compose an ephemeral but fully-realized poem, turning the

mundane into the sublime if only for a moment. She was in her element writing Home poems—spontaneous, funny, inventive, and contemplative. And since the natural world was Maeve’s touchstone, the changing seasons were always present in the poems: Flowering spring, a summer cricket’s chirps, the changing colors and stark branches of fall, and winter’s deepening snows.

My mother subsequently wrote Home poems for my brothers when they were in high school or lived at home, but she continued writing Home poems to me because I was the only one of her children who in her lifetime left Minnesota and only came back to visit; and I was her only daughter. She wrote me 150 Home poems over the course of eighteen years, beginning in the winter of 1962 and ending just before her death in September, 1979.



Maeve’s journey to the place in which she wrote these poems winds through the formative and tumultuous years of the twentieth century. She was born on November 29, 1919 in St. Paul, Minnesota. Four years later her grandfather, Pierce Butler, a second generation Irish Catholic lawyer who represented railroad owners, mining interests, and lumber barons from his office in downtown St. Paul, was appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court by President Warren Harding. He would remain there until 1939. He was the youngest of several brothers who had grown up on a farm near Northfield, Minnesota, moved to St. Paul to learn the building trades, and eventually became the contractors of the State Capitol building and wealthy owners of North Country iron ore mines. As a Justice on the Supreme Court Butler was an unwavering conservative, joining in decisions that upheld segregation and dismantled President Roosevelt’s New Deal legislation.

Maeve’s father, Pierce Butler Jr., the oldest of Justice and Ann Cronin Butler’s eight children, was also a well-known

attorney in St. Paul. He was politically conservative, but unlike most of his Republican colleagues he opposed war and lobbied in numerous speeches for peace through world law. A well-known practical joker, he once won a trial in which he invoked “the writ of *se coiver*,” the Latin reflexive of the verb—as in “to fuck oneself”—referring to the opposing counsel who thought he was using an arcane legal term. Pierce also spoke Spanish from his time living in the Panama Canal Zone during WW I.

Maeve’s mother, Hilda, who was from back East, was a different character. Over six feet tall, she was a formidable woman who might put on snow shoes and tramp through the woods on a winter day but would dress formally for supper. Emotionally distant, she had no idea what mothering meant. She was very critical of Maeve and locked my mother in a closet when she misbehaved. She also saved every scrap of Maeve’s writing and drawing. Hilda invited artists, scholars, and government leaders from all over the world into her home but was equally happy reading a book of essays or poetry, seeking out a wild animal in its habitat, or identifying a migrating bird in the spring.

Hilda allowed her children to run around naked in the summer and home-schooled them until they were ten years old, an unconventional, even shocking thing to do in the Butlers’ St. Paul upper-class social circles. Maeve’s home schooling consisted of reading widely, exploring, piano lessons, gardening, and studying plants, animals, and birds. Maeve and her siblings also learned the fine art of performing practical jokes, which my mother carried into adulthood.

Pierce was fair and short, Hilda was dark-haired and tall. My mother inherited Hilda’s hair, height, inquisitive turn of mind, and her love of nature. From her father she inherited a ready sense of humor, a love of music, dislike of war, and a passion for language, make-believe, and the carnival of politics.

For most of her youth my mother, her brothers, Pierce III and Michael, and her sister, Deirdre, lived in a large three story, but not fancy, house which was referred to as “Edgecumbe,” because it was just off of Edgecumbe Road in St. Paul. Hilda had designed the house so that the east porch, where breakfast was served, was flooded with sun in the winter and the south-facing windows heated the living room and upstairs bedrooms. Although downtown St. Paul was minutes away the house was built on a secluded eleven acres of grassy hills, hay meadows, fruit trees, and flower gardens—all of this surrounded by woods and parks where my mother would ride her horse.

My mother’s small bedroom on the second floor had windows that looked out over the expansive grounds, and beyond a poplar grove on the bluff, to the farms of the Mississippi valley in the distance. Her room had a fireplace, a large bookshelf next to the bed, and a window seat beneath the west window, perfect for reading. On the third floor of the house were the bedrooms of a live-in cook and housekeeper. The family also had a gardener and someone who came daily to do the laundry.

A deep ravine curved around the house and down the hill into a major thoroughfare which led to downtown St. Paul. As a child Maeve spent her winters careening down the sides of the ravine on either skis or a toboggan. In a nineteen page autobiography intended for a magazine that she began in December, 1947 but never completed, Maeve described those snowy days:

We were never afraid of getting cold and spent hours lying at the bottom of the ravine in deep snow. It was impossible to miss the beauty of the old bending golden rod stalks hung with snow, the twisted lacy shrubs and the absolute comfort of

body contours snuggled in the softness. We were still too young to have harnesses on our skis, so our legs were never twisted when we landed; we were just heaped in a drugged pleasure of awkwardness and freedom...

...When we were finally bigger and even more daring we rode the toboggan down the steps that had been made on the hill...out into the world of houses, stores, and the streetcar line. I broke my two front teeth going down them. I had broken them once before running upstairs to show mother a cut on my leg. I had gotten two new teeth and these broke off...

As a little girl Maeve was often sent to the home of her adoring grandmother and stern grandfather in Washington D.C., the townhouse family members simply called, "Nineteenth Street," after the thoroughfare on which it was situated. Until 1935, when the present U. S. Supreme Court building was completed, Justice Butler's judicial chambers occupied one floor of the narrow multi-storied house. Maeve had a bedroom on the top floor with her Aunt Margaret, who was disabled, and her aunt's nurse, Miss Bailey.

When Maeve was in Washington she reluctantly accompanied her grandmother to teas where the children of the ruling class conversed in French and wore fancy clothes. Maeve felt out of place and bored. She preferred sliding down the house's shiny bannisters and riding on the shoulders of her grandfather's messenger, Jones, while he galloped down five flights of stairs, the family dog at his heels. She also loved riding the elevator that had been installed for Aunt Margaret, where she pretended she was in a department store—calling out the merchandise on each floor when the doors opened. On one occasion she startled her grandmother who was

hosting a social gathering in the parlor, announcing as the doors flung open, “Ladies underwear, silks, slips, brassieres, corsets!”

In the winter of 1927 when Maeve was eight, she was sent to Nineteenth Street to recover from bronchitis. On that visit she discovered an activity she loved above all else—writing “songs” with her aunt’s nurse. One day, on paper she had painstakingly lined herself, Maeve wrote in her tortured spelling and punctuation to her brother, Pierce, who was back home at Edgcumbe:

yesterday Miss Bailey and I were going to have  
supper up stairs Because ther was a party down  
stairs so Miss Bailey said lets each make up a  
song about our supper and I said all right...please  
tell mother that Ive never had so much fun in  
Washington before...hers was called Maeve at  
Bedtime it went lik this Maev Meave do Behave  
you keep me working like a slave. and mine I  
made went like this. anna is the cook. I have had  
Breakfast Lunch and tea and now good anna  
makes supper for me she gives me red apples off  
the tree.

Maeve was a handful for the over-worked Black staff at Nineteenth Street, but these individuals also nurtured her because she was so different from her grandparents and they knew she was lonely. Maeve sensed a difference between the staff, who lived in the basement, suffered Justice Butler’s “excruciatingly loud voice” and “fearful injunctions,” and herself—differences she eventually comprehended years later.



From a young age writing poetry was something Maeve loved to do. Certain special places also gave her joy, one of

which was “Camp,” a collection of cabins built by Hilda’s maternal uncles between 1889 and 1891 on a little island on Osgood Pond in the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York.

Maeve, along with assorted family and relatives, often spent weeks on the island in the summer. At Camp she slept in a tent on a platform by the edge of the lake, learned how to paddle a canoe, row a boat, fish, and many other backwoods kinds of things, since on the island there was no electricity, and drinking water was fetched from a spring across the lake. It was at Camp and in what she described in her little autobiography as the “indifferent deep woods, ferny and marshy places,” where she was first aware of the plaintive song of the hermit thrush and the white-throated sparrow—whose song in particular echoes in several Home poems.



In the fall of 1929 Maeve entered fifth grade at the Summit School for girls in St. Paul. Many of St. Paul’s wealthy families sent their girls to the Summit School, but unlike these girls my mother had never had a playmate other than her siblings and she had never taken a test. According to Priscilla “Perky” Hannaford Greeley, who was in Maeve’s fifth grade class, Maeve had a hard time adjusting to school. In her little autobiography my mother recalled how she chafed at the stifling hours of rote learning and studying Latin; her report cards from the Summit School noted that she lacked discipline, especially in math. (See poem on p. 101)

The result of her apparent shortcomings was that she had to spend time in the summer making up work. She was almost held back in seventh grade except for the intervention of her English teachers, who recognized her potential and whom she adored.

In 1932, when Maeve was thirteen, she sliced her right wrist on a window pane during an escapade that took place on

a porch roof at Edgecumbe. Letters she wrote over the course of a year document the operation and the healing process of her hand from complete numbness to tingling to eventual healing. That year she essentially became left-handed. It was only when she broke her left arm in a sleighing accident the following year that she began using her right hand again.

Sometime during her teenage years Maeve discovered “serious” poetry. She did not have close friends outside of school because Hilda did not want other children coming around, so for an adolescent who spent much of her time alone poetry became Maeve’s companion. “I knew a few poems by heart,” she writes in the autobiography, “and I knew a place to hide on a bluff above the Mississippi where I could say the poems to myself and look at the valley in different seasons.” She memorized hundreds of poems, which for the rest of her life, served as a source for quotations on any subject at any time.

In 1937 Maeve left St. Paul for Sarah Lawrence College in New York. Although the college was considered “radical” it also had an excellent academic reputation which Hilda felt would allow my mother to thrive. Lacking the social skills of her classmates, however, Maeve suffered through a lonely freshman year. Luckily, she was reunited with Perky Greeley, her former fifth grade classmate at the Summit School, who was also a freshman. Perky saw that Maeve was having a difficult time and offered to be her roommate, which they were for the next three years. Perky told me that Maeve eventually flourished but “it took her a long time to blossom.”

Maeve was happier her second year as she got to know like-minded free spirits, intellectuals, and poets with whom she could laugh, lose her shyness, discuss the issues of the times, recite poetry, and play music. Margaret Rockwell Finch met my mother her sophomore year. “She was tall, straight, and rather spare,” she told me. “She was bright and funny. She didn’t

play by the book.” Maeve often communicated with her friends by leaving poems in their dorm rooms—planting the seeds perhaps for the Home poems she wrote to me twenty years later.

At Sarah Lawrence Maeve was exposed to well-known intellectuals like Helen Lynd, who nudged my mother towards a progressive critique of contemporary social issues. The activist and poet Genevieve Taggard, with whom Maeve studied poetry, instilled in her a passion for teaching and social justice. Maeve said that Taggard “squeezed the best” from her students, teaching them to observe the little things from which great revelations are born.

Maeve’s most compelling writing, her truest voice, emerged when she was writing to or for people she loved—who tasted the world with the same passion she did, who felt deeply, and who heard what the poet Wallace Stevens described as “inescapable rhythms.” The letters she wrote to such people at certain periods of her life would fill several volumes. Writing letters was the way Maeve processed her life and restored her spirit—and, she hoped, touched the spirit of the person to whom she was writing. Genevieve Taggard, who friends called, “Jed,” was one of those people.

In her letters to Jed Maeve often invoked her memories of visiting Jed and her husband, Kenneth Durant, at their home, Gilfeather, a farm on the Brattleboro River in southern Vermont. In college and after she graduated, Maeve and close friends spent spring vacations at Gilfeather, where Maeve camped out in Jed’s writing cabin at the far end of a meadow. “I think of you when among earth’s vitals,” she wrote Jed and Kenneth, “because you both helped me to savor them. The happier laughter learned there may help me to help the greatest number I hope.”

In the spring of Maeve’s junior year at Sarah Lawrence she and a friend went to Gilfeather and spent a week in which fog

enveloped the meadow, the river-ice broke, and melting snow roared down from streams on the mountainside. In her little autobiography Maeve recalls watching a farmer neighbor work his fields, which led to a discourse about the place of work in one's life. For the first time she realized the unique circumstances in which she had been raised and the inequities it represented. When she returned to the campus she joined student groups, including the Popular Front, which advocated for progressive causes and grass-roots culture.

On several occasions Maeve traveled to Washington D.C. with friends to demonstrate alongside students from all over the United States for peace, labor rights, and the rights of African Americans. When in Washington Maeve and Perky would stay at Nineteenth Street. One day they got a ride to a demonstration with Justice Butler, who was on his way to the Supreme Court in his chauffeured car. As they were getting out of the car Butler turned to his driver and said, "Be sure you are here at eight o'clock sharp to pick up the girls. If you are late, I will repeal the Thirteenth Amendment!" Perky told me that Justice Butler's "joke" that he would rescind the Emancipation Proclamation remained vivid in her memory for over seventy years. Maeve's world had changed and it put her at odds with her family.



Next to Maeve's senior photo in the 1941 Sarah Lawrence yearbook was the caption, "I want to teach literature." She made plans to become an English teacher and inspire others the way her English teachers had inspired her; she also intended to continue to write poetry and fiction with hopes of publishing her work. She had several interviews for teaching jobs and was ultimately hired by the Harley School, a progressive private school in Rochester, New York.

A few days after graduation Maeve, her professor, Charles Trinkaus, Perky, Perky's sister, as well as the anthropologist

Cora DuBois and another friend, drove Perky's car down the east coast through the southern United States to Mexico, where Perky had a job with the American Embassy in Mexico City. Maeve wrote two long awestruck letters to Jed describing the people she met, the countryside, and a day she spent casting nets with fishermen in Veracruz.

We also rode on the roof of a caboose from Vera Cruz to Alvarado. Riding in a caboose would be enough, but to ride on top! and the sea was on one side, and fields and flying egrets on the other. Ask for no more.

In the fall of 1941, having found an apartment in Rochester, Maeve began her first job as an apprentice teacher at the Harley School, filling in for teachers at every grade level, in every subject. The United States was now at war and Maeve, though still a pacifist, wanted to help out. In the summer of 1942 she lived in New York City where she took graduate courses at Columbia University with the hopes of eventually obtaining an advanced degree; and every day she spent time reading to injured, bedridden veterans who were filling the city's hospitals.

At the end of the summer Maeve returned to her teaching job but also enrolled in education courses at the University of Rochester, having decided to get a teaching certificate instead of an advanced degree. In her second year at Harley Maeve thrived in her job, teaching English classes full-time to grades 7-12. In front of the classroom she lost her shyness; by using her dramatic skills and humor she captivated and engaged her students. In a letter to Jed written in 1943 near the end of the school year she described the seventh graders' "sublime production" of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*:

You can't imagine how unforgettable and marvelous the whole thing was; the little Banquo and fat Macbeth, serious, laborious, and keen. We worked for days with wriggly ladders, wooden swords, old petticoats, green paint, candles, hammers, tights, helmets, dishpans, electricity, card-tables and madly changed parts from day to day as each new person got measles, and finally performed in a high, climactic fashion with Birnam woods, duels, wild hair, death agonies, and sleep walking...

Throughout the school year Maeve took education classes at the University. One of her classes was taught by a young, ambitious first-year professor who was only a year older than Maeve, my father, Robert H. Beck, who first observed Maeve teaching in the classroom and was smitten. They began spending time with each other, taking long walks and picnics—even in the winter. My father said that Maeve was the first person who could keep up with his long walking stride.

Robert, as Maeve called him in those early years, was the handsome only child of Jewish parents who had grown up in the ethnic neighborhoods of Bridgeport, Connecticut, where he had gone to public school. He went to Harvard at age seventeen when they still had quotas for Jewish students, worked in factories in the summer, and got his Ph.D. from Yale, where he wrote his dissertation on progressive education in the United States. According to Maeve's letters, she and Robert shared a sense of humor, a love of the sea, music, and literature.

They kept their plans to get married a secret to all but their closest friends because Maeve had not yet told her parents. Soon after Robert enlisted in the Army in the spring of 1943 Maeve wrote her father about her feelings and her future with Robert. She summarized his resumé and spoke of his hopes to

one day get a position on the faculty of Stanford or Harvard. “Robert may not have been to Europe,” she wrote, “but he knows the east coast and Wyoming by heart. His mother teaches and his father was a physician.”

What she did not say was that Robert’s mother, Peggy, a lovely, learned woman whose father, a sculptor who had carved the ornate stone work of the New York State capitol building in Albany, had taken a job as a switchboard operator at Bridgeport High School after Robert’s alcoholic father, Carl, jumped or fell out of a window above the saloon in a Wyoming hotel. A few months before his death he had been stripped of his osteopath’s license after a Bridgeport woman for whom he had performed an abortion died.

What was also not mentioned in Maeve’s letter to her father was that Robert was Jewish. Maeve was certain that Robert would win her father’s respect on his own terms, but she also was familiar with Butler family attitudes such as her Aunt Anne’s disparaging way of referring to Jews as “Hebrews.”

In the spring of 1943 Robert entered the Officers Candidate School in Washington, Pennsylvania, where in the fall he and Maeve were married. He was soon transferred to Fort Meade outside of Washington, D. C. Maeve found a little apartment in Baltimore near the trolley and train lines and secured a job teaching English at The Park School, a school Robert had visited a few years before, devoting several pages in his Ph.D. dissertation to its progressive pedagogy. Maeve spent a happy year in Baltimore but wrote Jed that she and Robert were “steeling themselves against a giant future.”



In the summer of 1944 Maeve, who was now pregnant, moved to South Phenix City, Alabama, across the Chattahoochee River from Fort Benning, Georgia where my father, with the 71st Infantry Division, was preparing to go to Europe. She and Robert shared a tiny bungalow with another

couple in a neighborhood of similar homes belonging to workers in the cotton mills. She wrote Jed:

Much of my day is spent cleaning messes off the porch that stray dogs have made on it during the night. Cockroaches shuffle around in the kitchen. As for the neighbors...they have to work too hard + too long in the heat, and they have too many children. The woman across from us has a yard-long flail with which she lashes her children many times a day, cussing the while. The sad thing is that they don't even try to run away. They stand there crying while the blows fall. The children smoke + chew tobacco all day. So does she + she can spit great distances with it. The babies play in the dirt road + are pot-bellied + ill.

One day I went over + asked the woman if I could take the children off her hands for a while--- tell them a story or something...She said if I had anything to do with them she'd slap me to hell...And at night we have heard such things from darkened windows as: "Aw get offa me now. I'm tired—I'm tired, I say."

One day Maeve and Robert took all their belongings from what had become an untenable living situation and moved across the river into a log cabin at a tourist car park filled with other soldiers and families. Their cabin had no cooking facilities but everyone shared. Soon Maeve got a job at a Catholic mission that operated like a welfare agency, helping the people that worked in the cotton mills. Around that same time Maeve found out that she would not be able to breast-feed because of reoccurring abscesses. Soon after getting the

news Maeve wrote Jed, “but cows are nice + I’ve suffered worse psychological blows.”

In November, 1944 Maeve moved back to St. Paul and Edgcumbe. Roger was born on January 18, 1945 and the following day, after hearing of his birth by telegram in New York City, Robert boarded a ship that would take him to France.

While in the cold, muddy camps on the French coast where the 71st was preparing to move to the eastern front, Robert got a serious case of pneumonia which kept him in the camp hospital, critically ill, for many weeks. When he was well again he boarded a train that took him to the 608th Field Artillery Battalion on the border of France and Germany where the last horrible battles of the war were being fought. VE Day took place in May, 1945 but Robert remained in Europe for another year helping to secure factories, towns, and old castles with enormous libraries. He was posted in France, Germany, and Austria, odysseys he chronicled in daily letters to Maeve. She wrote him every day too, acknowledging and adding to the literary references my father used to get around the censors’ prohibitions on revealing troop locations and activities.

During the school year Maeve rode her bike to her old nemesis, the Summit School, where she taught French to elementary students alongside her old English and French teachers who were still teaching there. Maeve’s letters to Jed during this period reflected her despair about the horrors of the war and its effect on the soul of humanity:

Of course Robert is still there...but there is no war. I aint goin to study it no more. Not for a while anyhow. Yes, perhaps I want to forget. O how irretrievably vile. But no one will. It isn’t over in the true sense. Only in the combat sense. There is

fear, more transcendent than ever now that there can only be one more war.



When Robert returned to the States in February, 1946, Maeve felt they needed a “catching up place” where they could be by themselves as a family for the first time and figure out their future—which meant my father applying for a job. They moved into a cottage at Maeve’s grandparent’s Waterford Farm in Maryland, outside of Washington D. C., where they planted a garden and my father worked part of each day with the farmers. Maeve wrote Jed:

We have eaten our own lettuce already. Chard, okra, carrots, radishes, potatoes, peas, beets, all show above the earth... The veteran is quite a different person now, calm, hopeful, and eternally singing.

At the farm Maeve worked on her first novel; Robert sent out resumés and began writing a book on progressive education. He also did much of the cooking and child care, which Maeve acknowledged he was better at than she was. At the end of June, not yet knowing where they would be that fall, Maeve wrote:

...Now I know how to run a combine, a baler, a corn seeder..but my basic message is..that it grows increasingly difficult to lean over and pick peas for dinner and that’s because I’m full of child for next January.

With thousands of soldiers back from the war and few job openings, my father was fortunate to get a position in the Department of Education at the University of Missouri in Kansas City, *and* find a place to live. Maeve and Bob packed up

an old car and drove with Roger across the country, first to St. Paul and then to Kansas City. When they had settled into a tiny, one-room apartment Maeve wrote Jed about the morning in Wisconsin in which they entered a new era in their lives:

...It was about Five A.M. and the hills were green and the road was black and curling through the country...the meadowlark sang from a quick-passing telephone pole. We didn't dare stop much for fear of having trouble starting the car...

In the bright green grass on the shoulder of the road a man was walking briskly along. He wore overalls and carried a scythe. He was at his work, then, for the day: It was his work to go into the fields with a scythe, along the country roads to his own meadows, in the bright summer and early morning, walking on his land.

The car jerked and Bob started to stop it, then changed his mind and picked up speed again. "I knew that boy," he said, "He was a lieutenant in the 608th. I remember how he said he had a farm in Wisconsin..." That was so dreadfully strange then, to be moving away from a person who had been part of a life..in another country, in the intimate distress of war...to have passed this man suddenly, to be going off to our own perfunctory duties, while he, with his, walked in the early morning with a scythe...



"I'm getting terribly impatient + excited," Maeve wrote. "Robert does practically all the cooking. Instead of listening to Symphony Sundays he reads cook books aloud." In the same letter she asked Jed how when she had a daughter she had

managed to do housework, cooking, mothering, sewing, “AND publish books.”

I was born on January 24, 1947. Shortly afterwards we moved into a cottage attached to a garage on the property of a quiet house in Kansas City, with lots of trees and a broad lawn where I spent much of the day. Maeve wrote her mother that I was “very energetic all the time,” and that I smiled “radiantly.”

At last she’s learning to sleep the night through without a 2 A. M. bottle. She’s a very happy person + always wants to have games in the middle of the night.

And later that spring she wrote:

Peggy is very happy and very strong. When she is waked to be fed she smiles right off, and often just lies in the lap laughing for no reason.

Although they were content in their little cottage my father’s work was unsatisfying. The listless education faculty, although they liked my father, had no interest in his ideas and no vision of their own. Fortunately, in late spring of 1947 my father was invited to to join the Department of Education at the University of Minnesota, which had a faculty that was exploring ideas and methods compatible with his. He was offered a tenure-track position with the assurance that he could teach a course in the philosophy department, too. He accepted.

“Dept. of Irony and **Fate!!!**” Maeve wrote in a letter to Jed, when it was clear she would be moving back to Minnesota. “After my eight years of work to leave that particular area.”

My mother was ambivalent about returning to the terrain of her childhood. The St. Paul she had known as a child and

adolescent had been stifling, and as an adult she had imagined herself living in new and unfamiliar places. She also anticipated the critical gaze of her parents, especially her mother's, at a time when she was trying to define herself as someone distinct from the girl raised at Edgumbe. Maeve admitted, however, that the offer meant that "Bob had arrived professionally" and that having "grandparents at hand would be good for the children." She looked forward to being on the road again. Even though they had not yet finalized the purchase of a house in Minnesota, she made plans to take a canoe trip with Bob up north on the Canadian border in the fall.



We ended up living only minutes away from Edgumbe, though in very different circumstances. Our tiny house, described by Maeve in a letter to Jed as "this nutshell by grace of a G. I. Loan and obliteration of various savings," was in a middle-class neighborhood with a corner grocery store and trolley car line at one end of the two-block street. At the other end of the street was an undeveloped hill which formed a tenuous barrier between our block and one of the busiest thoroughfares in St. Paul—a wild playground for kids where the air smelled like caterpillars and butterflies in the summer. "Someday the road will be cut through the hill," my mother wrote, "...but for now it's a pure rough hill..a lovely hill and shows most from the kitchen window, breakfast and supper and the sunset there."

That fall, after their canoe trip up north, my mother and father transplanted three birch trees in the front yard and in the spring put in twenty-five lilac bushes along the two-lot perimeter. Maeve planted flowers and a couple of pine trees, turning the patch of lawn that was standard in front of every house on the block into a miniature forest.

When they bought the house they also bought the vacant lot next door—the only vacant lot on the block. There my

mother planted cherry and plum trees and put in a vegetable garden. When we were a little older she taught us how to shuck corn and peas, how to roast tomatoes for lunch over the kitchen stove's gas flame, and how to make jelly from the Concord grapes which she had planted and trained to grow along a fence.

Fresh summer vegetables supplemented the corn beef hash from a can, creamed chip-beef on toast, fried kidneys, and boiled tongue which were the staples of my mother's cooking. Curiously, on Halloween Maeve always made *finnan haddie*, the traditional Scottish stew of salt-haddock in milk. Perhaps that was something they did at Edgecumbe—Halloween is often associated with Celtic festival of *Sambhain*—but I never asked and the custom ended when we eventually moved from St. Paul.

The most significant event of the 1948 new year was the purchase of a piano. On January 30, 1948, Maeve wrote Jed. "We brought a piano. \$40, a beaut. Choice between Bendix and it, definitely it, we decided." The Bendix would have been an automatic washing machine; Maeve did the laundry in a wringer washer in the basement and hung the clothes out on a clothesline. A week later she wrote Jed again, quoting a Shakespeare sonnet:

I have been letting to the marriage of true minds  
admit impediments. Ever since the piano came I've  
gone to pieces. Bob had to phone this morning a  
little while after he left to remind me to take the  
bread out of the oven.

And after a couple of weeks:

...the piano has taken..the place of all great artistic  
releases, because it is a release in itself. We should

have got it years ago. Life has been so smooth and untempestuous since we've had it. My life has not been tempestuous. I don't mean that, but there have been times when I've blown my top within the framework of small house, juvenility...With the piano I can let loose on simple basking chords and all is well.

At the beginning of 1948 Maeve wrote to Jed that she was "the happiest person in the world." Her letters to Jed described the motherless kitten my parents adopted who slept in my crib, the differences between the two babysitters, my father's cake-baking, the wonderful furnace in the basement, the poems she was reading, and her gaze up to the hill with its six oak trees holding civilization at bay. In addition to domestic anecdotes designed to entertain Jed, who was in excruciating, debilitating pain from acute hypertension, were queries regarding Jed's illness, perspectives on the lamentable state of politics and world affairs, and expressions of anxiety about whether she could be a good mother while staying true to her craft.

On April 10, 1948, after she had called the fire department to alert them to a fire on the hill, Maeve wrote Jed:

So I must get to work. How often I feel this when I go in to cover Peggy at night. I take the old white blanket you gave to Rogie when he was newborn. It is a symbol of the freedom I once had and I bind and pin Peg in it, sleepily drawing it around the little body that anchors me so to domestic trials and I think of you in the night, how you had a daughter and wrote both, and had so many other things too...

...Do you remember holding [your daughter] as a tiny child. Her face alongside your face, and you

perhaps singing to her or saying something gentle.  
Then you feel the bulge of the smaller cheek against  
our own, which means that there is delight and  
smiling on the smaller face, which you can't see,  
since it is too close beside you. You must remember  
this...



In November, 1948 Genevieve Taggard died. My mother lost not only a great friend and teacher but the catalyst for most of her writing and introspection during a period in which she was slowly and fitfully maturing.

At the beginning of the new year Maeve was pregnant again. The Korean War, which my mother had dreaded and hoped to persuade politicians was folly, began in June, 1950. We spent the summer of 1950 in Los Angeles where my father taught at UCLA. Upon returning home in September my younger brother, Carl Taggard Beck, was born. Shortly afterwards he was diagnosed with glaucoma which threatened him with blindness. In early February, 1951 Maeve took her tiny child to New York City where a sensitive and painful eye operation was performed on Carl. She returned to New York City in May, 1951 for a second operation which saved the sight in one of his eyes.

From 1950 to 1955, my father drove each weekday morning to the U of M campus a half an hour away in Minneapolis. Besides teaching and publishing academic papers he was also involved in developing a middle school curriculum for the Minnesota public schools. The curriculum was controversial because it included discussions of social issues and economics—ideas considered “leftist” in the cold-war days of McCarthyism.

This was a tense time for my parents. My father, as an advocate of change in public school education, was a target of

criticism from the right; a few professors at the University had already been fired for their suspect affiliations, and the singer, Paul Robeson had been barred from performing on the campus. My mother was familiar with effects of anti-communist witch hunts since many of her friends were leftist activists.

In 1952 Roger was in second grade and I was in kindergarten in the U of M laboratory school system. When the two of us were gone during the day and Carl was asleep, Maeve began a new writing regimen which consisted of hammering out long, realistic novels on the black Corona portable typewriter that her father had given to her for her sixteenth birthday.

Her first novel was about a trip to New York City in which a woman surrenders her son to unknown doctors and an unknown fate while reuniting with old college friends and professors—an embellished account of her trips for Carl's eye operations. She wrote two subsequent manuscripts, also borderline autobiographical. Writing them must have been therapeutic for a woman whose dreams and aspirations were a distant memory but who was intensely loyal, trying her best to be a good mother and wife according to 1950's propaganda and Dr. Spock's book on child care. During this period she occasionally smoked Chesterfield cigarettes.

In the summer of 1952 we went to the island in the Adirondacks for the first time. I traveled there with my grandparents and the rest of the family joined us after the University summer session was over. At Camp my mother taught me the euphemistic phrases of bird songs, pointed out the constellations, showed me where the leprechauns lived, and how to paddle a canoe past a deer without scaring it. Summers following, when my father had finished teaching, we would drive across Canada and spend a few weeks on the island.

In December of 1952 my mother came up with the idea of making a record of carols to give to a few relatives for Christmas presents. Accompanied by Maeve on the piano and her sister, Deirdre, on the recorder, Roger and I sang songs from *The Oxford Book of Carols* and *The Fireside Book of Folksongs*. In a downtown St. Paul recording studio we cut a 78 RPM record, singing one verse each from “The Holly and the Ivy,” “Masters in This Hall,” “The Children’s Song of the Nativity,” “Good King Wenceslaus,” “The Hanukah Song,” “Angels We Have Heard On High,” and “Go Tell It On The Mountain.”



In 1952 and 1953 St. Paul was the epicenter of the polio epidemic that swept the nation. During the first week of August in 1953 Maeve was stricken with the virus. She was sent to an already crowded hospital and we were sent to Edgumbe. During the first week of her illness she suffered from spasms and pain and could neither eat nor sleep. Gradually her condition improved and she was transferred to another hospital where she regained the use of her left foot and right hand which had suffered nerve and muscle damage—the same hand she had lost the use of when she was thirteen.

Our world tilted; it was a scary time for us. Once my mother was back home she began physical rehabilitation for her hand and foot. She also cut her hair short, painted all the appliances in our house in primary colors, the bedsteads with floral designs, and helped us paint murals on the walls in the basement. She joined a Bach choral that met once a week and also got into a routine of drinking a pre-supper “old-fashioned” or scotch and sipping a can of Hamm’s beer after supper.

The damage to my mother’s hand made playing the keyboard a particular challenge, so not long after she finished physical therapy my parents somehow obtained an ancient

Brattleboro pump organ so that Maeve could exercise her hand and foot while playing music.

As part of her daily routines Maeve looked forward to practicing the piano, especially J. S. Bach's compositions for the keyboard. Maeve loved the beauty of all Bach's music which she once described as "dreams caught in the cloth of dawn." I suspect she identified with Bach's interplay of joy and sorrow because it was also a refrain of her own. Bach's Goldberg Variations, The Well Tempered Clavier, and other keyboard collections formed the soundtrack of my childhood.

My mother played the piano every day until her manuscripts were worn and tattered, and we gathered around the piano almost every night to sing from various folk song books, but as the years went by the muscles in her hand deteriorated from the residual effects of the polio virus.

My mother fostered my musical interests, too, by giving me records of folk and cowboy songs as well as biographies and records of classical composers. She also encouraged my sense of adventure and tried to accommodate my unbounded energies by letting me ride my bike everywhere and play up on the hill for hours with the neighborhood kids.

I suspect that I was often too rambunctious for our small house and for this reason my mother sometimes dropped me off at Edgumbe for weekends (as well as when I had the measles and chickenpox.) I was lonely and homesick at Edgumbe but learned to get along by exploring the surrounding forest and the third floor attic, which had windows that looked out on the world, old magazines, and fun stuff to play with. My grandfather, who called me, "Sacajawea," after the Shoshone guide of Lewis and Clark, taught me to read from *The Lewis and Clark Expedition* and Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House in the Big Woods* during those exiles.

In 1954 Maeve filled out a Sarah Lawrence alumni questionnaire, reporting that among other things she was involved with unnamed St. Paul “civic groups.” One of these was most likely the fledgling Planned Parenthood office in St. Paul. Since 1951 my mother had engaged in unpaid work for the organization, enlisting friends to serve on its board. The other civic group would have been the DFL, Minnesota’s Democratic Farmer-Labor party for which Maeve was a delegate to the county convention that year.

Maeve concluded the questionnaire by saying that she was also “very slowly” pursuing graduate studies at the University of Minnesota and teaching a creative writing course at the Minneapolis YWCA. “Granting me time and contentment in these pursuits,” she wrote, “are a tolerant husband, an untidy house, and three children who need baths.”



In the summer of 1955 we left our St. Paul house and moved to southeast Minneapolis. At this point all of us spent the better part of our week on the University campus and my parents’ friends were now primarily from the University community. Above all we needed more space.

We moved into a two-story stucco house on the elm-lined street of East River Terrace at the lower edge of Prospect Park, an established neighborhood of mostly University professors and students built on a hill topped by an old gothic water tower. The address was “1610,” which is how we eventually referred to our home.

Our long, asymmetrical block sloped down to East River Road, a boulevard along which grand homes with their sweeping lawns looked out to the bluffs of the Mississippi River. The East River Terrace side of the block was more conventional: we looked across the street to a row of houses, and behind the houses, beyond an embankment, to the

railroad tracks which carried freight cars filled with grain from farms in Minnesota to elevators and processors in Minneapolis.

Just up the hill from our street corner was a railroad crossing with a hand-operated gate attended by a railroad man who had spent years working on the rails until his leg had been severed when he was caught between two moving freight cars. Now he spent the day in a little shack with a potbelly stove and watched over the crossing.

What made 1610 special was that behind our house was a separate, hidden world. Our side of the block was terraced and consequently all the houses on the terrace side had two back yards. Out our kitchen door, next to the garage, was the upper yard, a grassy square where we had a clothes line, a slide, and a swing set. There was not enough room for a vegetable garden so my mother planted honeysuckle bushes and other flowers alongside the house.

Below, reached by means of steps through a terraced stone wall, was the lower yard, a spacious and secluded area shaded by tall oaks. There my mother planted ferns, wild flowers, maple, crabapple, and nut trees, creating a quiet but bird-filled retreat where she often wrote in the summer. I played football there and for two winters we flooded the yard to make a skating rink.

Throughout the summer of 1955 my father and a colleague built a downstairs bedroom for Roger. In the early fall we rented 1610 and took a ship to Holland where we lived for a year on my father's Fulbright Scholarship.

From our row house in a newly-constructed post-war neighborhood along a canal outside Amsterdam my mother did all her errands on a bicycle with Carl perched on the back. Roger and I rode our bikes to school and ran with the neighborhood kids. Maeve began keeping a journal that year, went to as many concerts as possible, and even squeezed a rented piano into our tiny apartment. Late the following

summer we returned to 1610, the house in which my mother created her Home poems and spent the last decades of her life.



In a Home poem my mother described 1610 as “a simple spot/Outwardly plain: inwardly plain...” (p. 226) The front door of our house opened into a tiny vestibule and a rectangular room divided by an arch. To the left was a fireplace, my mother’s desk, an array of chairs along a bookshelf, and a couch against the wall between the doors to Roger’s and Carl’s bedrooms. The other half of the room—past the stairs that led up to my bedroom, my parents’ bedroom, and the main bathroom—was essentially empty except for my mother’s floor-to-ceiling bookshelf of poetry, her piano, and a collection of large potted plants crowding the north window.

The “living” part of the room was simple, bookish, and comfortable: motley rugs thrown here and there on the hardwood floor, cushions and blankets tossed on the rumpled couch where people read and talked. On the mantel above the fireplace were a few artifacts—like the Dutch foghorn Mom blew from the front steps to call us in for supper. My mother’s desk next to the fireplace looked out at our small front yard to the street. Soon after we got back from Holland she enlisted the family to plant cedar trees along the sidewalk. Eventually they grew tall and bushy, hiding the sidewalk and street from view.

The space opposite the living room was supposed to be a dining room, but we ate in the kitchen which was entered through a swinging door next to the piano. When guests were expected or for special occasions, a formal dining table magically appeared—my mother had painted a door-sized piece of plywood the same color as the walls, attached an ingenious hinging mechanism for its one-by-four legs, and installed it in the built-in china alcove next to the potted plants. One simply

lowered the plywood, set the legs with a hinge pin, and covered the top with a table cloth.

Mom made 1610 her own in other ways, too. Throughout the house she mounted little metal warning signs, typically written in four languages, found in the bathrooms and above sinks on trains and boats in Europe. She had filched these signs (using a screwdriver she carried in her purse) the year we lived in Europe. Above our kitchen sink was an “Eau Non Potable” sign she had unfastened from a French train, the English translation of which struck her as particularly funny—“Unpotable Water: To Get Water Turn the Handle Indifferently to the Left or Right.”

At 1610 my father had an office in the basement and we each had a bedroom with a desk, but my mother had no privacy in which to write unless everyone was gone from the house or asleep. Only in the last decade of her life did she have “a room of her own,” as Virginia Woolf wrote about in an essay published a month before my mother was born. Late in 1968 Roger moved into his own place and his bedroom became Mom’s study. Ironically, one of the projects she worked on in that room was a series of lectures about Virginia Woolf and the Bloomsbury Group.



Between 1957 and 1962 Mom continued her unpaid work for Planned Parenthood and also finished taking graduate courses at the “U” with hopes of eventually teaching in the English department at the University. In May of 1962 she took a steamship to Italy where she spent two weeks. She stopped smoking on that trip. She also brought back a new sign from off her ship, the S. S. Vulcania, the English translation of which was, “Please Do Not Open the Veranda Door in Bad Weather.” She fastened it on the wall by the door that opened onto the tiny deck of my parents’ new bedroom addition upstairs.

During these years my father spent all day at the “U” (or traveled the world doing research), so most of the family chores, which had intensified as we grew older, fell to my mother. These included driving a carpool to and from school (my father walked to the campus), getting us to appointments, housework, and cooking supper—all of which we took for granted. At five o’clock every evening Mom poured herself a stiff drink which enabled her to face the daunting kitchen stove. By the time my father got home and we sat down at the table she was in a slightly altered state which led to either stimulating conversation or friction. Often I ate quickly, and as soon as Roger and I had washed the dishes I fled to my room.

In January, 1962, Roger was a junior and I was a freshman at University High School; Carl was across the street in 5th grade at University Elementary. Roger lived a precociously bohemian life, avoided school as much as possible, and did not drive. I was into the latest rock and roll, had lots of friends from school and around the neighborhood, and spent most of my free time away from the house on my bike or hours in my room learning folksongs and practicing my guitar.

On January 24 I turned fifteen and promptly got my driver’s license. I was soon asking for the keys to the car so I could go out into the snowy Minneapolis night to drive to basketball games on Friday nights, to movies, slumber parties, or to visit friends. Our car at the time was my grandfather’s gray and black ’57 Oldsmobile, a big, heavy vehicle, which we had acquired after his sudden death from leukemia in the spring of 1957. I loved speeding down busy Franklin Avenue at night on my way home from south Minneapolis, trying to make all the green lights, the top 40 blaring over the radio.

At this time in our lives my mother and I had a turbulent relationship. She said I was moody. I felt misunderstood. She must have sensed that if she didn’t reel me in she would lose me. Since Mom did not easily engage in heart-to-heart talks

she needed something that would catch my attention without having a sit-down conversation. Her solution was to write poems to me.

Her early Home poems were like talismans—"Dearest Peggy as you enter/ I hope without a broken fender"—chanting a spell so that I might come home safely. They reminded me of where home was,

This is your place to boss + roam  
Hold dear or cheap  
It is where you're at home  
Softly or loud. Shallow or deep... (p.226)  
and my room:

...Up to her bed, quiet place, she will retreat  
to fidget, + to hear the cricket of the heat.  
Up to her refuge, to her books + desk + sheet  
she'll find her way, her safety + her beat...(p.69)

Home poems envisioned me out in the world but the emphasis was always on coming home:

...Great cold there was in this free zone.  
Great rains, great winds and darting clouds  
But no rain great as was your own  
Amid the deep woods and the northern shrouds...

We did not chase, nor search her out.  
We did not phone police.  
We did not question nor did doubt  
her safety or her peace.

So welcome home. Find not the hearth  
A suffocating limit...(p.123)

By combining humor with expressions of affection—a typical Home poem trait—Mom was able to keep me from recoiling in that teenage way:

She is a special + a rare  
Person, + lively like, who knows,  
The aardvark, leopard + the hare...(p. 136)

I'm sure my active and changing life wasn't easy for my mother to navigate. Year to year, as I went from athlete to folksinger to actress to politician, Mom had to constantly tack in order to keep up with me. Despite our conflicts, however, she wrote empathetically about my life in her poems, encouraging and praising me in words her mother had never spoken or written to her.

I probably did not appreciate the genius of Mom's Home poems and she probably wished I had commented on the poems more often than I did, but it didn't matter: she kept writing them because it was something she wanted and needed to do. Ultimately, no matter how rocky our lives might be or how stormy things were between us, Home poems reiterated our mutual love of language, music, politics, humor, the quirks of being human, and the ineffable wonders of the natural world.



My mother wrote most of her Home poems with a ballpoint pen as she sat on the couch or in one of the chairs by the bookcase with a pad of lined, legal-sized yellow paper in her lap. If she had the time she might sit at her desk a few feet away and type a longer poem on her old Corona typewriter using plain paper, air-mail onion skin, or letterhead she had printed with “Mrs. Robert H. Beck’ and her address. If the typewriter ribbon needed changing and I was available, she would ask me to change it for her because her bad hand made

handling the spools difficult. A few Home poems were embellished with freehand sketches drawn with colored pencil or ink.

Mom's early Home poems were fairly simple but it wasn't long before the poems became sophisticated exercises in prosody. Although a majority of Home poems were written in iambic pentameter, "Whose message," she wrote in one poem, "howsoever slight/Is deep + cogent, + is terse," she enjoyed mixing poetic forms like a painter with paints. Experimenting with different meters was a game she played as well as a mental exercise:

Dactyls are splendidly  
Hidden + voluble  
Keep them in trust  
Find them insoluble (p. 85)

For the most part Home poems used rhyme schemes of various kinds. My mother's musical world and her early memorization of poetry was grounded in rhyme, so it came naturally to her. Rhyme, since it could be used both subtly and humorously, was the perfect form in which to write Home poems with their blend of thoughtfulness,

...the winter beat  
on hardened leaves,  
lacquered from heat  
like pods and greaves  
  
of ancient history.  
There is a miracle, however  
in the cricket's mystery:  
the longer song, the wicked hover

not of the broken chirp, mosaic:  
Steady and singing now  
poetic, not prosaic,  
Most sweet, as seasons come and go. (p. 192)

and play:

What if the daughter coming home  
Should stumble on the frosted loam  
And break her foot to ope her tomb?

But what if better she should find  
No stumble-stone, no axe to grind  
No rule to ply, no law to mind? (p. 82)

My mother often wrote acrostic poems to people for their birthdays and other celebrations, and quite a few Home poems are written as acrostics as well. I suspect she liked writing Home poem acrostics because she relished the challenge of writing a metered poem with a unique rhyme scheme dictated by the parameters of a message down the side.



One by one my mother's "muses," as she called us, scattered from 1610. I went away to Sarah Lawrence College in the fall of 1965. The night I arrived back home for Christmas vacation I found an acrostic poem about my parents unsuccessful attempt to meet me at the airport, a poem which began sublimely before it delved into the frustrating particulars of the evening:

We wait + hope the night will bring  
Enchanted ancient memories  
Like a sweet bird who from bright wing  
Comes back to warble ancient stories

Or from a coign or rock to sing  
Memorial offices upon this season  
Evidently we sought you without reason... (p. 167)

My mother missed writing me Home poems, so she was overjoyed when I decided to make up credits at the “U” over the summer of 1966. “O my daughter, with what joy/To latent habits I return,” was the first line of an acrostic, “Otters Are Frolicking” that greeted me the day I arrived home. (p.168)

In 1964 Mom had began teaching freshman English at the University of Minnesota, fulfilling her ambition to teach literature. She continued in this job for the next seven years. The burgeoning civil rights and women’s movements invigorated her and inspired both her writing and teaching. She also wrote letters-to-the-editor to the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* against U.S. involvement in Vietnam and worked with groups in the peace movement.

In the fall of 1966 my parents and Carl moved to Paris for a year so my father could do research for a book on European education. Carl attended the American School of Paris where Maeve taught high school English classes. They returned in the summer of 1967. When my summer jobs in New York ended I drove across the country with a friend and stayed at 1610 for a couple of weeks before returning to college for my junior year. After a year without writing Home poems Mom left one for me the night I arrived, a poem that typically combined lyricism, humor, and commentary:

Dearest Peggy, in this room where moonlight often  
slanted sweet, grief-emptied on the vacant corners,  
now brings new sight. Your coming makes a shadow soften  
and brightness leap. The ghostly mourners

disappear. This is your room, your past, your present,  
lugubrious, delightful, queer, air-waved with music,  
silent, noisy, not unpleasant,  
nor ever with a soul diseased, nor with a muse sick.

Enter, may again it be as wholly yours as is the sky,  
essential as the tse tse fly.  
And as the constellations leap; above this bed, above  
the earth;  
Know who has loved you since your birth... (p. 175)

In the mid-sixties the controversial I-94 freeway, which sliced through the Twin Cities and ruptured several communities, was built less than a quarter of a mile from 1610. It was out of sight but it cut off our block from the rest of Prospect Park; we lost our railroad crossing and the one-legged railroad man lost his job.

In late August, 1968 when I was at 1610 for a couple of weeks before my senior year in college, Mom joined three other members of a neighborhood group to petition the Minnesota highway commissioner for cement walls to be built along the length of the freeway to dampen the noise of the traffic. One of my favorite Home poems which begins, "When people talk about communication/they usually mean a thing with words," is a meditation on the nuances and mysteries of communication:

...But I usually think of rumination  
flowers, sounds, cows, and birds.  
"There is", they say, "a problem of  
communication". They mean phrases.

The problem, I think is of love,  
of nature, motion in its phases.

I think of cars on distant roads  
deep in the night in strangest ways,  
passing each other with their loads,  
then dimming lights for salutary grace.  
Each one unknown to each,  
But in the judgement of the land,  
new-faced and the dark reach,  
of blinking give a sensing hand... (p.180-181)

Although the petition was successful and the walls were built, the freeway's presence beyond the railroad tracks changed 1610. The noise was less but didn't go away. Mom, being who she was, pretended the sound was the ocean.



During the decade of the 1970's I lived far away and only returned to 1610 for visits. I did not have a phone from 1972 until the end of my mother's life so my visits home were the only time Mom and I could really spend time talking and catching up—although she visited me briefly in some of the out-of-the-way places I ended up living.

Beginning in the fall of 1970 through the following spring I lived on an island in Maine where I was a student teacher and wrote for a local newspaper. In the fall of 1971 I began graduate school at the University of California in Santa Cruz. That same year my mother stopped teaching freshman English at the "U" to join the faculty at the Loring Park School for high school dropouts. She wrote me a letter describing how she was reading a short story out loud to her English class and overheard one boy say to another, "Man, can that chick read!" She also began spending more time writing what she called her "serious" poems—lyric, narrative, free-verse combinations—which were published in journals and magazines under the name, Maeve Butler.

The Home poem from which this book gets its title was written in September, 1972. I had spent the summer in Mexico and Guatemala after which I drove to Minnesota before moving to the mountains of northern New Mexico to write my Ph. D. dissertation. The poem begins, “Tonight is the first night of fall...” and goes on to evoke those things that change and also stay the same:

...the mighty branches of the heart  
within, the heart without  
about the searching end and start  
of timelessness, of drought,  
dampness and flood, desert, and friend  
eternal questions that make whole,  
if always asked, that always mend  
the hurts and breaches of the soul. (p.199)

Beneath the poem Mom had added a paragraph describing an incident at the train trestle bridge on her bike ride that day, perhaps so that I would not think that she had written a “serious” poem.

I completed the first draft of my dissertation, *The Way of the Fool*, in the summer of 1973 and sent it to Mom to proofread. She wrote me periodically with questions, quoting at length the passages she loved. For a final consultation she visited me in October, 1973 in my adobe house with no plumbing, leaving me a Home poem about our hike to the high alpine meadows above the mountain valley where I lived:

I thought today that there was  
something so simply exalted about  
going barefoot + seeing the tops of trees  
at the same time...(p.217)

My mother's Home poems began to change. Not only were her metered rhyme schemes more subtle, she also began to intersperse free-verse with combinations of rhyme and meter. Her playfulness was still evident but my infrequent visits and dreaded departures induced a special sadness and regret:

Torn by your coming, leaving,  
that I'd learned to live.  
I distract myself this evening  
having nothing now to give.  
Clearing the birch shoots  
that draw a staggering blood  
from its white roots  
I wonder if it was good  
to have kicked myself awake  
through two nights  
for a child's sake  
and a husband's lights,  
ambitions. (p.212-213)

My younger brother got his own place and moved out of 1610. In March, 1974, free of domestic responsibilities, Mom commented with irony and regret,

...But as my life that now embarks  
freely at last I've grown  
and sown too much  
too late. Unknown  
must be my latter crutch. (p.218-219 )

That summer my mother's former college roommate, Perky Greeley, visited at 1610. Perky told me that early in the evening my mother excused herself and went upstairs to bed. After she had gone my father explained that Maeve was an

alcoholic. I was surprised when Perky related the incident to me since my father had not shared similar thoughts with my brothers or me at the time.

We had grown up in the era when everyone drank “cocktails” before supper. When my parents’ friends came over for an evening my father mixed the cocktails with aplomb—an after-work ritual he had begun after Mom’s polio, to soothe her. On some level I knew there was something odd about Mom’s post-five o’clock behavior—my brothers and I even joked about not calling the house after 5:00—but we shared no vocabulary with which to discuss Mom’s condition. Theories of alcoholism—the concepts of denial and therapeutic intervention, for example—so commonplace today, were not available to us back then. I was especially disconnected from my mother’s daily life because of the circumstances in which I lived.



In the fall of 1974, after spending the summer doing fieldwork in Oaxaca, Mexico, I got a job at Navajo Community College (now called Diné College) on the Navajo Nation, where I lived in a little stone cabin without electricity or plumbing in a place called “Wheatfields” in the foothills of the Chuska mountains.

One of my jobs at the college was to write a textbook on Native American religions. *The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge, Sources of Life* was the eventual title of the book my mother proofread as I sent her chapters by mail. I did research for the book in Minnesota in November, 1975 and May, 1976. Mom visited me in Wheatfields in September of 1976 and finished proofreading the last chapter of *The Sacred* in December. (See poem on page 238-239).

By this time my parents lived very different and separate lives. My father’s world revolved around colleagues and friends from the University, where in 1976 he had been awarded a

Regents' professorship; my mother's life was with her writing and like-minded friends.

Between 1976 and 1979 Maeve published poetry, wrote book reviews for the *Minneapolis Star and Tribune*, gave a series of lectures and seminars on Virginia Woolf for a continuing education class at the "U," and mentored younger poets who met regularly at 1610 where they would read and discuss their work. In the summers she went to Camp and visited long-time and long-lost friends in Maine and New England. She also worried, in Home poems and letters, that I worked too hard and that I wasn't getting enough to eat.

My mother came to dread the coming of winter at 1610. The fact that she could no longer play the piano due to the deterioration of her hand made the thought of a long winter unbearable. She met with a surgeon at the "U" to discuss reconstructive surgery on the nerve in her hand. He was optimistic, she had the surgery, and it was a failure—in fact it made her condition worse.

The absence of the piano from Mom's life was devastating but no one knew because she never complained about anything. Her ability to mask pain and sorrow for our sakes was one of her more extraordinary qualities. That capacity came from the same well that was a source of her creativity, but it also came at a price. In the last years of her life alcohol both medicated and fed her pain.



In August, 1979, Mom and I met at Camp where we looked forward to spending two weeks together on the island before I returned to Taos, New Mexico to teach and she to 1610 to face another winter. One day she led me through a stand of tall pines to a clearing. There in a shaft of sunlight grew a white pine sapling, a crooked little tree reaching for the sky. Perhaps large branches from a bigger tree had fallen on it

in storms and bent it, who knows, but each time the sapling had curved around and straightened up again. The record of four such events was written into the twists and turns of the young pine. What Mom loved about the sapling was that even though it had been bowed down it had survived and had grown straight again. “That’s where I want my ashes to be buried,” she told me.

Fall was in the air when Mom wrote her last Home poem to me. Unlike other Home poems which did not have titles she called this one “Augmented Interval.” Even as a draft I consider it one of her most accomplished poems in any genre. She wrote the poem at Camp on the ancient typewriter there and sent it to me from 1610 after we had left the island to go our separate ways. In this poem she uses musical metaphors to describe the end of summer, suggesting that the interval until our next time together would be longer than usual. Although she inserts typical humorous deflections, the poem has a wistful, misty quality about it, the feeling of what we would call “a Camp day,” when it rains softly all day long, the lake is silent, and “the twisted smoke” drifting from the chimney of the fireplace melds with sharp, piney air:

You are in the turn of weather and tune.  
Autumn demands the cello of final wings,  
the measured stroke,  
the bowing and white dew...(p. 251)

When Mom returned from the island in late August she wrote in her journal that someone had left personal items in the bathroom while she was away. She guessed that my father was involved with another woman.

On the evening of September 9, 1979 my brothers came over for supper and together with my father confronted Mom about her drinking. The next day she put her affairs in order

and wrote me a short letter, saying among other things that she did not want to be a chemically-dependent burden on anyone. She mailed the letter and then went upstairs, took a bottle of sleeping pills, lay down on the bed in my bedroom and died. She was fifty-nine.

I returned to 1610 to plan a memorial in which we read my mother's poems, played the song of the hermit thrush, and read from her favorite passage in Euripides' *The Bacchae*:

Will they ever come to me, ever again  
The long long dances  
On through the dark till the dim stars wane?  
Shall I feel the dew on my throat, and the stream  
Of wind in my hair?...  
What else is Wisdom?...  
    To stand from fear set free, to breathe and wait;  
    To hold a hand uplifted over Hate;  
    And shall not Loveliness be loved for ever?

That week at 1610, when I was rummaging through the old filing cabinet in the basement where family documents were stored, I discovered a folder crammed with the Home poems Mom had written to me since I was fifteen. She had saved them, the poems I had returned to her so she would know that I was home.



## A NOTE ON THE TRANSCRIPTIONS

The Home poems which I found in the file after my mother's death were not in any particular order. I knew that a collection of these poems would have to be chronological since they reflected our changing lives and times. Unfortunately, Maeve did not date her poems, so I had to do some sleuthing.

Both my mother and I saved the letters we wrote each other during the two decades she wrote me Home poems; they provided some details of our lives and my visits.

Although Maeve often neglected to put dates along with the photos in our three family albums, I was able to figure out the months and years of most photos from my childhood and those that, in later years, showed me visiting 1610.

I used on-line archives of various kinds to find out when public events (space missions, horse races, elections) and performances cited in the poems occurred.

In addition to these methods I scrutinized the poems themselves. For instance, Maeve's writing evolved over the years. Deep reading of a poem's form and message allowed me to tease out elements that revealed the month and year in which a poem was probably written.

I also compared the types of paper Mom used for each poem. The paper she used for typing Home poems was more consistent than the paper on which she hand-wrote poems. She would go through spurts of using one kind of typing paper, so I was often able to tell when one typed poem followed another. However, when she hand-wrote Home poems, she wrote on any paper she might grab, and the pens or pencils she used to write with might change with every poem.

Another signifier was that my mother called me different names over the years. "Peggy" was my actual name. In high school she began calling "Maggie" or "Mag" for short, and continued to do so for the rest of her life. In some later Home

poems she reverts to, “Peg” or “Peggy.” No one ever called me “Margaret,” so when my mother used this name in early Home poems she was implying “grown-up.” She called me “Jane” in certain contexts: when asking a question or in an emphatic, declarative statement as in the note after the poem on page 168.

And finally, over the years my mother signed her poems differently. Early on she wrote, “Mom” or “Mommy.” Later she wrote “Ma” or just a meandering “M.” These changes provided me with a broad outline of the era in which poems were written.

Home poems were by their nature informal and quirky. Ordinarily my mother was a stickler for grammar, but in her Home poems she was not: she made up her own rules as she went along, just as she made up words when she needed to. For instance, she might begin a poem by indenting lines in the verses and then later abandon indentation. She often used extra spaces instead of commas or dashes. Sometimes she capitalized the beginning of lines, sometimes not. She often capitalized words for no reason. Her most common shorthand mannerism was using the plus sign, “+,” for “and”. I have followed her intentions and eccentricities in my transcriptions.

The majority of my mother’s Home poems were handwritten. Maeve’s handwriting is for me a whimsical force behind the poems and in transcription the poems lose a little of her personality; her old Corona typewriter was also a venerable companion and had a unique type font. To convey these qualities I have included reproductions of some of the original poems.



1961-1962  
HIGH SCHOOL: FRESHMAN YEAR AND SUMMER



Typed on six sections of a roll of toilet paper. I came home from school one day to discover that the toilet paper holder in our bathroom, which I had left empty that morning, had been filled with a fresh roll of toilet paper with this poem written on it—a roundabout way of telling me to change the roll in the future. This may have given Mom the idea of leaving Home poems for me, a ritual that began soon afterwards.

I should think that  
in your youth you  
would have learned  
the thing to do  
was to replace  
a roll of such tissue  
once the original  
was used.

In ancient Gaul  
they would refuse

-----

to take such stuff  
not on a roll.  
Refresh. Refresh.  
The English  
on the other hand  
were bold  
and they could understand  
even when very cold  
the needs at hand.  
The Settlers in the U.S.A.  
didn't bother with the stuff.  
They were happy with the  
Good Book

-----

and with snuff.  
In later years  
phone books and catalogs

and tears  
served for the erasing  
of large smears  
upon the person.  
In Mexico  
where people go  
to see the sea and feel the sun  
They're very careful  
every day  
to throw

-----  
the older roll away  
and put the new one on.  
They put little else on.  
It's a warm  
country  
so no harm  
is done.  
They stay  
quite warm.  
In other countries  
of the south  
customs differ.  
People live  
from hand to mouth

-----  
and many people  
are religious.  
They go and pray  
inside a steeple  
and have a lot of kids.  
Not much time  
remains  
for other pains

though lots of slime  
comes down with rains.  
In Greece  
people are neat  
and raise sheep

---

The fleece  
and the seas  
make blue and white  
that meet the skies.  
Eyes are dark  
and sponges plenty.  
They sell them in  
the streets.  
Little sin  
abounds. There  
you would not kill  
a bear.

Late 1961.

Methinks that now the little miss  
After Thanksgiving + permissiveness  
Could in her hatred + her bliss  
Grant a 'goodnight' + grant a kiss

Sweet Peggy, know we love you in a way  
Most specially saved: No word can say  
What you can understand or play  
On your bright strings on mornings grey.

Believe that we, the Family Beck  
Cherish you deeply + expect  
A morning buss, or midnight peck

X X X X X X X X X X

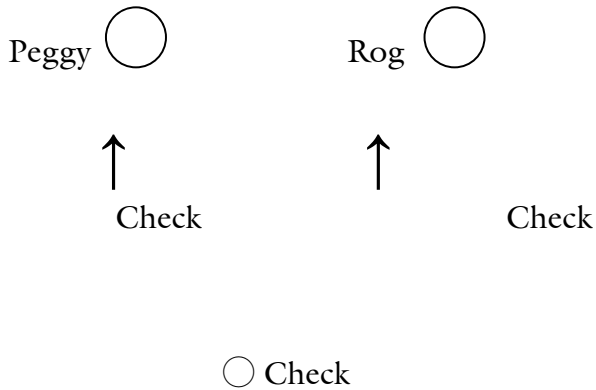
[Drawings of heads with 2 scowls, 2 smiles]

Please check

My children, a slight kiss is welcome  
Or else a rattling at the door  
That lets the old folks know you're home  
Before they fall upon the floor.

Always a kiss is best, of course  
A quiet smack about the quilt  
That guarantees you're 'sans' remorse  
Returning without shame or guilt

From what, who knows,  
But let us know  
That you are safe, despite the snows  
That soon about your house will blow.



Winter, 1962. Handwritten.

Oh, Peggy, now as you return  
Shut off the front door light + come  
Upon the rug of this old room. Don't spurn  
Its raggedness + heavy crumb

Take note upon a cupboard door  
Inside the kitchen, where a list  
Hangs high above the spitty floor  
And where, with simple turning of the wrist

You can compound desires upon  
The items gently listed there  
Nor spread the smile nor crease the frown  
But make an order for a bear.

We hope you're safe + that the night  
Has not with mystery been fraught  
Rather that mirth has won its right  
And laughter + delight been caught

When you come back we all will be  
In bed, In bed, + you won't know  
When we last snored, + who shall see  
Where we last dropped what rose, + so

Gather yourself together now  
The night grows shorter with each word  
Each word grows lesser as the blow  
of Winter wind gives flight to bird

Go swift to bed, + swift to snore  
No one will knock upon the door.

Winter, 1962. Handwritten. To “drop a rose” is an archaic phrase meaning  
“to fart.”

This is a letter for my daughter  
Who went outside the door  
Even though she hadn't oughter  
+ she spat upon the floor

This is a letter for my girl  
Who left the house at night  
With face bright red + hair a whirl  
+ stockings pulled up tight

This is a letter for the one + only  
Female that I claim  
I hope she doesn't feel lonely  
+ am glad that home she came

Sincerely

Mrs. Beck

Our little girl is not home  
+ night weighs heavy on the clock  
Where is it that her ankles roam  
With or yet without a sock?

Grant that she may soon return  
+ enter lightly through the door  
Hang up her coat + slowly learn  
Not to spit upon the floor

Gladly she may enter to the stair  
Gladly be greeted by parental brows  
Twisted in worry + darkened, as the bear  
Who walks by night amid the passive cows.

Some token of her entrance gives content  
Before our souls with worry break + rent.  
Please Maggie please, just get the hint.

Our little girl that from the dark  
Comes in the waiting door  
Deep in the bowels of Prospect Park  
Ready to step upon the floor

Must REALIZE that she is dear,  
Vested in love + other things,  
like books + records + odd gear  
+ sometimes bracelets, sometimes rings

She must though mustard might be lacking  
Come into the waiting room  
Where parents wait to give shellacking  
To tardy wenches of the gloom

O let us know that you are home  
Twist a knob loudly on a stair  
Bubble a bubble till it foam  
To let us know that you are here!

x Mom

x Dad

It will be late when you come home  
It will be late  
Without the trust of brush or comb  
Without a waiting dish or plate

Your parents will be sleeping right  
Fast in their sheets  
Unknowing of your sound or sight  
Or where you are upon the streets

They will be frantic, as you guess  
So when you step inside the house  
Make noise so that their hearts say “yes,  
She’s home, + quiet as a mouse.”

Dearest Peggy as you enter  
I hope without a broken fender  
Know your parents cherish you  
Although they do not smoke or chew

Arise + with the dawn  
Do anything you wish to do  
Inform us though if you should wish  
To take the car to buy a dish

I'd like the car in the P.M.  
But bend according to your whim—

Ma

For Margaret— in the reach of summer  
who walks into the family room  
in reaches of her own, the gone, the comer:  
welcome is laid, + bud + bloom

Up to her bed, quiet place, she will retreat  
to fidget, + to hear the cricket of the heat.  
Up to her refuge, to her books + desk + sheet  
she'll find her way, her safety + her beat

She'll hear the cricket, even, in his chirp  
setting the temperature in rhythmic bleats  
under the hover of the summer height  
under the height of old July

She'll find her way. She'll know the stair  
on which she'll find with tempered grace  
The smell of soap to greet her there  
the silence of her own: her rug: her place.

P, sorry the metre  
is broken. Dad was  
conversing with me  
about etwas important  
while I

1962. Handwritten. The corner of the page was torn off. “Etwas” means “something” in German. Mom was fascinated by the changing cricket’s chirp. This is one of four poems that mention the cricket’s chirp which she used as an indicator of the changing season. See poems on pages 161, 193-194, and 202.



1962-1963  
HIGH SCHOOL: SOPHOMORE YEAR AND SUMMER

Dearest Peggy welcome home  
From mighty punting on the field  
I am glad that you have come  
And have not to a prayer deep kneeled.

I wonder who the team that won  
was whether Rochester or what  
Edina in that latter fun  
The mayo clinic King of Swat

I make no sense as you can see  
As rhymes are difficult to find  
Unnecessary, like a bee  
And dreadfully stilted, dreadfully blind.

But welcome home is what I meant  
Safe welcome to your house  
And love to you from heaven sent  
Who enters softly as a mouse

Always considerately too.  
Peggy doesn't swear at night  
Her gay self shines like precious glue  
And binds her with a welcome bright!

—Peg I wanted to say something about  
how happy I am that you can take Hilloway  
in + out of your stride, + that you have  
enough interests so you can always find  
something fun to do. But I didn't succeed  
in saying it in verse.

x x x —sleep late  
sleep tight

Mom

Fall, 1962. Handwritten. Mom's garbled attempt at a sports theme. Neither Rochester nor Edina were in our high school's athletic conference. "The King of Swat" refers to baseball's Babe Ruth. He once appeared on a train in which young Maeve was a passenger, causing great excitement among the passengers, who were shouting, "There's Babe Ruth!" She didn't see him, however, because she thought "Babe" was a woman. I went to Camp Hilloway in northern Minnesota in the summer of 1962.

For the certain type who entering late  
Declares her truth + worth to be  
Something particular, sculpted by fate  
A specimen not all should see,

For that same one, that Peggy bold  
Who from the hill + from the snow  
Postures her shape against the cold  
And smiles unlike the blackest crow

For that same one we here inscribe  
A letter for the darkening night  
That ever over who imbibe  
Is fair + honest + quite bright

This letter says then with the ring  
Of curfew round about the gates  
Life should not pinch or bite or sting

Peggy, welcome to this house  
Peggy smile in its door  
Laugh, or enter as a mouse  
And do not spit upon the floor

I love my little girl + she  
Smiles through tears + snow + season  
Helping each person burst with glee  
With or without a decent reason.

Winter, 1963. Handwritten and illustrated. Written on the back of a piece of paper with the words and guitar chords of a folksong I was learning in the fall of my sophomore year.

Dearest Peggy: late + soon  
You will return + go away  
Lock up the car + also Doon  
And end your night of joy + play

Goodnight, goodnight, the time has come  
To blow the candle + depart  
Go up the stairs but linger some  
To fart or not let out a fart.

Be sure we love you  
Come what may  
Eat no more stew  
+ gladly stay.

1962. Handwritten. "Doon" is short for "Doonie," the Norwegian elk hound at Edgcombe who we took for a couple of years after Hildy could no longer care for him.

Dearest Peggy from this hour  
Your father, mother + brother  
Wonder if Doonie held you up  
Far from your home + far from sup

We'll keep the fires glowing, glowing  
Even though you are far  
+ we are farther without knowing  
If you have fallen into tar.

O wake us please O shriek haloo  
Whenever you come home  
O frabjous night. O holy Pew  
Enter inside this dome—

x x Ma

1962. Handwritten sometime around Christmas. Perhaps the penultimate line refers to the carol, “O Holy Night,” which is often awkwardly translated from the French and which Mom found a little corny. The carol spans several octaves and gave Mom fits when she accompanied people on the piano who were attempting to sing it. “Frabjous,” is a word coined in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*.

My daughter that the dark has claimed  
Who does not enter in the fold  
I hope is not in pain or maimed  
Or frozen in the New Year's cold.

My child that has not gone to bed  
Though it is late + fires die  
Who knows where she may lay her head  
In cake, in pudding, or in pie.

O where is she, that sparkling one  
That hides her sadness in a laugh  
That sings + dances in the sun  
Tightens a girth + makes a gaff—

O child I fear the night  
Has taken you inside its claws  
O come + tell us all is right  
Rush up the stairs + and do not pause.

1963, New Years. Handwritten. I don't think "gaff" is a word, but perhaps what Mom wanted to say was something having to do with sailing knots or a "gaff hook" used in fishing.



Now when you come home you will  
Unloose your parents from their thoughts,  
Their worries, lest their daughter chill  
Solidify, and grow quite ill

Tell us you're home, or me at least  
Or else I'll shiver all the night

Yelling from time to time, unpleased  
Of worlds that are not right.  
Upset us not. Tell us of all.



Winter, 1963. Typewritten.

**H**ow sad it was to crunch  
**A**long the snow  
**P**lopping a foot +  
**P**lopping down another  
**Y**et on coming to the

**H**ouse never to know  
**O**f where her daughter was. What bunch  
**M**other was wondering  
**E**ncircled her only daughter  
**C**ared for her needs + gave her water  
**O**r what vile person  
**M**ight have hurt her  
**I**ncurring sin or uttering belch  
**N**egating truth + being bad  
**G**lad you are home. O Glad Glad Glad—

What if the daughter coming home  
Should stumble on the frosted loam  
And break her foot to ope her tomb?

But what if better she should find  
No stumble-stone, no axe to grind  
No rule to ply, no law to mind?

Then she would enter as we hope  
Straight in her readiness to cope  
Fair in her vision + her scope.

Thus she is coming we are sure  
With music as her sinecure  
+ not escorted by a boor

O Shout + roar  
+ scour the floor  
Tra la, the bed is fast + sure!

So the girl comes home at last  
Full of movies and of nuts  
Blasting out Tom Pendergast  
And squashing out tobacco butts.

So she returns, and so she goes  
Up to her bed *comme çï comme ça*  
Turns out her light and blows her nose  
And thinks the world is full of blah.

What happens then to her intestine,  
So redolent with gas and waste  
In which archaic food is festin'  
Leaving a wild and belchy taste.

Oh dear, we're off on the wrong track  
Lacking in dignity and valuing  
Only the crass, the rude, the rack  
Because you can't seem to go pooing.

I'll change the subject and we'll see  
If by such subtle methods you  
Can come back to sanity  
To gently pee or loudly poo.

Oh dear, that word snuck in once more  
I didn't think it would, alas,  
Politeness now will hold the door  
No mention shall be made of gas.

I hope the movie was ethereal,  
And that no nightmares follow  
And hope tomorrow you'll eat cereal  
Even if you cannot swallow.

Goodnight my child, and may the sliver  
of the moon that barely lights  
its fractioned self, enchant and quiver  
across your bed for many nights.

1963. Typewritten. This is one poem with lines I never forgot. “Comme çï  
comme ça” means, “like this like that” in French.

Margaret wondering hopefully  
Turns out her genius in  
Commerce + distantly  
Aims for a portrait

Gully + gulch for a sinfully  
History belchingly wondering  
Where the main currents of  
History start, + where the most

Piles of old apple tart  
Hidden in cellars +  
Bursting with meaningful  
Tidings are likely with art,

From the entrance + exit of  
Chemically ordered +  
Worthy constructed holes most  
Likely to fart.

Dactyls are splendidly  
Hidden + voluble  
Keep them in trust  
Find them insoluble

∩\_\_ \_\_∩∩\_\_      Ma!

1963. Handwritten. This is the first poem in a five-poem series featuring different meters. The meter in this poem is a dactyl which has one stressed and two unstressed syllables. When scanning a poem Mom used “∩” over an unstressed syllable, and \_\_ over a stressed syllable. Using these symbols I believe the message at the end scans, “I love you very much.”



Darkness, Lightness, fearless  
Women. Come not to the  
Hearthbound stone. They  
Welcome other people, tearless

Hoping freedom destines  
Endless joy and play  
In palace, castle, fray  
Under beds, under thunder

FART !    ART !

Trochees aren't easy, but I'm  
glad you're home —

Ma + Pa  
x x x

1963. Handwritten. A trochee has one stressed and one unstressed syllable.

## Iambic Dimeter

I hope you come  
Most safely home  
Ruptured by none  
Without a groan

---

May soon the hearth  
Flash bright the fire  
That from your birth  
You would admire

---

The coal is out  
Your bed awaits  
And peace wins out  
Despite the fates

---

1963. Handwritten. An iamb has one unstressed and one stressed syllable. This poem has two in each line, hence iambic dimeter.

Tonight we go back to the trite  
Iamb + the five-foot verse  
Whose message, howsoever slight  
Is deep + cogent, + is terse

The meaning of each line is dark  
The five beat lean, the scanning stanza  
Against a spondee is not stark  
In fact is something like bonanza.

Much love from your loving parents

1963. Handwritten. This poem is in iambic tetrameter, a four-beat iambic line, although Mom refers to “going back” to iambic pentameter, a five beat line, which is typical of most of her iambic Home poems.

To Margaret on Her Return From the Basketball Game

Dear Annie, welcome home.  
The cobwebs hover on the door.  
Old bones are buried in the loam.  
Bedsprings have fallen through the floor

Gherkins with vinegar complete  
Have filled the jowls of dour souls  
And souls have walked along the street  
Clutching their bowels asking for bowls!

Oh Annie. Miss Ann Thrope, beware  
The claws that scratch, the paws that itch:  
Beware the jub-jub bird and snare  
The raveled hem before the stitch.

O Miss Ann Thrope tonight delight  
In thinking that the past is passed.  
Welcome the darkness of the night  
And heed the thunder of the blast.

O Misanthrope, how well we know  
That horror of the gentle being,  
Who loving all cannot say “no,”  
And must in windows be all-seeing.

O child, who enters once again  
Know you are loved beyond the pen!

1963. Handwritten. This poem is based on some joke we had about me being a misanthrope, the details of which I can't recall.

Poem for Peggy

The fold of dawn cracks in the cloud  
Our one + only is not home  
The stroke of dawn is never loud  
But now it sounds as from a dome.

The thunder of the threats are clear  
Rape, murder, strangling in the brush  
Our daughter is not here. NOT HERE.  
Silence + dark + vile hush

Usher her parents to their cots  
Darken their dreams with gloom  
And fill the air with crafty plots  
And make a torture of their room

O daughter fair how late it rings  
At your return, enter the fold + gently say  
“I’m home. I’m here you ancient things  
Now let me go to bed *my* way.”

Before the phone destroys  
What letters ought to do  
I know that ink annoys  
But still would favor you

Withall that pens might yet convey  
Against the blasting of the phone  
I put the ringing far away  
And scribble with my tea + scone

Goodnight, goodnight, + may the dawn  
Burst forth in witty banter + bright sun  
May future munching of a prawn  
May future hopes, make future fun

Goodnight! The evening now has passed.  
The freight cars hump along a track,  
And pitch + heave slowly, not fast,  
While Becks go up to hit the sack.

1963-1964

HIGH SCHOOL: JUNIOR YEAR AND SUMMER



The night + Monday morning loom,  
dark + light + full of hope  
The sunlight comes into her room  
floating like Palmolive soap.

It is the Margaret room, where light  
through white-drawn curtains levels forth  
a quiet sanity + trust + right:  
a sense of south from north.

Inside a few short months she has  
(this Margaret of the whitened room)  
Seen many-sided characters + gas  
Moreover with herself to groom

She's pressed her blouses with the dawn  
kept fresh her person, + with lessons hard  
has typed her thinking in a tight-form drawn  
Full of ideas, + echo, + the bard.

On top of all, with feelings fresh  
And many hours tired spent  
On stage, as if in blood + flesh  
She has her soul + body bent

How rare to be so young + sage!  
Her parents greet her with respect  
She surely helps along the age.

Fall, 1963. Handwritten. Reference to "the bard" and "hours spent on stage" refer to my role as Puck in our high school production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Dearest Peggy, while you're gone  
Don't wonder how the talking goes.  
Some are chatting; some are long-  
Winded like the windmill blows.

But all are wise + all are quick  
+ speak good English + don't say  
Like I said the snack or snick  
Or waste time with the sad or gay.

We have heard Greek tonight, + too  
Have heard great Latin from the couch  
And winds that sucked + winds that blew  
And sat up straight + also slouch

Continuing we wonder if  
You will come in + end  
Before you're cold or we are stiff  
The chocolate, lest it bend—

How wonderful the soufflé was  
How blown, how brown how grand  
Yours was the winning; ours the loss  
Great is your triumph on this land

Come in Come in, however late  
Enter with gladness. Know our love  
Go fast to sleep. Continue great  
Develop in your sacred grove.

Fall, 1963. Handwritten. My father always made the desserts for guests—chocolate soufflé or chocolate mousse, the leftovers of which I ate for breakfast. “Sacred grove” might again refer to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Dear Peggy welcome to your bed  
I hope the night was glad  
I hope that everything you said  
was right + was not bad

I hope that everyone had fun  
+ you especially. Now you dream  
of everything that you have done  
There are no bugs. You need not

SCREAM

Fall, 1963. Handwritten. Probably after my final performance.

Dear Peggy Thank you for your sanity  
In driving, dining + in song  
With all bourgeois urbanity  
I know you never will do wrong.

Thank you for taking brother Carl  
Across the river to the party  
Where, I hope, he didn't snarl,  
Throw-up, or act absurdly naughty.

Goodnight sweet lass upon your mattress  
May you rest in freshness sweet  
And grow to be a great great actress  
With many splendid things to eat.

Dearest Peggy, did the map  
take you to the place required  
with no confusion + no crap  
to the one once well-admired?

Come home at last into this room  
Where no witch ever needs a broom  
Where mites in nice or vile bloom  
Have now been chased into the gloom.

The candy's gone; the fire out  
Doonie is safely in her yard  
The pig is snouting with his snout  
While England celebrates the Bard

Bruce + Karen, Carl, + I  
Rolled laughingly upon the couch  
In stupid games in which each try  
Made everyone say ouch ouch ouch

O owtch she screamed  
For lack of time,  
But mostly dreamed  
For better rhyme.

Sleep well Sleep tight  
I hope you had a happy night

Halloween, 1963. Handwritten. Bruce and Karen were my brother Carl's friends. I might have gone to see *Hamlet* at the Guthrie Theatre.

Dearest Peggy, now to know  
that at your mother's school you sang  
+ danced along with even flow  
+ balanced fingers for a gang

of matrons + their frequent sort  
Who (often nice) may be a type.  
Where did I chin myself for sport  
From what bannister or pipe?

The matrons will know you, but not  
those things that my school has to show  
Where I once leapt upon the stage + fought  
+ let my hair + nails grow.

Where once, or twice I failed a test  
+ oftener a math exam  
Where teachers thought I was a pest  
but I knew what I was + am.

I could have showed you every clock  
Whose hands were slow, + every crack  
Of faulty walls that bored—Dear child take stock  
Of all you have, for which I lack

the brains, the purpose + the drive,  
The independent spirit of  
The mind so splendidly alive  
The outer heart of poise; the inner, full of love

I hope all went well. It delights  
me to think that in a place where I  
was so often a failure you were a  
success. We'd appreciate knowing you're  
in—  
Saw note in garage?  
Ma

Winter, 1963. Handwritten. Our U High French teacher arranged to present a musical Noël skit for a French class at Mom's old alma mater, the Summit School, in which I performed and played the guitar.

Dearest Peggy late + soon  
Your entry at the family step  
Will hope to find you not in swoon  
Hot, tired, but instead, most hep

Make sure the lights upon the car  
Are doused, + dark, + surely cold  
Then enter safely as you are  
Not ever shaken from a mold.

Your parents love you, + your sibs  
Think that you have splendid ribs

Advance upon this vestibule  
O children of our time  
Enter without rhyme or rule  
Shake off the snow of wretched clime

+ tell us how the song went forth  
What faces smiled over candles  
We are interested, of corth,  
+ want to know of Bachs + Handels

That decorate this sixty-third  
Cool decade of the post-war years  
We want to know you have been heard  
As peacemakers of solid word

We want to know that you are home  
+ great as always, + we will  
Stay 1/2 awake till you are come  
Blessed + deep + sweet + still.

Dearest children of our hearts  
Welcome to your welcome home  
Although there are not any tarts  
There is ice + frozen loam

But warmer than these dark bits  
Is loving of our parents' souls  
Please do not have farts + stits  
If we fondle you like moles

Welcome home! Under this roof  
Find ever arms to circle you  
To scold, to smile, to bloop, to goof  
But always ready to make stew

x x x x

I wonder if the people know  
From state to state from creed to creed  
Where years behind are doomed to go  
Christian to pagan: need to need

For now the iron bells are ringing  
The dynamite is making bangs  
And certain people who are singing  
Resolve to never show their fangs

Life in this region claims a new  
Habit + custom for a while  
But other regions with less stew  
Have had their celebrated smile

Hindu + Shintu + Mohammed  
Have all spelled out their sacred days  
Islam + animism were not damned  
And there are many other ways

That mark no years, but feelings only  
Tonight is a mere night like all the others  
For some a joy, for many lonely  
And mentioned by lugubrious mothers!

HAPPY + GREATEST YEAR

x x Mom

Dear Peggy + Carl  
Hope life ain't a snarl  
Glad you are back  
Without ruin or rack

Hope Karen is home  
Without scolding or fuss  
And not buried in loam  
With pomp + with fuss

We hope Peter is safe  
And his name not in vain  
That stands for a rock  
On the south coast of Spain

So tell Doctor Spock  
The teen-age is good  
And sure as the rock  
Despite changing mood

1964. Handwritten. An anapest: two unstressed and one stressed syllable, two feet per line, hence an anapestic dimeter. Dr. Spock is a reference to Dr. Benjamin Spock's book, *Baby and Child Care*, a best-seller published in 1946.

Sweet Peggy, now the night is dark.  
Your mother is asleep, and you  
Are greeted only by the bark  
Of Doonie bouncing from her stew.

I don't hurrah this tardy entry  
Or driving late the homing Charlotte  
I'm sorry, too, we have no pantry,  
But awfully glad you're not a harlot.

What was the movie like? Indeed  
It is a great one, spread out wide  
With all great color and great speed  
Upon the newspaper inside.

But now it's late. You must to bed,  
Or at least to do your homework, bide.  
There is no butter on your bread to spread  
There is in honor marks a pride.

The wind is whistling and the sky  
Is minus stars, but soon the moon  
Will have abumt that hits its dry  
Reluctant surface, like a spoon.

The satellite, or rocket ship  
That rallies forth into the stars  
Will give us all a tighter grip  
Of knowledge of the moon and Mars.

No man will drop from out its board  
No spot of brightness will betide  
The impact as it smashes toward  
A crater, hideously dried.

Tomorrow an appointment studs  
Our calendar of sundry chores  
The Arneson would check your duds  
At thirty after fours.

Please don't forget. We must with haste  
make sneakers feel right and sing  
of Sarah Lea and glue and paste  
and almost every other thing.

January, 1964. Typed. Ranger 6 was an unmanned mission to photograph the moon. Dr. Arneson was an orthopedic doctor.

Dear Peg, I see the lighted house  
inside whose walls you tend the young,  
I see you guarding them. The mouse  
will scamper at your song.

What tender squirm, what tiny grunt  
Bespeaks your task on such a night  
In truth lays out the tock + brunt  
Of all you care for. Taste and sight

Are short compared with nascent sense  
How bright you are, how good, have no  
Relation to the utmost time: prescience  
Is all, + all you know.

It is the tickle in the throat  
The chiming hiccup after dark  
It is the fantasy and spark  
That strikes the knowledgeable note.

1964. Handwritten. I was babysitting across the street.

Peggy must feel that her hour  
of thinking has been badly torn  
Many problems, sweet and dour  
Today have pricked her, as a thorn.

First the tension of the paper  
B.F. Skinner late and soon  
No danger, though, that he might rape her  
In his box for the cucoon.

But, nonetheless, more trouble came  
The day was wrong, and so tomorrow  
She must endure the hard, the same  
Long preparation and long sorrow.

For an occasion where she finds that song  
Besets the best way to the rule  
of democratic ways: and rightness and no wrong  
Becomes the coming and the upright school.

And so, sweet person, to your bed  
Your duty done today, at least  
Your public waiting, while your dread  
Of writing is increased.

Pardon my entry on this sheet  
That subtly waits your tender hand  
For better things than I find meet....  
Goodnight, and make your essay grand.

I have read nothing in this room.  
Nor touched a page, nor turned a leaf  
Nor haunted spiders out with broom  
But gave my trust and my belief.

1964. Typed. The story goes: B.F. Skinner visited Edgecumbe when Maeve was a child. He boasted about training pigeons to play the piano by feeding them crackers. Maeve piped up and asked him why he didn't play the piano himself and let the pigeons go outside.

Dearest Peg your parents are  
About to go to bed, assuming  
Rightfully that you aren't far  
Kindled in their love that you

Are near. Now sleep with glee  
Nothing becomes the best of grooming  
Delight in face + hip + knee

Desire + life than heavy sleep.  
And so try now to yet dismiss  
Your day's distress so foul + deep.  
Butter your hopes with rest  
Retreat + spend your night with leap:  
Entreaty of the mind: + kiss  
Askew the tribulation  
Knocking on a passing star.

That from the theatre she comes in  
And finds her room in turbulence  
No downy sheets turned down with care  
Or creased as smoothly as a fin,  
Instead the problem of suspense  
in Rilke's life remains her fare.  
And sleep must wait until the dawn  
Lights the last sentence on the tome  
that is assigned.....  
.....But what of Williams in all this  
Is he to be forgotten after all?  
    The blaring of the trumpets + intense  
last moment of the curtain call  
    Would make us parents wonder what  
Peggy considered as the play unrolled.  
    What comments lay inside her nut  
What criticism ever bold.

I longed to clean your room + shape  
Your bed to bear your tired form  
But feared confusion and the gape  
Of Ma's concerns would make you storm.

1964. Handwritten. I went to see *The Glass Menagerie* at the Guthrie Theatre and had a paper to write for German class.

Dear Peggy when you come  
We hope you will have sobered up  
From all those quantities of rum  
Champagne + wine throughout your sup

We hope the shriek occurs less often  
The dancing gait fearless of thunder  
Minds not that in our beds we soften  
+ all of us are way down under.

Spring, 1964. Handwritten. Perhaps this poem refers to the night a cyclone hit the Twin Cities between the time I finished a junior prom supper with my date and the dance itself. Fallen trees blocked many streets, so I chose to cut the night short and did not go to the dance. Since childhood I had always been afraid of thunder.

Before I eat my egg + soup  
Before I fail to rhyme  
With anything except for “poop”  
And while there still is time—

I wonder loudly where you are  
And set your father pacing floors  
Examine lateness by a star  
And do unnecessary chores.

I do not worry in a sense  
But merely miss you. In the night  
We had a fire past the fence.

Dearest Peggy Step inside  
And see the place wherein you dwell  
Many people there abide  
Some you hate and some love well

O climb into your private bed  
Stretch forth your limbs upon the sheet  
Aware of laurels on your head  
Your soul that has a deepness sweet.

Summer, 1964. Handwritten. I was U High's representative at Girls' State, a yearly conclave where a girl from each high school in the state spends three days learning about the legislative process. Perhaps the "laurels" in the poem refer to the fact that I ran for governor and won, and the next day gave a speech to the joint House and Senate in which I called for universal health care funded by a tax on liquor and tobacco, all of which was written up in the newspapers.

Dearest Peggy in your roses  
And dark leaves that swarm  
About our ears + in our noses  
Of your bright dress: — Stay free from harm.

Now come upon the stair + rise  
Slowly + surely to your room  
Let no one make a wild surmise  
Or follow you with tong + broom.

Your brother says that an old friend  
Of yours named Uphoff. Gene  
The front step blithely did ascend,  
But left, as you weren't on the scene.

No doubt he'll phone. No doubt  
The earth will turn  
As rivers from their sources spout  
As ashes scatter from the urn.

So now mount up amid the roses  
Move to your room, yet fresh + warm.  
Note how the moon its grace exposes  
Keeps your room light: — + free from harm.

Summer, 1964. Handwritten. Perhaps this poem refers to my inauguration as governor of Girl's State for which I wore the same borrowed gown that I had used for my short-lived junior prom. Gene Uphoff, a student at the "U" who was briefly my guitar teacher in 1963, participated in the southern Freedom Rides.

Dearest Peggy, Welcome home  
From early summer's heavy leaves  
Come to the hearth, once more. No loam  
Shall heap yet. No one grieves.

Instead we joy at your return  
We do not vomit, but we light the door  
To welcome you + not to spurn  
Your tardiness upon this floor.

Goodnight, sweet child, for such you are,  
High in your youth + spirits clean.  
Goodnight, sweet child, + may our star  
Stay lucky + bless where you have been

Goodnight + may your talents grow  
As beans upon a pole  
How hard you think, how much you know  
Makes bright the everlasting goal.

Of course when one must live  
And know there are 3 Peters  
For one's life. One teeters  
Such as jumblies in a sieve

And never quite knows where  
North poles + south poles are.  
Despite their markings on the globe:

Crowned with the hemisphere  
Lit by the towns + all the lands  
Omnipresent in the dear  
World-wielding body + bright hands:  
Nature has shaped + made so clear  
So splendidly: + , now, young maid,

Who dashes out from earth to sky  
Ills will not meet you if you're staid  
Like prudish people +, if you  
Live frugally + gently ply

With solemn mind, some gentle trade  
In which you're able.  
Now go up + sleep, + bide

The wholesome night through.  
Hell + high  
Eliminating all that's dim

Winning the dawn + endless blue  
Of summer sky  
Rubbing the mist from out your eye—  
Lids, + living for the day,  
Dawn + delight + gallantry.

Summer, 1964. “Jumbles in a sieve” is a reference to Edward Lear’s *The Jumbles*, a favorite rhyme of my mother’s.

How sad I am you did not sail  
Upon the lake named Bear  
but had to sit + chat like quail  
+ on the boatless water stare

Let's hope that many better days  
will bring you weather for the mast  
+ thus erase the vile ways  
+ shove this Sunday to the past.

I like to think that soon a wind  
“sits on the shoulder\*” of a sail  
That you will skip + master mind  
through every calm + every gale

I like to think that on a pond  
of northern waters, you'll allow  
Your ma to cunningly respond  
to tempting waters at the prow

+ hold the tiller some  
+ grasp the sheet inside her palm  
+ slip it past a gripping thumb  
in answer to the squall or calm.

\* Hamlet

Summer, 1964. Handwritten. A high school classmate had a place on White Bear Lake near St. Paul where I went to swim and sail a couple of times. However, the “pond of northern waters” refers to Osgood Pond in the Adirondacks. Mom bought a Sailfish boat for the island and hoped I would take her sailing when we went to Camp later that summer.

When Peg comes back into this room  
The Becks will squeal with glee.  
Mother will rally with the broom  
And Dad will cover up his tea.

His beard is gone, alas alas,  
He found it prickled every night.  
So, finally, by the looking glass  
He screwed himself up very tight.

And inch by inch began to shave  
Each whisker from his noble cheek  
He didn't call his wife (who's Maeve)  
For fear she would not speak.

And so the afternoon wore on.  
The master plucked at every hair.  
This celebrated beard was gone,  
Whose celebrated chin was bare.

The wife and bairn paced two and fro.  
They rent their clothes and sobbed in grief  
“Just as well to let it go”  
The master said with great relief.

Great cold there was in this free zone.  
Great rains, great winds and darting clouds  
But no rain great as was your own  
Amid the deep woods and the northern shrouds.

How often did we wonder where  
Our daughter drank deep of the wild.  
How oft we longed to take her there  
A heavy blanket for a child.

But, knowing that she was away,  
And grown into a princess fair  
Far too grown for us to lay  
A blanket on her tousled hair...

We did not chase, nor search her out.  
We did not phone police.  
We did not question nor did doubt  
her safety or her peace.

So welcome home. Find not the hearth  
A suffocating limit

Nothing else rhymes and Daddy's looking for  
an electric outlet, so he can feed the Scat.  
He's had a burdened week and is glad you're  
home. We need the car for the evening  
tomorrow  
and for the morning. But it's yours from 11:30  
to 5:15.

So much love      Ma

Late summer, 1964. Typed. I took a canoe trip in the Boundary Waters of northern Minnesota just before my senior year in high school. The "scat" were my brother's tropical fish in a tank.

1964-1965  
HIGH SCHOOL: SENIOR YEAR AND SUMMER



Dear Peggy, Here upon this floor  
I wonder where you are, and thither gone.  
Who called for you at the front door  
And ushered you upon the lawn.

And in whose sports car you did ride  
In thunder and in tempest bright  
Into what earthquake did you stride  
And with what party of the night.

Your father and your mother fared  
Damply at the noisy fair.  
Those who wished and those who dared  
Came to our booth to grin and stare.

In heavy rains, our duty done  
We dashed through this street and through that.  
Water seeped through every bone  
And funneled off of every hat.

But, all the same we made good pause  
About the Belgian waffle house  
And brought you waffles in our paws  
With which you may carouse.

Enough, enough, the hour grows late.  
Fail not to give it one more test.  
Move back those hands that count your fate  
And take another hour to rest.

The Fall has come and with its haste  
Take brief respite from the tide  
That makes the summer's final taste  
Give back a precious hour of pride.

Good night straight hair.  
Good night you nut  
Go to your lair  
And rest your butt.

Ma

September, 1964. Typed. Mom and Dad worked a booth at the Minnesota State Fair, perhaps for Planned Parenthood. For a brief time I ironed my hair in order to straighten it so I would look like the folksinger Joan Baez.

Father and daughter have returned from their duty  
Applying their wisdom and strength to the cause  
Father and daughter have ushered their booty  
(In strength and in vigor and also applause)

To the winning of winners, the fine second ward.  
They have lent their attentions to Fraser and Smaby  
Their energies also to all who are bored  
And the undisclosed middle that might have said  
maybe.

The lady, the lady, the lady however, who sleeps  
A half-sleep in that maybe, and weather  
Is doubtless still counting the pigs and the sheeps  
Till both of her prized ones come back together.

Please pause not to scan the meter above,  
But race up the stairs as fast as you can  
To assure the old lady whose endless fat love  
Wants to welcome you back as fast as she can.

How sad to make final the word of the night.  
The missus is grieving that she must fold up  
The paper and typing, and get out of sight  
The crumbs of the snack and the lunch and the sup.

The dog is without, the Doonie is penned.  
The Carl is ensconced under blankets and spread.  
Be assured that your evening has come to an end  
With all but yourselves well-fed and in bed.

Fall, 1964. Typed. "Pause not to scan the meter above..." which seems to be an anapest with variations. Dad and I must have gone to some Democratic function to support our congressman, Don Fraser, and Alpha Smaby, a Democratic party organizer who lived nearby.

After tonight I cannot say  
That you or I have any words  
To mark the tragic or the gay,  
To ape the twitter of the birds...

Perhaps the only thing that stays  
Perfected in the inner ear  
Are echoes from a century's ways  
We will not often hear:

And so remember for the chill  
Is of September and our will  
No longer can instruct our days  
We must remember all, and still.

“You that would last long, list to my song;  
Make no more coil, but buy of this oil.  
Would you be ever fair and young?  
Stout of teeth and strong of tongue?  
Tart of palate? Quick of ear?  
Sharp of sigh? Of nostril clear?....”

Ben Johnson

from Volpone (1606)

NEVER NEVER EVER to be confused with  
Sam Johnson,  
an equally important man of letters.

“The seasoning of a play is the applause.  
Now, though the fox be punished by the laws,  
He yet doth hope there is no suff’ring due  
For any fact that he hath done ‘gainst you...”

September, 1964. Typed. Mom and I went to see *Volpone* at the Guthrie Theatre.

Dearest Peggy, From my couch  
Whereon my feet have sought a roost  
I welcome your return + vouch  
Upon your chastity—not loos'd

To any untoward wanton youth,  
Not loos'd of any impetus  
But safe as all the



except “booth”

nothing more rhymes,  
+ that’s too suggestive.

NOTE: M T will be here to answer phone  
in the morning. Lucille may be here too  
+ thank heaven. I’ll be back from class etc.  
around 11.

Meeting P.M. around 3:30 with Dr. Chou  
+ probably Uncle Walter, + you, if it can  
be arranged + if the man across the hall  
from Dad doesn't choose to vomit in a loud  
manner. Dad is now in a new room 491 (Station 42 per  
usual) He can phone out.  
No one can phone in.  
(Can't wait to kow-tow vis. A. Karenina"  
+ Garbo)

Early October, 1964. Handwritten. My father had a sudden stroke from a hereditary venal/arterial malformation and was admitted to University hospital. His uncle Walter flew in from New York city. MT was a friend of my parents. Lucille Washington began coming to 1610 once a week to clean the house (except for the kids' bedrooms) when my mother started teaching freshman English classes at the University. She later became the shop steward of her union at the Ford Motor Company whose assembly plant was in St. Paul but has since closed. Reference to the 1935 film *Anna Karenina*, which I must have watched in school.

We watched the Beanfeed on the screen  
The governor went on + on  
And didn't eat a single bean  
And had nothing to sit upon.

We looked for Peggy in the crowd  
She wasn't there, of course,  
But lots of people belched out loud  
And let the sweat come through their pores.

Tomorrow I must have the car  
To drive the patient Uncle Walter  
From here to Airport. That's not far,  
I will not hiccup nor will falter

The plane leaves at twelve thirty-five.  
I'll meet the uncle at Dad's bed  
At ten, or so, then drag him (live)  
For early lunch + see him fed

Under this roof. From here we'll go  
After the meal of ancient duck  
To seize the jetline that will blow  
Him far away from field + truck

Into Manhattan + Peugeots  
And I'll come home to drop a rose.

October, 1964. Handwritten. The DFL had their pre-election Beanfeed where all the local politicians hobnobbed. They must have watched it on a TV in my father's hospital room.

Some people call her Marguerite  
Others pretend she is not there  
Some might ask her out to eat  
But others wouldn't dare

She is a special + a rare  
Person, + lively like, who knows,  
The aardvark, leopard + the hare,  
But she is special + she grows—

Her mother cannot type tonight  
Because her father is in bed  
To clatter would not be quite right  
His brain needs rest within his head.

But welcomes crowd about the door  
And clumsy writing welcomes back  
The daughter to the family floor  
The goose into its gunny sack.

All right, my daughter  
On whose footsteps hang  
The happy saving, or the slaughter,  
The single purpose, or the gang.

All right, sweet child,  
Who hadn't oughter  
Enter so late, lest dire men  
Should take advantage  
Of the nature mild  
Much to their dotage  
Ever riled

The physical + wild  
Recklessness + worse  
Usurp the nether acumen  
That leads them on  
Hot vintages to press upon.

Goodnight, goodnight + may  
The family step familiarly  
Lead you to bed + to a day  
Of dreams + of hilarity  
For you to gladly tuck away.

O how the theatre rankles  
Turns + sunders in your brain  
How lucky in the mood to strain  
Your heart you've kept your ankles

Without sprain or smart. Now  
Rise the risers to your room + shoot  
The second rug down down, so chow  
Will not stop short + dawn be moot.

For our green rugs must never whirl  
Inside the dryer, as the air  
In such a cylinder is cruel  
+ wrecks the rubber backing there

Nature must dry your rugs + so  
Time must stand still while  
On the line they do not shrink or duly grow  
+ so not stink  
or get quite vile.

So drop the second rug + count  
The hours for it to lose its water  
Turn off the soap: turn off the fount  
+ be the very blessed daughter.

Fall, 1964. Handwritten. I played Lady Bracknell in U High's fall production of *The Importance of Being Earnest*. On the wall next to my bedroom door was a laundry chute to the basement where the washing machine and dryer were located. Instead of reminding me to throw my rug down the laundry chute when I got home Mom wrote this poem.

A daughter should never  
Have to speak of all  
Her evenings, now or ever  
But since her character is tall

Her parents wonder + forever  
Long to know what breath  
What blood, what clever  
Laughter led, what stealth

To what endeavor. We  
(Her parents) now will climb  
The steps to sleep. But she  
(The daughter) of this rhyme

Must answer in her soul  
Or later. Because Time  
Is very short + life's a role  
That isn't evil or sublime.

Dearest Peggy late or soon  
Before you belch. Before you swoon  
Consider Mister Pirandello  
Who is an interesting fellow

Shall I tomorrow seek a ticket  
For the great play that you may picket?  
But will not, because its whimsy  
Would make a picket-line quite flimsy.

I only ask if I can gather  
From the ticket-window, rather  
To find a place for you to sit  
So you may, gladly, witness it.

The play, that is, that fine Sir Tony  
Rehearses with, each day + groany  
Tries to sell his Irish jam  
For simple shillings per the gram.

Please advise what I can do  
That you, the theatre may eschew

Goodnight,  
                    Goodnight,  
                                    Goodnight to you!

November, 1964. Handwritten. The play *Six Characters in Search of an Author* was being performed at the U of M theatre department under the direction of Sir Tyrone Guthrie.

Cavort, collapse or what you will  
Overt or intro, loud or still  
Meet home + hearth + evermore  
Enter with grief or joy or sore.

Insist that what is yours is yours:  
No striped hood closing any doors.

Withal, be sure that you are loved  
In nakedness, or boots, or gloved.  
Truth is the end. The foul fiend goes  
Hie to your room + hope for snows.

Just now assume your person lives  
Out of this moment + is deep  
Yielding, yet pushing, always gives.

November, 1964. Handwritten. "The striped hood theory," was a term coined by Mom to describe my habit of accusing someone of stealing an article of clothing (in this case, my striped hooded shirt) when I had, in fact, misplaced it.

Dearest Peggy, dear wild child  
Existential  
Artist singer + delight  
Right + wrong

From the peaceful to the wild  
Rebounding always  
Into song  
Enlivening + always special  
Night has been yours, perhaps successful  
Delight has been ours.

Winter, 1964. Handwritten.

My daughter in the depth of night  
Leaves her own table + her hearth  
To seek more fascination + delight  
Ignoring Rolvaag—(dim on Karth)

She will not tell us when she comes  
Back to her house all safe + sound  
So we will sleep amid the crumbs  
Of worry + anxious if her corpse was found

No, not at all we know at best  
That Margaret Beck takes care  
Without unbuttoning her vest  
Or vomiting in smoggy air

She will return + up the stair  
Will trudge, with sweatshirt + with glee  
+ she will fall asleep + wear  
Her new pajamas HAPPILY

x x x x xx x x x x x

Note Bene: Dear Mag. Do touch me when  
entering

MBB

Around Christmas, 1964. Handwritten. Karl Rolvaag, who was governor of Minnesota, did not support the Vietnam War unlike Congressman Karth, who did. “Note Bene” would be “Nota Bene” in correct Italian.

Dearest Peggy yet so near  
And yet so hasty in the far  
Distant + length. Don't fear

Love lacks if we who love  
Observe old rules + seem not dear  
Volution, motive, schools + care  
Enwrap you in whatever mile  
So earthbound now but as the

Year unwinds we love you more  
Over the petty schedules of the day  
Under concerns that scratch + score.

x x Ma

You might throw this into the  
hallway. Then I'll know you've  
come home.

Enough is said. When darkness falls  
Night hangs among the naked limbs  
Jesting its secrets: lights + palls  
Omitting nothing from the eastern rims  
Yet giving entry to the world at large

To grant, to give, to open wide  
Heave forth the gates for every barge  
Entered through customs bona-fide.

Never to shallow or too large  
Invents no pardon for its whims  
Great is the night + great the year  
Hailing sweet Peggy whose great charge  
To laugh, to labor, + not sneer.

January, 1965. Handwritten. Possibly my birthday. The rhyme structure is abab cdcd bece. Mom painted a silver arrow from the “b” rhyme in the first stanza to the lone “b” rhyme in the last stanza. Those two lines by themselves are a little poem within the poem.

I often cried

Loving a child's stride  
Over the anxious mother's word:  
Vested in enormous pride  
Enlivened in a guitar chord.

Your conscience is full  
On language and friends;  
Upon your parents' twists and bends.

January, 1965. Typed. "I love you" was drawn as a pine tree with roots.

Dearest Peggy. Please don't look  
Around the room for special things  
Remember that in every nook  
Kudus + antelope wear rings.  
Nothing is special. All is kind.  
Essence is ripe + please observe  
So thoroughly how every book  
Sententiously will lose or find

Immanent words of every gender  
Silently meant from wheel + fender

Kindly described, but always queer  
Indigenous, but always blind  
Now go to sleep + know that you  
Deserve the words: The pulp + rind.

The night of trying wet + snows  
Has cast a sorrow on the map,  
Filling the healthy-growing nose  
Again with sputum + with crap.

Surely, the longer dampness holds  
Sooner comes summer in delight  
And cotton dresses in bright folds  
To ravish late the August night.

May you come safe into your room  
Silent, as always in your thought  
That chance the bang, or chance the boom  
Your parents might become distraught.

[Don't think I'm a sorehead,  
But I would like my Muirhead  
In toto unspurned,  
And safely returned.]

Goodnight, + with your coming, rout  
The root of winter! Melt  
Old lingering snow. Cast out  
All but my love so splendid felt

Upon a splendid girl  
Who irons out her curl

Late winter, 1965. Handwritten. I don't know what Mom's "Muirhead" was—perhaps a book. "Sputum" was our word for "sputum."

Perhaps you had to face the diaper  
the pitied cry, demanding change,  
hot or cold (or like the viper)  
simply demanding nothing strange

But merely faces, not so new,  
Or hands, less new to infant art  
simply demanding gently hue  
and gentle handling of the fart.

Perhaps no challenge challenged you  
Perhaps no interruption broke  
upon the duties that you knew  
were yours + had you in the yoke.

How conscientious was your soul  
that all day long\* you gave up skiing  
and heights of snow on every knoll  
the essence + the end of being!

\* The star is marking the full place  
The author halted at your coming  
Last week. So now a night of grace  
Hails you again in rain + drumming

Thunder. Welcome O welcome home!

Doonie is in the basement. It was too vile to put her outdoors.  
Also Dad phoned. Sounded fine.

1965. Handwritten.

Dearest Peggy, will the days  
Measure your slender measure here  
Upon these steps + on these ways  
Your gentle coming through the door

At latter hours. Where are you now  
Your mother wonders, + her heart  
Or liver gripes. You know  
How much we'll miss you. How the fart

Half-blown in fullness soon must blow.  
But seriously in this dark night  
I caution you about the door. So  
Carefully enter, left or right,

The kitchen's painted portal. Move  
As one who would the darkness try  
The dimmer lights of winter prove  
The ides of March to pray + pry.

Wet paint is worse than wobbling faith  
Or erring footstep on the stoop  
It lingers, sticks, + like a lathe  
Makes grooves upon the gentle doop.

Love from Dad + Mom

The booster for the battery is tied  
along with that, that heats the motor.  
Both to a single wire are plied  
Both to a single slot will dotor

to electric charge. I think that both  
take strength from both, and do not fear  
(and am not dubious or loath)  
that fire may rage. So steer

Up the dark stairway to your bed.  
Don't linger wondering and queer.  
Don't halt, don't question. Do not dread.  
But mount the stair without a tear.

You must, however be well-fed.  
Put Polish sausage in a pot  
Or mushroom soup instead, instead.  
Or bread or beer, a lot, a lot.

When morning comes tell me indeed  
how sang the singer or the stringer strummed  
Tell me from that deepest creed  
If sound made music and the great depths  
plumbed.

And if you wake upon the dawn  
When scarlet bands move past the east  
Remember then to turn upon  
The telly for the cosmos feast

Of astronauts and space and reason  
And Spring the first day of that season!

March 22, 1965. Typed. The equinox. I must have gone to a folk concert. The next day Gemini 3 orbited the Earth. Our TV, which we got in 1960, was in the basement. Mom only watched space missions, horse races, concerts, and major political events.

Dearest Peggy from the snow  
Let us shout our blessings through  
As you return from food + show  
+ enter cold, + wet + blue

So blessings to you, child of night.  
Sleep well + deep with knowledge fresh  
You may sleep through the morning light  
In satin, corduroy, or mesh.

The snow will melt. The day will come  
Even the spring will show its face  
And bread will always drop a crumb,  
And men will race to get in space.

Goodnight, goodnight. May Saturday  
lead to an Easter fair + bright  
And nothing break upon your play,  
Your able studies, + your sight.

Make sure the fire is safe  
before going up.

Dearest Peg with delight  
I've wondered on the long campaign  
I've seen two plays + mused tonight  
On many things that wax + wane.

But mostly am in Ireland yet  
Steeped in guide books, mountains, fairs  
That we may see + not forget  
Before the earth erupts + tears.

But now: to bring us to the hour.  
Remember to set your clock ahead  
Lest drooping as a drooping flower  
When you should wake you're still in bed.

April 25, 1965. Handwritten. Mom was reading guide books in preparation for our trip to Ireland at the end of the summer—my high school graduation present.

No mail came today. No bad  
Or good hung in the balance  
Wrung of Spring, of dampness + of wood

Instead the weeds that long have had  
Strength in the garden were dug up

Their roots were firm. And it was sad  
Hoing their beings from the earth.  
Evening was good though. So was sup.

Without you not too effervescent  
In every sense, but always pleasant  
The things we ate were plain, but firm  
Chatter was good. I wonder now  
How well you faired with friends + fodder—  
If all was filling, strong, + fun  
No need to tell me all. Just rather  
Get thee to bed + sleep in thrall

Hour after hour. Tomorrow Lucille  
Opens the door quite early  
Unwinds upon the the cellar floor, the feel  
Rumpled + wrinkled of our clothes

She will iron + wash + make the beds  
Leaving the house all clean + pearly  
Ending her morning with a smile.  
Eternally I think I see a better world  
Perhaps for her. Perhaps a while

Will take to make it full, but it  
Eventually will come. Oh lucky us  
Loving so easily + well! But now we sit  
Less easily for all our guile.

Spring, 1965. Handwritten.

Dearest Peggy, as I wait + wonder hard  
Where you may be or how the night  
Plays hob upon you, + the card  
of good + evil plays the wrong + right

I seize upon the moment of the bloom:  
The spring + bursting pear  
The honeysuckle + the frantic plum  
The knee + ankle + the garden chair

To say I love you + I think  
It's high time you were home. But know  
I'm not lugubrious + do not stink  
And love is deep however slight the show.

Best enter tranquil as you are within  
Exploding outward, bird heard + welkin watching  
Lone inside, sad, ridden: even “sin”  
Outrides so stupidly the inner peace that you are catching  
Vest + divest yourself of pain.  
Enjoy reflections of an hour or day  
Delight as only you delight in every grain

Put down by wonder + astonishment.  
Exult in order to exult; give as you may  
Give always from your brain + everything.

Spring/Summer, 1965. Handwritten.

Dearest Peg    Nothing rhymes with half-past-one!

Just be astonishingly proud that you  
have parents who understand you.

PEW!

Any indication that you are safe  
At any time

WILL DO!

Spring/Summer, 1965. Handwritten. This may have been written the night a friend's car broke down on our way back from her family's cabin on the Apple River where four of us had spent the day canoeing.

Dearest Peg

No Rhyme

At this time

But

Glad you are

Back

From wherever

You were

Carried worry + rack

Next year

You are free

No one

Shall see

Where you are

You'll be FREE

Spring/Summer, 1965. Handwritten.

Dearest Peggy wonder not  
As you go out or you come in  
Whether it is cold or hot  
Or blessed with holiness or sin

But wonder only how the night  
Invites the longer cricket song  
As August passes + light  
Fades faster whether right or wrong

And notice also how the stars  
Once darkened now emerge again  
As leaves fall down + window bars  
Rise up to meet the weather vane

And shift more gently to the south  
Whose welcome beaten by the summer  
Once more tastes sweetly in the mouth.

Beginning of September, 1965. Handwritten. I love this little ode to wonder and the turn of the seasons.

We say good night to our good child  
Who rushes out the door  
Not always calm, not always mild  
But often peevd + often sore.

We say come in to our good child  
Who in the looming world will soon  
Find life + laughter strictly filed  
+ not exactly easy-boon.

Now that's a new one "Easy-boon"  
Just tell me, Ma, what is this term?  
I don't know, kid, It came so soon  
As rhyming agent strong + firm.

A "boon" means wish. A wish  
Means boom,  
So go to bed  
I'll see you soom.

Who won the game  
Who won, she wondered  
What the score + what the name  
Who was met + who was sundered.

Who will have the world series  
Who will win? O what a day  
When all the dears + all the dearies  
Have to leave or have to stay.

We soon shall see. Tomorrow though  
Consists of turkey all the day  
To honor you before you go  
Smelling the house with curds + whey

Stuffing + liver; thyme + sage;  
Drippings from here or there,  
A spice for every person's age  
A taste for every person's care.

And other victuals too, will grace  
The table with its steaming load,  
As every person stuffs his face  
He'll come much closer to explode.

And so who cares who wins the pennant  
Who is fat + who is thin  
Who the landlord who the tenant  
Tomorrow shall be revealed in.

September, 1965. Handwritten. I was about to leave for college. My grandmother Hildy, who called everyone "Dearie," was coming to 1610 for a farewell supper. I must have been talking a lot about the Minnesota Twins during their pennant run, which they won on September 26.

1965-1969  
COLLEGE AND SUMMER/FALL



We wait + hope the night will bring  
Enchanted ancient memories  
Like a sweet bird who from bright wing  
Comes back to warble ancient stories  
Or from a coign or rock to sing  
Memorial offices upon this season  
Evidently we sought you without reason—

Hope you're not tired cross + stuffed  
Or wish that time did not exist  
Maintain your loveliness unmuffled  
Enliven all who live in mist.

Patience was all as we rode round  
Endless the airport loading space  
Goggling at people, sky + ground  
Groaning your absence + your face  
Yet you are here at last. Oh Grace.

1965. Handwritten. Home from college for Christmas vacation my freshman year after a mix-up at the airport.

O my daughter, with what joy  
To latent habits I return;  
To grounded greetings, quip + ploy,  
Ensnared within the well-wrought urn.  
Reluctant still to go to bed:  
Set, though for horrid hours ahead

A hope of waiting up for you.  
Rest only hopefully because  
Entrusted I must rise + spew

From out the bed tomorrow morn;  
Rise up I must, + drive the car  
Over the lanes in rain forlorn  
Leaving the dishes, as a mar  
Incarnate on my daughter's hour.  
Carl must go to school, alas.  
Knocking of fate upon his door!  
I, too, must seek a book or two,  
Noting the spirit + the bore.  
Go sweet to bed. Sleep sweet + far.

Jane:

Wake me. I'm utterly in the mood to  
see you. Dad may call ere you sleep.  
Note fr. peaches.

Summer, 1966. Handwritten. Mom wrote this when I returned home to go to summer school at the "U" to make up some French credits. Carl's high school was still in session. Dad was away. Below the poem Mom has drawn a dancing figure. "fr." means "fresh."

**I** Ici bas, on ne pleure plus  
**M** Mandis le temps, et les nuages  
**U** Unis sont tous les espoirs foux  
**S** Soulenant les vers, les mots, les pages  
**T** Tout est content et tout est sages.  
  
**T** Tomorrow I must be at three  
**A** At the University  
**L** Lagging at a desk or two  
**K** Kicking in untrue + true  
  
**T** To get there I will need a ride  
**O** Or someone's back on which to slide  
  
**Y** Your father's plane is 62  
**O** On Western + it will arrive  
**U**  
  
**A** at 10:14 a horrid hour  
**B** But maybe someone can devour  
**O** Our ancient meals + meet the man  
**U** Under the roof of safety's bower  
**T** The other chore is to stay live  
  
**F** For his dear nature  
**R**  
**I**  
**D**  
**A**  
**Y**

Summer, 1966. Handwritten. The lines in French translate approximately:  
 Down here, one no longer cries/curses the weather, and the clouds/are all  
 our crazy hopes/sustaining verses, words, and pages/all are pleasing, all are  
 wise.

Now, dear Peggy, how I wonder  
Of your whereabouts but know  
Wherever you have sought to linger

You are not in the sands or snow  
Of course are free; + no long finger  
Usurps your pleasure as you grow

And enter fully into life. How  
Rounded, Splendid you are now.  
Ever remain as young (+ old)

Far-viewing, strong, + good,  
Righteous + unrighteous, as today,  
Encompassing your every mood  
Elliptically with light + food.

Mag: [UNPOETIC NOTE]

I turned on your air conditioner full  
blast to cool your room thoroughly  
even though outdoors is quite cool. You  
probably will want to open your window  
+ have natural + not-so-cold air at this  
point.

W With limited supplies of ink  
O Or other matter to make marks  
E Endless I end + make no stink  
S Smell, or encompassing of Marx

V Vainly however I eschew  
A All politics + civil strife  
N Nothing is old. Nothing is new  
I Indeed nothing itself is life.  
S So here I put my finger print  
H Happily on life. Catnip + mint

Q Quickly are savored. Taste  
U Urgently swept in  
I In deeply too, like whitened paste  
C Cut from the jar + free of sin.  
K Keen is the principle of living  
L Lively the warrant that it grants  
Y Yeasty + good its mighty giving.

## The Word

Turn this book upside down +

### Open

---

The word  
is that  
No person shall  
the closet door most

### Parentál

+ held in thrall

### OPEN

Without permission  
Least of all  
Take from its well

### ANYTHING

→

---

But now your parent must begin  
Not in delight + not in sin

The parent who is mentioned now  
Wonders what happened to a pair  
—Indeed what happened to a shoe  
Whose mate, + it, is on the stair.  
A precious set that late  
Were bought in full embarrassment  
Yanked o'er a dirty foot in hate

Yanked o'er the future + the fate

How sweet the night  
That such as this must stare  
Backward upon the plight  
Of those most precious + most rare  
Expedient souls  
O rare  
May they be Yours  
O stair

---

That harbors shoes  
Render in safety such a foot  
That strongly beats out all the blues  
And fills itself with snot + soot

Alas, Do Not. Do Not  
She cried  
Take this verse deep  
To your heart

Alas, alas, your life  
Your pride  
Must give a sense of apple tart  
+ not of belch + not of fart.

To get back to the shoes:  
Who cares  
What is the reason or the ruse  
Oh Stairs!

---

That carry such a fuse  
The up, the down, the in between  
The balance of the math + muse

The word + unseen + the seen

Excuse

The bursting forth of all

This feeling + profuse

Expression like old Geritol

Be advised. Oh be advised

The morning comes before  
the night

+ in the morning, without rum,

Carl takes the wheel

+ is sized

Between 9:30 + eleven

Give up the car + go to heaven

All evening yours to fetch the Jim

Make fresh a bed to comfort him

-----  
The Deep Word

The Deep

World

July 9, 1966. Handwritten in a college examination composition book, a poetic chastisement for taking a pair of Mom's tennis shoes. Jim was a friend of mine who came to visit from New York.

Dearest Peggy, in this room where moonlight often  
slanted sweet, grief-emptied on the vacant corners,  
now brings new sight. Your coming makes a shadow soften  
and brightness leap. The ghostly mourners

disappear. This is your room, your past, your present,  
lugubrious, delightful, queer, air-waved with music,  
silent, noisy, not unpleasant,  
nor ever with a soul diseased, nor with a muse sick.

Enter, may again it be as wholly yours as is the sky,  
essential as the tse tse fly.  
And as the constellations leap; above this bed, above the  
earth;  
Know who has loved you since your birth.

Take notice also that downstairs the roof leaks  
Above Eddie's bed in Roger's room. So if the rain  
Descends and squeaks,  
Ed must cover up in pain.

I left a poncho on the bed, and please advise  
his circuit to the downstairs john  
or secret voyages into the size  
and smallness he may seize upon

inside the kitchen. Show him the bread  
Show him the meat. Let him not dread  
The ice-box or the deep retreat  
of cupboards with their fare replete.

Anything goes. How cold my toes. Rest well. Rest well.  
Please let me know if any persons we could ask  
to come and visit for a spell,  
or for an evening eat and bask.

Early September, 1967. Typed. My friend Eddie and I drove from the East Coast to Minneapolis before I returned for my junior year of college. "How cold my toes," is from *Winnie the Pooh*.

What a lovely person comes  
Back to the house that holds  
So many conflicts: brush + combs  
So many heats. So many colds

Now what a lovely person dreams  
Is what the father or the mother hope.  
To be her fullness: That all seems  
Is real; + there is no grope.

Here where a lovely person sleeps  
Whose parents will be left alone  
May the Great star his crab + sheeps  
Shine out forever in the precious stone.

And may the sea who bore her here  
Withdraw the teeming wave tonight  
To let the sun + moon adhere  
Dissolve the future + drown fright.

For the gentleness that comes  
Over the years + in the new  
Renewal of the sums  
Gotten by hardship + the true  
Effort to balance soup + stew  
Tomorrow beckons + becomes

Yew tree + holly. May the day  
Of Christmas + what follows  
Upset no will, disturb no play  
Revolve upon no secret sorrow

Toss in no grief + may tomorrow  
Reverberate in years that come  
Over knotted brows haggard arms  
Under the calendars + days  
Blow in a trumpet call of charms  
Lift up the mists of this December  
Enliven all at last. Goodnight,  
Sleep well! + when you can, remember!

Music is not food; it is  
The come + gone of all  
That lives; inside or outside  
Short or tall.

I thank you for the sounds  
Hung all about the room tonight  
How Splendidly the heights + grounds  
Took leave from smell + taste+ sight

Only the bottled melody  
Hung delicate upon the air  
Its hardened course with ivory  
Made delicate + rare

Speaking of “delicate” let’s think  
Of all the things that don’t belong  
To such an adjective. And in the sink  
It can’t exist: But is there song?

Ah yes, above the snorting pipes  
Music tonight was haunted, free  
Amid the gurgles + the gripes  
The flute + ivory spelled glee

Goodnight, goodnight +, if you will  
Or will not—leave a shard  
To indicate that you are still  
Meeting your bed, but “en retard.”

Christmas, 1967. Handwritten. I played carols on the recorder  
accompanied by piano while the water gurgled in the radiators.

When people talk about communication  
they usually mean a thing with words.  
But I usually think of rumination  
flowers, sounds, cows, and birds.

“There is,” they say, “a problem of  
communication.” They mean phrases.  
The problem, I think is of love,  
of nature, motion in its phases.

I think of cars on distant roads  
deep in the night in strangest ways,  
passing each other with their loads,  
then dimming lights for salutary grace.

Each one unknown to each,  
but in the judgement of the land,  
new-faced and the dark reach  
of blinking give a sensing hand.

I think of biking down our walk  
amid the burblings of babes  
scarce alive to grown-up talk  
but tricycling with vim and gabes

in fetches of the evening light:  
How quick the least one will respond  
with jingles from his little right-  
hand bell, like the froggy from a pond

if I ring mine as I advance.  
Who says we can't communicate  
when there is yet this special dance  
above our destinies and fate?

To the capitol of our great state  
I go tomorrow with three others  
as emissary to berate  
the freeway racket and the bothers  
  
that smother love and increase hate,  
suggesting hotly how to blacken  
the paving and to slow the rate  
of haste, so noises slacken.  
  
Into the lap of Mr Lapegaard  
we put the petition  
and he will be most on his guard  
at our rendition.  
  
He's the commissioner  
and we the people  
and noise can crack  
the greatest steeple. \*

\*

---

Ergo: lack of rhyme makes me say ridiculous things, but do  
you remember the steeple toppling in *The Tin Drum*?

Late August/September, 1968. Typed.

Perhaps we dedicate this new December  
Effluently to all + not remember  
God's worser times; for now we grow aware  
Grow cosmically + try to stare  
Yet through the very pith to the deep spot

Insistent + over looked; see bare  
Silence + isolation: those forgot.

Here is our time, our mountain, + our fold  
Over all else; + now tonight what joy, what care  
Meets with our child who has all things  
Engaged, concerned, + brings all cheer!

I love each moment of this snow

Love all its threat + all its glow  
O say you love it too: that night  
Vested in winter has a plight  
Ever to last + to remember.

Yesterday we met December.  
Our day is now much earlier  
Under lighter skies we grow.

Saturday, December 21, 1968. Handwritten.

Tonight you have the snow  
Have still the welcome home  
Instant delight in all you know  
Safety at night like secret gnome.

It is the night of softness, yet  
Sweetness is hard. BET

That the morning will be deep  
Or frozen. Sleep. Sleep.

Be sure to worry not  
Enjoy your safety + your tiny grot

And know that you are loved. All

People at Hildy's house are sick  
Or rot + Katie too, is not so well.  
Enjoy life while you have it. Tick  
Mightily before the final knell.

Splashdown re 11 tomorrow.

December 26, 1968. Handwritten. We usually spent Christmas day at Edgecumbe, but relatives who were staying with Hildy over Christmas were sick. "Splashdown" refers to the Apollo 8 moon orbit mission.

1969 - 1971  
JOURNEYS



Bed is a welcoming right now  
Enticing needed  
Leveling to level brow  
I wonder how your evening “speeded”  
Ending in sleepiness, and now  
Venturing another day  
Entrusted with its wing  
  
Incarnate if uncertainty  
New hours of decision move  
  
Perhaps in slightly happy waking  
Ending with more sleep or baking.  
Anyway know that I love  
Chats on the stairs or in a grove  
Each joy is mostly on the stove.

Tires on both bikes inflated  
Winter has abated  
O how lovely summer falls

Beside new shadows on the walls  
In deepest greeting  
Keenest thralls  
Enlivened keeping  
Surest calls.

March/April, 1970. Typed. Red letters begin each line of the first poem, green letters begin each line of the second poem. Drawings are of green music notes, books, an apple, a bird singing, “HA HA,” and two people riding bikes. A friend, Sylvia, from New Mexico, was visiting from graduate school on the west coast.

Instead of wondering about the sea  
Lords + kings + gods, or what  
Obliterate your minds + free  
Voices + ears to careless chat  
Ever remember nonsense wins

Youth + whimsy also count  
Only lugoobs have guilt + sins  
Unless they're doused at nature's fount.

Breath is a precious air  
On every evening: every day  
Totter below or on the stair  
Heaving each care + thought away

Belated though your entry is  
Late + undaunted in the cold  
Accept a plea. Unplug the tree  
So safety is with you in the fold—  
Totter to bed, and finally

On the high landing of the stair  
Forego this sheet that I may know  
Foes are without + you are here.

End of January, 1971. Handwritten. Sylvia and I drove from Stonington, Deer Isle, Maine to Minneapolis for my January 24th birthday. The second line may refer to *Hamlet's Mill*, a book we were reading about mythical representations of celestial events. The "BLAST OFF" refers to the Apollo 14 manned moon mission on January 31. "Lugoobs" are lugubrious people.

Dearest children welcome home  
Attach yourselves onto the hearth.  
Remember all heaven + earth  
Envelope you. Each elf. Each gnome

Trusts your dear lives, believes  
He has your trust. So do the trees  
Eternally. So do the roots, the rose

The timeless things that no man knows.  
Implicit in the night are these:  
Man's joy at what can die or be  
Every man's chance to live. O see  
Sweet snow. Breathe life. Believe—

Fart! Too many interruptions  
Entered in this work  
Entered +botched it  
Lethal eruptions

Frizzled its genius  
Rankled its word  
Eh Eh Eh!  
Elevate turd.

Sylvia and Peggy, very dear,  
after your bar crawl and pub hop  
without hail you'll get safely here.  
Without perfunctorily a stop.

With hale, though  
and sans drear be driven  
safely to the trough  
by gentlemen who've given

comfort in rain and snow.  
They might have rather  
stayed; not seen the show  
with the mother and the father.

I thought the play  
was pushed and snarly,  
a bit too fey  
even with Carly.

Though he was droll.  
The eighteenth Century  
isn't my bowl  
however ventury

I try to be.  
The bee is at the pollen  
now. We see  
the fallen

petal leaf.  
Look only on  
a shimmered sheaf  
of fresh grass spun

from a wee brown  
fleck of drift  
whose fall with sun  
is the moon's lift

to benison and weed  
of summer's tide.  
The treed  
yard and the world wide.

Sleep well and thorough  
tonight before the winter tide  
tomorrow  
brings with sorrow.

Your window is open, Sylvia, and if it might  
rain in all you have to do is jam it down muy  
simplitica.

August, 1971. Typed. I was getting ready to drive to the University of California at Santa Cruz for graduate school, Sylvia back to Stanford. The play Mom refers to was *The School For Scandal* at the Children's Theatre in which Carl was an actor. "Muy simplitica" means "very easily" in Mom's made-up Spanish.

Enter with love the end  
of night or else the strong  
beginning of the day.  
Ends and beginnings mend.

The summer slackens; goldenrod  
appears no longer as a weed  
or something perilous and odd,  
but as a flower that we need.

A scarlet leaf appears  
from some rich greeny hedge.  
The spears  
of newest foliage

are spread apart;  
the velvet pattering of April  
poplar becomes the chattering  
skirl of the heart,

the winter beat  
on hardened leaves,  
lacquered from heat  
like pods and greaves

of ancient history.  
There is a miracle, however  
in the cricket's mystery:  
the longer song, the wicked hover

not of the broken chirp, mosaic:  
Steady and singing now  
poetic, not prosaic,  
Most sweet, as seasons come and go.

August, 1971. Typed. Another whimsical fall poem featuring the longer cricket's song. See poem on page 161.

1972-1974  
SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA  
AND  
NEW MEXICO



Where the snow night unobserved  
Takes no startle from dull eyes

The lovely tongue caught  
Flake chased astonishment

Is not now to be wondered at.  
What is astonishing

Is only to shrink from  
The enormity of anything.

Give us your poor, so nothing  
Is given. Nothing. The hour

The sea its shore. What  
We all long for apparently

Would have us favor the silly  
Phrase one has cherished before

Nonsense will win out, + art  
And mountains can go fart.

Dearest “Pearl” from the bill  
The switch of tires was not listed  
So do not think they did you ill  
And don’t get hot + heavy fisted—

Thanks for closeting the dishes  
I love you for the nasty pain  
And hope your shoulder with my wishes  
Recovers from its vile strain

A happy thing it was indeed  
To see you sleeping on your bed  
Quick in the moment of your need  
Midday + flattened without dread—

Tonight the darkness is a joy  
High breezes toss the summer leaves  
That clinging like July’s employ  
of heavy summer that one grieves

To lose, they lose not + their sap  
Flows long in growing limbs  
And rich, Lamartine says “Trap”  
The rapid flight of life whose rims

So quickly wash away. O Mag  
Thank you for coming to this place  
And briefly coming in + out. The rag  
Foul boneshop of the heart takes grace

Becomes a heartening spirit  
With your face

Ma

De “ Le Lac” par Lamartine

“O temps! Suspend ton vol; et vous heures  
propices!

Suspendez votre cours;  
Laissez nous savourer les rapides delices  
Des plus beaux de nos jours!

(O time! Suspend your flight; and you happy hours!

Stop your course;

Let us savor the fleeing delights

The most beautiful of our days.)

September, 1972. Handwritten. Before settling in San Cristobal, New Mexico to write my dissertation I drove up to Minnesota. There was some mixup with a bill for tires I bought and my name was written “Pearl” on the bill. Along with the poem was a quotation from Lamartine’s “Le Lac,” which I have roughly translated.

Tonight is the first night of fall  
the summer's ending equinox.  
The dark and crimson wild whorl  
of vines on tree trunks and on rocks

marks unremarked when summer rang  
and beetles scurried under bark  
and heated torpid creatures sang  
their beam of noonday: envy of the lark;

the sultry story and the rains  
are over and the fall remains  
with enamel in the poplar leaf  
and cold nights strengthening belief

in anything until so soon  
the empty branches on the sky,  
leaves hauled away, the moon  
will throw again the tracery—

the mighty branches of the heart  
within, the heart without  
about the searching end and start  
of timelessness, of drought,

dampness and flood, desert, and friend  
eternal questions that make whole,  
if always asked, that always mend  
the hurts and breaches of the soul.

I rode my bike up along the tracks to the railroad trestle before the sun went down. There were some Bad Children up there trying to throw the switch and put things on the track so as to mess up oncoming trains. When they saw me coming they must have thought I was a plainclothes policelady because they sort of dribbled down the hill. I longed to ask them their techniques and be in on the plot. Since I wasn't, I removed crap from the tracks and guaranteed survival of the Establishment.

September, 1972. Typed.

The white-throat plies  
her plaintive call  
as she did with spring:  
The sense, the deep, the cavern tries.

She comes again, as in Jones Creek.  
At dawn her versatilities  
will wake you with some ancient ring—  
Not spring but autumn's wayward squeak.

The cricket has at last begun  
to make its compass, scale and run,  
relate to history and warmth:  
Fahrenheit and critic hearth.

You miss the mountain of  
self grown selfless, strong.  
You miss the autumn love:—  
Experiment, and long

ways of asking.  
Basking in the horror of free  
ways, and wondering.  
The scree

of mountain steps, the hurt,  
the independent slips, the sweet,  
deep holds of foot  
and places where all comforts meet.

You are responsible and able.  
Independent, warm, and stable.

September 27, 1972. Typed. Mom dated this poem. Jones Creek is the creek that feeds Osgood Pond at Camp in the Adirondacks. The white-throat is the white-throated sparrow who sings, "Lord Pity me, pity me, pity me." In this case, the white-throated sparrow is visiting our bird feeder at 1610 on its way south from northern Minnesota. (See also poems on pages 243 and 244-245).

Dearest Maggie, welcome back  
not welcome home; that cannot be;  
Your home is in the stove and sack,  
the chard and honey bee.

Your home is on the fairy fringe  
and end of earth  
and people who have known the line  
of mountain-cropping from their birth.

Your home is at that drawn  
and reckless margin  
penciled from the sun  
on every mountain.

Your home is in that sound  
of certain talking  
in a stream, a mound  
of sureness in a squawking

bird. Your home is where  
the cone and storm  
together bear  
you from their harm

to the certainty of mirth,  
your stove, your bed, your  
heaven hearth  
of wood and spore

you cherish, saw, and store.  
Your home is there  
where no door  
is shut against the fare

of seeping thoughts, skies,  
descents of secret nights,  
immensities and whys  
and wheres, past ears and eyes

are with some other sense  
some other immense  
cognizance, no fence  
bars entrances.

Returning to your temporal room  
remember Donne experience told  
“makes this little room an everywhere”  
You mother’s love is manifold.

January, 1973. Typed.

How hard and steep  
the colors of the wall must be  
where you will sleep  
and smell and hear and see

the minutes of your life  
and work—  
the knife  
of trial and of worth.

Look back and know,  
the south the north  
of every essay at the hearth,  
the place and ravage of the brow.

Here, where the birch  
and cedars scorch or cheer  
and celebrate your birth, and dear  
departs and entrances—

know in the pirouette  
and circled dances...  
Not to be afraid of HERE  
the doorstep and the balances.

January 24, 1973. Typed. My birthday. The birch and cedars refer to both trees and logs in the fireplace.

Whether for left or right  
It is the foot that means  
the step on mountain height  
or tamping rows of beans.  
Perhaps to keep whatever foot  
readied for the infinite  
step to the sky or bottom sea  
I hope it comforts you at night.

January, 1973. Handwritten. With a present of socks.

The night comes in the afternoon;  
the struggle comes at dawn  
where darkness sits in horrid swoon,  
and all one's energy is gone.

But with this dismal growing shade  
there are some reapings.  
Bright kinds of light are gently made  
in shadowings and leapings

from hedge to highway,  
brain to foot.  
From knee to by-way-  
bleach to soot.

Know, as you do  
the difference and sense  
of all things  
moot, true.

Ideas and dreams,  
thought-over  
the reams one might  
have told a lover;

The streams  
untrespassed  
that still linger  
and the seams, the hiding

sewed keenly,  
soldered—or left  
open finely  
for the bereft

matter of the heart  
and pained deciding.  
However hard.  
However sad

making and choosing  
is itself reward.

Reentering the child's abode  
Asks problems anywhere of old-  
Rooms; the load  
Emotion takes or leaves,

Just as the robin heaves  
Off its nest,  
Yet hails and sings success

It is the flower and the weed;  
Spring's moment fills a sudden need.

With you to praise for knowing  
Its essential light  
That creed;  
Hope delight and laughter

You engage  
Omnificently, true and without unco  
Utter and fresh as the late junco;  
Real and sage.

Perhaps the heart  
Reclaims the hearth,  
Encircles embers,  
Seeds the garth  
Eschews the part  
Nasties might fancy.  
Certain your coming  
Establishes dancy

Reels and many quiches lorraines  
Arcs of the sky  
Rare aches and rare pains.  
Exult for our joy and never you cry.

May, 1973. Typed. Illustrated. “Omnificently” means “able to do all things.” Several years earlier Mom had given me a quiche lorraine baking dish she called the “quiche deesh.” When I was home I would make her quiche lorraine.

For Peggy on the 25th of May

No secret joke lies in these lines.  
The joke takes place at day  
in the wild and total vines  
when weeds take glory, sway

as if to vie the hoe.  
The last effect of the one day  
of spring that falls to go  
another greeny way

are the spyria in your room  
“bridal veil” the vernacular  
Their scent spells out a social doom  
while still they are spectacular.

It is the hush the tart the scent,  
the moment of your coming  
your swift descent  
a week ago, summing

the race a horse's beat  
below your own pace on the stair,  
in the violets' quick retreat;  
the scent of bloodroot in the air.

May, 1973. Typed. The horse race Mom refers to in this and the following poem was most likely the Preakness. I had gone down to the basement where she was watching the race on TV to tell her I had arrived.

Torn by your coming, leaving,  
that I'd learned to live.  
I distract myself this evening  
having nothing now to give.

Clearing the birch shoots  
that draw a staggering blood  
from its white roots  
I wonder if it was good

to have kicked myself awake  
through two nights  
for a child's sake  
and a husband's lights,

ambitions. If I've done  
anything to keep  
my life unspun;  
which it may be. Peep

occasionally  
so I can live  
in this sterility  
C'est la vive.

I thank you dearly for coming:  
the joy on the stairs.  
O Mag do that again; summing  
the lovely, dancing over chairs

Coming to my lonely T.V.  
moment of a horse  
race while the peevy  
Indy's soup held its course.

Love to you dear Mag,  
and thank you for the skirt;  
you measured so carefully in a drag.  
Your machine can manage the least shirt.

I love you.

M

May, 1973. Typed. "C'est la vive" is Mom's version of "C'est la vie."  
Reference in the last line to my sewing machine.

Dearest Maggie  
here you are:  
a check  
or one and eighty four.

No taxes and no frills  
are here.  
Lifting over hills  
with beer

is all.  
Many a rub  
this fall:  
to write a stub

with sub terfuge  
makes one not credible  
with huge  
lack of edible

ethic and moral  
but the ultimate good  
for one and all  
is in the joyous food

that you might bring  
over tall mountains  
on the wing.  
What fountains

of delight  
what song  
if you might  
possibly come

August, 1973. Typed. I think this poem was in a letter, along with a check for air fare.

Matter. What matter is uncertain  
Yester + morrow together

Wind with another.

Encounters are without season  
Loved, wondered, perceived. The air, the  
Chords come + dissolve. The fair  
Omnifiscence of someone dear  
Meets and  
Evaporates. Love

Is what is + is not there.  
So hills so seas + so anxieties

In every sense shape  
Nature + take nature to its snare  
Aware, we have a short  
Dear, cunning + abundant place  
Enormously + quickly in a share  
Questioningly to see  
Unquestioningly now to taste  
Abundantly again to wonder with,  
To see most suddenly a place  
Enchanted, child-wrung + clear

September, 1973. Handwritten. My coming home is summed up in this affecting acrostic.

Dearest Peggy, Rhyme, I've decided  
If euphonious + fine  
If often good + quite derided,  
Is thoroughly dispensable

Specially if one wishes to  
State something simply

That is, if one wishes new  
Wishes, directions + empathies.

I thought today that there was  
something so simply exalted about  
going barefoot + seeing the tops of trees  
at the same time

+ wondering who in particular  
it was that thought up months  
minutes + places, when smells,  
faces, + even particular floors

are more important.  
That I wanted always  
To go barefoot, but I am  
Too civilized: + desired to sneeze.

+ thought how wonderful to have you near  
+ that I'm not the one to have invented the  
brassiere.

October, 1973. Handwritten. Mom visited me in New Mexico. We  
climbed up San Cristobal canyon to a high meadow at around 10,500 feet.  
It probably took four hours. There we took off our shoes and had a picnic.

dearest child, the vex is where  
withal the robin from the snow  
confusion from the primal air.  
That which you dare. That which you know.

The hearth has habits, as the stone  
from ages previous to man,  
measures not the young or grown  
but some horrendous social plan.

And you have known  
strong ways and other paths:  
the other growing bone  
beyond the logics and the maths...

the other hearths  
the other stones  
of other earths  
and all alones

of days and darks.  
I prize you for the heart  
of scent and touch and sparks.  
But as my life that now embarks

freely at last I've grown  
and sown too much  
too late. Unknown  
must be my latter crutch.

Loveliness is not alone.  
Your warmth, you know, is much.

March-April, 1974. Typed.

Dearest Mag, you know I am,  
after a year without a muse,  
confused about the dithyramb  
& classic forms that one might use.

But in plain language be assured  
I know the logic of the day.  
Nothing is bogged or deep immured,  
and the last bit of winter's play

has thawed and cured  
the last hip or the aching  
knee. Dawn is assured  
with the most totally unfaking

whip of the bird  
and song and dawn and hours  
waking and splendid with the heard  
world and secret bowers.

So the life heaps  
and giant notions  
match the vast reaps  
of plains and oceans.

And persons here,  
comfort or rare—  
move in as bear—  
or out, as hare.

I go at ten in someone's car,  
to yoga high above a bar.  
Return near one  
and afternoon must claim an hour

of the car to park  
and spar the every book  
to every library and queer  
demanding, stark

type who might require  
a several volume  
for his pile and pire.  
There isn't room

to tell you more.  
The fat is is never in the fire,  
and I love you and adore.

The moon invisible behind the stars  
shines lightly for others,  
mild other moons  
to help them shed their aureoles.

So night is not  
a black and darkened thing;  
but a bright  
sweet knot.

So everything of dirt  
and doubt  
may find some heart  
in simplest loving.

No food is in that part,  
but memories creep  
astonishing abundances:  
laughter and fart.

And privately each  
of us does  
her own part.  
Not with speech, but with heart.

So now the darkness and the cold  
descends, as the white enormously  
begins in spring.  
The roots are deep

greening under the levels  
and wind  
of snow. Colors  
of all kind.

I love you so.

M

Within scholarly limits!

March-April, 1974. Typed. The note after the poem is handwritten.

1975-1979  
NAVAJO NATION  
AND  
NEW MEXICO

Magwa

Welcome again + always know  
Enveloping arms would have you here

Lessons unlearned, seed one might sow  
Own no part of this house  
Vows you might take, or any fear  
Erased from the slate; even the blouse

You might just choose to wear  
Or not is sure effaced, deleted  
Under this roof whatever skirt

Is on your person is of no matter  
Nor must it be clean or carefully pleated

This is your place to boss + roam  
Hold dear or cheap  
It is where you're at home  
Softly or loud. Shallow or deep

Here is a simple spot  
Outwardly plain: inwardly plain  
Unless the things that some have not  
Seem more important than the rain  
Encountered on your pane, or family knot.

January, 1975. Handwritten. I had traveled from Wheatfields on the Navajo Nation to Minnesota where I spent my birthday and did research for *The Sacred: Ways of Knowledge, Sources of Life*.

Beloved child  
return in peace  
from what the mild  
night increased

And extends in heaps  
of wandered snow.  
Deeps of mild  
queries; wild

scenes and places  
child,  
that you are not,  
but truthfully know  
I thank you for the heart

And the eternal  
wonderings  
that your strong  
endurings

keep me young.

(PEW too many interruptions)  
I hope you sleep abundantly  
+ am glad you've had laughter.

M

January/February, 1975. Typed. The note after the poem was handwritten.

However small the room how much we grow  
here, where the horror  
and the drum  
borrow

from  
shallowed confrontations  
and fake spaces.

Doom

is not, nor  
future, in any sense.

There is  
the sounding boom

of surf, and  
unrelentless blow  
of wind, still  
uncontrolled.

There is  
a pine-cone part  
treasured as ambergris  
in the cuff of a shirt.

The stuff  
that one lives  
is muffed, fragile  
invisible.

The stuff that one is,  
feels obvious, dreadful.  
Best that one feels  
those that are needful,  
  
lives to the heart  
and height  
of each who lives  
doing his tidy strangled part.

M

Late November, 1975. Typed.

As one hides the pomegranate  
one assures  
secrets in granite  
and secures

the flying entry  
of a child  
to a pantry  
viled

by family  
closeness and despair  
emptily  
aging on the stair.

Pomegranates found  
behind the cream  
heal the wound  
and hurts that seem

unmountable.  
Welcome, and farewell  
accountable  
and well

dream  
of a child  
slim,  
mild;

and grown  
who comes and wades  
in the groan  
world of trades.

Late November, 1975. Typed. In Minnesota for research, at Hildy's for Thanksgiving. There was a pantry between the kitchen and the dining room at Edgecumbe where the china, glassware, and silverware were kept. All holiday dinners at Edgecumbe included a bed of lettuce with a white vinaigrette dressing arranged on a large Italian platter with pomegranate seeds, avocado, and grapefruit sections.

If anything can mar  
and anything destroy  
what is far  
deep and going,  
  
is nothing.  
We keep the star  
noting  
its new blur  
  
in newer sky.  
We keep the stir  
and ply  
of the friend and doer  
  
who does  
most differently  
from us  
in competence.  
  
But love  
is simple like the dust  
and covers lust  
and every move.  
  
The myth  
is surely  
its truth  
and clearly  
  
its trove.  
I start to understand  
the grove  
the forest and the hand.

November, 1975. Typed.

The air is holding  
damp;  
but you are free beholding  
Vivid memory.

Tramp, scholar  
reasoned molar  
vamp. You are  
warmly an enterer,

Safe and well-met  
delighted with.  
Fret  
not but sleep.

For light  
and life  
is fraught.  
Sleep tight

And not too hot  
too cold  
but with sweet  
ties that hold

the memory of  
face and Grace  
and love of old  
spot and ephemeris.

Know you are loved  
and gentle.  
Bold.

November, 1975. Typed. "Not too hot/too cold," is part of a childhood good-night ritual verse we recited before I went to sleep.

Especially now the  
Newer time of seeing you  
Lifts the  
Insistent blue  
Venture of winter  
Even though that season,  
Never is a total hinter—  
Ersatz reason.  
Despair can

Bump along as flan  
You might say

You scan  
On each day  
Under west Europe sky.  
Reach now your knowing

Visit has, where your roots  
Involved with your growing  
Stay in your boots.  
It's a joy for us all:  
Too much to tell.



Mag, this neat black ribbon I thank you for attaching. I  
dreaded having to do it. I get tangled, inky and cross. Do

hope there were no problems and that you effervesced after  
the show. The final shadows over the sleek cast back yard as  
you left were very violet sweet. Too bad people can't say  
what they love and burst forth then and there.

May, 1976. Typed. Shortly after my visit Mom flew to Europe and met an  
old college friend in Cornwall, England, then to France and Holland to  
visit friends. Below the poem was the drawing which follows.

As you depart  
as you return  
there's something  
in the urn;  
the art.

Far nodes  
of life  
are loads,  
rife

with tossed  
worlds  
mossed  
whirled.

Tomorrow  
let the trip  
of our sorrow  
and your blip

be smooth;  
the intermittent clouds  
soothe  
the swung shrouds

of stint  
and Minnesota hour;  
of hint of job  
and dour

duty  
of family  
beauty

they gamely  
claim  
is better  
with fame.

No letter  
can claim  
old St. Paul  
than shame.

PEW; this is no way to say goodbye  
to thank you for driving this afternoon or  
understand astonishingly better what  
mountains of views and mountains of clans  
combine in healing and song, & assuagement  
of overrunning stories, childhoods, plants.

Early May, 1976. Typed.

Margarita, and Peggy, very dear,  
I hope you had good dinner and a show  
I did not shed the gathering tear,  
Although I missed you so.

In midst of which my good idear  
was of a light bulb, tender, good  
to keep C's car in warmth and cheer  
and place the bulb upon the hood.

I'll do this if you don't come back  
before the hour of bed.  
I'd put the bulb within, but lack  
what's said

about the smart unlocking  
of what the British call the "bonnet"  
And something else they call the "stocking"  
referred to in a Shakespeare sonnet.

I'll simply lay the bulb on top  
and trust the heat may radiate  
through metal, chromium, and slop  
hydraulic oil to penetrate  
and heat withal.

Chapter fourteen is done.  
My eyes roll back into my soul,  
and conscience clear in every bone.

I end, as night begins  
with lines from Yeats  
who, once again ascends  
in all one's lares and penates.

“You cry aloud, O would t’were spring  
Or that the wind would shift a point  
And do not know that you would bring,  
If they were suppler in the joint  
Neither the spring, nor the south wind  
But the hour when you shall pass away...”

a few lines also from Sister Anthony Barr; “A  
complaint to her Lord in her loneliness,”  
Sewanee Review, Summer ’76

“I am more clothed than  
wintered people in the coldest land; yet even as  
I anticipate your hand, I am more nude than  
Any woman before any man. If you will take me.  
I will shimmer, like the morning in your hands.”

December, 1976. Typed. My friend, Margarita, from Oaxaca, Mexico, traveled with me to Minneapolis for Christmas. “Chapter fourteen” was the final chapter of *The Sacred*. The Yeats quote is from “The Hour Before Dawn.” The show Mom refers to was probably *The Little Match Girl* at the Children’s Theatre of Minneapolis where Carl was a principle actor. On the reverse side of the paper upon which the poem was typed was a scribbled note saying that Mom had gotten the “bonnet” up and put a light bulb next to the fluid.

Welcome home to this confusion  
horror, calm, and hope;  
there is no rhyme or exact fusion  
between the meter and the trope.

We start with spondees  
and we end  
in undees  
or the bend,

of fixing verse to various pattern  
that heaps and piles  
to women slattern  
with smiles and wiles.

But there are many things I feel,  
apart from words.  
I telephoned the good Lucille  
who asked of Peggy and of birds.

Her aged mother lives indeed  
in that sweet flat  
and may be seed  
from some slave that

she might  
yet speak of  
But fright  
not love

surrounds her tiny  
place. Lucille  
has made it viny  
so the wheel

of time is easy.  
Lucille works all day.  
Her mother's meals  
are brought on city's tray.

The Noel singers came just by,  
with dripping noses, covered ears.

Sweetness in their music ply  
about the streets, among the cars.

Now of the night, now of our blood  
I cherish all of Peggy's coming,  
and Margarita's gentleness; who stood  
and stands without complaining

of our strange ways.

Tomorrow will be warmer. Days  
beyond that day, longer  
and the light on snow, stronger.

In deep of winter  
the snow, in its whiteness holds  
astonishing wonder  
and light.

December 21, 1976. Typed. The verses migrated to the right as transcribed.



The bird (the White throat returns—  
did you hear it this morning?)  
song; the cloud, grass, ferns,  
don't exist except for learning.

They aren't there. No call  
of whispered dove, no thrall  
of bud and lingering light on tall  
suspended vines, or bright

hoar sumac and its yellowings  
have meanings. They aren't there,  
except for the dark leanings;  
the sight, the smell, the listenings

of the human and recording art.  
The toad will seek his grass;  
the pig his fart; the ant his mass.  
Out there is nothing

if it weren't for us, recording:  
BEING.  
Let the scent, the face, the absent seeing  
be the new pace,  
and dreaming  
full of the heart, and full of grace.

May, 1978. Typed. The white-throated sparrow in this poem is not the white-throat at Camp in the Adirondacks but is a migrating sparrow stopping at 1610 on its way to northern Minnesota for the summer.

Goodnight sweet child  
and for your presence  
thanks, and mild  
delight, and cognizance.

We are here looking  
at each other's faces  
for the changes  
of the year:

one grown gentle;  
one grown hard;  
one bewildered  
in the world.

Think of the primal  
time.  
How violent the  
violet of dog-tooth

or the bird's foot blue  
or the yellow,  
root to the rock.  
Freaked black...violet

Tonight,  
already I have heard  
the cardinal's fright  
and lashing come-on.

Also the Chickadees'  
sweet song  
of spring, like the Lord  
Pity-Me's

of Camp:  
The White-throat  
agony into the least crook  
of heavy paddling.

May, 1978. Typed. The "least crook of heavy paddling" probably refers to returning from a picnic up Jones Creek or down the Osgood River. If the wind is blowing strong from the west, paddling back to the island at night is against a headwind.

Afternoon of pleasure  
Joined with you  
Of yesterday's leisure,  
Your presence a treasure

Today too  
Of hearths and hearts

Heaping the salad  
And slicing its parts.  
Vouchsafe you good night,  
Ensuing your seeing

Your brother and friend  
Of a moment of being.  
Undo all your cares

Hang onto the least  
Elusive moon.  
Rise in the rankest  
Effort would bring

Springs to the springs and skies  
Written with song, grace  
Earths of an older tune  
Either or between the phantom scope  
Touch, remembrance, and spring.

Clutch that deep thing  
Harboring instant heart:  
Ironweed, vetch, and sweetest clover;  
Loosestrife, a tender face;  
Drift of the banking plover.

November 23, 1978. Typed. Thanksgiving at Edgumbe. The date was scribbled on the paper.

You're coming oftener  
Now how does it work? May you get  
this  
ribbon in foully. PEW

This is a Shakespearean sonnet. Tomorrow there  
will be a Petrarchan one.

If in my face you should see death.  
Remember that all life is quickened  
in sweet and unexpected breath;  
a person who has never sickened.  
You're coming oftener to think  
delight, and energy above the drought;  
the untalked books or need to drink;  
the dull idea without the thought.  
What is special is to thrust  
the body through the deepest snow;  
to what one breathes, to what one must  
superbly cherish as we grow.  
The loveliness in every alley  
is joy in thinking of the valley.

March-April, 1979. Typed. I had not changed the ribbon correctly. The  
original sonnet begins in smudgy type, "You're coming oftener," which was  
a line Mom used later in the poem—after she had reinserted the ribbon  
herself.

This here is a Petrarchan sonnet  
I told you lately I would write  
Like a lady trying on a bonnet,  
The form is somewhat stale and trite.  
However it is all-inclusive,  
Like the bard's whose hit and bit  
From time to time is too permissive  
And might put someone in a fit.  
So be in hand as now I write.  
Consider all you know of rhyme,  
Or puddles of the nearing spring.  
Sleep in warm sweetness of the night.  
Remember cumin, marjoram and thyme.  
Sumer is a cumin in; birds are on the wing.

March-April, 1979. Typed.

growing older the first  
dull scissor scurl of the jay  
is less painful and cursed  
dawning in the winter's sway.

The start of chickadee  
in the sweet April mate-  
song, briefly just once, is free,  
tried simply for the soonest date,  
reminding of "lord-pity-me."  
Peterson says the white-throat sings  
in wild places far from sea;  
with shining eye and darkened wings.

And rabbit fumets are about,  
revealing that a frozen season,  
low metabolic rate, is out,  
dancing in lenten night with reason...

The heart takes heart,  
the early scurryings declaim  
that our old hurryings and dart  
can stop. Nothing's the same.

Each moment of a face, each day  
etches another person on the brief  
universe, and ferny way,  
the fog, the warpy lake, the leaf.

No question should be asked;  
nor answer given,  
it is the masked and the unmasked  
lane, or face, for each one's heaven.

Late March, 1979. Typed. "Peterson says," is a reference to *Peterson's Field Guide to The Birds of North America*.

Tonight no bloom  
Tonight no special rhyme  
spends thought within  
margins  
diapasons, petals  
where you are: what  
you believe  
your help: your being  
Springs  
are the essences  
that matter: chords  
Summer  
Clover sun  
Remembered or  
unremembered scent  
tart taste of  
whimsied plum.

Life is  
What Life is not  
Life is.

Perhaps the taste:  
perhaps the tart  
core + the sour  
fight  
make bed + white  
sweet comfort of  
the season's hour.

I love you  
- Ma

June, 1979. Handwritten.

## Augmented Interval

You are in the turn of weather and tune.  
Autumn demands the cello of final wings,  
the measured stroke,  
the bowing and white dew.

Semi quavers fall  
that give you back;  
lightness, a catching air;  
green, blue, and scarlet drifting.

This ivy twisted like the treble clef  
climbing the frets and tugs of scabrous bark  
is music of the diminished step and singing\* lake;  
or pluck of pewit in the sand.

This is the return of twisted smoke—  
the far song you made. I hear  
the creak of buck pods\*\* opening with rain;  
musk smell presage of dusk.

Scores of summer settle, scattered  
over staves, patterned as the leaves  
that quiver  
in whole notes and in halves.

---

\* bad word here

\*\* no such things exist

August, 1979. Typed. An augmented interval is a musical term meaning a major interval where the top note has been raised by one half-step. A semi-quaver is a sixteenth note.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to especially thank Abby Lester, the archivist at Sarah Lawrence College, who provided the impetus for my research into the roots of my mother's Home poems when she sent me, out of the blue, copies of letters written by my mother to Sarah Lawrence professor Charles Trinkaus, between 1941 and 1946, as well as a sheaf of poems which were among his collected papers. Abby continued to help me by sleuthing the archives and providing me additional material from my mother's college years

Barbara Michael of the Sarah Lawrence alumnae relations office provided names of my mother's college classmates.

Maeve's reminiscence of Genevieve Taggard as a teacher can be found in the Rauner Special Collections Library at Dartmouth College, Genevieve Taggard Collection.

The Manuscripts and Archives Division of the New York Public Library (Genevieve Taggard Collection) sent me copies of Maeve's letters to Genevieve Taggard written between 1941 and 1948, from which I have quoted passages.

Thanks to my brother, Carl, who provided me with all of my mother's early novel and short story manuscripts and the "Autobiography" she wrote in December, 1947; and to my brother, Roger, for the family photo albums in his possession which helped me piece together my visits to 1610.

Ellen Fifer was a doctor Maeve persuaded to serve on the St. Paul Planned Parenthood Board in the early 1950's. She described their first meeting and conveyed to me an image of Maeve during that period.

Kathy Wessels was my closest high school friend. Her memories of my mother have been both moving and invaluable.

Hoodie Beitz designed the book and patiently stitched together all the pieces of its production.

Craig Smith edited this book with precision and grace, providing knowledge and support in many ways.

Margaret Rockwell Finch (known as Maggie), a poet who lives in Maine, was a friend of my mother's from the moment they met their sophomore year in college to the end of Maeve's life. Her delight and curiosity about everything, as well as her stories about Maeve were vital to the creation of this book. Her daughter, Annie Finch, also a poet and source for all things having to do with poetry, was my initial contact with Maggie. Her book *The Poet's Ear* was an invaluable guide to Maeve's poetry.

I had the good fortune of finding out that Perky Hannaford Greeley, originally from St. Paul, lives in Massachusetts. Her remarkable memory provided me with vivid descriptions of my mother during her college years, accounts of their stays at 19th Street in Washington, DC., as well as perspectives on my mother's childhood and family. I am grateful for her readiness to answer my questions, her good humor, and her encouragement of this project.

The edition of *The Bacchae* that I quote on page 45 is from the Gilbert Murray translation, published in 1938.

To Peggy Nelson who is always there.

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