

Hilda van Stockum (1908-2006)

Remembrances by Her Six Children to Mark the Fifth Anniversary of Her Death
All Saints' Day, November 1, 2011

OLGA (Joan in *The Mitchells Series*) has for 51 years been based in Nairobi, Kenya and writes from the Navarre Clinic in Pamplona, Spain:

Mother liked to say that we were a family *that knew how to love*. I think this is very true. Our parents lived for us, and we grew up very close to one another. Since Mother went to Heaven five years ago, it's as if we closed ranks and have become even more united.

During this fifth anniversary of our Mother's death I am experiencing the great joy of being reunited with each one of my brothers and sisters in Spain, where I am undergoing medical treatment and am more accessible than when I have been in Kenya. Our Mother's smile and blessing accompany us always.



BRIGID (Patsy) writes from Berkhamsted, Herts., UK, where she lives near her sons Chris and Desmond and Desmond's wife Anna and son Ivan:

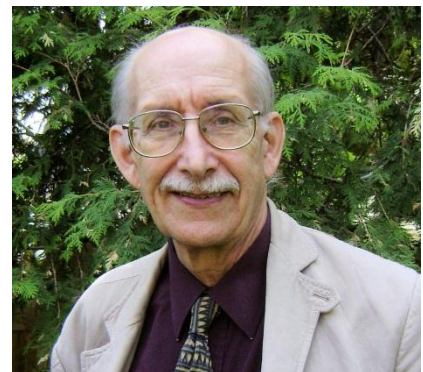
Mother often seems to be near me. She was a larger than life person and I can detect parts of me as I get older that are parts of her. I feel in a way she has gone ahead into the unknown valley of death to help us cross the barrier when the time comes.

Her "Thoughts on Death" is the most amazing thing on death I have ever read, and it helps take away my fear of death. [It is attached at the end of these remembrances.]

RANDAL (Peter) writes from Ottawa, Canada, where he lives with his wife Elaine and keeps in touch with their six children, two of whom have married:

We know Mom thought a lot about her duties as wife and mother. In an interview, when someone asked how she could write, paint and raise a family all at the same time, she replied "by neglecting my duties."

One day (or night) she had an epiphany about her duties as wife. She was in one of her very Catholic-religion frames of mind, something that Dad did not share, being of a more secular or at most



Protestant frame of mind. Well, she imagined herself post-death, facing God, clothed in all her religious raiment. But God said to her: "But where is Spike?" Then, very embarrassed, she realized that she was responsible for bringing him with her, whether or not he shared her religious beliefs. So, back she went to bring Spike.

I thought about this during religious meditation a week or two ago. I wondered whether Spike was indeed with her. I remembered Sheila's story about telling Mom she wanted her to send a sign that she was in heaven. "Send me eight white roses," Sheila had asked. We all know Sheila's story. [At Mom's funeral, someone who could not have known the story sent eight white roses.]

No, I didn't need a sign, I thought. But after my meditation I went out into our side garden, not looking for anything in particular. We've had a very good harvest of potatoes, raspberries and much else. What caught my eye, though, was our rose bush. It was long after the rose-flowering season... yet, there they were, exactly two white roses, blooming side by side.

So I don't think any of us need worry any more about Spike. He's with Mom.



SHEILA (Angela) writes from the High Elms Manor in Garston, near Watford, Herts., UK, where her four daughters and spouses, grandchildren and friends live under the same grand roof:



After five years, the memory of Mother has not faded but is just as strong. I have become far more appreciative of her books and paintings and wish that I had purchased more of her paintings. I have many portraits but few landscapes or still lifes. I particularly like to look at a photo of her laughing heartily. I can just picture her again enjoying life. She had a wonderful sense of humour. What an amazing, talented, religious, generous and

loving mother she was. She is always in my thoughts and I miss her so much.

JOHN (Timmy) is writing from New York City, where he lives with his wife of 40 years, Alice. They visit frequently with their two children who live in the New York area:

We can't know how Mom has changed in the last five years! But the five years since her death have given me so much better an appreciation of who she was and how she got there. Her letters and unpublished manuscripts, as well as her published books and paintings and photographs, add up to an immense and intense body of work showing her evolution as a writer and thinker and mother, as well as providing deep insights into the times that she lived in. More than that, they bring Mom back to life as surely as if she were in the room.



Some of these documents are posted on [her 2006-2007 website](#) and the [Boissevain family U.S. website](#). More is on its way, and pretty soon we will have some more HvS books.

LIZ (Catherine) writes from London, where she lives with her husband Cliff Paice and is called on frequently for babysitting for their grandchildren. They have two married daughters and a married son:

I find myself remembering Mom's sayings.

'Writers write. Painters paint. If you haven't got time just now, you aren't a writer or a painter.'

'You can't have creativity without mess. But you must ALWAYS wash your brushes!!!'

'When I paint I am trying to capture God's joy in his creation.'

'Happiness comes from using all your talents to the full.'

'It is not the taking away I mind. It's the not putting back.'

'Start every meal with raw fruit or vegetables.'

'If you aren't hungry for an apple, you aren't hungry at all.'

'I have had a certain fame. The trouble is so few people know about it.'

'My first language was bad English.'

Thoughts on Death

by Hilda van Stockum, 2004 (aged 96) [See Brigid's remembrance above.]

I think that death will be a surprise in two ways.

First, **it will be easier than we think**: especially if we've practiced a little by realizing that it is not only NOW we are living but that living involves more than we think. We're meant to clock in to Eternity. Therefore we must not be preoccupied with our life now and here. We must make room for changes. When

death comes it may be a kind of “letting go” into a condition that we have already lived towards and that brings its own skill.

A lot of it will be a “letting go” – and we must realize that there is something definite we have to let go of; but we have to work on that – so that we can let go when the moment arrives. Sometimes it may be a strong sense of our own individuality that we need to let go of, because it surpasses our sense of being part of a whole. We must patiently allow ourselves to clock into our world at the moment and harmonize with our momentary difficulties – we have to keep on belonging to our present world as well as preparing to let ourselves go into a further existence in this or the next world. We must try to be happy and include others so that we keep on growing and developing.



Second, **we will be transferred into Eternity**. This is not a climate we grew up in, yet this is what we are trying to grow into. A sudden death is very difficult. We can try to make it less sudden by practicing certain exercises. For instance, you need to build up a trust that will catch you when you fall. In this way you can gradually arrange your safe arrival.

All things in life – the seasons and the plants – show us that dying is inevitable and should be helped and encouraged, just as you encourage a toddler to walk.

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