PART THREE
Partners

When Judy called me New Year's Day, 1992, she said she had something important to talk with me about. Jerry and I had just finished dinner with Bob and Rany, who had come up for a few days; I excused myself and went to the phone in a back bedroom. Judy's request came as a complete surprise: Could Jamie (my younger niece) come to live with Jerry and me for a while?

Things had not worked out just as they'd hoped they would for my sister and her family. Paul had left the church that originally called him, in part due to its lack of interest in community service, and he was now the pastor of a small congregation that met in a Grange (farmers' fraternal) building north of Sandpoint, Idaho, just a few miles from Canada. On one of my visits, I attended a church service there, and I was impressed and touched by how dedicated both Paul and Judy were to their Christian mission. Judy typed the program, taught a Sunday school class (even bringing graham crackers for those children who might not have had any breakfast), and accompanied the devotional singing. Paul made routine repairs and improvements on the building, and gave generously of his time, both for the Sunday and Wednesday services and in pastoral counseling. Even my nieces and nephew helped by their chores and participation in the services.

But something happened, and Paul left this church too. I understood at the time that the church board had expressed some dissatisfaction with Paul, complaining that he was remiss in making church visits and, perhaps, enlarging the congregation. Whatever the case, Judy and her family gradually stopped going to church altogether, and Paul began working as a clerk in a hardware store in Sandpoint, where he is today.

All three of Judy and Paul's children had some difficulty with the role the church played, and then ceased to play, in their lives. For a time, Judy and Paul were extremely zealous in the pursuit of their beliefs—even to the point of not allowing the kids to observe Halloween (because of its Satanic associations). Then they realized they might have gone too far, and they relaxed and became more permissive. This tacking must have been confusing. But, with the help of counseling and Judy and Paul's determination to make their marriage and family work, they have become a mutually supporting group, and all the communication lines remain open.

When Judy called me, I didn't have all this background—and, indeed, the situation with the church hadn't yet come to a crisis. Her request that Jamie come here was based on the desire to be able to offer her a greater challenge in school. Jamie had already skipped a grade, and she still found her schoolwork easy and pointless. Near Dallas, with the variety of schools and cultural offerings available, perhaps Jamie could find some intellectual stimulation.

Jamie had come down the summer before to spend a week with us. She and I rode the narrow-gauge train between Palestine and Rusk, attended a chamber music concert in Fair Park after a picnic lunch on the grounds, and I watched her ride the Shock Wave, the upside- down roller coaster at Six Flags Amusement Park. As I always had, I enjoyed her companionship—her quick mind and gentle ways and unpredictable sense of humor. And I saw, more than ever, how much she had in common with Jerry, from their restless inquisitiveness and nervous energy to their love for staying up late. I was fascinated by the thought of these two together; I could easily imagine the influence each might have on the other, and the good company they could be for one another. It also seemed to me that Jerry and I would be sharing our bounty a little by helping Jamie, if we could—and if he were willing. And he was, without reservation.

So we agreed to be parents, starting in mid-August. Jamie was to finish the school year in Idaho; meanwhile, I would locate a school here for her to attend for the eleventh grade. By the end of April I had met with the principal of the Ursuline Academy and obtained her permission (contingent upon the school board's ratification) for Jamie to attend as a special student. It was during this meeting that I learned that Anne Freeman had just joined the Ursuline faculty.

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With the guest bedroom now available in the brick house, Jerry and I were able to entertain guests more comfortably and for longer stays. Karen Finley and her husband and manager, Michael Overn, spent a week with us in the spring of '92.

Jerry had given a concert at DiverseWorks in Houston earlier in the year, premiering ***Birome (fixture): topogram*** with the assistance of Michael Galbreth; this piece, later taped in a studio performance in Dallas, appears on the videotape of four of Jerry's "video translations" released in February of 1995 by 0.0.

Discs. Michael Schell's program notes describe the work as follows:

> *...Galbreth is seated, holding a metal grounding plate in one hand. Jerry, wearing Latex examination gloves, probes him with a device that measures his skin's electrical conductivity, a technique used in polygraphy to gauge stress. These measurements control the pitch of an intense, noisy whine that dominates the soundscape. In a live performance Jerry would have used a host of hand props... along with a video camera and an array of audio equipment.*
>
> *Here he makes do with a probe and a shrill tin whistle.*

Jerry described ***Bitom (fixture): topogram*** in terms redolent of exorcism or healing ritual.

The score refers to his and Galbreth's roles as agent and patient respectively. But other dyads suggest themselves too: experimenter and subject, interrogator and prisoner, father and son (in a peculiar rite of passage). Some find the proceedings charged with an unresolved sexual tension, heightened by the disparity in mood between the two participants (Jerry constantly active, Galbreth calm and stationary). The exact nature of their relationship is unclear, their naive expressions belying the ominous connotations of the event.

After the concert in Houston, I met Shelley Hirsch, who had performed several songs accompanied by Roulette's David Weinstein on the same program. She expressed her admiration for Jerry's work and her high regard for him personally. And I met Michael Peranteau, who runs DiverseWorks, while Jerry and I were packing up the next day. We told him Karen and Michael were coming for a visit later that spring, and he assured us that whatever we might have heard about her temperament would probably be irrelevant to how she behaved as a house guest.

The subject of temperament had come up because of the fit Jerry had thrown the day before. He arrived at DiverseWorks to set up and rehearse and found nothing ready. (He had sent his tech list weeks earlier.) Not only were no preparations in evidence, he could find no one who even knew who was supposed to help. Whatever the nature of his explosion (it probably included a threat not to perform at all), it had the desired effect: everyone there scurried to get the job done. Jerry was now apologizing to Michael for the spectacle he had made of himself.

It turned out that we had a very pleasant time with Karen and Michael indeed. They enjoyed relaxing in the country, indulging in a much-needed respite from their heavy traveling schedule.

Karen and Jerry made plans for their upcoming "Finley-Hunt Report" at the Kitchen (to be funded, in part, by the National Endowment for the Arts). We took them to the (then) "world's largest truck stop," Rip Griffin's ("Rip on In"), halfway between Canton and Dallas on the Interstate. Karen enjoyed looking at the Texas souvenirs; we all stood gawking at the TV room filled with truckers in recliners. And we visited The Sixth Floor, the Kennedy museum in downtown Dallas, in the old schoolbook depository building. Karen and Michael had just seen the Oliver Stone movie, and Michael was reading a new book on the assassination. Jerry and I enjoyed the memorabilia on display there because it so effectively transported us to our young adult years when anything seemed possible.

We headed back to the library where we had parked and got caught in a sudden rainstorm. For shelter, we ducked into the grand Adolphus Hotel and sat in the opulently furnished lobby drinking gourmet coffee and eating finger sandwiches. I was charmed by the irony of it—seeing a couple of subversive enfants terribles like Karen and Jerry in Yuppieland, Brahms' intermezzi being played unobtrusively on the grand piano across the room. Jerry collected all our rock candy-coated coffee stirrers to take home for use in some as yet undetermined project.

The "Finley-Hunt Report" was to be a parody of TV talk shows, including songs sung to her own texts by Karen and with music written and performed by Jerry. There were to be "remotes" as well. After Karen and Michael left, Jerry rented a camcorder and asked me to tape some footage of him standing in the crimson clover beside our road 'talking' with Karen, who was to tape her part of the planned dialogue from beside the highway between Boulder and Denver, Colorado. Befitting a Texan, Jerry held a gun quite unselfconsciously while he talked about clothing styles and mock meats; at one point, just as he was insouciantly scratching his chin with the gun's barrel, a couple of men in a pick-up passed and one of them yelled an incredulous "Hey!" at what he saw.

These fellows really would have been startled if they could have seen what I was taping down the hill. Jerry, in his father's paisley silk smoking jacket, took us on a tour of the property.

We had a comparison of toilets: the one we built in the

barn house and the conventional ones in the brick house—in each case, Jerry raising the lids and the seats with the ubiquitous gun. We had a lesson in horse-feeding, Jerry still in his smoking jacket but now wearing a pollen mask, berating the horses and mules and donkey for their shameful greed in trying to get the most carrots, their total lack of "Christian ethics." Jerry pointed out the weeds and the fire ant mounds and the gopher holes using the tip of his mother's parasol. Throughout it all, I was beside him, recording everything for posterity.

My favorite part of the tape was the gazebo sequence. Jerry sat in the swing and delivered a monologue, through his mask, on life in the country ("so here I am, allergic to my own land"). I made a slow circle around him as he talked and swung, and when I passed behind him, he launched into an inventory of the natural vs the man-made materials around him, pointing things out by means of his handy handgun: "natural. . .synthetic. . .natural. . .synthetic.

The three performances of "The Finley-Hunt Report" in June went well. Karen called Jerry to read him the ***New York Times*** review. People especially seemed to like the songs ("My Own Memories," about rape, and "Road Kill," about other forms of violence); Karen's hard-driving delivery was balanced and ultimately intensified by Jerry's businesslike handling of sound sources. All three audiences were, I understand, much taken by the video footage we had made of life on the ranch.

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We had another couple visit us in the summer: our young friends Peter de Rooden and Ria van Bakel, from Leiden. Peter and Jerry had kept up a steady correspondence, mostly in Dutch, since their meeting at the Apollohuis. Peter had been to New York on business, but Ria had never been to the U.S., and they were both curious about life in the sparsely settled Southwest. They were to spend several days with us in Canton at the beginning and end of their trip, and they planned to rent a car in Dallas and drive to New Mexico and Arizona for a week in the middle of their stay.

We met them at the airport in Houston late one hot afternoon for the drive back to Canton. Their fair complexions flushed as soon as they stepped into the near-100° parking lot, and the whole time they were here, I never saw them in anything but shorts and the coolest shirts and tops they had. With their blond hair, European features, and Dutch accent, they drew attention wherever they went—beginning with the Dairy Queen midway between Houston and Canton, where you enter at the big wooden dog ("hungry as a") and exit at the pig ("ate like a").

Ria and I put up with a lot of talk about 01 lie Bommel and Tom Poes. As we had Karen and Michael, Jerry and I took Peter and Ria to Rip Griffin's, where Peter photographed the scores of 18-wheelers in the parking lot. Jerry carried them to the Kimball Museum in Ft. Worth one Sunday, leaving me to work my four hours at the library; when they returned to pick me up, I gave them a short tour. Then we met Rod and Sharon for dinner at a Tex-Mex restaurant. I aired up the tires on my two bikes and sent them off one morning with a map of the county roads. And we took them for pizza and beer at the (Asian) Indian-owned Mr. Pizza in Gun Barrel City ("We Shoot Straight With You"), near Cedar Creek Lake.

After their adventures in New Mexico and Arizona—which included Ria's hitting a traffic sign with their rented car on an Indian reservation and getting into trouble for it with the tribal police—we took them for a brief tour of Central Texas before their flight home from Houston. We stayed in an old motel in La Grange for a couple of nights, and one evening we attended a chamber music concert at Round Top, where a summer conservatory attracts students and teachers from all over the world. After the concert we drove back to La Grange, but our young guests were hardly ready for bed.

Since there was nothing open in town, we followed the directions given us by a convenience store clerk to a country- and-western bar just outside the city limits. Jerry and I stood by the fellow on the sound mixer and watched Peter and Ria dance, right in there with all the cowboy boots and hats, the big-buckled belts and sequined blouses. We must have been as much of an attraction for the regulars as they were for us. (At one point the man at the mixer had to reach around the machine to make some adjustment, and since Jerry and I were standing in his way, he excused himself with "Pardon me, boys—or girls—or whatever you are." It was said just politely and quietly enough to be ignored.)

The next night the three of them left me to hear another concert at Round Top while they drove into San Antonio for the evening. It worried me that Jerry might have to do a lot of driving in heavy traffic, but I picked up Peter's hint that he was willing to help drive and was relieved. I know Peter and Ria were a little

concerned about Jerry's health. Peter remarked at how thin he had become, and they both saw several manifestations of his irritability, aggravated by the extreme heat and the allergens in the air.

We had agreed to meet at the gazebo just outside the entrance to the concert hall, at about 10 or so, when the concert would be over. By 11 p.m. I had still seen no sign of the car, and I panicked.

I called the motel in La Grange, but they hadn't been there. I was worried that they might have had an accident (neither Peter nor Ria had had much experience driving) or that Jerry had gotten sick; would they be able to reach anyone at Round Top to get word to me? I stood there waiting helplessly another half hour or so, staring out into the darkness, straining to catch a glimpse of any distant moving light. The only relief to the void was the occasional sound of a mosquito or a cicada.

Then they pulled up, Peter driving. Everything was fine—they were just late, having underestimated the time it took to return and being delayed in a catfish restaurant on the way back. The concert hadn't been over long, I lied.

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My nephew Paul Michael's turn finally came to spend a summer week in Texas. He was now thirteen, and I was eager to remake his acquaintance. The last time we'd had a day together was almost two years earlier, when I took him to Spokane while visiting Judy and her family in Sandpoint. We saw a school class on its way to a special presentation at the large Omni theater there, and one of the teachers allowed us to tag along at the end of the line and gain admission. Afterwards, we took turns reading aloud chapters of Joseph Krumgold's ***And Now Miguel*** beside the river.

Jerry and I picked him up at the airport. We stopped at the grocery store in Kaufman on our way to Canton to give him a chance to lay in a supply of his favorite foods. He marched to the produce aisle and selected a couple of big bags of washed and trimmed salad greens, explaining that he was "eating healthy now." He also stopped by the Little Debbie display and put several kinds of cupcakes and cookies in our basket. He started on the Little Debbie snacks on the drive from Kaufman to Canton, but the salad greens languished in the refrigerator the whole week he was here.

Although Paul Michael could have slept on the futon in the barn house, I thought he would be more comfortable in the guest bedroom in the brick house. I was wrong. The first morning he was here, I had just gotten up and was shaving when Jerry and Paul Michael came in. "Your little guest's awake," Jerry announced.

Sure enough, he had been uneasy in a strange room with everything so quiet around him (Jerry, working all night in his studio in the adjacent room, had used headphones). He hadn't slept—had even grown so desperate as to go out to the car to watch the digital clock on the dashboard count down the time until morning.

It took him, it seemed, most of the week he was here to catch up on his sleep. We drove to Rockwall to have lunch with Aunt Hazel and Uncle Henry, and he was so lethargic sitting on their couch he could barely take part in the conversation. On our way to lunch, we stopped by a used furniture store so Henry could make arrangements to have some filing cabinets delivered. To our amazement—and Henry's eternal delight in retelling the story—Paul Michael had found a bed on display and gone to sleep on it. The next day I took him to work with me; we agreed to meet at the library entrance at noon for lunch. When after 20 minutes or so he hadn't showed up, I had him paged. He had fallen asleep at a reading table on the seventh floor where he had gone to look at his parents' high-school yearbooks.

We made a trip to Sea World near San Antonio, and he talked me into riding one of the roller coasters there. When we got to the departure point, after a long wait in line listening to the repeated warnings ("Pregnant ladies, people with heart trouble, anyone with any reservations should not ride this ride"), Paul Michael himself was ready to back out. Remarkably, I encouraged him, as I put my glasses safely in my shirt pocket. And it really wasn't so bad, thanks to my myopia helping me sustain the impression that it wasn't really happening (a kind of "virtual reality"). Neither of us, though, wanted to ride a second time.

Paul Michael and I had some good talks and renewed our friendship during our week together. One afternoon I took him to the store to show him how to select and buy condoms with spermicide; I had become sexually active by his age or soon after, and there was no reason to assume he wouldn't soon be, and the risks for him were so much higher.

He also clearly enjoyed Jerry's company: they spent quite 'a bit of time with the synthesizers in Jerry's studio, and Jerry showed him one or two of the horror

movies he had recently taped.

Since Jamie was due for orientation in just another week, Paul Michael decided to stay on with his Aunt Ann in Dallas and ride back with his father when Paul brought Jamie and her things. I got Jamie's room ready, and Jerry and I waited with some apprehension for the adventure ahead.

It began dramatically enough. When Jamie arrived after the long car trip from North Idaho, she was obviously in trouble of some kind. Nerves had caused a rash to break out on her face, and she had chewed her fingernails down to the quick. She was considerably overweight, and she seemed to peer through her glasses (one lens of which was missing, having "blown out the window" on the trip down) with suspicion at everyone and everything. Jerry and I both were a little alarmed, but we could see how important it was going to be for us to help her make a go of things here.

We got her school uniform and books and public library card; I took a picture of her standing in front of the handsome main building of the Ursuline Academy (not far from the statue of Christ that had worn a brassiere one year, thanks to some senior girls). While I attended the 'orientation for new parents (where I renewed my acquaintance with Anne Freeman), she visited with the school counselor in the lounge.

On the evening before the first full day of school, I took her to the family she was to stay with during the school week.

(Driving her in every day from Canton, almost two hours away from her school in Dallas, would have been impractical.) I had liked the Mantheiys right away, from the first visit I had with them to plan Jamie's coming. They had a daughter in Jamie's class, and they had two others who had been graduated from Ursuline. And although they were a traditional Catholic family, they never gave me any reason to believe they were uncomfortable with the unusual nature of the arrangements surrounding Jamie's being here—in particular, the two "uncles" who often came together to pick Jamie up on Thursdays or Fridays or return her Sunday nights.

They were, I think, a little uncomfortable with Jamie, though. Although sometimes shy, she can be quite outspoken, and she articulated liberal views in the conservative Ursuline community. Most of the girls and their families supported George Bush in the election of 1992, but she (as were Jerry and I) was in favor of Bill Clinton. She told me about several angry exchanges she had with some of the girls at lunchtime. Jamie is also an independent spirit (and a brave one, too, as her coming here certainly showed). Regular schedules and organization bedevil her, and Mrs. Mantheiy complained to her and to me about her oversleeping and her cluttered room. Jamie has a facility to lose herself in a book or music, tuning everything and everyone out; this can be irritating, and threatening, to those who have her in their care. More than once she left papers here that she needed in school, and she'd forget to tell me about variations in her schedule until it was almost too late for me to change mine to accommodate them. What was especially hard for me to see, as an ex-teacher, was how she'd put off work until it was too late to do it well.

The more I saw of Ursuline, however, the more it reminded me of Cistercian Prep; these are schools that train for success, and they function best when that success is defined narrowly and conventionally. By the second month Jamie was chafing under the constraints of the school and the Mantheiys— just as she was under the rough-textured plaid skirt of her uniform that she immediately changed for her comfortable shorts in the car every time I picked her up after school.

Jerry and I discussed Jamie's being here and the effect that it was having on all of us often. He saw earlier than I was prepared to admit that Jamie wouldn't want to stay at Ursuline. When she began talking about going back home at the end of the fall semester, I encouraged her to wait until Thanksgiving, at least, before making up her mind.

And I received proof one night that staying here was not what she needed to do. We'd called Idaho to visit with everyone there, and I left the room when Jamie was talking with her father about the upcoming presidential election. Paul and Judy supported Ross Perot; Jamie had tried to sway them to Clinton several times. Jerry and I were in the living room, and when I thought it was surely time for Jamie to have joined us, I went back to check on her and found her crying on her bed. "He wouldn't even listen to my reasons," she sobbed. I had never seen her more miserable. I called back and told Paul how inconsolable she was; he was surprised and talked with her again and made her feel better. But it became clear to me that Jamie needed to be with her family, to work things out. At 15 she needed still to be in dialogue with her father and mother.

We told the school and the Mantheiys a little before Thanksgiving that Jamie would be returning home at

the end of the semester. There was a relaxation of tension all around. Jamie continued to work for good grades and became friends with the Mantheiys, now that some of the pressure was off them. She had made friends already with the staff of the children's center at the library where she ran the projector for Sunday films. And she made one close friend at school, Pia, whom she invited to spend the weekend with her in Canton several times. (They made gingerbread men to give as Christmas presents one afternoon, and Jerry cleaned dough, he said, off the counters and the floor for days afterward.)

We tried to give Jamie as many opportunities as we could to see Texas and experience the cultural events here. Some efforts were more successful than others. We had car trouble on our way to Houston for a Saturday night concert and had to return just an hour into the trip; while my mechanic repaired the car, we ate the picnic lunch we'd prepared for the journey. By the time the car was ready, it was too late to make it to the concert.

I took Jamie to a Dallas Symphony Orchestra concert, in the beautiful new Meyerson Center. We had cheap seats on the choral terrace, just behind and above the cellos and basses. During the first movement of the Brahms violin concerto, Jamie whispered to me that she wasn't feeling well. Her face was flushed, and the stage was warm. We tiptoed out to the restroom area, and I stood anxiously with an usher waiting for Jamie to come out. She did, shortly, and said she felt better after splashing water on her face. We got back to our seats just in time for the final chords of the concerto—which Jamie later told me she had found boring (nauseatingly so, perhaps).

We took her to Austin one weekend where we all three enjoyed Francis Ford Coppola's ***Dracula.*** The next day, we had lunch with the son of composer Jim Fulkerson and his wife, Mary, the dancer who had invited Jerry to teach at the Hogeschool in Arnhem the previous fall. Jamie was quite taken with David, who had come to Austin to learn to play the guitar like Stevie Ray Vaughan. I have a picture of Jerry and the handsome, long-haired David, with Jamie standing between them and looking as though she were having a very good time indeed.

She didn't have such a good time the weekend we took her to Edgewood. This little town a few miles north of Canton has created a village of restored old buildings arranged in such a way as to convey what life was like in a small Texas town in the early 1900s. One beautiful autumn day the three of us wandered in and out of a country store, a blacksmith's shop, a barber shop, and a gift shop where a lady in a period costume was demonstrating weaving. There weren't many young people on the grounds, and Jamie, though patient with us and indulgent of our interests, was clearly bored.

We were heading back to the car when we passed an old train on display. We walked through the passenger car and on back to the caboose. Jerry's manner and mood changed suddenly, and he told us he had just realized that the car was exactly like the one he had ridden in with his grandfather near Mart one summer, 40 years ago. He sat down in one of the trainmen's seats, and on her cue, Jamie and I left him alone there for a few minutes, giving him the space he needed to savor the memories that had so unexpectedly (and uncharacteristically) overtaken him.

This was only one of the many times during Jamie's stay with us when she demonstrated extraordinary sensitivity to the feelings of others. Jerry was having good days and bad days. Although he appeared to be free of infection during most of the fall, he complained about his allergies and suffered headaches and the sense of "a weight pressing down on me." He was no longer smoking (at least as far as I knew), but he had begun using chewing tobacco made in Denmark: "Oliver Twist, Senior-dense plugs that he would keep between his gums and cheeks and finally deposit in ashtrays where they piled up in great numbers. He had long since given up on tranquilizers because he "couldn't get any work done" on them.

So Jamie witnessed some rather marked mood swings, and she sometimes saw what might have looked like his abuse of me. He and I had some heated exchanges in the car, and Jamie sat in the backseat with her headphones on, our flare-ups certainly audible in front of the rock and roll she was listening to. Usually, though, when Jerry felt bad, he became merely hypercritical; Jamie and I both could easily ignore this because we knew it originated in the frustration he felt at his own inability to do things.

He'd walk through the kitchen where Jamie was helping me prepare dinner and point out a better way to do something; as he left, Jamie would turn to me with just a suspicion of a sweet smirk on her face.

During the early fall he was practicing the piano for a recital he was to give at Paul and Oz' house in November. He was planning to play some pieces for prepared piano by John Cage, the Pinto sonata we both loved, and some Zez Confrey tunes. Each was difficult

in its own way: making the mechanical sounds of the Cage musical, interpreting Pinto's sometimes vague musical notation, and executing the tricky passages of the Confrey. Jamie got to hear some piano fits as well.

But she saw what all of that was for on the afternoon of the concert. She and I sat on our folding chairs in Paul and Oz' sunny home with the 50-or-so other guests, all of us captivated by Jerry's conversation and mesmerized by his music. With insight and wit, he introduced the pieces, and after performing them, he accepted our applause with his usual humility, even apologizing for some passages that hadn't gone as well as he thought they should have.

After the recital, the guests gathered in the game room for refreshments—just as we had on so many similar afternoons over the last two decades. A few people kept Jerry at the keyboard with their questions and comments about the music. The others cornered me in the back, expressing their concern about Jerry's health, about how emaciated he looked and how short of breath he was. I told them—by now a small crowd had gathered around me—what Canton's new family doctor, whom we had recently seen, had diagnosed: chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), a progressively debilitating condition consisting of both emphysema and bronchitis and, in Jerry's case, made worse by allergies. I tried to assure everyone, myself included, that we were on top of it—that Jerry had quit smoking, and that we were taking every precaution to protect Jerry from respiratory infections that would further damage his lungs. We had just bought a book on living with COPD, and it had given us several useful suggestions as to how to make the indoor environment more healthful and life generally easier. As I talked, and sipped sherry, I caught a glimpse of Jamie standing in the next room visiting with Ron and Joan's son, Dorian. The happy (and beautiful) look on her face was exactly like the one my camera had recorded when she stood between Jerry and David in Austin.

Jerry seemed to go into a decline after the recital. He wasn't happy, he told me, with his performance—part particularly of the Confrey. "It was like my brain wasn't working well enough, wasn't concentrating." Although no one in the audience I talked with admitted being aware of this, I myself had the feeling that Jerry was having a harder time playing the music than he should have, or than he usually would have. He was probably suffering from some oxygen deprivation: what he complained of was the difficulty he had "getting all the way through" the pieces.

Jamie and I would come home to find him still in his robe and slippers. More and more often we arrived hungry and found that he had done nothing to get dinner started. She gamely pitched in to help on these occasions, as Jerry sat nearby visiting with us and playing with Mary and Frances, dangling their Cat Dancer toy (a wire with cardboard strips attached to one end) in front of them. Most days we'd find the mail still in the box on the road. We'd get it and bring it down, and although most of it was for him, he showed little interest in it.

Not so the proof copy of the CD ***Ground*** that we brought him one day. As there had been on all the Irida records, there were a couple of typographical errors in the CD program notes that Jerry found unacceptable (including "pianforte"). It would have been prohibitively expensive to reprint the entire program booklet just to correct a couple of errors, so Jerry asked Joseph Celli to ship the lot of CDs to us and we'd have self-adhesive labels printed to cover the mistakes.

Before she left for Idaho, Jamie helped me affix these labels to the hundreds of CDs that arrived by UPS one day. We had to remove the shrink-wrap and take the "jewel case" apart to get to the portions of text that needed correcting. Jerry did a few to show us how, but he didn't feel like doing many. Jamie sat for hours at the card table we had set up for the project systematically processing the CDs, looking up from time to time to the TV across the room.

I am grateful to Jamie for her help in this and so much else while she was here. She gave me moral support, and she lifted Jerry's spirits and helped him pass the time—particularly during the late hours, when they watched TV and movies on videotape together.

She also helped me understand a little better what being young today means, and what being a young girl is like. She taught me to be more careful with bleach in the laundry (after I ruined a pair of her socks), and she showed me how to tie long laces in double bows to prevent tripping. And she set good examples before me, like the day we waited at a traffic light and read the marquee in front of a Baptist church that announced an upcoming discussion of homosexuality.

"How to spot a queer," I said, cynically.

She replied: "Well, at least they're talking about it."

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At first I thought it was a dream: "Stephen Stephen"—

I kept hearing, lying in bed in the barn house, my name not so much called as spoken, whispered almost. Then alarm jerked me from the bed toward the sound: not in the room, nor in the next room ("Stephen"), but outside, a few feet along the walkway between the houses. "Help me... I can't... breathe," Jerry whispered.

I got him to the house (he had to pause after each step), and we made it to the bathroom, where I turned on the electric heater. Then I called an emergency medical number for advice and was told to have him sit down, bend slightly forward, and inhale steam.

When the breathing problem eased—and it would, the nurse promised—I should get him to a doctor. Sure enough, my little clothes steamer seemed to help, and in a couple of hours we were on our way to the Canton clinic, planning to arrive at about the time it opened.

Because he believed he was near death that cold January morning, Jerry told me on way to town how much he had always loved me, what I had meant to his life. I tried not to cry, but failed, and I told him how much he had meant to me all our years together, how he had opened up the world for me, and made me a better person—but I also said I didn't think he was dying, that we were going to be able to get help. During the 10 months he had yet to live, we never made those speeches again; they never seemed necessary.

The Canton doctor listened to Jerry's lungs and explained that the wheezing, gurgling sounds that we were hearing were being caused by the difficulty of moving air through diseased tissue, now further complicated by an influenza-like infection. He arranged for Jerry to be admitted to the Mother Frances Hospital in Tyler, and we drove there immediately (after having a tire changed on my car: we'd come out of the clinic to discover a flat).

Jerry was in the hospital for three days, on an intravenous glucose drip with antibiotics and taking steroids. A pulmonologist, Dr. Gass, ordered lung function tests; he later told us that Jerry had lost over half his lungs' capacity to emphysema. "Make walking your religion," he said. Nothing could be done to reverse the deterioration (now that Jerry had stopped smoking), but Jerry could indirectly help his weakened lungs by strengthening the rest of his body, thus asking less of them.

Dr. Gass stressed that Jerry had to be extremely careful to avoid further infections; each one would only damage his lungs more. There were medications that dilate the bronchial passages to help keep the airway open, and a respiratory therapist would train Jerry in their use. (The-blue, hand-held inhalers with their small bellows became commonplace in our lives over the months to come, usurping the role cigarettes had played, in a sad irony, by giving Jerry something to do with his hands and mouth.)

Jerry liked Dr. Gass—his professionalism, his candor, and his good looks. He'd come in, tweak one of Jerry's big toes, and stand at the side of the bed, listening closely and growing more and more curious about the atypical patient he had. He very quickly read the nature of Jerry's and my relationship and frequently addressed me as the person who would be looking after Jerry. (Soon after we had been admitted to the hospital's emergency room, Jerry agreed to undergo an HIV test; the hospital records reflected the negative results, and at the same time these results allayed the staff's fear of AIDS, they announced our identity as a gay couple.)

By the morning of the day he was released, Jerry had begun to feel much better. The steroids had improved his appetite: he ate the vegetarian meals the hospital provided and a good portion of what I brought from home each day for myself. Seeing his color improve and the old animation return, I realized how sick he had been, and for how long. We were both encouraged that a crisis had been put behind us, and that we could manage Jerry's chronic condition by prophylaxis, medication, and exercise therapy. Dr. Gass even saw no reason why Jerry could not give the concert he'd been asked to in New York in late January, if he felt like it.

There was one troubling element, however: the X rays and CAT scan of Jerry's chest showed a spot of some kind in the upper portion of one of Jerry's lungs. The radiologist's report, which we read later, suggested that this spot be monitored. Dr. Gass believed this was probably a calcified granuloma, the result of a succession of pulmonary infections over the past several years.

What we could do right away was to get Jerry enrolled in a pulmonary rehabilitation program, and since Mother Frances wasn't presently offering one, we signed Jerry up at the University of Texas at Tyler Health Center, a teaching hospital that used to be a tuberculosis sanitorium and thus has a large pulmonary clinic.

As soon as he returned from his New York trip, we'd begin the exercise therapy.

Thanks to our good friend Sally Bowden, Jerry was

able to get through the New York concert, a performance of his ***Birome (fixture): topogram*** (using a New York actor) for the World Music Institute. Sally arranged to have Jerry picked up at the airport, and she saw to it that he never had to carry his bags or equipment up or down the stairs to her and Ted's apartment. She also enforced rest, planning all their meals and running all the errands. He could not have made it without her.

Shortly after he returned, we went to K-Mart and bought his exercise gear: tennis shoes, a sweat suit, and an athletic bag to ' carry them in. Trey, the exercise physiologist, outlined a program combining weight lifting and aerobics, and I, as the "significant other," was invited to join in. We made two trips a week to Tyler, having committed ourselves to an 8-week training period, after which we would be on our own (though always able to use the gym there without charge).

We were both amused at what we had gotten ourselves into (we could afford to be amused because Jerry was feeling so much better). Jerry and his "trainer," Trey, hit it off at once: his cynical banter notwithstanding, Jerry was trying hard, and Trey could see it. We began to see the same faces on our regular visits, and we sometimes chatted with a couple of fellows in both the cardiac and the pulmonary rehab programs. But, above all, it was work: we both ended up sweaty and always took a shower afterward (though never together).

This was a hopeful time. We had been badly frightened, but there had been a reprieve, and we were determined to deserve it.

In a letter to Jacqueline (his last), Jerry wrote:

> *Unless something happens to alter or interrupt the plans, I'll do a few more concerts through this season in Canada & New York, then Holland in June for a month-long installation in Rotterdam with a friend Paul Panhuysen. I'm adding a new computer system—this health problem and its expenses have actually convinced me to spend the money and do the work while I've still got the money and health to do it—if all goes well, then all goes well: if things don't go so well: you're on your way, down the path....*

We began to do everything together again, from making our trips to Tyler to running the simplest errands. We spent a lot of time talking. Sometimes we watched TV, or movies on videotape. Things that might once have seemed a waste of time did so no longer: we took rides, we went shopping, we ate out.

One early spring day after our workout at the hospital gym, we drove 20-or-so miles northeast of Tyler to Gladewater, where Helen Lee over thirty years earlier had had thousands of daffodils planted in her husband's memory. (A boxcar full of bulbs had arrived from Holland in the fall of 1960, accompanied by a representative of the Dutch exporter, here to oversee the planting.)

We followed the signs along narrower and narrower county roads until a curve revealed the sight of 20 acres of brilliant yellow and white, with a small lake in the center. We were alone in the park. We walked along the path, marveling at the sight of so many flowers massed together as thickly as the tulips are in the fields we'd seen in Holland. We strolled out onto the pier where two chairs had been placed, for fishing no doubt. Jerry was a little winded, so we sat there a few minutes, admiring the daffodils' reflection in the water. What a wonderful way to remember someone, we agreed.

Jerry was never very good at being sick; he always considered illness an affront, then a bother, and he tried to go on with his usual activities, never resting enough, and, perhaps, prolonging the period of recuperation. His work habits, like his conversation, were not long focused on a single project: he was up and off, onto something else, then back. Living with an ever- diminishing oxygen supply and its consequent debilities was extraordinarily frustrating for him. COPD turns energy into money: you have to save to be able to spend.

With the help of the books I brought from the library, and the telephone counsel of the nurses on the Lung Line switchboard in Denver, Colorado (a service of the National Jewish Center for Immunology and Respiratory Medicine), we were gradually learning to cope with his condition. Whenever exertion brought about shortness of breath, Jerry snapped his fingers to a steady beat to facilitate regular breathing and the return of the normal respiratory cycle. We learned to allow for periods of rest between activities: getting up could not be immediately followed by leaving the house, getting dressed was something to rest up for and to rest from, and we couldn't make love just before dinner.

The planning and patience required to live like this was contrary to Jerry's nature, and he experienced long periods of depression.

One of the requirements of participating in the pulmonary rehab program at UT Tyler was to be examined by a resident pulmonary specialist. We saw Dr. Idell, the head of the clinic, and he impressed us from the first visit with his knowledge and experience of lung conditions. Where Dr. Gass had apparently been content to release Jerry to exercise therapy and watchful waiting, Dr. Idell took a more active, interventionist role: he prescribed a variety of medications for Jerry to try in order to see just which ones helped his breathing the most, and he ordered more X rays and CAT scans and oximetry and blood gas tests to learn just where the tissue degeneration was and what exact effect it had had on Jerry's ability to utilize oxygen. We were glad, at first, to have made the change in doctors, although the state-supported Tyler clinic was filled with sad cases: mostly elderly people in wheelchairs and on oxygen, the majority of whom began smoking as soon as they left the hospital.

Dr. Idell was particularly intent on identifying the suspicious mass in one of Jerry's lungs. He ordered still more X rays and a localized CAT scan, and he asked Jerry to collect and mail in sputum specimens. (There had occasionally been some blood in what Jerry coughed up after his hospitalization, but we understood that this sometimes happened as a result of respiratory infections and their treatment.) Above all, Dr. Idell urged Jerry to undergo a bronchoscopy; only then, by actually looking into the lungs and extracting tissue samples for analysis, would we know what was there. Jerry read about the procedure and was disturbed by the risks it entails of causing further infection and spreading malignant cells, in case cancer is found. Moreover, his Amsterdam friend Joel Ryan's partner Greg, suffering from AIDS, had said that having to overcome the gag reflex to be able to swallow the bronchoscope had been an especially miserable ordeal.

We made an extra trip to Tyler in March to attend classes during Pulmonary Education Day, hoping to learn even more about how we could cope with Jerry's illness and make it easier for him to get his work done. In the morning session, we were shown a variety of products, from devices used to pick up objects without having to bend over to cushions for supporting the back. There was a session on how to correlate breathing with stooping and how to overcome shortness of breath by emphasizing exhalation (in order to expel stale air, thus making more room for the fresh air then inhaled).

On our lunch break, we ran into Dr. Idell in the hall. "Uh oh. Dr. Death," Jerry said; Dr. Idell didn't visibly react, although he certainly heard the epithet. He had in fact come specifically to find us, having taken the trouble to check the class enrollment lists in the supposition that We might be there that day. He led us into his office and explained that the sputum analysis indicated the presence of a large number of squamous cells that might or might not mean cancer, but a bronchoscopy, he felt, was even more strongly indicated.

Jerry immediately asked what would happen, what could be done for him, if cancer were found. Dr. Idell outlined a six-to-eight- week course of radio- and chemotherapy, requiring five treatments a week; surgical removal of a tumor or tumors would probably not be possible, although a lung might have to be collapsed to help prevent the spread of malignant cells. Jerry then asked what the quality of his life would be, how the treatments would affect him. "Well, of course, you'll be weaker—I would say the overall quality of life would be reduced, but you could handle that."

Lung function tests at this time were measuring 43-47 percent of normal capacity. Any treatments would further reduce that.

At Jerry's request, I called Paul Srere, who found a colleague on the faculty of the UT Health Science Center in Dallas who agreed to look at Jerry's test results and give us a second opinion. We took the radiologist's interpretations, along with the original films, from all the tests done at both Tyler hospitals since January in to Dallas and left them. The doctor called early the next morning, and since Jerry was still asleep, I talked with him. He couldn't say definitely that there was cancer, but to rule it out, he'd recommend the bronchoscopy. If cancer were present and nothing done about it, Jerry could still have a couple of relatively good years, he added.

We talked about what this third lung specialist had said and about what our choices might be and might mean all that day. When I woke up the next morning, I found a long letter to me on my desk:

> *Stephen:*
>
> *I've spent some time working tonight: mostly I've been trying to work out the...setup for the [new] computer, but it's also given me time to think some; because you'll be awake sooner,*
>
> *I want you to read this, because you may be the first line of defence for me in correcting*

what I believe is a false path:...I do not want to continue the visits to Tyler...I think it's best for me, and for you, and ultimately for us both, to stop all of this now and become very selective about each new step. As I've been working tonight, I've begun to realize that the only way I'll be able to have anything left of anything is to leave this mistaken path and go on the way I would have gone on if I had left Mother Frances and not started up on all of this: no new information has been obtained since I left there: all of the suspicions, worries, and questions that the original information from the hospital suggested haven't changed: only more concentrated and [more] carefully extracted and detailed questions about the oddities originally noted have been emphasized: I do understand the focus of all of this in terms of Idell's sense of responsibility and his professional integrity, but whether these concerns are accurate or not is, in my own situation, completely meaningless: there is no way that I can tolerate continuing to draw this out with the false expectations that something can, in some way, be done to avert or modify what may or may not happen: what <u>is</u> happening is that this is ruining both of our lives, both of us becoming involved in making judgements and guesses about possibilities and outcomes, all of this is something that I don't believe in and that can't really help you, and that can and will ultimately hurt us both much more than necessary, certainly more than is desirable for me.

You've heard me squeal before, you know how to handle that.

The way I have lived up to the visit to the hospital has been, clearly, too destructive, but my collapse has permanently changed that, and the only part of the past I would have wished to alter would have been my pursuit of a narrow dark self-destructive aspect in all my living until now there's no way to change that now, or to understand what caused it; even if it could be understood it wouldn't help: what I must do is deal with whatever happens in a sensible but situational day-at-a-time encounter, dealing with each circumstance and... situation as it occurs, not living constantly doing one thing after another trying to outguess nature and make something else happen which might or might not be useful, when both of the events are unspecified as to outcome: this is only compounding the problem with futile grasping in the air. I know some people are willing to engage in this kind of approach, but I think it's as much self-deception as the kind I'm willing to <u>live</u> with.

I called Dr. Idell's office and canceled an upcoming appointment. He called me right back and accused me of being "revenue neutral, " encouraging me to urge Jerry to undergo the bronchoscopy. We sent Trey a box of Aplets and Cotlets fruit corlections with a note that we'd be putting to use all that he had taught us in the athletic center in Athens. Jerry had already sent Dr. Idell a copy of his CD ***Ground.***

*

The effect of Jerry decision was immediate: he began spending long hours at the new Amiga computer, and he bought a laser printer to make fair copies of his pieces. Because he had just received a contract to write music for a new community college series on health (he half-jokingly volunteered to be interviewed for the segment on emphysema), he felt he could justify the expense of a new Kurzweil synthesizer. He worked late every night.

In addition, his conversation was now more about his work than his worries. He told me about a new piece he was planning, ***Hemisphere,*** that would use close-up video scans of a human body which would be stored on a laser disc and then accessed in performance, along with music, by means of a computer interface.

He was preparing for concerts in New York (with Petr Kotik's S.E.M. Ensemble) and in Houston, and he and Paul Panhuysen were corresponding about their joint installation in Rotterdam. (The concert in Canada fell through; they weren't able to offer as much money as Jerry needed to cover his expenses and have any left over.) He also remained in touch with Karen Finley, Maria Blondeel , Michael Schell, and Laetitia Sonami, planning future work.

Above all else, though, we were both looking forward to three weeks in Holland in June. This trip became a goal and a symbol.

Together we made two weekly visits to the Cain

Center in Athens, exercising for about an hour and a half. Jerry sometimes made a third trip on Sunday afternoons (while I was at the library), and he made friends with a bright and good-looking young man working part-time as a desk clerk there while studying political science at UT Tyler.

This gym at the Cain Center was an upbeat contrast to the rehab facility in Tyler. To the accompaniment of loud rock and roll, young people from the community college in Athens came in, often with friends, to pump up, slim down, and socialize. Older adults joined them occasionally, and one day I ran into a fellow who had taught in prison the same semester I had.

Jerry and I suited out in the locker room, stuffing our street clothes, athletic bags, and valuables into one locker that I secured with a combination lock, and warmed up, walked on the treadmills, rode the exercise bikes, and lifted free weights.

While Jerry stepped onto and off an elevated platform, I used the NordicTrack and did sit-ups. We both worked hard; Jerry conscientiously added time when he had to lower resistance settings, and he always finished the number of repetitions he had set for himself even if it meant having to take short rest breaks on the way there. As things grew easier, as his strength improved, we felt more confident about being able to make the trip abroad.

Our friend Mark flew down from Philadelphia to spend a few days with us in May. He and Alan had broken up but had remained good friends. Mark was still teaching paralegal studies and enjoying it, and he was working on a textbook on the subject.

Jerry and I had always felt completely at ease around Mark, and we were each able and happy to confide in him our concerns about Jerry's health, and about me as well. Mark went to the gym with us one day. Another afternoon he and I waited in a Dallas recording studio while Jerry used their piano to record some music for ***Haramand Plane,*** the new CD he was working on for Nonsequitur in Albuquerque.

Mark took a picture of Jerry and me standing at the studio's reception desk and visiting with the wife of the man who had started the business years ago. Jerry had been a regular customer over the years, and both his music and his manner probably made a welcome change for them from the usual clientele working on commercials or laying down tracks for what they hope will be country-and-western or rhythm-and-blues hits. His friends at the studio noted the difference in Jerry's appearance, and the photograph clearly shows the big Ziploc bag of medicines, inhalers, masks, and tissues he now carried everywhere. The subject of health inevitably came up, and Mrs. Cunningham remarked that her father had died of emphysema. (This same studio, Real-to-Reel, did the audio editing for ***Haramand Plane*** according to the instructions Jerry left and I delivered after his death. Although I asked for one several times, they never sent me a bill.)

Near the end of May, Jerry's medications had begun to run out. Our Canton doctor was reluctant to renew some of the prescriptions, so Jerry decided to return to Dr. Gass for a checkup. Also, as a result of a couple of frightening episodes of shortness of breath, we had started to think that Jerry might need supplemental oxygen (available only by prescription).

Dr. Gass remembered him, remembered us. I did most of the talking, at first, to save Jerry's breath, which was always a little short in stressful situations. I told him about what had happened at UT Tyler, about our cancer fears. "If the radiologist at Mother Frances had suspected cancer, he would have said so," Dr. Gass declared. Then he compared new X rays with those on file from five months earlier and examined Jerry. Everything seemed to be in line with the usual progress of the disease. The good news was that Jerry had suffered no further loss of lung function.

Then Jerry talked. He asked Dr. Gass point-blank if he were the one with Jerry's condition and cancer were discovered, would he do anything about it. "No," Dr. Gass replied. "Treatment wouldn't affect the prognosis, and it would make you sicker. If it were me, I'd go on as long as I could, and then I'd take a bottle of Jack Daniels and some pills down to the creek bed. My kids need a daddy." I remember these words clearly.

The nurse instructed me in the techniques of chest percussion ("You now have permission to beat on him") and then brought us the medication prescriptions, including one for supplemental oxygen. She also gave me her card, urging me to call if I had any questions or needed help.

We had one more chore to do before we could go to Holland relatively worry-free. Our first wills had been made almost 20 years ago, and it was time for new ones. What if something happened to one or both of us —an airplane accident, maybe; what would happen to Mary and Frances and to the property? Mrs. Hunt was no longer here to take over, to see to things.

We visited with our lawyer, Don McLean, the husband of a lady whom Jerry had met at SMU years earlier

when she was working for the contemporary performance group Voices of Change, and whom I got to know when she later came to work for the library. Since the law doesn't yet recognize gay "marriage," Jerry was especially concerned about securing my right to inherit the land. Don recommended that we undertake title research and include deed descriptions in the wills. Another of Jerry's worries was that he would lose control of his life and of his manner of dying, and Don helped us with living wills and powers of attorney to preclude that—to the extent we could.

Nine months later Don McLean was at my side before the county judge for the probate hearing. Everything legal worked out just as Jerry hoped it would.

*

Our last trip to Holland began auspiciously: from the window of our KLM flight from Houston to Amsterdam, the full moon looked so close it appeared for a while to be our destination. Jerry had a copy of ***De Telegraaf*** in his lap, thanks to the Netherlands-based flight crew. We knew Mary and Frances would be well cared for by Bob and Rany while we were gone.

And we had made all the arrangements we could in case of accident or illness. I had been assured that there was a supply of medical oxygen on board the plane, and I had the address of a medical equipment firm in Amsterdam that would rent us a portable cylinder if Jerry needed it. In addition to the oxygen use prescription, I had copies of our wills, powers of attorney, and living wills in my coat pocket—along with the names and telephone numbers of people in Dallas who could help in emergencies of any kind. When Mark was in Canton in May, he had offered to take Mary and Frances if something happened to both of us; he even said he'd drive down from Philadelphia to get them.

Since we had shipped ahead the electronics and other paraphernalia Jerry would need for his portion of the installation with Paul, we were able to travel relatively light. The first test of how well Jerry was going to be able to manage came at Schipol, where we had to carry our luggage long distances through an area of the airport undergoing expansion; he made it fine, as long as we stopped frequently to rest. We watched the workmen on one of these stops, but we moved along as soon as Jerry translated the hand-lettered sign one of them had tied to the chain-link fence: ***Aapjes kijken niet voederen*** ("Watch the monkeys, but don't feed them.")

Throughout our stay in Holland, in all the use of trains, trams, subways, and buses we made, we never consulted the timetables displayed in the stations: Jerry couldn't rush, so it was better just to get there when we could and wait. I often thought back to our trips to New York where Jerry, as most Manhattanites, 'disdained to stop at cross streets, while I saw each "Don't Walk" sign as an opportunity to stand and gawk.

By the time we'd traveled south to Eindhoven, we were both exhausted, but seeing Paul and Helene again and being so warmly welcomed by them energized us. If they were disturbed by Jerry's gaunt appearance and labored breathing, their faces didn't reflect it—at first. We sat and talked for a couple of hours before going to our apartment to rest. There had been a misunderstanding about some of the arrangements for the installation in Rotterdam, and Paul was no longer inclined to do it. (As best I gathered and remember, the misunderstanding had a political element.) What would take place, if Jerry agreed, would be an installation and opening concert at the Melkfabriek in s'Hertogenbosch; unfortunately, the opening could not be scheduled until a week after Jerry and I had planned to return home.

There was never a question of our being able to extend our stay. I had to get back to work, three weeks was plenty long for Bob and Rany to keep the cats, and any change in our advance- purchase airline tickets would have been costly. We all realized, too, that Jerry wasn't up to returning alone.

The disappointment about Rotterdam was somewhat lessened by the fact that we had come, as it turned out, for a three-week vacation in Holland with a rent-free apartment and Jerry's airfare paid, courtesy of the Apollohuis. Privately, I was relieved: the trips to and from Rotterdam to plan the installation, the eventual move there for a few days for the opening, and getting around in the city itself would all have been very difficult for Jerry.

S'Hertogenbosch is less than an hour by train from Eindhoven, and a few trips there and back near the end of our sojourn would be all that would be required for Jerry's share of the collaboration.

Jerry was less sanguine. He was so tired that first night that he couldn't sleep, and he had begun to feel worse and worse. Even the chest percussion treatment didn't help, as it usually did. By early daybreak (a little after 4 a.m. in June in the Netherlands), he had decided he wanted to fly back to Texas the next day: "It's a total

collapse: this trip, my work, my life."

I agreed to call KLM first thing in the morning.

But he felt better a few hours later, and we postponed returning (though it remained an option). How Jerry felt, physically and emotionally, seemed more and more to fluctuate between low points of despair and highs of "feeling almost good." The oxygenation of his blood was certainly a controlling factor, and rest and a good meal could sometimes affect that. Just as we had with the train timetables, we learned to avoid letting external factors set our goals: we could do what he felt like when he felt like it.

In a few days we settled into a comfortable routine at the Apollohuis. Before Jerry awoke, or got going, I wrote letters, read, or visited with Paul, who had come up to the studio adjacent to our apartment to give fresh greens to the members of his Grand Kanarie Band in their cages by the sunny windows. (Birdsong accompanied our stay there.) Later in the morning, when we saw how Jerry was doing, we'd make our plans for the day. We went to the bookshop or to the bakery or the market, when he felt like going with me; several times, we walked through the residential neighborhood near the Apollohuis, along streets with names like Nachtegaallaan and Pelikaanlaan and Koekoeklaan and Fazantlaan—to continue the ornithological theme so well begun by the resident canaries. '

In the afternoons, while I took the longer walk to Eindhoven's city center and back, Jerry and Paul visited and made plans for their joint work, ***Marten Toonder's Studio:*** an installation inspired by 01lie Bommel and Tom Poes and their adventures as much as by Toonder's old-fashioned Dutch and its grand style. Paul and Jerry read portions of a few of the Toonder books on tape, and this tape was to be played, randomly accessed, from within a double bass to be suspended in the center of the installation space at the Melkfabriek. Jerry's music would be heard in the space whenever it was triggered by infrared motion detectors —and the motion to be detected was that of four goats moving about in their pen on one side of the room. (We made several trips to oversee the setup of the installation toward the end of our stay; Jerry got to go to a farm near s'Hertogenbosch to help select the guest-artist goats.) During the opening concert, which Jerry and I would have to miss, Paul would play his long-stringed instrument, attached to the bass.

We usually had dinner with Paul and Helene, sometimes contributing a dish or two that I had prepared to the meal.

Several times we ate on the roof garden overlooking the neighbors' yards. Sappho and Paul's son, Raphael, joined us on two separate occasions. I went in to Eindhoven for concerts many evenings, and there were always events at the Apollohuis on weekends. We felt quite at home and kept ourselves pleasantly entertained. I always brought Dutch reading matter home to Jerry from my shopping trips, and he spent a lot of time with his dictionary, compiling questions about the language to ask Paul and Helene. He even did a little wiring for Paul.

I could see how concerned they were about his health. Paul always tried to make certain that Jerry really felt up to whatever might be on the day's agenda. He offered again and again to refrain from smoking in Jerry's presence, but Jerry wouldn't hear of it; like many Dutch people, Paul loves to smoke, and it was, after all, his own house. I had bought Jerry a little battery- operated fan (with fuchsia-colored rubber blades) for use on the plane in case he had breathing problems, and he used that once or twice to blow the smoke away.

Helene brought food up several times. One morning she knocked on our Dutch door with several pounds of fresh farmer's cheese, and she was always bringing us treats from the neighborhood bakery. She offered to wash our clothes with theirs, late at night when the electricity rates dropped, but we had so few I was able to hand wash them and hang them out to dry in a tiny courtyard behind the building. She told me once that seeing our socks, shirts, and underwear on the line each morning was a signal to her that I was up and Jerry was well enough for things to go on routinely.

We made a spectacle of ourselves on the stairway every other day. I hadn't been able to find a suitable gym in the area, so we exercised at home. We used bricks as free weights, and we did 30 minutes or so of stepping on the stairs. Guest artists, Paul and Helene and their friends, and the young man doing alternative military service at the Apollohuis (as Peter had done) passed us as they went up and down on their errands, hugely entertained not so much by the sight of two odd fellows, one wearing a sweatband, stepping up and down to the ticking of a timer, but by Jerry's sardonic comments about what he had been reduced to, the pointlessness of it all, etc., etc.

*

Holland is such a small country and the network of trains crisscrossing it is so well planned and efficient

that traveling from city to city rarely takes more than a couple of hours (unless, of course, you take a local train, a ***stoptrein,*** between distant points). Jerry and I were able to visit Utrecht, Amsterdam, and Leiden, taking advantage of the ***sneltreinen*** departing often from the busy station at Eindhoven.

We spent an afternoon in Utrecht with Jane Henry, the violinist who performed in ***Chimanzzi (olun): core*** on Jerry's ***Ground*** CD. I took a picture of him standing in front of a comic book vendor, with large cutouts of Heer Bommel and Tom Poes in the display window above his head. We also traveled to Amsterdam to meet Joel Ryan for dinner.

Peter and Ria invited us to stay a few days with them in Leiden, and we made the longest train journey of our trip one rainy day, riding comfortably through the countryside and seeing more windmills than we'd ever seen. Our young Dutch friends hadn't realized how sick Jerry was until they saw how much he had declined since their visit to Texas. Peter quickly learned our pattern of frequent rests, and as he took us on walking tours of Leiden, he regularly proposed stops—for ice cream, coffee, or beer.

One afternoon he suggested we take the bus to the beach, to Katwijk aan Zee on the North Sea, just a few miles north of the resort city Scheveningen. Jerry was amused by the prospect of visiting the family home of his old piano teacher at SMU, Paul van Katwijk.

It was a chilly afternoon on the beach. We rested from our long walk from the bus stop at a little cafe on the sand, eating cheese sandwiches and drinking Heinekens and looking out at the gray ocean. Peter is a photographer and he brought his camera along, hoping to get a few interesting shots of the long expanse of shoreline and the water and the light.

We resumed our stroll and followed the boardwalk down to the upper beach, studded with over a hundred individual changing houses: three-sided wooden structures fitted with benches and covered by colorful roofs, each with its own canvas door for privacy. Peter suggested, laughing, that Jerry and I sit in one of these structures for a picture, and so we did—"Knabbel" and "Babbel" (Chip and Dale), as Peter called us, me with my goofy grin and Jerry with his penetrating yet distant stare, shoulder-to-shoulder beneath the mirror that reflects the photographer's right shoulder.

Paul and Helene had a little more free time toward the end of our visit, and they took us to several park-like places near Eindhoven. We visited the grounds of an old castle, following an irrigation canal into the woods, where Paul pointed out various plants and birds and we compared them to American counterparts, noting especially any interesting similarities between the Dutch and English names. One evening they carried us to a nature area with a dessert cafe; we enjoyed rich pastries and dark beer and coffee, and then we took one of the well-marked paths into the woods. In the middle of one of our comparative discussions, this time on insects, Helene, always the most wide-awake of our foursome, began shouting ***"Pas op! Pas op!"*** and almost too late we turned to see a cyclist coming directly toward us on the narrow path. Bicycles in the Netherlands have traditionally had the right-of-way; however, with the growing number of automobiles, that right is increasingly being threatened, and not without resentment.

Jerry and Paul were finishing up preparations for the installation in Den Bosch during the last days of our stay, and things were taking longer than they had anticipated. I wanted to see a little more of Holland, particularly of Amsterdam, so we agreed that we'd spend our last two nights near Schipol; Jerry would join me there the first night, when he'd finished at the Melkfabriek.

I reserved a room at one of the motels in a Dutch chain located just a taxi ride away from the airport, in the relatively new town of Hoofddorp. I arrived before lunch, but I decided to explore the village instead of going in to Amsterdam. I ate dinner back at the motel and waited for Jerry.

He had hoped to be able to arrive by 6 or 7 p.m., and by 9 p.m. I was quite worried. This was the longest period of time we'd been apart on the whole trip. I finally called Helene, and she told me that Paul himself hadn't gotten home, so they must still be working. I sat—for another two hours—watching a tennis tournament on the lighted court just outside my motel room window, too worried to read or listen to music. I remembered waiting in the gazebo at Round Top that night, almost exactly a year ago.

The only interruption—I dove at the ringing phone—was when Jim Fulkerson called from Amsterdam (Helene having given him the motel's number) to speak with Jerry and to tell him he and Mary were looking forward to seeing him that next fall when he was to be a guest teacher again at the Hogeschool in Arnhem. When Jerry finally arrived, I tried not to let him see just how anxious I had been, but I think I was less successful than I had been at Round Top.

We decided to spend our last day in Amsterdam, a

short train ride away. Pacing ourselves, we walked from the Centraal Station to the Begijnhof, a 14th-century garden dedicated to the memory of the laywomen of charity, the begijnes, and surrounded by houses dating from the 16th and 17th centuries. At one of the entrances to this garden is the Engelse Kerk, where we heard a concert of Baroque music performed on period instruments.

We headed east to the Hortus Botanicus, where we explored the grounds and the greenhouse, taking pictures of one another: me beneath a huge, leaning palm, and Jerry beside a circular pond decorated with a large piece of iron sculpture in the shape of an overturned mushroom, the ridges of its underside and its long, curved stem suggesting an umbrella someone had carelessly dropped there.

Finally, we headed west, past the new Muziektheater and the Centraal Station, and on to the Brouwersgracht ("brewers' canal") and to our dinner destination: De Avonden ("The Evenings"), a vegetarian restaurant named after the novel by Gerard Reve that Jerry was listening to on the CDs Joel Ryan had sent him over a year ago. By now, Jerry was tired, and the restaurant turned out to be much farther away than it had appeared to be on our map. We were almost there when—***"Pas op! Pas op!"*** we heard from behind— a cyclist flew by, almost hitting Jerry, then hurling an epithet at him in the Dutch that Jerry unfortunately understood: "Old fool." Jerry was furious and tried to yell something back, but his shortness of breath allowed him to produce only a shouted whisper. Of course, he indulged himself in ***l'esprit d'escalier*** for several minutes to come, trying to find the most damning Dutch comeback.

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We'd achieved our goal: we'd made the trip to Holland, and it had been a success (after the initial disappointment over the Rotterdam fiasco). Jerry had felt good most of the time, never even needing oxygen, and we had been able to see many of our Dutch friends as well as the Americans we knew who were living and working in the Netherlands. Our last meal at De Avonden—and the last really good meal Jerry was able to enjoy—was a celebration of our success; the young Belgian chef prepared delicious dishes using ingredients in surprising ways, and Jerry had a culinary adventure he talked about often afterward.

Sometimes there comes, after a longstanding goal has been reached, a period of uncertainty, of precariousness. Neither Jerry nor I knew what was ahead, what would be reasonable to aim toward now. I was startled to see tears in Jerry's eyes as we climbed away from Schipol; "I'll never see Holland again," he said. The long flight home was miserable for him. He couldn't get comfortable, couldn't rest. Bob met us at the airport in Houston on an insufferably hot and humid afternoon, and almost as soon as we got to Bob's house, Jerry began using the oxygen we'd left there.

During the next two months his oxygen use steadily increased. He felt like doing less and less: every effort cost energy, and he suffered more dyspnea and, hence, more fatigue. I bought him gadgets for use in picking up fallen objects or bringing distant ones near, and I brought in stools for both kitchens. Sometimes I'd come home from work to find him sitting on one of the stools and peeling or slicing vegetables for dinner, but he'd quickly give the chore over to me and go sit down nearby.

We resumed our gym visits, but Jerry wasn't able to do as much. He'd have to interrupt his exercising to use the inhaler, which he sat prominently beside his little packages of tissue on the desk where people put their keys while they work out. When his breathing became especially labored and he produced voiced sounds as he inhaled, some of the newer users of the facility would look his way in alarm. Two or three times people asked him if he were all right, and he'd tell them he had emphysema. I had been routinely bringing a box fan in from the free weight room to plug in near the treadmills and the exercise bikes (a breeze in his face always helped Jerry breathe); one day we arrived to find a new fan installed just where we needed it. Jerry no longer sweated and didn't have to shower, so he'd wait for me at the front desk and visit with the young man working part-time there while attending college.

When he felt like it, he worked at his new computer, revising and reprinting pieces. ***The Village Voice*** published Kyle Gann's periodic "Consumer Guide" (August 31, 1993), and Jerry's CD ***Ground*** was chosen as a "Pick Hit" and honored with the only A Plus given:

> *Didn't expect this Texas wild man's manic genius to survive on disc, but actually, minus the distraction of his deadpan antics, his sonic originality blares louder. His noises result from electronic skrying with John Dee's angelic tables...; as Hunt puts it, 'congruent layers of associations of*

inflection-calls evoke, through a directed scanning skrying action, point specific, melody- action strings embedded in a reference context of conventions of performance.' Whazzit mean? In ***Chimanzzi (olun),*** *Jane Henry plays stream-of-consciousness violin while Hunt rattles jingle bells and scrapes a hardware store of doohickeys.* ***Lattice (stream): ordinal*** *is a Nancarrowian barrage of nervous piano clusters that sometimes astonishes you with its prettiness. Elsewhere, Hunt surrounds his whistling, cow-horn blowing, and stuttering conversation with metallic bumps and electric shimmerings. His purism is Cagean, but the frenetic gesture-language he's evolved is a purposeful, undecipherable tone-magic.*

This good review surely provided some impetus for Jerry's work on the new CD to be issued by Nonsequitur, although I don't remember Jerry ever saying very much about it.

Months earlier, Uncle Henry, a veteran of World War II, had mentioned that he'd like to attend the annual reunion of his infantry division, the Railsplitters, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in late September. I offered to drive him and Aunt Hazel there. We were to be gone about 10 days, visiting Army buddies in South Dakota and Indiana in addition to attending the Iowa reunion, and then driving home through Kentucky, Granny's birthplace.

As the time for our departure grew nearer, I began to worry about leaving Jerry. He had become dependent on me in so many ways, and I was continuing to give him the chest percussion treatments twice daily. We discussed my going several times, and I repeatedly offered to stay home, to arrange flights to Cedar Rapids for Henry and Hazel. He insisted I go, and I finally decided to. I based my decision in part on the hope that being independent for a while might actually make Jerry feel less dependent, more self-confident. I talked this over with Oz, who called regularly to check on Jerry; she agreed with my plan, and she assured me that she'd stay in close touch with Jerry while I was gone.

Although the reunion itself was a disappointment due to the poor attendance, our trip was a very pleasant one —except that how Jerry was doing was so much on my mind, I expect I often seemed preoccupied to Henry and Hazel. As soon as we got to our motel each night, I'd call Jerry, and his report more or less determined how I felt through the next day, whether worried or relieved, anxious or happy. In fact, after a few rough days shortly after I left, he did begin to feel better; he even went to the gym alone one day. When I got home, he told me, as we sat on the deck beneath the maple tree, Mary and Frances on their leashes beside us, that he was feeling better than he had in months. I promised myself then never to leave him again: I didn't want to miss a minute of the good times.

I began thinking about our upcoming birthdays and about their significance in 1993: we'd be 50, and we'd have known one another for 35 years, a cause for celebration. My initial plan was to reserve a private room in an Indian or Thai restaurant in Dallas and invite a group of old friends to join us for dinner. It might even be a surprise for Jerry. When I talked with Oz about my idea, she insisted that we plan to have a dinner party at her and Paul's house, with food from a Lebanese restaurant we all four liked. She even offered to mail the invitations from my list.

One of the people I very much wanted on that list was my sister. I decided to fly her down for a week in mid-November; after all, it was her turn, her three children having made the trip the last three years. She was concerned about Jerry and had even offered to come down to help during his hospitalization in January. I wanted to be with her now.

Driving back from Athens late one October day, Jerry began experiencing such severe pains in his chest that he had to pull off the road. He took a couple of ibuprofen tablets that he now carried in his medicine bag. Then he told me that he'd had enough, that he couldn't go on much longer. The exercise was hurting now, not helping, and he was coughing up blood-streaked sputum again. "I don't see how anybody can feel this bad and live," he said.

So I told him about the party I'd planned. We had another goal .

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Since his first hospitalization in January, I had always tried to counter Jerry's anxiety and despair about his illness with reasonable optimism. We both realized how directly his condition affected his mood: sometimes the fluctuations were swift and wide.

I encouraged him to wait the bad times out, to try to hold on to a "usable" attitude. When I found him in a panicky state, it often helped if I could make a short call for outside help—to a nurse, or to the hospital

emergency room staff, or to the Lung Line—for any little suggestion as to how to make things better, for any reassurance.

We learned to elevate the heads of our beds by 4" or so to facilitate drainage from Jerry's lungs and make breathing easier. As he continued to lose weight, we laid in a supply of foods that are nutritious as well as easy to eat, like instant breakfast and little cans of pudding and fruit cocktail. For soreness due to muscle strain, we discovered DMSO, and I rubbed it into his back and shoulders and it gave him almost immediate relief. The electric massager we bought helped some too.

But there were problems we couldn't solve, oddities no one could explain. Several of the arteries and veins in Jerry's chest remained swollen, and no one knew why. The sense of pressure in his head that had prompted a CAT scan of his sinuses back in January had never gone away. And his voice grew weaker—so much so that he never answered the phone if I were around, and if a call came for him, it was by no means certain that he would be up to the effort to try to speak.

I began to worry about him being alone while I was gone, and I started calling him from work. As did others who called him regularly (Oz, Rod, Michael Schell, and Bob), I noticed that it took him some time to get his voice. He always said, though, that the effort to do so resulted in a stimulation that made him feel better, for a while.

He was most comfortable, and could breathe most easily, sitting at the small dining table that he used as a desk in his study, leaning forward and resting his head on his arms or a pillow. I began to find him in that position every time I came in. ("Howdy, Mr.' Bull," he'd lift his head and say to me, alluding to an old joke that, given Jerry's weakness, had become regretfully apropos.) Eventually, he became restless everywhere else, whether sitting on a couch or in a chair. Sometimes he had to interrupt a meal for a few minutes to go lean over his desk.

It became harder for him to hold Mary and Frances for long. Because he was staying more in the brick house now, I had been bringing them over to be with us, but I came to realize that I wasn't doing him, or them, any favors. He hated it that he couldn't give them the attention they were used to, and he would sit and dangle the wire cat toy for them to bat and chase, but even doing that for long came to fatigue him.

We were able to make love only when he was experiencing his best times. I watched for them. In the afternoon, before dinner, without hurrying, with no strain—it happened as a gift, bringing relief and a renewal of the old, intimate bond. But it happened less frequently, as Jerry grew ashamed of his emaciated body. His last orgasm, he said, felt like someone else's.

Nothing gave me more joy that to be walking toward the house and begin hearing him at the piano. It didn't happen often, and he never played for long, but I would stop and stand frozen on the walkway or on the porch, listening to whatever he had thought to play—a piano rag, some Scriabin or Pinto—and hoping it would go on and on. He had ordered a new computer program for the generation of musical notation, and he tried it out by composing the single-page "Melody" that I found on the music stand one day.

We could see, though, that he was losing ground rapidly. He had already canceled the teaching engagement in Arnhem; not only did he feel that he was no longer up to making such he trip, he also wanted to finish up work here. He rented a video recorder and a camera with a small magnifying lens and scanned his body for ***Hemisphere.*** (When we watched the tape, he told me that he thought it had more "narrative interest" than any other video work he had done.) And he continued to revise and print older pieces using the new computer and printer.

Everyone we talked with recommended that he have a flu shot to protect him against the respiratory infection he had had last winter. He had a slightly elevated temperature the day we went for the shot, so we had to return the following week. By the end of the month (October), he was in the hospital in Kaufman with pneumonia.

One of the luckiest things that ever happened to Jerry during the course of his illness was meeting Dr. Laurie Harris. This young lady had done part of her residency at the UT Tyler Health Center, so she had considerable experience with pulmonary patients (or "lungers," as she chillingly called them). She had established a family practice in Crandall, a small town between Kaufman and Dallas. Jerry and I both were impressed by her practicality and candor. She acknowledged that the flu shot might indeed have made Jerry sick, but she also said that it would have been a mistake for Jerry not to have had it. She also confirmed our fear that the pneumonia had further compromised Jerry's lungs. Getting over it would not be easy, she explained, and she recommended that we have a visiting nurse come by to check on Jerry twice a week during the period of recuperation.

Jerry asked her if she thought he might have cancer, and she admitted that he might. She proposed another CAT scan (to compare with the ones made almost 11 months earlier), but she added that only tissue samples obtained in the course of a bronchoscopy would establish the diagnosis conclusively. Jerry agreed to the CAT scan.

He was approaching the point where he had to know. Although he never said as much to me, I believe that he had come to feel that going on suffering would only be worth it if he could have some hope that he would have a little more time, and that some portion of that time might be a little better than what it was now. He did ask me once, after a chest percussion treatment, how much longer I thought he had to live. "I think you probably have several pretty good years ahead," I said. He didn't comment.

I suppose I believed it. My boss and friend Frances came to see Jerry while he was still in the hospital. We stood at the foot of his bed discussing what Dr. Harris had just told us—that yes, the CAT scan did indicate that a bronchoscopy should be done, but that we should first take Jerry home with some antibiotics and hope that they would fight the pneumonia and help him get to feeling better, then we'd see about the other later.

Jerry spoke a little about how sick he had gotten, about how little there was for him in life now. Then he told Frances he was anxious for me, concerned about what would happen to me were he to die.

"Don't worry about him, Jerry. Of course he'll be sad a while, but he'll be all right," Frances said.

At first I wasn't sure who she was talking about. Then I was startled—alarmed—to realize it was me. "Sad a while." Eighteen months ago I had first imagined losing Jerry, but I had not yet imagined myself going on alone. Could I? And would I, beginning now, have to reassure Jerry that I could?

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As Jerry frequently pointed out, I've always been adept at seeing what I want to see. This "selective inattention" may have served us well during Jerry's illness: he sometimes had to prove to me he couldn't do what I thought he could, and on occasion he happily failed. After his hospital stay in Kaufman, I began to see more clearly, more honestly, how sick he was, and the way other people reacted to his appearance helped me—forced me—to bring his condition into focus.

The visiting nurse came four or five times to monitor Jerry's vital signs and listen to his chest. He was eager for her visits, and she always managed to allay some of his anxiety by reminding him that recuperating from pneumonia takes a long time, especially for people with COPD. Each time she came, she said she thought he was moving air more efficiently in his lungs.

Her calls would begin with my telling her, as we walked to the house from her car, how anxious and despondent Jerry was, and they would end along the same route with my thanking her for her encouragement and concern, and for how generous she had been with her time (she always had to telephone her next client to tell them she'd be a little late). I couldn't help notice, however, on these trips to the driveway, that she wasn't as encouraging to me as she had been to Jerry. She later told me that she knew he was dying the first time she came.

Jerry made a trip to the library with me one Sunday afternoon. We had taken full advantage of the medical research materials there over the years; the physicians' drug manuals and the CD-ROM product including articles from medical journals and reference sources had helped us learn about the side effects of some of the medicine Jerry was taking. We also gained a fuller understanding of the nature and likely course of Jerry's disease.

I don't know everything Jerry investigated that day, but he did read extensively about antibiotics. Several times during the afternoon, he came to my floor to have some coffee and rest at the table in the staff area. As always, my colleagues and friends got a kick out of seeing him; they'd all told me again and again that they'd never met anyone like him. Even as ill as he was, he was outrageous, ranting on about doing his own bronchoscopy, and about having Dr. Jack Kevorkian (notorious at the time for having helped terminally ill patients commit suicide) as his "personal physician." When he came out to the service desk area, he would so command all our attention that the library patrons there just had to stand and wait their turn.

After the hilarity would come the questions: Is he serious?

Is he getting better? Everyone was obviously concerned, and I look back now on a year filled with the kindnesses of every type that they showed me, from volunteering on short notice to work in my place when I had to be with Jerry, to knowing just when to ask about him and when not to.

One expression of thoughtfulness especially touched me.

Yolanda was on her way to work one day and spotted a chair on wheels someone had left on the side of the road. She had her husband pull over, and they loaded it into their pickup and brought it in to offer to me. I had been talking about how hard it was to find a chair for Jerry that was both comfortable and would allow him to roll, without getting up, from the computer or the synthesizer to his desk and back. Our needs were on her mind.

The Humanities Division gave me a surprise birthday party: a complete lunch, and a birthday cake, all beautifully served on two large tables. Shortly after we'd sat down to eat, Jerry called from Canton to tell me that he had unexpectedly run out of the medicine he used in his breathing machine and that he was going to Canton (seven miles from our house) to get the prescription refilled. He would call me again, he said, when he got back so I would know he'd made the trip all right. I begged him to call our neighbor, Garland, who I assured him would be glad to run the errand for him. No, he insisted; he'd be careful, he'd take his time. I was extremely upset. Jerry hadn't driven alone in weeks. In addition to his shortness of breath and overall weakness, he was taking powerful antibiotics and an array of analgesics.

My panic was such that I don't remember how much, if anything, I told my friends about the nature of the call, although everyone knew it had been from Jerry. Brian had devised a birthday scavenger hunt for me, and I went off to follow his witty clues from book to book until I located the treasure: a box of Indian sweets Tarlika had brought. Shortly after I returned, Jerry called to tell me that he was home and had made the trip fine; he had only gone off the road once. Whether or not I had been able to disguise my anxiety, I am sure I made no attempt to conceal my giddy relief.

Having Judy here was a joy and a comfort, although it hurt to see how shocked she was when she saw Jerry. She fell into our simple routine, helping with chores in such unobtrusive ways that I only much later realized all she had done. The best thing was to sit visiting with her, the three of us reminiscing about the adolescence we shared while watching "The X Files," "Mad About You," and the British sitcoms that gave Jerry some diversion during the last weeks. Judy listened to what Jerry had to say about his illness and what it was stealing from his life and his future, and she offered her loving sympathy without a trace of false optimism. She knew then as I do now that he often told her things in order for me to hear them.

As our joint birthday party approached, Jerry began to doubt that he would be up to attending. Certainly everyone would understand were he not able to, but I pressured him a little because I believed going would be good for his spirits. It was to be a happy evening, a celebration; almost 20 longtime friends would be there.

Weeks earlier I had written the poet Mark Doty to ask if he would record his poem "Wings," from ***My Alexandria,*** so that I could play it at the party as my gift to Jerry. He agreed, and he sent me a tape of a reading of the poem in Provincetown, a reading he dedicated to Jerry and me. Before the tape arrived, however, I had decided not to use it that night. As I watched Jerry grow worse, I began to feel that the poem would be too wrenching for an occasion that I wanted, above all, to be a joyous one. I did read the poem to Jerry myself one night, after Judy had left, and I listened to Mark's tape, alone, on Jerry's birthday.

Dressing and leaving the house had become very difficult for Jerry; unless he had to go out, he wore robes around the clock. I could see we were going to be late to the party, so I called ahead. As soon as we entered Paul and Oz' home, Jerry was led into the living room and seated beside Judy, and Oz asked me to accompany her to the dining room to assign places at the long table. I shuffled the name cards she'd made and placed them in such a way as to separate couples, while she followed along behind me and made a reference list to post at the door. As I worked, I became aware of how quiet the living room had grown as everyone took in the change they'd seen in Jerry and strained to hear him.

Jerry and I were seated at the head of the table, in front of the beveled windows that I'd looked through for so many years when they were behind the piano that had been moved in for the Sunday afternoon concerts. The Lebanese food was delicious: thyme pie, baba ganoush, felafel, and various meat dishes and white wine. My matchmaking must have been successful because everyone seemed to be engaged in lively conversation.

Just about when we'd all finished eating, Jerry began to speak to the group. (He himself hadn't eaten much, and even I was too nervous, too distracted, to be able to concentrate on the food.)

He talked a little about what a good life we'd had, how lucky we'd been in one another (in spite of my

"meanness") and in our friends. And then he made his way around the table, addressing remarks first to one person and then another, recalling events from years back or mentioning special traits that he had always appreciated about the individual. He regretted that Houston and Jill weren't with us. It was as though, in his steady gaze at each guest, he shone a light on the uniqueness, and value to him, of each relationship. Because his voice was so weak and his breathing difficulty forced him to speak so slowly, we all hushed any table noises to be able to hear.

There was a moment of relief and laughter when Jerry was describing a certain period of time and happened to mention lava lamps. "Jerry—wait just a minute," Paul interrupted, jumping up from his seat and rushing out of the room. And he returned with one, a gift for us from Oz and him and David and Norma McManaway.

When I talked with some of these friends later about the monologue Jerry delivered that night, several of them characterized it as a "piece," as Jerry's last performance. It had been extraordinary, the way it wove together sentiments, ideas, and personalities in the most unpredictable and yet exactly right manner. As I listened to him, looking into the beams of his eyes and stealing occasional glimpses at their targets down the table, I felt again that familiar excitement that had always come from the way he could heighten my perception of the world, enthralling me by his extraordinary way of seeing it. Just as he'd done this for me for 35 years, from that day on the blacktop outside the junior high-school cafeteria when he demanded to know the secret the green door was keeping, so had he done it for almost as long for most of those people listening to him now.

There could have been no better celebration—and no more fitting memorial, because Jerry himself led it.

Dessert was served in the game room, but Jerry soon came up to me to say that he had begun to feel bad and that he thought we should leave. Oz packed some food for us to take along, and Judy and others gathered up the gifts we'd received and loaded the car out front. We got Jerry settled in the front seat, and I noticed Toni standing on the front lawn staring at Jerry with tears in her eyes. I went over to her and told her something I had wanted to for years: her appreciation of Jerry's talent and her support of his work at SMU, almost 30 years ago, had helped his parents accept the fact that they had a homosexual son, so Jerry told me, because they saw from the way she regarded him that his sexual orientation would not be an obstacle to success.

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We had reached our second goal, but just barely. Jerry continued to feel worse as the evening wore on, and around midnight he asked me to take him to the emergency room of the Kaufman hospital. Our supposition was that the antibiotics he was taking for the pneumonia weren't working, and the young doctor on duty that night agreed that that might be the case. After examining Jerry's records, however, he talked very frankly with Jerry about the possibility that there was more making him feel bad than just pneumonia. He changed the prescription for antibiotics and released Jerry to return home shortly after daybreak.

I began to see a change in Jerry's emotional state after the party. Where he had been despondent, even depressed, before, he was now often agitated and sometimes desperate. He could not sleep in the bed at all, and he got what little rest he did by putting his head down on his desk. The nights were long for him, and he seemed to want to keep me with him late. The last few mornings Judy was here, he called me on the intercom at dawn to ask me to come over. After she left, I set up a cot in the living room of the brick house and slept there to be close to him, leaving the bed available to him whenever he might feel like trying to lie down.

He wanted me to take him to Dr. Harris' office the day before Judy's departure, and she repeated what the resident at Kaufman had told him. Jerry had been taking antibiotics so long that he had developed a bad case of thrush, and he was feeling worse and worse in spite of all the medication. Dr. Harris asked him if he would let her set up an appointment with a pulmonary specialist in Mesquite to discuss a bronchoscopy, and Jerry agreed. He had to know now, he said, if he had cancer.

I took Judy to the airport the next day. She had done so much for us during the week she was here, and I was able to work a day or two more than I would otherwise have been because she offered to stay with Jerry. I know it meant a lot to him to see how concerned she was for me and how close we are. And it was good for me to see the two of them renew their friendship as they sat talking or watching TV, just as they had when we were all teenagers and I left them to spend a couple of weeks with my aunt in Kilgore. I waited for Judy in the car while she told Jerry goodbye. When she got in, she said, "Well, that was hard."

We saw Dr. Zevallos the next week, on the day before

Thanksgiving. He told us pretty much what the other two specialists had, but he admitted that what he saw on the X rays did look like a tumor. If it were cancer, Jerry asked, what could be done? Dr. Zevallos told us that there was some chance that the tumor (or tumors) might respond to radiation and chemotherapy—we could talk about that after the bronchoscopy—but that such treatments wouldn't make Jerry feel better and might not even prolong his life by much.

Jerry was very frank with Dr. Zevallos, as he had been with all the other doctors he had seen. He was interested in the quality of life; merely adding days was without meaning if his life was without meaning. "We've had a wonderful life together," I said. To avoid a long delay due to the upcoming holidays, the bronchoscopy was scheduled and performed that afternoon.

Dr. Zevallos came to the waiting room and told me that yes, it was cancer, and in both lungs as well as in the esophagus, and that there was some involvement with the vocal chords. "Well, that's it, then," I said. He mentioned again that some radiation might help, but I got the feeling that he didn't really believe it would.

When they let me into Jerry's room he was sitting up straight in his paisley hospital gown, the color good in his cheeks and his eyes unusually wide open and bright. The nurse asked him if he wanted a soft drink, and he replied he'd split a Coke with me.

"It wasn't so bad. Actually, I don't remember much about it," he said. It was a pleasure sitting there with him, drinking our drink and enjoying the illusion the drugs loaned us that everything was O.K.

It wasn't until we were halfway home that he asked me what the doctor had said. I told him everything.

We had an ice storm that night and the lights were off for eight hours. Jerry was frantic, even though I had brought over a large kerosene stove from the barn house and we had plenty of kerosene lamps, candles, and flashlights. He had me call the electric cooperative every hour or so, and I was told each time that all their crews were out and working as fast as they could.

On Thanksgiving Day he dictated a letter to Steve Peters, the producer of the Nonsequitur CD. He went over with me the notes he had made earlier about how to edit the audiotapes for that CD as well as the videotape for the ***Hemisphere*** laser disc. I helped him set up two mikes in the bedroom, and we put an assortment of sound-making devices on a card table at the foot of the bed: bells, rattles, metal and plastic objects and sticks to beat them with. While I monitored the audio levels in the study, Jerry created one of the sound tracks for ***Haramand Plane.*** Later that afternoon he showed me a list he'd made of the composers and performers he believed would promote his work.

That night we called Judy and her family and told them about the results of the bronchoscopy. I heard Jerry tell my older niece, Jenny, that he only had a few more days and that they should all help me because I'd need them for the next few months. (Jamie later offered to come back to live with me.)

We decided it was time to call Bob, and we asked him to come up the next day. He had a hard time believing the bronchoscopy results; he didn't think Jerry was that sick. But when he arrived Friday afternoon and saw Jerry, he was convinced. The three of us talked a long time Friday night, sitting in the living room and looking over at the TV from time to time. "These last few days Stephen's been like steel," Jerry said.

Saturday morning Jerry needed more oxygen, so Bob and I made a quick trip to Athens to get a full cylinder. When we got back, we found him anxious—worried because we'd been gone so long. For lunch I fixed a Mexican cheese omelette, and Jerry ate well.

After lunch we talked a while. At one point, Jerry caught me staring at him, and he smirked. Then he got up to get dressed. He called me, needing help. I guided the belt around his waist, loop through loop, my arms encircling him—and then I lost control: "If you ever needed proof how much I love you, this is it," I cried, kneeling before him with the side of my face against the front of his trousers.

"I never needed any proof," he replied. I noticed that he was steadying himself by holding onto the edge of the lavatory. "Stephen," he said quietly, "this sentimentality leads nowhere."

I stood up to help him finish the job. Bob and I were going to Wal-Mart to return some slippers I had bought for Jerry that turned out to be too small. Jerry walked with us out to Bob's car.

"Bye bye, Stephen," I heard Jerry say.

I turned around and looked him in the eye.

"Bye bye, Jerry," I replied.

Then Bob drove me away.