

WAPPI
DUTCH

A Festschrift
for
Ellen Davidson

*On her 75th Birthday
October 6th, 2023*

*Written by her friends, colleagues, family, and loved ones
Compiled by her daughters, Hannah and Aviva*

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Aron Wolf

I first met the Davidson family when I was 18, Pat was 15 and Ellen was 7. Pat and I were just starting to date and she said to me that she wanted to meet special people in a special place. She was **so right** and I have been proud to be family ever since.

The time of this introduction was just as they were moving to “the big house” when Henry assumed the position as Superintendent of Overbrook. Looking back, I see “the house” and its milieu as the symbol that Ellen has taken with her for the rest of her productive and meaningful life.

The “house” and their circumstances allowed Adeby and Henry to include all of their interests and all of their family and friends at one site. The “house” became the hub of a community. That community embodied many aspects of their lives. The community and milieu included the basics of human caring, of fairness and intellectual pursuit all in one venue. Everything was also done and accomplished with thought and grace. I did not appreciate it at the time, but the “house” and its activities became an **“unintentional” community**. Spending time with the Davidson-Heyman-Yohalem family was always a growing experience for me.

The members of “the community” extended beyond the Davidson nuclear family but also to extended family, colleagues and friends.

There was always Nanny who was always welcoming with a smile and a hug. If prompted, she would also share her history with the early trials for equality for women both in general and in the workforce. There were also several generations of Yohalems including Ada and Henry as well as Minna and her family. There would be Lena and Mary and their focus on social good and their demonstration of a long term loving and caring relationship in a time where this was not generally accepted. There were the Garners with their multiple interests and with Luke and his role with the Clergy. There was Pauline who did run the kitchen with grace and charm but who became family and shared the passion with Adeby in the



Urban league with equality and education for people of Color. There were “the Douglas friends” whose friendship and focus demonstrated a generation of women who were finding themselves as individuals in the world. They passed this enduring friendship on to the next generations as well and I still remain friends with Nina Gerstenzang, Steve Reibel and Peter Sack. Ellen has also continued this with friendship with my children (her cousins) as well as with my granddaughter Ella. Henry’s writings and activities both scientific and humorous were there to appreciate and absorb. The friendship, intellectual interests and mentoring of the generations has carried forward with Peter Sack, Steve Reibel and myself following Henry in his intellectual and administrative pursuits.

Ellen was exposed to this wonderful mélange of positive input on a daily basis. Why would anyone be surprised that she has created **an “intentional” community** that has survived and flourished over many years. Ellen then also had an understanding and has been able to adapt to the culture of her surroundings as first demonstrated in her sojourn in Kotzebue while in college and with many of her roommates over the years.



in developing the school with Larry and in more recent years become a respected member of the Simmons faculty.

Ellen has become a dear friend as well as a “cousin” over these last 70 years. She has been able to knit together both literally and socially the threads that she garnered from growing up in the “house” to make a meaningful and giving life for her friends, her students, her more extended family, her daughters and herself.

Happy Birthday.

Pattie Heyman

It is a delight to reflect on my relationship over the years with Ellen, who is my second cousin. Ellen's beloved mother Adelaide was my father's first cousin through Adelaide's father who was the brother of my father's father. I hope I am correct on this because there is no one to consult.

My earliest memory of Ellen was when I visited her at the huge house she and her family lived in in Cedar Grove, NJ, on the grounds of a sprawling psychiatric hospital and community. It was definitely an adventure to be there, given the unique setting of where she grew up. I remember she played with a lot of dolls and I remember a big doll house she had. We didn't see each other a lot so it felt like a special visit.

Another early memory is from when we went to the same summer camp, Camp Hidden Valley in Freedom, Maine. Ellen loved the responsibility of caring for the goats and I remember her in the pen with them with her long dark braids. She was always full of spirit and loved her role with caring for the animals. Again this is a memory from 67 years ago, and I hope I am accurate in my memory.

Another memory is visiting Ellen at Antioch College and staying there for a few days with her. I know she loved her experience at Antioch and I don't have a vivid memory of the place but I do remember visiting her there.

I remember visiting Ellen at the wonderful camp she was part of in being a counselor and worked in other roles. This community was very important for her at that time and she talked about the people there and the progressive activities with great excitement. She made close friends there and continues to see some of them.

Another memory is that Ellen and I both spent our 3rd year of college in Scandinavia through a program called Scandinavian Seminar. I had heard of



the program through someone at my college and I cannot remember if we were each exploring it independently or one of us told the other. I was in Denmark and Ellen was in Norway. The only time I saw her was when all of the students from the four countries of Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland met up in Oslo, Norway for a week. I think Ellen attended a folk-højskole that focused mainly on crafts, which may or may not be true but I associate Ellen with going to that kind of program.



Over the years I have seen the MANY sewing projects Ellen made for so many people and I was very happy to receive a sewn matroushka doll when I was about to travel to Russia to adopt my son. This doll has always meant so much to me. I always had a fantasy that someday everyone could bring their quilts, clothing, dolls and everything to one place and have a kind of museum of all that Ellen has created. It would be a big museum!

Through the years I have seen Ellen live a life of joy, creativity and generosity in all of her endeavors whether it be teaching, and maintaining the communal household, with all the dimensions of that whether it be cooking delicious meals, taking care of cats or socializing with everyone who lives there. She is unstoppable and the impact of Parkinson's does not slow her down with traveling to visit family and friends, and just being in connection with her large community of friends. I have seen her move from long dark hair to shorter, many shades of gray curly hair and her strong spirit, cheerful nature and determination keep her flourishing and staying as vibrant as ever.

Much love on this 3/4 of a century birthday, Ellen!!!!
Pattie

I love family—my own (of course), but also just the idea of family. I remember hearing my friends talking about their aunts and uncles and cousins—who seemed to be so plentiful and available. They would talk about family reunions that filled banquet halls and sometimes would suggest that they couldn't name all their cousins because there were so many of them. I was jealous.

I remember feeling like I somehow missed out on the extended family concept because we lived in Alaska and because my mom and dad (Pat and Aron) were only children. The exception, of course, was that I had my New York family—Lolly, Lenny, May, Aunt Kate, Aunt Adeby, and my two cousins—Ellen and Larry. I had no trouble remembering their names—as there weren't very many of us to keep track of. Instead of numbers, what I had was an amazingly impressive group of role models. I had relatives who had interesting stories, fascinating lives, and who were trail blazers in so many ways.

I fondly remember visiting New York as a child and in my teens and spending time with my extended family—connecting me back to my roots. You, though much older than me (the age difference seems to have shrunk as I have aged), had a particular influence on me during those visits. I remember visiting Adeby's apartment in New Jersey, for example, and going into your room and seeing all your dolls from around the world. I wanted to not only have such a collection—but I also wanted to be worldly like my cousin. I remember you coming to visit us in Alaska when you were in college—engaging in all kinds of exciting adventures in Kotzebue and beyond. To have a cousin in college when I was young and to have her come visit us in Alaska made a big impression on me.

Other Ellen memories stand out as well. I remember talking to you about your Antioch experiences. I remember talking to you about your lifestyle



choices—your diet, your commitment to social justice, your strong belief in the power of education. I likely never told you—but these things stuck with me in ways that I don’t often even acknowledge consciously.

I have particularly fond memories of your wedding—the woven tunics, the Indigenous chants, the flat cake with no layers—I think because you were opposed to hierarchical structures. You lived your beliefs and embraced them—imbuing them into your very core. When I was older, I remember you moving into your collective house and getting to come visit you when I was in college. I remember lively meals and more lively conversation. I remember the birth of your daughters—and the joy I felt that our little family was now getting bigger.

When I got my doctorate in education (likely influenced in part by my admiration for you and the work I knew you did), I found myself even more attuned to all that you have done and been in my life. To know, firsthand, about your work as an educator at Simmons and to know all of the ways that you influenced the lives of your own students—who in turn influenced the lives of their students in a reciprocal loop, served as an inspiration for my own career in academia.

As an adult, I feel like I have stayed connected to you in all kinds of meaningful ways. You were a great source of solace and support when my mom passed away—again, more than you know. You are, in fact, the de facto matriarch for our little family—a grand title to be sure. While we don’t see each other often—I have gotten to visit Aviva (twice) in Nashville and these visits make me feel all the more connected to you.

I love my family. I can name every member of it. Each is special and unique. Each adds to my own story and my own sense of who I am. Ellen, in particular, has been a steady influence in my life—despite our age differences (again, which seems to have diminished over time) and our physical distance from one another. Thank you, Ellen, for all you do, all who you are, and for the love you continue to share with me and your family.

Happiest of birthday dear cousin. I love you.

Lisa

DeCourcy Squire

The years spin out our friendship. It thickens and thins but the thread never breaks.

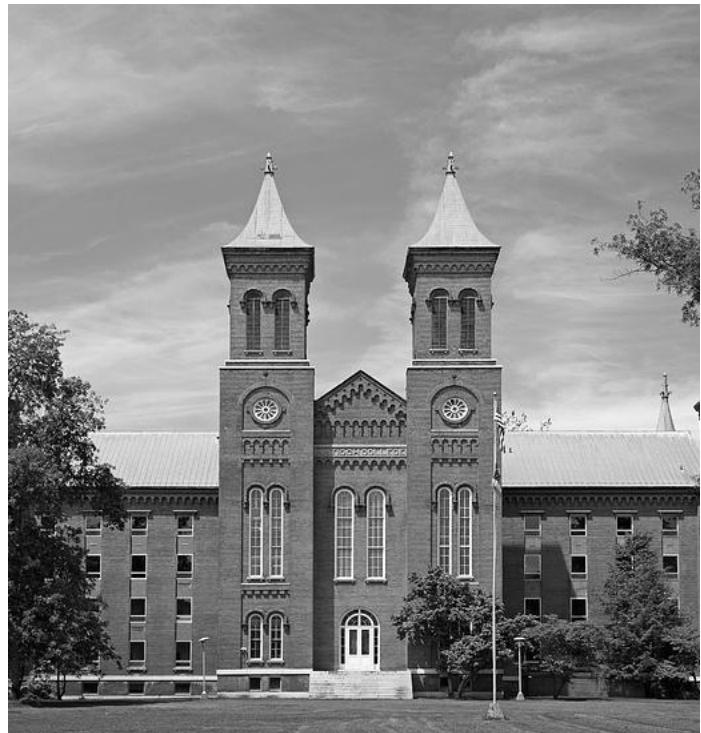
It was the first day of the 1966 summer quarter at Antioch College. My parents and I carried my various bags through the corridor of Greene in North Hall. We passed rooms of chaos as other new first year students were unpacking. Then we came to a room that was an oasis of calm and order. The beds were made up with blue and green striped bedspreads and throw pillows, with matching curtains already hanging. There were pictures on the walls and a mobile floated from the ceiling. A large colorful lollipop rested on one of the pillows. And there you were, with your thick dark curly waist length hair and welcoming smile. It was hard for me to believe my luck that you were to be my roommate.

First impressions can often be mistaken but this one was not.

You have a talent for making places beautiful, for creating order, for giving generously, and for extending hospitality widely.

I remember your father had a labeler and was busy using his new toy to put labels on all your possessions. He made a label for me for my fan. I kept that until I sold the fan in 1989 when leaving Boston, and every time I saw my name on the fan it brought back a memory of that first day.

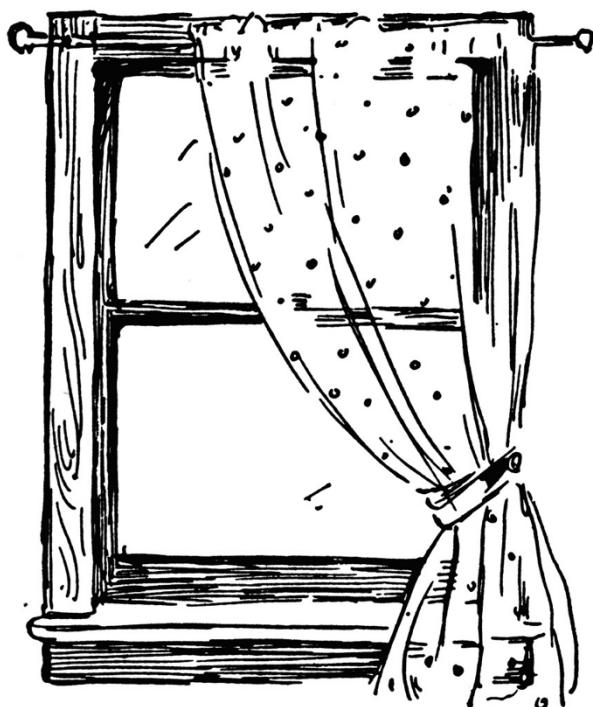
Other things I remember about our first year—you would go folk dancing Friday nights on Red Square and you had an early morning class at sunrise in the Glen (you would often be leaving for breakfast or class just as I would be returning from a late night). We usually ate lunch and supper together at the same table with a bunch of people and you introduced me to the weird



food, yogurt. (The first few times I tasted it, I took it back and got a refund, convinced it was spoiled.)

The other main food memory I have is being on the top bunk (we had stacked our beds) and doing a workbook together which was about ‘active listening’. Once while we were doing that, there was the call COOKIE LADY. She was an older woman who would come around to the dorms with warm freshly baked cookies for sale. I remember vividly the taste of the melted chocolate chips.

Many of the people in the hall were going through difficult times. Gene, our male preceptor, had a nervous breakdown and people did not care much for the person who had to take his place. Diana would come in at night late and shout loudly, “I HATE GUYS!” and throw glass bottles which would break and shatter outside our door. Diane, her roommate, would stay up in the common room all night long sitting on the couch and just staring. She wore white make up and dark eye shadow. She was totally exotic to me (years later someone said she had been on heroin). Everyone else on the hall was experimenting with sex and/or drugs so I was especially grateful to have you as my roommate.



At the end of our first quarter, we went to the housing office to thank them for putting us together as roommates, to offset the many people complaining to them about their roommate assignments. For many years after we had left Antioch, we still introduced each other as ‘my roommate’ which was confusing to people who knew we lived in different cities.

The one thing the housing people got wrong was a question “do you sleep with the windows open or shut?” I thought that was weird. In the summer

one sleeps with them open, in the winter with them shut. Since it was going to be summer, I said ‘open’. When winter came, I discovered my mistake as snow blew in on my bed because you liked the windows open. But this was a small price to pay for having you as a roommate.

I also really appreciated that despite the fact your belongings were always neat and organized, you were not judgmental about my sloppier more chaotic ways. I do remember you asking me to make my bed and giving me three or four cogent reasons about why made beds were better, so I tried to comply. Since that time whenever I make my bed (which is not daily) I do think back to the reasons you gave to do it.

I was always impressed by your extraordinary talent for gift giving. I still have a doll you made me and a sundress with an elaborately embroidered yoke. When I learned how to knit, the first thing I made was a fuchsia scarf for you with a knit one row purl one row pattern and only a few mistakes. Simultaneously in Norway you were learning to knit and made me a hat and mitten set, light blue with a snowflake pattern and no errors.

You showed me how to make mobiles using glossy gift ribbon woven to make fishes. One year you made me an advent calendar with a little gift behind each window. One year you took little gifts to give to the toll booth attendants when you were going home for the holidays. You had presents for children you had used to babysit. I admired how you kept people in your life.

You also had an adventurous spirit (which continues to this day despite the Parkinson's)—going to the remote town of Kotzebue in the Northwest Arctic Borough of Alaska and later teaching in a one room school in West Virginia. From Mexico you wrote me that because of your coloring and dark hair, people in the market would think you were Mexican until your New York accented Spanish gave you away. In Norway, though, your coloring made you stand out more among the blonde Lutheran Norwegians.

You came back from your year in the Norway fylksul (sp?) with even more craft skills—from stained glass to weaving. One of the letters from Norway I remember is the drama the school went through when two students were discovered to have a lesbian relationship. This was before second wave feminism and such things were considered more shocking. You would have been nonjudgmental then but now I think you would be more actively supportive. But you in general seem to undergo gradual evolutions rather than seismic changes, I think because your positions are already carefully and reasonably thought out so do not require dramatic realigning.

You have been an inspired and creative teacher. Whether you are teaching elementary school children in West Virginia or college students in Boston, you bring an enthusiasm and creativity to the work. And you are always ready to create a teachable moment I remember in 1980 visiting you in New Paltz and going on an outing with some girl scouts. We were on a boat and they

were arguing about which cola drink was the best. You organized them into an experiment where they would taste each beverage without knowing which it was and vote on it. When this was done, there evolved a general agreement about the best one.

It was in New Paltz that you also worked on a cooperative game with a professor from the local university (a SUNY), Nancy S. It was called Won for All and highlighted “little known famous people:” women, people of color, activists.

I vividly remember your wedding. It was planned for the start of May and was to be outside in Boston with no contingency plan for bad weather, which in Boston is a real possibility. Even when it actually snowed the weekend before, you and Jim remained sanguine—and in fact on the day itself the weather was perfect. Having it outdoors meant that the children were able to move around without disrupting the proceedings, and it was a beautiful celebration. Instead of catering, guests brought special dishes so the food, in keeping with the general spirit, was varied and delicious.

Over the years in spite of living in different places, we have been able to see each other at intervals. I saw you in West Virginia and New Paltz, and slept on that trundle bed. You visited me in Minneapolis, while you were attending a math conference. You visited me in Georgia, I think during a math conference, and we went to the King Memorial, and you visited again when you were going to a craft conference. I remember visiting you when you first moved to Cambridge/Somerville from New Paltz and running errands with you. I remember a folk music festival in Boston as well, and I still wear the tie dyed skirt you bought for me there.

I remember my shock the first time I saw you with shorter hair, since your long braids were such a part of my memories of you.

After your marriage, I stayed a number of times at your large communal house and my friend Diane sometimes stayed there as well when she was in



Boston. It has been interesting over the years to see the shifting population there but the stable undergirding of the house.

So many (most) communal houses fall apart, so the long-lasting nature of Tkanye is a testament to your ability to live your values in a practical way, working through the inevitable conflicts and differences.

In 2015 you suggested we go to the Antioch reunion, which I never would have considered doing, but which I am grateful for having done. Unfortunately, you took American Airlines which got you from Boston to Philly to DC and finally to Dayton, a day late, leaving very little time together. We stayed with Linnea and saw Al and Donna; since Al died a year or so later, I was really glad to have seen him then. I am just sorry you and I did not have more chance to walk around the campus and reminisce and go together to many of the programs and events of the weekend.

When I look at the tapestry of your life, I am impressed by the colorful patterns and closely woven threads. I know there are things that did not work out, but these do not leave ugly snarls or holes—you have continued on steadily, sometimes of necessity modifying the pattern, but in a way that retains the continuity and wholeness.

Even when we are not in touch for long periods of time, you remain a permanent fixture in my life and it comforts me when I think of you and hear your voice in my mind's ear. Your courage, commonsense, and creativity inspire me.

With much love for your 75th birthday!

DeCourcy

H appy Birthday

And Welcome to the three-quarters of a century club!

When I first noticed you at Antioch College during the summer of 1966, I was impressed by your long, thick braids and your enthusiastic spirit. Then, during the fall quarter we got to know each other since we both had our first co-op job at the NYU Hospital. We were assigned to different pediatrics units, so we could usually arrange to have the same time off for lunch. You were much more adventurous than I, living on the lower East side. You seemed to take in stride your apartment being broken into and kept living there.



And our friendship continued. I remember that you invited me to join your family for Thanksgiving and I had my first introduction to Overbrook Hospital, where you grew up. Our second year we roomed together at Antioch and we both chose to spend our third year abroad in Norway.

Then we worked at Camp Thoreau in Wallkill, NY, (and later in Vermont) and I joined you for a year of teaching in rural schools in Tyler County, WV. For a number of years before you headed to the Boston area we both worked in the mid Hudson Valley. Since then, we have stayed in touch sporadically, but I will always continue to value our friendship.

Following Ellen Davidson Across Six Decades

When you've known someone going back 54 years, serendipity, coincidence, and sheer good fortune can help maintain life-long connections. So it is with Ellen and me.

We met at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio, in September 1969. She was a "Preceptorial Fellow," a guide and resource for newly arrived freshpersons who were not sure what the school was all about and what it would be like to study and work there. Ellen and her fellow PF, Chester G. Atkins (soon to become a Massachusetts state representative, state senator, and eventually leader of the Massachusetts Democratic Party), created a remarkable orientation curriculum for some two dozen newbies. Ellen guided us to countless new things to discover: roommates, the Caf, the mailroom, multiple dorms with odd names, WYSO, SVAHA, The Record (newspaper), Glen Helen, Main Building, McGregor Hall, the abandoned South Hall, the Olive Kettering Library, and the Charles Kettering Science Building—and more. In town there was Com's, the Trail Tavern, the Little Art, Young's Jersey Dairy, Village Bakery, the SuperValu, and so much more. Ellen introduced us to Glen Helen, the Clifton Grist Mill, and folk dancing on Red Square; Chet and Ellen memorably showed us a working hog farm and the Yellow Springs wastewater treatment facility, while Chet took us to the Air Force Museum in Fairborn during the height of the Vietnam War with Sabre jets and B-52s flying over the campus daily. There was cross-state trip to Akron to see the workings of municipal government. We learned a lot from Ellen and Chet.

That first year—1969-70—seems now to have been packed with every possible activity known to college students, from movie marathons to Kent State protests. Ellen was always available to answer questions and offer suggestions. No wonder she went on to a career in education.

Four years later (1974), Ellen and I met again... in my own hometown of New Paltz, New York. She was a 4th-grade (?) teacher at the Duzine elementary school, a scant two miles from my parent's house and lived in an apartment less than 1/4-mile away. She asked me to do a photo project with one of her students and we had a wonderful time making photographs and creating a

hand-made “Debbie’s Book” with captions by Ellen and Debbie. My youngest cousin Paul, also at Duzine school, had some reading issues which Ellen helped solve. My Aunt Susanna Lent (92 this year) still offers praise and gratitude to Ellen for “Teaching him to read!” That skill came in handy, as he is now the Rev. Paul Lent and an in-demand minister on Long Island.

From the mid-70s to the early ‘90s while I was working in Worcester, I would see Ellen at Antioch gatherings in the Boston area. I knew she married and raised two amazing daughters, and was living and working in Cambridge and Somerville. By this time I too was married, raising an adopted daughter, and had moved to Cambridge. We were not surprised when we discovered Ellen’s children had just left the Newtown School (now Garden Nursery School) where Aviva and Hannah had been. Eleanor fit right in, and for a time Aviva, and maybe Hannah, were occasional babysitters for our daughter.

By the early to mid-2000s, I moved to Waltham to ease my commute, yet somehow we still kept in touch. Most memorably for me, following a divorce and remarried to Jennifer, we were invited to Ellen’s amazing household of communal living and shared space. As guests on a weekend evening, we were in awe of the varied backgrounds and intellectual intensity each individual brought to the table. Jenn and I still talk about it, and how easily Ellen kept the conversation going into greater depth. At one point, knowing my daughter was adopted and was struggling in some ways, Ellen calmly noted that the person sitting next to me was adopted, as was his sister, with very different outcomes. That evening of first-hand discussion of personal issues has helped me reframe how to support Eleanor, especially now that her mother, Nancy, has recently passed away.

Looking back, your skill at maintaining a continuity of connections is simply remarkable! How delightful that we are still connected after so many years and changes. Rather than rambling away on paper, I will send you a special photo section once I have all the pieces in place.

Happy 75th Birthday, Ellen, from Ryck & Jennifer Lent

Laurie, Dan, and Ella

Part of my parent's move to Alaska (before I was born) was a lifetime commitment to staying present and connected with our extended East Coast family. We didn't have many people in that circle so maybe the impact of each visit across the country felt even more meaningful.

As a child and even now, I barely knew anyone on my dad's side of the family beyond my grandmother who died too soon in my life and an uncle I only knew as the man who sent us fancy New York chocolate for the holidays.

So, my mom's side of the family took center stage. Particularly for me, my special people were my Aunt Kathleen and my Aunt Adeby. I loved my grandparents, but I adored these women and I think they adored me. I remember Aunt Kathleen as an adult sized playmate, and I remember Aunt Adeby as the model of elegance. Her house seemed like a museum that was meant to be looked at and not touched—even the dolls in the glass case.

On one rare visit to Adeby's house, I met Ellen for the first time (or at least that is how my 5-year-old brain remembers it). I can't remember the occasion, but it was something that required me waiting on my mom to arrive and sitting with Ellen who helped me put on my fancy blue velvet party dress. This memory is etched in my life in many ways including pictures (see attached) and a keepsake box that still holds that special dress.



Our age difference meant that this moment is shared with only one other childhood memory at the Bronx Zoo. After that, I don't have another solid memory until Ellen's wedding and Lolly's 80th birthday celebration. By this time, I was a young adult, and the wedding and birthday are part of my core memories and still strong connection points for our family.

Fast forward again and now as an adult and parent, I know and love Ellen in a whole new way and frankly it just makes me wish we spent even more time together throughout my life. Ellen's kindness and love of Ella from the day she was born to today is profound. We feel so grateful, at many levels and in many ways, for our relationship with Ellen and her daughters.

Today, as we mark and celebrate Ellen's milestone birthday, I feel like I am continuing our family promise to stay connected from Alaska, and I love that I have passed that commitment to Ella who thinks of Ellen as a core family member.

On this occasion of Ellen's birthday, we are honored as a family to celebrate Ellen for all the ways she has impacted our lives as a family and all the connections yet to come.

We love you, Ellen.

Laurie, Ella, Dan

Nancy Schniedewind

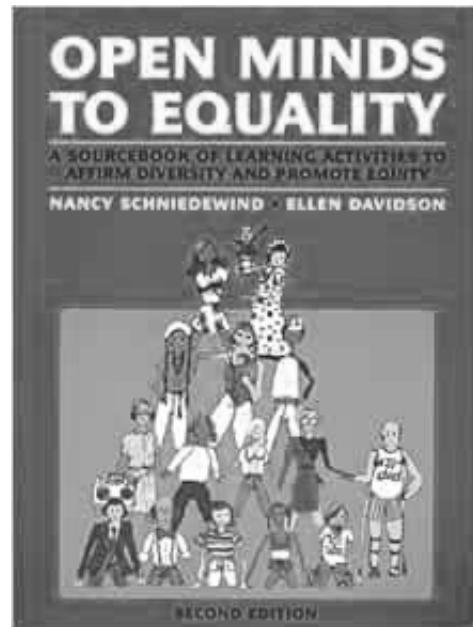
Happy 75th Birthday Ellen!

What a gift to have known you during your amazing life! You are one of the most talented educators I have ever worked with. Your deep sensitivity to young people and teachers, combined with your knowledge, creativity, and pedagogical insight, fostered your outstanding educational career.

Now a caveat: What I write below is based on my fading memory. When we next get together, we can explore differences in our recollections!

When we met in my “Issues of Racism and Sexism” course (in 1975?) little did we know it was to be the beginning of a decades-long collaboration. After you submitted your project for that class, a board game for students to teach them about people of color and white women who had been left out of educational materials, we decided to collaborate to expand its reach. With the support of a Women’s Educational Equity Grant Program (1979-1980) we learned so much from developing “Won for All”. How exciting to see it field-tested in high schools with such success. (We were surprised that there was little of our feared reaction to some of the radical personalities in the game, but rather student resistance to the cooperative nature of the game!) When Ronald Reagan was elected, and defunded the WEEA Program because there was, “already enough about women in the schools’ curriculum,” our hopes for seeing it distributed nationwide were dashed. Having won an award from the Women’s Educators Curriculum Awards Program of AERA (1982), and having been played with much enthusiasm in my graduate courses and in informal contexts for decades, our contribution nevertheless lives on!

Our collaboration grew as we expanded my dissertation to write the first edition of *Open Minds to Equality: A Sourcebook of Learning Activities to Promote Race, Sex, Class, and Age Equity* (1983). While we were both excellent teachers, as I remember our synergetic writing relationship grew



out of your very grounded child-centered sensibilities and my penchant for clarity and organization. While you lived in New Paltz we had precious opportunity to collaborate face-to-face, often in our homes. As the decades passed so did the expanded focus of the book and our method of writing together. We often talked on the phone between Boston and New Paltz when writing the second edition (1998), which additionally addressed ableism, heterosexism, linguicism, anti-Semitism/other religious oppression, and competitive individualism. Email helped with the third (2006) and 4th editions (2014), though phone calls enabled us to struggle together with hard issues like addressing gender identity with young people. How many hours of dialogue went into these discussions across the decades??!

Little did you expect that 30 Walnut Street would become a book distribution center! Well, it did in 1987. When we negotiated the contract with W.C. Brown to publish *Cooperative Learning, Cooperative Lives: A Sourcebook of Learning Activities to Build a Peaceful World*, to bolster their confidence in adequate sales, we agreed to buy some books and distribute them ourselves through “Circles Books,” our distribution center. Our impetus for writing the book in a time when cooperative learning was very popular, was to enable educators not only to teach cooperatively, but to teach content about cooperation and competition as ideas and values. As with OMTE, we collaborated with artistic family and friends to include creative art work and sometimes developed lessons grounded in our experiences with students, family, and friends. I am amazed at all the work that went into what turned out to be a unique and practical book. How did we do it?

I appreciate so much of what I have learned from our collaborations. Your provocative questions and far-reaching ideas have made me a more thoughtful, informed, and sensitive person. Given the rich array of positive feedback we've gotten over the years from our writing I imagine we have

changed the lives of many of the users of our books and readers of our articles. Planning and presenting many sessions with you at the National Association of Multicultural Education Annual Meetings, and those regional ones in New England, was exhilarating as well as very engaging for participants. What a team!

You've been present in my life over the years in a myriad of ways. There are recipes in my recipe file box from you (and perhaps your mother). Your life-long love of crafts is embodied in the



lovely backpack you made me and your handmade ornaments that go on our Christmas tree each year. I so much appreciated your generosity when I was recovering from recent surgeries and you sent a plant to me via Joan, and when a big box of books from your bookshelf arrived to help me pass the time. One, *All the Light We Cannot See*, has become one of my all-time favorites. We were fortunate to share a few days together at Cape Cod a few summers ago where you relished swimming in the fresh water ponds and where we watched the magnificent sunsets in awe. Your energetic spirit mirrored the sunsets, as it always had in outings, classrooms, and conversations.

Having given me so many life-gifts over the years, it's so appropriate that I share the gift of my appreciation on this special day.

With love,

Nancy

Noelle Parker

Happy 75th Birthday to Ellen! I have the fondest memories of numerous craft sessions with Ellen while growing up, including her teaching me how to sew my own stuffed animal (which I loved)... as well as an elaborate, whimsical brightly colored bird costume we created together and I wore for Halloween in 8th grade. She was always so kind and patient & her sense of humor and twinkle in her eye was contagious & made her such a joy to be around. I was lucky to reconnect after so many years when she was visiting Seattle & loved seeing the twinkle in her eye & her zest for life was just as I remembered!
Cheers to Ellen on her special day!



Ellen and I were ready to go! As usual, the car was quite full—four lawn chairs, two suitcases, Ellen’s walking devices, paper towels, snacks, tote bags, umbrellas, backpacks. When everything was finally crammed into the car, we climbed in and set off on our yearly journey. We headed to the turnpike, got off at Sturbridge and sailed down the highway toward the Connecticut fairgrounds. We were going to the Falcon Ridge Folk Festival!

Falcon Ridge is one of the highlights of our summer, a trip we have taken for many years. Originally its location was just over the border in New York where it occupied part of a large farming area with a huge hill for sitting.



When we got there, we immediately placed our chairs on the hill close enough for a good view of the stage. Our second chairs found their own places at a smaller stage with shows that were more

informal than those on the primary stage. A couple of years ago the whole shebang moved to the Connecticut fairgrounds. Compared to the stage at the bottom of the hill in New York, the Connecticut stage is only OK. Ellen and I often sit in the area reserved for those who are less agile and mostly older. No problem there. We can hear the music, look out over the crowds, and watch people of all ages jump up to dance.

Ellen and I have always stayed at a BNB not too far from the festival. What we want most are comfortable beds, and we usually get them. For the last three years in Connecticut, the bedroom across the hall was rented by the same Falcon Ridge couple. We chat with them from time to time, but they have never become old friends. The old friends that we connect with every year are Ellen’s old friends whom she knew before moving to the Boston area. This year they invited us to eat with them at their trailer on Friday night right before the first evening concert, and we did.

One of the things I love about Falcon Ridge is its yearly repetition. We know the way the festival works, we see friends, we see other people we recognize and remember because like us, they have consistently appeared at Falcon Ridge each summer.

It has been such a pleasure to have had Ellen as a friend for many years. We both taught at Driscoll School in Brookline, and we were often working with the same students in the same classroom. In fact, we have done a great many things together—taking walks, going out for dinner, going to the theatre, talking on the phone, Rosh Hashanah dinners, birthday celebrations, just sitting together and chatting—the list is endless.



Ellen is a true and dear friend, and I hope our friendship will continue to flourish. Though we are both at a point in time where health issues often slow us down, they will not interfere with our friendship. Our goal is to move along together for many years to come!

Happy 75th birthday, Ellen!

With Love,
Barbara

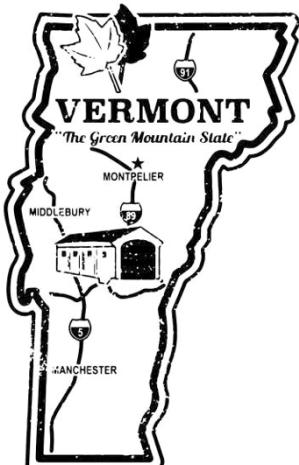
Some Thoughts in Celebration of Ellen Davidson's Three Quarters

By her friend Steven G. Blum

The first day I met Ellen, we were embarking on what seemed to us a long driving adventure together. A journey to a faraway place in the middle-of-nowhere in Vermont. Years later, that far away place would seem like home. Having never met before, I climbed into her passenger seat. We started the trip as strangers and arrived as old friends.

Our first year together at Camp Thoreau was a revelation to me. It may have seemed as familiar as an old hat to her. A community of young kids and older

kids making up its own rules (sort of) in the woods in the greenest place I'd ever seen. In that remarkable environment, we forged our growing connection with each other. Ellen was older than me in 1979, and more familiar with an alternative world that I was just beginning to understand at the conclusion of my sophomore year.



I loved to be around her. She knew worlds that I did not. In particular, the coming together of folks whose goal was to remake the universe into a better place. Ellen is beyond articulate, and it was wonderful to engage her in conversation. She was also the first person I had met who would sooner lay hands on a problem than sit and talk about it. She is, in many ways, the living embodiment of the camp slogan "many hands make light work." I was inspired by her endless energy and awed by her creativity.

It wasn't too long before I developed a romantic crush to go along with all that admiration. Ellen was beautiful and, framed by the lushest place I had ever been, very attractive. Like Cyrano, though, I was too bashful to speak of my feelings. While I cannot know for sure if those feelings were requited,



there is a bit of suspicious evidence. Every two weeks, campers and staff were assigned to new tables in the dining hall. It so happens that it was Ellen who was tasked with making the matchups. The concept, of which she was a great champion, was for every community member to meet as many other people as possible with an emphasis on creating interesting connections and opportunities for new friendships. Everyone got totally shuffled up every two weeks. With one exception: somehow Ellen and I were matched every single session that first summer. I was as much delighted as terrified that others would notice and accuse us of some sort of amorously inspired misdemeanor.

We got away with it. By the second summer (1980), we spent as much time together as possible talking, thinking, kibbitzing, and watching over the beloved little community. I think back upon those years as among the sunniest of my life. I hope Ellen remembers them as fondly.

The problem with an idyllic summer community, though, is that it ends with the Autumn and must be rebuilt, always a bit differently, the following summer. Time and growth took us all in different directions. I got the foolish idea to go to law school. Ellen moved to Cambridge to become part of the founding collective of a new experimental school. Eventually, she met Jim and they created a family together. By the time Hannah was born, I was dating Janet—easy to remember since I sent the future midwife speeding down dirt roads to Ellen’s bedside so that she might be present at the birth.

The years went by. Aviva arrived. Ellen’s career morphed and changed. I chased after a contentment I could not quite find while indulging in the strange hobby of running back to graduate school every few years. Our connection was maintained primarily by telephone, although I remember some lovely gatherings. Sometimes Adelaide would come to town and that might occasion a warm visit. Larry usually had something interesting cooking and, now and then, an outing would result.

Part of my life story was attempting to drop everything in the springtime so I could go be part of the camp staff. Some years it worked, some years it didn’t. My efforts culminated in a position at Dartmouth College and a move to Hanover in 1990. For four delicious summers, I could spend evenings and weekends at the end of Miller Pond Road as part of that wondrous community. For almost three months, the sun was always shining on my skinny little shoulders. As they grew older, Hannah and Aviva each took their turn being part of Camp Thoreau. They grew with the years, and I watched with pleasure and a certain pride. Ellen’s daughters.

Hannah and Aviva were special. And, of course, they were not special. At camp, they were part of the group. Playing, running, eating, dancing with all the others. Under the same trees, same dining hall, same Arts & Crafts, same goat pen, same pond where Ellen and I had first gotten to know each other years before.

The years went by. Time and distance and other pursuits tugged at the connection between us. Ellen became a college professor. I became a college professor. The girls grew to adulthood. The world changed a number of times. The “good fight” was always there to engage in, but it seemed to get redefined every so often. I have enjoyed calling Ellen on the telephone for over 40 years but, in recent times, it seems I only do it on her birthday.

Ellen Davidson is among the most unique people I have ever met. She is very special in so many ways: incredibly smart, remarkably can-do, and with extraordinary resolve. When we were younger, I would suggest that nothing could stop her. Now I would say, with even greater admiration, that only the tallest of mountains can slow her down (a little bit). How lucky are her friends, colleagues, students, housemates, and family to have Ellen in their lives. Perhaps “lucky” is not the right word, since she almost surely made the connection happen and kept it meaningful. How lucky is our world to have Ellen as a part of it. I am so glad to know you, Ellen, and to call you my friend. How lucky am I.



Barbara Bean

I've known Ellen almost as long as I've known Larry (42 years!). Although I don't remember actually meeting her I do remember being surprised at how different she is from her brother. Larry wants things "just so". Ellen is easy going and goes with the flow, ever accommodating. She's also much more physically active—walking, hiking, swimming, maybe even rock climbing?

And whereas Larry's idea of a large party is six people Ellen loves large gatherings, and enjoys hosting events, particularly at Jewish holidays. Most notably she has carried on their mother Adelaide's traditional Thanksgiving extravaganza, with the twist of the Harvest Haggadah (which is now not new anymore by any means and which needs updating and editing every year).

She is also fiercely loyal and is a great support for people she loves, which I truly appreciate.

Harvest Haggadah

Thanksgiving, 2011

Preparations

Like most rituals, this one requires a few preparations to make it work well. In addition to whatever foods are being cooked for the main meal, the following ritual items should be set on the table:

- ◆ A plate containing small bowls or piles of various harvest grains. These can include some combination of rice, wheat (flour), beans, oats, corn, and other grains.
- ◆ A basket of fruits, preferably filled to overflowing.
- ◆ Representations of each of the four ancient elements:
Earth—usually a plant in its dirt.
Water—a bowlful will do well. Some people use salt water to represent the oceans.
Fire—the candles will be lit during the ritual.
Air—all around us, so don't worry about this.
- ◆ A designated song leader who should practice the songs beforehand.
- ◆ A designated storyteller who should practice the story beforehand.

[Actually, the last two of these are not set on the table.]

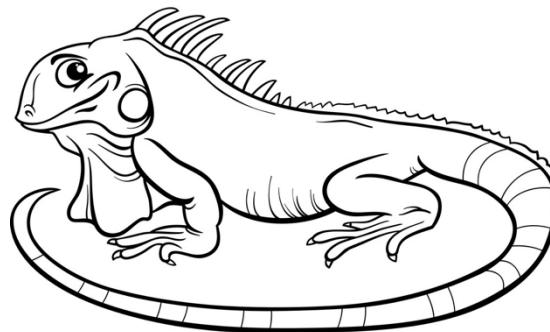
Alexander Goldowsky

I first met Ellen as a teacher. That is to say, I taught with her at the Phoenix School, but she was also very much *my* teacher when it came to the world of education. Ellen in her day-to-day teaching turned many theoretical ideas, and educational theories, into day-to-day reality. Perhaps most memorably, she was always paying attention to what students understood, asking questions to find out more, and discussing their ideas with them. Working with her it was clear that it was one thing to understand the subject matter—another thing to understand how to teach it, let alone understand what someone else was understanding as they were learning.

Fast forward a few decades, and during COVID, my son encountered long division while his school was still online—if he was going to get anywhere I would have to teach something I barely remembered how to do. I figured if anyone could help me it would be Ellen. So I was not completely surprised when she had at least an hour of thoughts, methods, directions she had tried, activity ideas, suggestions for manipulatives, and philosophical and historical background (all referenced) for how to approach teaching it.

Of course, Ellen’s understanding of students went far beyond academic subjects. She built relationships with them, and their parents, and often was a critical support for them. Time, energy, and care, not to mention detailed plans for tomorrow’s activities, flowed from her, in a seemingly endless way—often when the rest of us were ready to fall into bed. And on a larger plane, her teaching reflected a deep caring for the communities around her—on a local and global level. Of course, Ellen’s teaching continued way beyond the Phoenix school and the same qualities allowed her to teach any age, whether kindergartners or graduate students.

I count myself lucky to have taught with Ellen, and also—at different times, and over decades—to have known her as a friend, a co-op housemate, to have seen her raise amazing children (carrying them around while teaching), and create communities in classrooms and beyond. Not many people would make a fun story out of the time someone’s pet lizard (ok, a 3-foot-long iguana) decided to leap from a hiding place on top of a high shelf onto her sewing table while she was working quietly, be willing to turn a classroom into a steam-filled rainforest one week and a bedouin tent the next, plan weekly field trips to explore the city, or embrace an April Fool’s day feast of questionable foods as a yearly house tradition.



So much for history. Ellen, you continue to be an inspiration, as you enjoy the many friendships you have made, deal with the slings and arrows of fortune, and continue with strength, a clear voice for justice, a skilled eye and hand creating beautiful things, endless curiosity, still teaching, and all with the endless energy that is you. (Don’t try to diagram that last sentence.)

—Alexander

Jim Hammerman

I met Ellen in 1984 when I was fresh out of college, and she hired me to teach at The Phoenix School—the innovative, cooperatively run, urban one-room schoolhouse in Central Square, Cambridge, founded by Ellen’s brother Larry and others, where she was the primary elementary grades teacher. Then and now, Ellen brings to teaching her many gifts—passion, creativity, scholarship, and enthusiasm. Together with other staff, we created engaging curriculum focused on a central theme each year, went on weekly field trips all around the Boston area (“*Charlie on the MTA*” was our school theme song), and embraced constructivist pedagogy, integrated curriculum, and project-based learning before these were “things.” We also created a deeply caring community, where quirky and interesting students and teachers (and families and visitors) could feel well held and nurtured to explore, and be creative, and learn.

Every day we sat together for morning meeting—Ellen’s lap was always full of kids—and talked about the issues of the day at school and in the world, and sang folk songs, often political ones. Students imagined themselves as superheroes with unique superpowers, writing stories about how they’d improve the world, and making costumes for the posed picture illustrations. We recreated a Ghanaian village on the playground as part of our yearlong study of world cultures. We measured the room in units of Sarah, our shortest student (we traced her and made a cardboard cutout), and by the end of the year discovered that Sarah was $1\frac{1}{8}$ Sarahs. We held an indoor beach field trip on a cold January day to get a needed taste of summer—kids put on bathing suits, we turned up the thermostat a few degrees, spread sand on the floor, suntan lotion on our skins, and played surfer music and danced. These were joyful, creative, heady times.

The values of The Phoenix School—community and collaborative effort, nurturing the unique gifts and potential of each person, exploring deep connections among places and times and people and ideas, the ever-present possibility and imperative to work for equity, inclusion, and social justice—are ones that Ellen has always held dearly. These values, which I also share, drew us to buy a house together with others and create a community, which we called “Tkanye,” a word based loosely on the Russian word for “weaving.” They drew us to start a family and raise our two amazing, palindromic-ly

named daughters, Hannah and Aviva, together in marriage and then collaborating and co-parenting after we divorced. Our expanding circle included many housemates who sometimes became family, like the Siek-Manz clan (Andrew and Aviva are “twins, 3 weeks apart”), as well as my wife, Maggie, after we married. As our daughters have grown into fabulous women, their partners, Ben and Jake, and all their families, are woven into the ever-broadening circle.

Ellen’s curriculum development projects—for *Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego?*; *Fires in the Mirror*; *Cooperative Learning*, *Cooperative Lives*; and the many iterations of *Open Minds to Equality*—and her work doing teacher education and professional development for *SummerMath for Teachers*, *Math for Tomorrow* and other projects at EDC, Wheelock, Simmons and elsewhere, also embody these values. They have made a difference in the lives of the many people they’ve touched.

Ellen has always liked making things. There are puzzles, dolls and picture books for her students, daughters, and granddaughters; Thanksgiving and other holiday centerpieces inspired by her mother Adelaide; and many, many fabric projects like pillows, clothing (twirling skirts!), picture frames, boxes, quilts (including for my parents, Herb and Evie, as they launched their new boating life together; and for many babies including our granddaughters, Eve and Ada), weavings (card, backstrap, and floor loom-based), costumes for superheroes, Ghanaian villagers, and First Night stilters among others. These creative gifts bring beauty and joy to many.

As we celebrate your 75th birthday, Ellen, I wish you joy and love and many blessings. May you continue to grow and thrive and find ways to bring your values and gifts to your family, your community, and the world.

With Lots of Love,
Jim

Andy Hammerman and Michelle Kirby

Rambling Memories from brother-in-law Andy

I think I first met Ellen at the Phoenix School where my older brother Jim was teaching (and running the school) and they were already dating. It was probably in 1983 or 84? Maybe it was when I was in High School and came out by train to the east coast to look at Hampshire College. Jim lived on Prospect St and Ellen lived up in the neighborhood of Tkanye (Walnut St)? Fuzzy memories.

I remember wearing a crazy purple tie-dyed shirt with large bellbottom type sleeves to Jim and Ellen's hippy wedding... I fit right in. Hahaha. There were 2 different periods that I hung out at Tkanye—one was when Chuck and Cheez and I lived down the street in Newton Sq and the other was with Michelle.

Early on I was given Ellen's old red 2-door Datsun 210 named Grizelda as a hand-me-down when Jim and Ellen were given my parents old black Subaru hatchback as an upgrade. Ellen had bought Grizzy brand new many years ago and she already had almost 200,000 miles on her. The Subaru was more of a family car.

Michelle learned how to drive stick-shift on Grizzy when we drove from California down to the Green Tortoise Baja Mexico beach camp. By that time, I had hand painted Grizzy blue with a brush. Before that I had painted her with green and purple and blue flames off the hood. In Mexico I painted the 'Mona Grizzy' on her hood before she became a permanent Green Tortoise Beach mobile.



I remember parking the Green Tortoise Bus on the steep hill in front of Tkanye after driving cross country from San Francisco. It was between trips picking up another 40 passengers to drive back west. Somehow the bus got broken into and my guitar (named Magdelana) was sadly stolen right there.

I remember briefly living in the basement of Tkanye with Michelle when we were trying to save money to move to Ecuador. The basement was not really set-up as an apartment, but we moved boxes and storage stuff and furniture around to create a space for a futon and 'lived' there. We both worked to save up for our Ecuador adventure. The area of the basement that we were in was directly below the dining room living room, so it was really loud when people walked through upstairs. Bones was down there with us, but he didn't make too much noise.

Michelle worked as a home health aid and I returned to work at the warehouse for Northeast Cooperative Organic Produce. I used to bring home

fruits and veggies from the warehouse—I remember bringing home a case of Avocados. Our turn to cook? Guacamole! Mexican Food!

People in the house at that time: Jim Ellen Hannah and Aviva; Lori Gordon and Emily and Andrew—before they started breeding like crazy. Alexander lived up on the 3rd floor attic apartment with a pet Iguana. Before Michelle and I lived there I remember Kristina and Rick (the tree planter guy) who had the coolest old Chevy Van turtle top camper complete with a forest of Bonsai Trees inside it...

Michelle and I actually bought our 1977 VW Westfalia Camper van just down the street from Tkanye at a garage for \$2000—I think it was in 1991? That was the most money

either of us had ever spent at the time. Ellen is an amazing person. She can make and sew anything. She added sunflower fabric to the curtains of our van which still hang in our VW today!

Ellen, even though she was prone to get seasick, went sailing with Jim and my parents Evie and Herb on their boat Lory on Lake Michigan!

Michelle's Memories

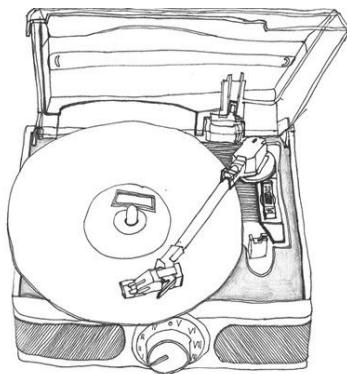
Ellen was always very accepting of me (Michelle) when I felt like I didn't fit into what Herb and Evie wanted for Andy. She welcomed me into Tkanye

(like she did everybody!) with a brief hug and easy smile and put me to work right away with helping to prepare dinner. I remember the girls so young, Aviva always wanting ‘nursies’ and Hannah always a bedtime story. I remember ‘hands’ around the dinner table and communal meals with interesting conversations. I remember puzzles and numbers games. I remember Adelaide and Alton, what a handsome pair. I remember Ellen’s long thick braids, and then when she cut her hair how beautiful it looked short. Ellen has always been ageless. She has a wonderful spirit.

Sharon Kennedy and Paul Lehrman

From Sharon

My quintessential oft-told tale is about meeting Ellen for the first time. I was up at Camp Thoreau with Paul whom I had also only met quite recently. He was roaming around the camp gathering material for a Boston Globe story he was writing about the camp, when, left to my own devices, I came upon Ellen, who was organizing folk dancing for the campers. She needed to go off camp to borrow a record player, and I offered to accompany her. When I returned, Paul was rather chagrined, since he had been looking everywhere for me, and he said, “You missed a sunset!” I said, “Well, I’ve been busy making a new friend, whom I think I’m going to have a for a very long time.”



From both of us

We share Ellen’s sense of humor and especially her sense of irony. We share her politics and big-picture perspective of the world. We also share her interest in community, especially as expressed by dinner parties celebrating holidays such as Passover and Winter Solstice, and by community sings during the pandemic.

Ellen is such a loyal fan and attendee at years and years of Sharon's storytelling shows and Paul's concerts. She is equally supportive of Sharon's book.



Ellen and Sharon share an intense interest in sociological analysis, of people, places, and really anything at all.

From Paul

I have a sister named Betty, but I never realized I had another sister named Ellen, until the denizens of Medford's Wright's Pond started frequently inquiring, "Is your sister coming today?" meaning Ellen, whom we sneak in (the pond is "Medford residents only") many times each summer. Sharon and I have decided that I am a middle child with an older and a younger sister. And my two sisters are BFFs.

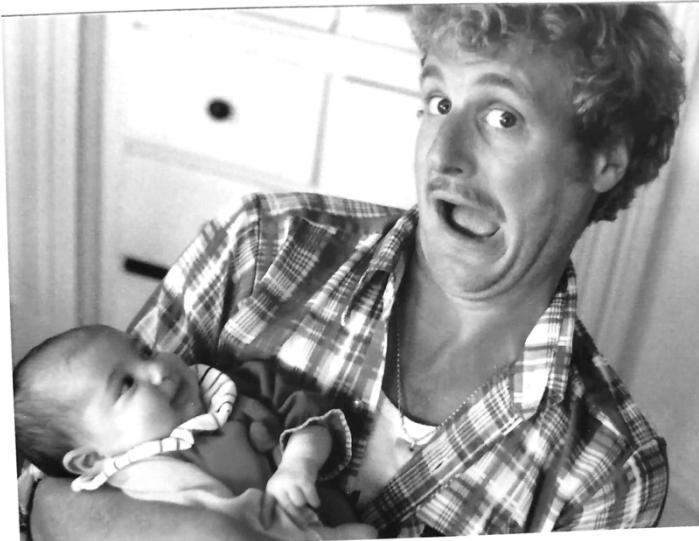


From both of us

We have been close friends for a very long time. We cherish our relationship which has evolved and taken many forms over almost 40 years. We admire Ellen for her courage, patience, and persistence. We are fortunate to have a friend like her. A friendship like this is a rare and valuable thing.

Arnie Hammerman

I met Ellen in the mid 1980's when she started dating and later married my older brother Jim. Ellen and I didn't have a lot in common. She was older and a lot more mature than I was, an educator, a vegetarian, and prone to motion sickness. I was a single college student and a boat captain frolicking around. Over the years I got to know Ellen better at family gatherings and while stopping into Tkanye when I was in the Boston area. I learned that she has a constant presence. She typically doesn't make a fuss but in her determined way gets things done and gets what she wants or needs. When Hannah, and then Aviva were born, Ellen really shone, teaching the girls, and helping them to grow while allowing their unique personalities to develop. I saw her maintain control during times when I would have exploded, she calmly plodded on. Even when faced with challenges Ellen remains poised and resilient. As time rolls on, I have learned to respect Ellen's constancy. I am sure she has changed over the years but in many ways, she seems the same to me. Her intellect, her determination, and her calm willfulness shine on. I wish her the best at 75 and it is nice to know that at whatever age she is at or achieves she will still be the same thoughtful person that I have known for over 40 years.



Dear Ellen,

Happy Birthday, we have known each other for many years and have shared many milestones, co-housing, pregnancy, babies, birthdays, graduations, holidays, weddings, a bar mitzvah and most sweetly our grandchildren.

A common thread that runs through all these events is the creations you crafted to commemorate many occasions. From hats, scarfs, mittens, special dresses and outfits to quilts for new babies and weddings.

I'll write about a few special ones: the stuffed three-toed sloth that lives in Andrew's man cave. His presence is always noted. A very special angel Christmas tree topper that we use every year. You recently gave her a face lift. I love her so much. And most specially the wedding pillow you made for Gordon and I. You appliquéd Gordon, Emily and I standing on the porch of 30 Walnut St dressed in our wedding finery. Our wedding date is embroidered on the pillow.



Since early September is often hectic Gordon and I can't remember if our anniversary is September 8th or 9th. After several years of ripping the house apart the first week of September to find papers with our wedding date I remembered "the Pillow". Now I check it the beginning of every September!

Mostly I appreciate how you passed on your talent and love of craft to Hannah and Aviva. Both create memorable

keepsakes for family and friends. Including Charles's beautiful Bar Mitzvah Tallis that Aviva made for him.

Happy Birthday Ellen!, May you continue to grace us with your beautiful objects and presence for many years to come.

Lori

Emily Manz

Ellen made my husband and I a quilt as a wedding gift. She chose a fabric of purple, silver and black birds and cut and sewed pieces into an interesting geometric pattern. If you look closely at it, you can see how she examined the fabric from multiple angles and carefully chose the way she cut it to create patterns within patterns. The birds' necks and wings create new shapes across the seams. Ellen designed and sewed this for us with love and joy, to engage both our sense of beauty and our intellectual curiosity. It is emblematic of the way she engages with the world.

As my teacher in Kindergarten through third grade, I know she taught me some important skills and facts. I remember phonics worksheets with her long braids dangling in my field of vision, piles of base ten blocks, nocturnal animals and "Sarah, Plain and Tall". I also probably would have learned those *things* without her. Being her student was about being part of a community of learners in a world of questions. She'd teach us something, then we'd flip it over and examine it from multiple perspectives, combine it with something someone else learned and create something new. The phonics worksheets (and the braids!) are long gone, but her challenge to consider the process of discovery and the way knowledge fits into the world remains.

I enjoy the aesthetics of this quilt in my home. I also love that it reminds me that Ellen is always ready to join family and community to celebrate a major life event. And I love that it reminds me to approach life with curiosity, craft and complexity.

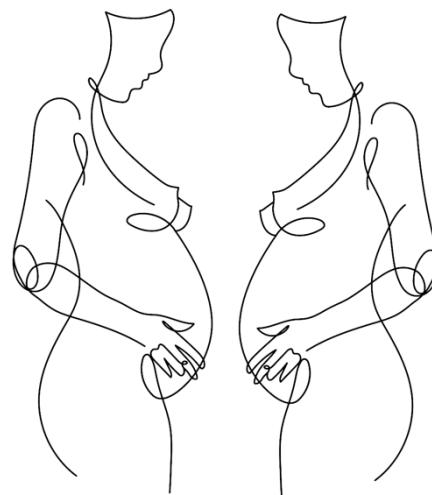
Ellen loves people. She is endlessly interested in and amused by them, and she remembers everyone—even if she hasn’t met them. She always sees the best in people. I’m proud to call her my “sister.”

Ellen and I met through my (real) brother and sister-in-law, Paul and Sharon, back in about 1986. We were casual friends until I became pregnant for the first time, and Ellen—pregnant with Aviva and due two months before me—became my pregnancy partner. Not only did we compare aches and heartburn, fatigue and energy, we talked about men opening doors for us (which was unexpectedly welcomed in our preggie-state) and everything else. She was definitely my gentle, calm guide. Ellen and Aviva came to my baby shower and I held the (4-week-old?) baby on my baby-belly as Ellen laughed. During our baby years Ellen was a wonderful listener and consultant, a calm voice at a point where I had so many questions—the color of poop, lack of sleep, the first cold, first words, and so much more.

As the years passed we celebrated birthdays, Thanksgivings and Jewish holidays together—so much so that our kids thought Hannah and Aviva were cousins as they were growing up. After college, Laura moved into Tkanye and we saw another side of Ellen—the very laid-back center of the household, who easily navigated many different personalities, and delighted in things around her even through unexpected events.



And then there was boating... Somewhere along the way, Ellen and I became kayaking buddies. I don’t remember the first time we went out, but for at least 10 years I would get a season pass and we’d meet at the state park on Lake Cochituate. We’d rent a double kayak, pack a picnic, and paddle under Route 30 and the Mass Pike to the North Lake, until we reached a tiny spit of land we thought of as “our beach.” There we’d swim, eat, and swim some more. We never ran out of things to talk about.



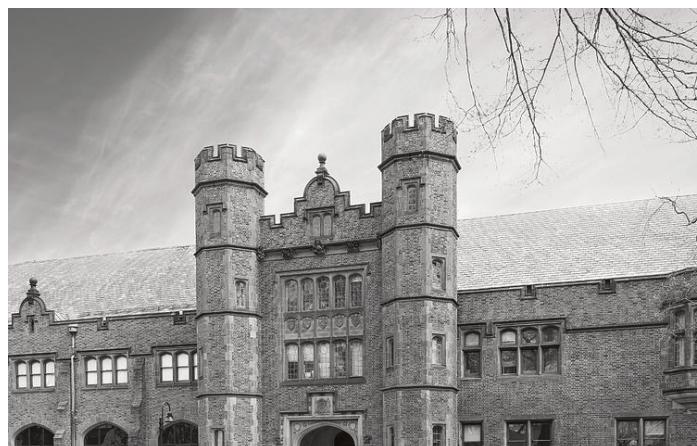
Frequently I would share stories from camp and Ellen would have insightful things to say about the campers, parents, or staff members involved. When COVID hit and we weren't sure the boat rental place would open, we bought an inflatable kayak. It was sometimes an adventure getting in and out of it, but Ellen always prevailed! Several times I've been tempted to go out alone, but I realized it's Ellen's company that is the secret sauce, making kayaking and swimming so much fun. This summer, toxic algae and busy schedules prevented us from going out much, but I look forward to next year when I hope we can spend many more days chatting on the water.



Everything is better when Ellen is there, with her unwavering interest in everything and anything!

Gini Stimpson

I met Ellen in the summer of 1987 when we worked together in *SummerMath for Teachers* at Mount Holyoke College. That collaboration led to other experiences where we shared our knowledge and expertise with each other, teachers, administrators, and students. Additionally, I was the NSF evaluator of curricula that Ellen helped craft called *Lenses and Learning*. In addition to providing facilitator workshops in the Boston area, Ellen and I traveled to districts throughout the country to do week-long workshops that made use of what we learned from working in the *SummerMath* Program and from supporting teacher leaders and administrator in implementing the *Lenses* curricula. Ellen always had something to teach me about creating a



supportive classroom that acknowledged the diverse needs of each and every student. Ellen provided research and data for me to consider as we worked to meet the particular challenges of the districts with whom we were working. We drew on our past practice yet we refreshed and improved workshops that we offered more than once.

I enjoyed learning with and from Ellen. We both loved mathematics and were grounded in research, formative assessments, and the practical work of regular classroom teaching. Ellen was creative, curious, generous, and fun. The problems she posed and the questions she asked encouraged each and every person to be fully engaged and open to trying out ideas they were learning from other participants. She listened for the sense in participants' approaches. Ellen could describe what people understood and had yet to learn, and then she had fresh ideas about how we might extend their thinking. I've loved being immersed in Ellen as a person as well. I love the clothes she wears and her desire to keep active. I share her pride in her two daughters. I love that Hannah and Aviva picked up their parents' commitment to learning and their desire to be adventuresome. They share their parents' commitment to a generosity of spirit. I appreciate that Ellen has found ways to accommodate her challenges as she continues to inspire new teachers.

It's a joy to celebrate Ellen's uniqueness and character. As you can read, she has been a wonderful collaborator and friend.

Gini Stimpson

Amy Hadley

Dear Ellen, so many years and experiences to choose from!

The first anecdote that came to my mind was many years ago, (over 30, in fact) when you and Jim were working at the Mt. Holyoke College summer math program and I was at social work school at Smith. You asked me out of the blue if I was interested in becoming an “entomologist”. That was a real conversation stopper—I had no idea what you were talking about! With some prodding from me, you revealed that I was going to become an “Ant”, because you were pregnant with Hannah. Very creative way to break the news!

Speaking of creativity, I am remembering the fabulous birthday parties you would create with and for your girls as they were growing up. Like the Pippi Longstocking party one of them had, complete with having kids strap sponges to their shoes and “wash” the floor (like Pippi did in the book). And the Famous Women party, when guests were asked to dress up like famous women, and then we all had to guess who was who. No plain old cake-and-balloon only parties for your girls!

One more—well, two more: it meant so much to Maya when you and Aviva helped her make a quilt for her baby using your fabric and sewing equipment and quilting expertise. You gave her so much ownership of that project, and she was so proud of the finished product. And when you (and maybe Aviva) helped Rosie make a stuffed animal donkey, again with material and equipment found right in your own home.

Thank you for all of these years of friendship and support and creativity!

Love,
Amy (Hadley!)



Gordon Siek

So having lived at Tkanye a number of years and having shared much time with you all (and playing with Hannah as I wrote my doctoral thesis there, and way more!!)—and through the birth of Aviva and Andrew (unofficial twins)—I could go on and on, but we come to the most debated discussion of all: Runcible Spoon or Spork?

Adelaide (who I adored) provided all of us at the time a great collection of silverware including a set of wonderful runcible spoons? Sporks? (Okay sporks are just not a Victorian description of Silverware!) *The Owl and The Pussy Cat* by Edward Lear (a wonderful children's book) was read to all the children in the house and beyond and has passed into history:

*"They dined on mince, and slices of quince,
Which they ate with a runcible spoon"*

Ironically, Edward Lear made up that name. Not to be a downer but Runcible Spoons are actually called... Well I still call them Runcible Spoons.

Gordon



Hannah Hamavid

I've known you (Ellen/Mama/Ma/Mom-squared) since 1988 or so, depending on what you think "to know" is (according to Hampshire College: not enough). As a fraction of your lifespan, seven 15ths is low to middling, but as a percentage of mine it's tied for one hundred with an elite crew of... everybody whose parents knew you before their kids were born! Okay so maybe a better denominator is not lifespan, but life, which is harder to measure. This feels like a dauntingly big thing to do justice to, so I'll try not to overthink it.

As of 2020 I've been newly initiated into the "sandwich generation" (in which my mother and my daughters are the bread and I'm the marinated soy-based protein product, or maybe just hummus, because why do people think that we want it to seem like meat?) While I've always been thankful for my parents and the unique way I got to grow up, this latest chapter in my life has given me fresh eyes on parenthood. I've come to newly appreciate and admire some aspects of how I was raised that I hadn't necessarily thought much about before having kids. These include your ability to not only stay afloat but thrive on chaos, your deft reframings of inconvenient situations, and your general disregard for societal expectations—at least the pointless ones like naptime or conventional living arrangements.

But beyond showing me how to ride the tides of entropy, I've been lucky to have you as my first tour guide to the world. Since my babyhood you have been enthusiastically introducing me to everything you know about, and nurturing my own interests and relationships as they emerge. I realize now that it's rare to be instilled with such a love of math, crafts, anarchism, adventure, and really most sections of life (except, of course, sports and business, which are kindling for the fire—although it turns out I actually like some sports). You have always



been supportive of challenges I wanted to take on and confident, sometimes less than accurately, in your belief in my abilities and independence. Importantly, all my life you have modeled how to be both a doting parent and very obviously your own person, with passions, deep friendships, values, and a life that happened before I showed up, and keeps on evolving with me as part of it.

One of the memes I remember coming up periodically when I was growing up was the melting pot. As was common with household ideas, this concept was introduced Talmud-style, that is, already replete with commentaries as well as commentaries on commentaries. So the melting pot was actually just the first course in a dinner, followed by stew, and then salad. For dessert there would be a debate about which of these culinary metaphors was the best fit, either descriptively or prescriptively, for the process of immigration and assimilation in the United States. Generally the deliberation was around texture, and how uniform culture is or should be; how much the diverse ingredients, aka people, should mingle into new flavors versus keep their distinctions, their histories, and whether or not these situations precluded each other.

Although that discussion was about America, I think the idea extends well to smaller groups, like say a classroom of 20, or perhaps a house of 8-10 people and 1-7 non-human animals, trying and erring their way into some kind of harmony (not to mix in music metaphors). Although everyone is raised in community, you are unusually immersed in yours, and living with people in the same house is a special kind of knowing them. I don't know how much it was from growing up at Tkanye or with you, or whether that's a chicken-or-the-egg kind of question, but I feel that I was given uncommon perspective on both the range of possible ways to be an adult and on how people function in groups. This included, a la stew, balancing an appreciation for distinctions and differences with making necessary compromises towards each other. It also meant experimenting with communication styles, and dreaming about



how these lessons could be applied back up through larger groups to all of society in order to make a better world.

Although I apparently decided to go with the food analogy, a common thread throughout people's submissions to this festshrift has been textile comparisons—perfect for you, really, as someone who has worked with fibers and fabric prolifically all her life, and even just last month attended a week-long weaving class with Aviva. The house itself is named Tkanye, which loosely translates to *weaving*, (perhaps it means loose weaving? That would be apt) in honor of us “weaving our lives together”. And the images of continuous threads and the interplay of textures and patterns easily evoke the ideas of a complex, yet cohesive, life and community. But, a mathy-textile connection I haven't yet seen made is that of increasing dimensionality: From when you first taught me to cast on (while visiting Nana at her place near CFS), I was struck by the magic of transforming something one-dimensional (eg a string of yarn) into something two-dimensional (an impractically small scarf, in this case). By entangling ourselves just so, we've turned a line into a plane. Similarly, you've always demonstrated that as simple little people in a big universe, we can nevertheless engage intensely with the world and with other people, and in doing so unlock new dimensions in life.

Reading all the responses for this book has been a lovely reminder of the plethora of connections you have made and maintained throughout life. Among other things, your ability to build deep relationships and keep old friends for decades is inspiring, and I hope I'm on a similar path.

Karen Snider

I think it was the fall of 1988 when I first met Ellen. I decided to leave my job in a design firm in NYC and study education. My cousin Evie's eldest son, Jim, lived in Boston and when Evie came to town I was invited to dinner. Dinner at Walnut Street was the first time I met Ellen. Ellen and Jim had created an environment that was warm, friendly, focused, chaotic, sensory-rich, and intellectually stimulating. So much was going on all at once... sewing, conversing, drawing, reading, knitting, cooking, baking, finding palindromes, math, eating, music, and fearless creativity... I felt

relaxed and enriched each time I came to the house—whether it was for Passover, a birthday, or just dinner. I loved to watch Ellen interact with Hannah and Aviva. I was (and continue to be) inspired by her passion for teaching—and the way she opened up the world up for her children (and grandchildren) and her students. Ellen and Walnut Street are very special to me—during the 5 years that I lived in Boston, I felt so lucky to be part of a family in which everyone's voice was important...and imaginative projects were underway in every corner.

Janet Hammerman

When I met Arnie in 1990, Herbie and Evie (his parents) were off sailing in the Caribbean after an early retirement. Though I had met Andy and Michelle, it was early on, and they were not yet a couple. It felt like a big deal to fly to Boston to meet Arnie's older brother and his family. I hadn't traveled very much at the time. Getting on the T, then off the T and going to Faneuil Hall felt to me exactly like Boston should feel.

I remember meeting Ellen and having her show us to our digs in the big house at Tkanye. Aviva was an infant. We spent time with Hannah and met the other housemates. I felt very welcome there. Much like the city of Boston is different from LA where I grew up, so was the household I was visiting. I was impressed by the large loom, by the abundance of musical instruments, and by the lack of TVs. I hadn't seen group living quarters where everyone sat down together for dinner and held hands. I hadn't thought about the socially and environmentally conscious activities the way they did. They taught me a lot about how to live differently and how to stand up for causes you believe in.

I liked getting to know Ellen and seeing her joy in being a mom. The girls inspired a sense of awe in her which seemed like for someone who has so



much knowledge and experience, was hard to do. It was fun to hear her giggle in delight around them.

Once I became a mom, it was fun to meet in Boston and play in parks together. She was then and is still genuinely interested in how the boys are and what they are involved in. I remember fondly all the books she sent to us for when Hadyn was born. There were all the favorites! Then there were the handmade gifts sent to us all. Ellen is talented, creative, and generous.

The car rides to New Hampshire always brought with it math games for the car. The girls learned about creativity and academics from an early age! I have such fond memories of visiting Boston and of knowing Ellen throughout the years.

Dear Ellen,

Happy 75th birthday to you! Or should I say happy 3/4 of a century, or 900 months, or 3913 weeks, 27394 days?

Carol Schraft

I met Ellen through Judy McCarthy who told me Ellen was the smartest person she knew about teaching math. We hired Ellen on the spot because Judy's assessment was correct. Not only did she know math, but she was funny, enthusiastic, and had a winning way with kids. I learned a lot of math tricks from Ellen such as when adding an odd lot of numbers, go to numbers that are easy to add in your head like 5s and 10s and then add on the small remainder. What the kids loved was all the ways you could get to a number, and the ways were infinite. Of course then Ellen would ask for the most elegant way; I just love that term.

One time Ellen invited me to her home in Somerville for dinner. Ellen shared her home with a group of housemates and there were shopping lists, cooking assignments and clean up lists. I thought it was the most complicated way possible to think about dinner, but it worked and was delicious.

Wishing Ellen a magnificent 75th birthday!

I'm not really sure how to gauge when I met Ellen considering my existence is intimately tied to her. I literally have not known life without her, and trying to write this reflection has turned out to be oddly challenging. Perhaps I'm just struggling with where to start and wanting to plan it all out and have a linear trajectory. But Ellen is not necessarily a fan of things progressing in a linear fashion, preferring to see things ebb and flow, grow thicker and thinner, and cycle back on themselves, so I'll try to embrace that mentality in this piece.

I don't remember how old I was when I first noticed a quote Ellen had in her study—printed out and framed, perhaps, which I believe to be attributed to David Hawkins: "We have to cross the boundary between knowing and not knowing many times before we achieve understanding." This is such a characteristic Ellen quote. Ellen believes in growth-mindset in its truest form, before it was such a ubiquitous catch phrase throughout education used so much it became almost a joke. For her, the mentality that we are always learning, we are always growing, we are always adapting, is undeniable and at the core of her thoughts and actions.



Lately, Ellen has embraced growth-mindset as she adapts to challenges and changes in her life. She somehow manages to turn almost all of them into positives, opportunities to develop new habits and routines. When it became challenging for her to cut her own nails, she started going to a nail salon down the street, experimenting with glittery nails and artistic decorations, and in classic Ellen fashion, befriended the owners to the extent that she gives them birthday presents for their own children.

Ellen is overwhelmingly passionate about education, and will never give up on it, even as I myself became jaded and

defeated by the system, Ellen pours her heart and soul into training new teachers. She is officially retired, but Ellen doesn't know how to rest. As she added a couple courses and some supervisees back into her schedule after "retirement," I would find myself half seriously/half jokingly mentioning that she was, in fact, supposed to be retired. "Oh..." she would remark, bemused, "I forgot." This has become something of a running joke between us, with her firmly asserting that she needs these activities to keep away the boredom.

I'm often told that I'm high energy, and I can be exhausting to be around, but my mother makes me feel like I take things slow. Ellen brings projects with her everywhere, and wants to fill each and every day with something productive. I find myself needing to carve out time to relax after she comes to visit despite the fact that many others have said something similar about me.

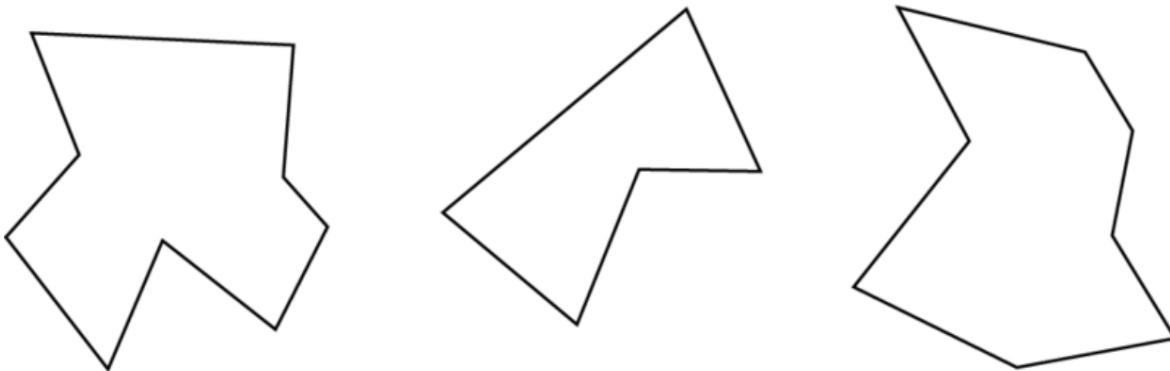
Our most recent adventure together was a week spent taking a joint weaving class at a folk school, spending 42+ hours together at the loom. Weaving is about connecting individual pieces into a cohesive unit. It's about using something simple and one dimensional to create patterns—patterns that may only be visible from certain angles, in certain lights, when looked at certain ways. It's unsurprising that Ellen has had weaving as a literal and figurative pillar of her life for decades.

She weaves fiber, but she also weaves people. At the folk school we were reminded that folk means people. It's about craft and art, yes, but more than that, it's about connection and those around us. Ellen thrived at the folk school. I remember when we were going on college tours that she rarely spoke up, articulating that she was not comfortable in those types of group settings. But at the folk school, she was completely comfortable. She was with people—her people—and you could tell. She made friends easily, challenged

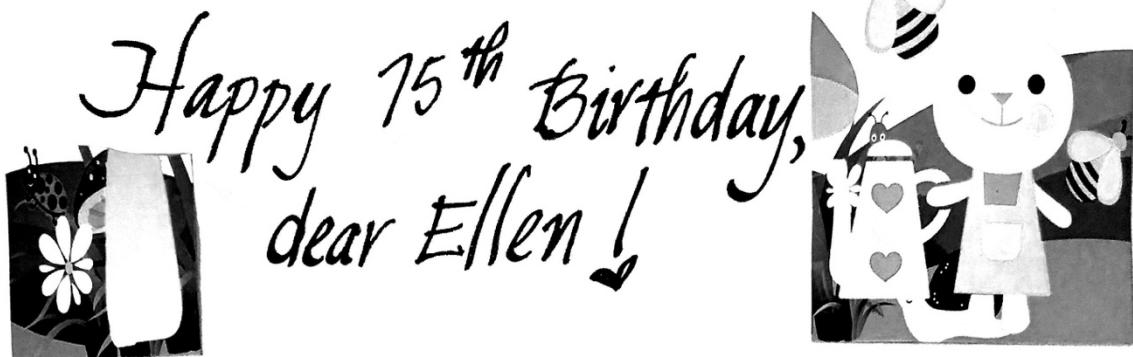


herself creatively and physically, and pushed herself to contemplate who she was, who she is, and who she's on a trajectory to become. Truly, an inspiration the entire time.

I'm inclined to comment here that we should all be so lucky to have Ellen's passion and creativity and energy at age 75. But it's not luck. It's intentionality and choice and prioritization. Ellen is clear about what matters to her. She maintains friendships through consistency and hard work, she stands up for her non-negotiable beliefs and lets go of those that do not matter, and she connects herself to others and people to one another, as this compilation of wishes and vignettes from so many facets of her life displays. And now I struggle just as much to end this as I did to begin it. Perhaps the challenge was that it was never meant to be linear. Perhaps not even something regular at all, for Ellen herself is far from regular.



Joan May Cordova



⌘ I remember when we first met in the

early 1990s : We were co-leading workshops for Boston
ESR (Educators for social responsibility) when a cute little Hannah
would enter the room at the end of the day to delight the group with
smiles. Meanwhile you nursed a soon to be articulate Aviva. ☺

⌘ We're so thankful to have been included

in the early years of TKanye : Hoping
you, we, many lives together

the girls recall how special it was to live

in an extended family community home that celebrated Holy Days,
veggie dinner parties, and mismatched birthday storybook recreations that even
Cambridge storekeepers knew about. We became "The Old lady professors" of Hazelots
and characters of Alice in Wonderland. And during Holier Days, our Hazelots of liberation
became meaningful for everyone - all the beautiful & stoners diverse people gathered at your clever
beautiful & bountiful tables blessed at your clever blessed we

⌘ The world needs to know what a caring,

thoughtful, and giving person you are.

through ups and downs, time, distance, friendship live on...

⌘ We're so blessed to know you ! Remember
driving me home in storms of rain or snow ? It's what your grandmothers would have
done if your handcrafted gifts are heirlooms - like your bunny on a wicker chair
that welcomed me to the office where we'd co-teach for nearly 10 years. You even paroxysmed
a mini-copy of our rabbit. She now reigns over my comatose grandmother's room. Little
Leia May enjoys her. My Passover Bunny "Ruch" (spit/wind belongs to Kori - daughter of poet prof
Sarah Lechtsis & Scott Kurashige (co-author with Grace Lee Boggs of The Next American Revolution). And so many
friends and family know you through the Grad Quilt ... Beyond gifts, it's the care and love and
friendship in every stitch, every gesture that ripples through your loving life. Ah. So. Blessed.

Kori is not
mentioning herself



page 2 for dearest Ellen -

May the light and
love of family and friends
who surround you today —
in real life (IRL) and in spirit
from all distances — be with
you and your "next generations"
forever. You are so loved!



Joan May

who has been living
on a beach, swimming
daily, and recently moved
to a garden retreat

↗
C for Communities — everywhere
Signal app
+63 946 018 5344 -

JOAN MAY T. CORDOVA

Alison Schwartz

To Ellen,

Thank you for always being my atheist-equivalent of a godmother! You mean a lot to me, and I appreciate your presence in my life since before I was born, more than I can put into words. Thanks also for being a home for my sister and for introducing me to your many diverse housemates over the years.

Happy Birthday!!!

Love,
Alison!

Joy Bettencourt

Ellen

Inquisitive, Creative, Adventuresome, Collaborative, Inclusive

Words that totally fit Ellen—and my sad attempt at using words with beginning letters in palindrome format—to make note of all of the ways Ellen loves to play with words and numbers and ideas and see them in fun patterns or unique ways or with interesting perspectives! But, with my attempt, all I could do was create a new word—**Icaci**. Now, continuing down this road for just a moment, if Icaci became an accepted word meaning a person who has all of those qualities, what a wonderful new word to add to our vocabulary, particularly in the times through which we are living. So may Icaci, as modeled by Ellen, thrive in all of us!

But, as much fun as Ellen has playing with words and numbers and ideas, she is all about probing the deeper meaning in the world around her. So let me focus on the deeper meaning of these words as I have experienced them with Ellen over the years.

Professionally, Ellen’s inquisitiveness and inclusivity have been a model for all of us who are fortunate to be her colleagues. I can think of so many

conversations in Ellen's office at Simmons that have probed playful approaches to teaching math, strategies that would help students engage with and understand a concept by applying it in practical ways. My eyes were first opened to how "white" the children's books we use in classrooms have been as I browsed Ellen's bookshelves and saw black and brown faces on children on covers and in books teaching about math and empathy and different cultures. Ellen has been way ahead of the curve in embedding multicultural literature into academic subject areas. She has delved into issues of race and racism for decades, and she prioritizes actions, activities, experiences that promote antiracism. I have learned and am continuing to learn so much from her!

Ellen is also humble! Over the years, I have sat in many meetings where I know Ellen's knowledge and understanding are deep and insightful, but she listens and learns from others, and, when asked, she adds a poignant and insightful thought to the conversation. With the richness of her experience and accomplishments, she just keeps on probing and exploring and experiencing and doesn't publicize her past accomplishments, as she looks to the next adventure or opportunity. I am full of admiration for Ellen's humility and wisdom!



Ellen is adventurous! She opens herself to new travel experiences, traveling individually as part of groups to new places—for a Civil Rights tour of the South, for a Habitat for Humanity house-building vacation, for trips to Africa and Asia to learn a new art form. She has travelled independently and with Aviva and Hannah.

And, yes, Ellen is creative and artistic, as can be seen in the beautiful quilts that she and her daughters have created! Ellen incorporates her appreciation for varied cultures by learning techniques that have a strong connection to peoples' heritages. She not only learns a craft; she develops an understanding

of why and how that craft became a significant part of a culture. Yep, I am in awe of her!

Ellen is a collaborator! Professionally and personally, working together as part of a community seems to be at the essence of Ellen! At Simmons, as a colleague, she welcomed sharing ideas and responsibilities in teaching and on projects. For her students, she modeled collaborative strategies so that her “future-teacher” students would embed a classroom culture that spread a sense of community and cooperation to their young students.

And I have an on-going appreciation for the wonderful community that Ellen’s home has been for as long as I have known her, so for decades—an inclusive space that promotes sharing of experiences, backgrounds, ideas, and responsibilities. Hannah and Aviva grew up with this sense of welcoming and camaraderie surrounding them. What a gift!

And what a special gift this birthday *Festshrift* is for Ellen. I am so glad that you asked me to contribute. And I would say that one of the greatest tributes to Ellen—one that is present on every page—is the fact that both of you, Hannah and Aviva, wanted to gather these thoughts for your Mom on her 75th birthday!

Happy Birthday, Ellen! May you thrive and keep on spreading your playful exuberance and deep commitment to social justice for years to come!
It is an honor to be your friend!

With deepest admiration,
Joy

As kindergarten began, Cambridge Friends School sent out a ZIP Code list to new parents for arranging carpools. Ellen and I found each other and have been friends for 30 years. Not only were Hannah and Tucker the same age, but Aviva and Oliver were also. The four went through elementary school playing whimsical creative games as a mixed-gender group can do. I was so fortunate that Ellen was home on all school holidays and snow days. Her home and her loving parental/teacherly gifts created a rich atmosphere for this play.

Ellen and I share an optimistic and resilient spirit, but hers is more remarkable than mine. She rolled with the disruption of her family in seemingly good spirits and then made friends with Maggie, simply including her in the family. She has rolled with her Parkinson's making necessary adjustments but continuing to teach and to travel, simply asking for help if needed. She has rolled with the evolution of her home, and lately ceded control in ways I never could.



The home she has created is one of her greatest successes. It has evolved from being families and mature adults to an ever-changing group of mostly young adults. The group decides on new members, not Ellen alone, but it is a carefully curated group. The current ethos is to be as helpful as possible (even though the routine chores are not always completed). Ellen has not only created what she needs as she gets older, but has provided a rich communal experience for dozens of people, many of whom continue as her friends. It enriched their lives.

Ellen has been my best friend for a long time. I am grateful for her thoughtfulness, her support , her company, her intellect and our shared mothering. I am grateful that the course of her Parkinson's is slow and we have many more years to share our lives.

I might have met Ellen once before this, but the time I remember is that we were at the Coolidge Corner Theater for a presentation for Jewish families on Christmas. I say that I must have met her once before this, because we vaguely recognized each other at the event. Our children were all very young.

We got together occasionally after that, but it took us awhile to realize our mutual love of theater. Especially theater that gives you something to chat about afterward.

Hannah and Sage did homeschool together for 3rd/4th grade and dropping off Sage on my way to work, got us knowing each other early in the morning—a good way to know if you can really get along.

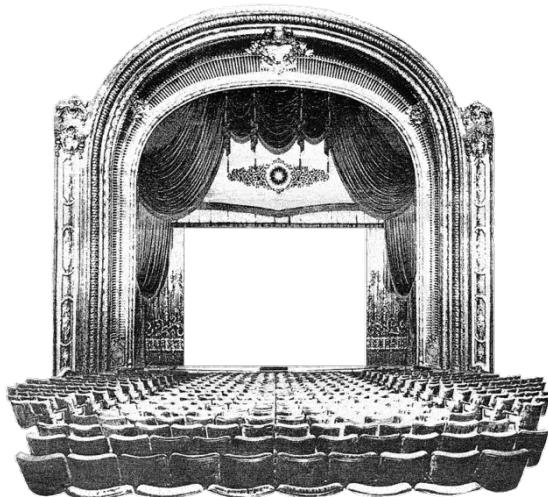


For many years, Ellen and her girls would pick Sage up from Rosh Hashanah services and take her apple picking—Sage has grown up to live on an apple farm (can we attribute this to Ellen—sure, she has had a huge impact on so many for many years).

Ellen and I have subscribed to various local theaters for years. We have seen wonderful productions, and plays that we didn't want to stay to the end for. We mostly combine theater with eating out, and it has been wonderful that we are both vegetarians/vegans, so we can eat together comfortably.

As we have gotten older, we have helped each other through various health issues with visits, food, and company.

It's a true gift of this incarnation that we meet people who are like sisters and soulmates. Ellen has been that for me.



On the occasion of Ellen's 75th birthday (just 52 days before mine)

When I first joined the *Lenses on Learning* group at EDC in the early 2000's and was introduced to Ellen, I realized I had met her before. The occasion was a havurah my husband and I attended a few miles from our summer home in NH. I don't recall how it came to pass that we were invited, since we didn't know the other guests or the person hosting the havurah. Her name was Evie.

Her home was lovely and rustic, set deep in the woods and perched high over a beautiful lake. The screened-in porch stood out. If I remember correctly, it was surrounded by screen on three sides, and on the lake side the land fell away steeply. Our NH home had no screened-in porch at the time, but soon after our visit to Evie's welcoming home on Thorndike Pond, my husband built one inspired by hers.



During the havurah, my husband and I walked down to the beach, and within moments, we were joined by a couple. The woman was laughing and talking excitedly about the summer workshop that had just concluded. The pressure was off, everything had gone wonderfully, and she was elated.

Needless to say, I had no idea back then that one day I would have the opportunity to work closely with this enthusiastic, fun-loving, energetic, knowledgeable and talented teacher. One of the most rewarding experiences I've had in my almost 75 years was co-directing a summer institute for school administrators with Ellen. She is a generous colleague, with her time and her know-how, and I learned a great deal from her through many discussions

and hands-on activities focused on how to make sense of the not so elementary ideas in an elementary mathematics curriculum; how to work with students' thinking, again not remotely straightforward; and how to help teachers decide which of the myriad possible directions to pursue would be the most fruitful when facilitating a mathematical discussion.

When Ellen and I were in charge of that summer institute, the work was intense, exhausting and rewarding, and after the institute was over, I fully understood the elation I had witnessed all those years ago when I met Ellen for the first time.

I was fortunate to have Ellen as a colleague during my EDC years, and now I am grateful to have her as a dear friend, one I wish I saw more often.

Dear Ellen,

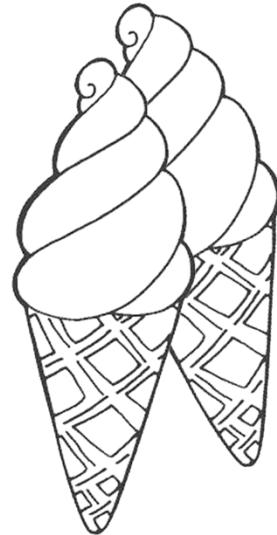
DWho would have thought that taking your math course at Simmons about 25 years ago would lead to such a rich friendship for me. I am honored to be your friend—sharing things from trips to local outings, book discussions and granddaughter stories. You enrich my life by pushing me to ponder and wonder about so many things.

Trips like the craft weekend in Vermont and the trip to Quebec were fun for me. I'll never forget trying to find our hotel in Trois Rivieres and then realizing it was near some not so reputable establishments. And then we helped that young man at the Quebec City AirBnB since he was cleaning the place and renting it while his friends were gone! Adventures and memories. The ice cream en route was delicious.

Local outings are too numerous to count. I love exploring museums like the MFA with you, attending plays and music events, and spending time in Somerville, Lexington, Boston, or Quincy. It's just plain fun to be with you. Sewing projects at your house are inspiring, and there are more to come for our collective granddaughters. I'm also remembering how my sons, Kevin and Danny, did handyperson projects at your house.



Ponderings and wonderings are some of my most valued interactions with you. Whenever you say "I wonder...", I know I'll be pushed to think hard and critically about my assumptions and attitudes. It happens all the time. Your mentorship is valuable to me: at Simmons, in Belmont for my year-long internship, in Acton teaching for 18 years, and now supervising teacher candidates. You help me see people and children on multiple levels. I loved being able to bring Anna as a young elementary student to your math class. I watched you figure out how she was thinking as she approached problems. You helped me be the best teacher that I could be. In our book group, your voice encourages me



to think in different ways and to choose books outside of my typical choices that often focus on equity issues. When we talk about our children and our granddaughters, I come away with new insights and new ideas for interactions. In serious times, you've supported me through breast cancer treatment, and I've been inspired by you living so fully with Parkinson's. And then there's our math project in Cambridge for which I still can't understand how *anyone* could label a number both odd and even. We need to follow-up on this.

So, happy birthday, dear friend. I look forward to celebrating with you. I am so grateful to have you as a friend.

With love,

Martha Sheridan

Denise Provost

I can't remember exactly when or how I met Ellen Davidson. It seems that she has always been a part of Somerville, a brilliant, talented, dynamo in her blue and purple house on Prospect Hill. What can Ellen not do? Sewing, teaching, mothering, advising, dancing, cooking; full of ideas, plans, and projects. But Ellen's most conspicuous talent has been her ability to bring people together, under her roof and in the broader world. That's why so many people know Ellen, why Ellen has so many friends. Her grand creation—beyond raising talented, courageous, and principled daughters—is community building. I'm glad to be part of any effort to pay tribute to her.



Leeanna Varga

I was lucky to be one of Ellen's roommates from 1998-2000. Even though my time at Tkanye was short, the experience has had an outsized influence on my life. There were seven humans, one rabbit, one dog, one cat, and a three-foot long iguana sharing the house, but it was Ellen's spirit and personality that I remember most vividly. I still remember my interview, conducted while I was still living in Mississippi. A "seeking roommate" index card I'd sent to the housing office at Harvard had been picked out of a box, and I spoke to Ellen for probably an hour over the phone. She told me there would be seven of us, and I remember her saying everyone was accustomed to sharing the bathroom, meaning when one roommate was in the shower, another might be brushing their teeth at the sink, or using the toilet... but explained that the shower curtain was thick. It's hard to overstate how unusual—and interesting—this seemed to me after six years living in Mississippi! She also said that some of the roommates occasionally walked around nude and asked if I would be okay with that... I thought for a moment and said I probably wouldn't be one of them, but it was otherwise okay with me.

I also remember her explaining in that interview that I would be responsible for cooking one vegetarian dinner each week. She was very clear that meat was never cooked in the house, but that if I went to a restaurant and ordered meat, it would be okay to store leftovers in the refrigerator. While I wasn't a vegetarian at the time, I remember really liking the fact that Ellen was living her values and was clear about her boundaries, but wasn't forcing them on anyone else. I think she actually explained this as the philosophy of the house, and I've often credited her for an approach to life that became a kind of guiding light for me.

Growing up, my family ate dinner together every night, but in some ways it's really Ellen's table that has had the most influence on the table I now set with and for my children. With a variety of graduate students in the house, conversations were always interesting, but I remember it being Ellen who cultivated a special spirit around shared meals, especially on holidays. There were candles and challah on Shabbat and Thanksgiving dinners with stir-fried rice served in tiny carved pumpkins at each plate. There were Passover Seders with a beautiful tablecloth, her mother's china, and folk songs. Mostly I remember the quiet at the start of regular dinners when everyone held

hands and held silence for “silent grace.” I have continued this practice in my own home, and at least two of my friends who experienced dinners at Tkanye do as well... so Ellen’s influence lives on at my dinner table in the suburbs of NYC, in Northampton, and in rural North Carolina... and who knows where else?

Ellen’s unconventional and intentional approach to life has carved out paths of possibility in my own life and now in my children’s lives as well. If I hadn’t met Ellen, would I have even taken the leap of faith to marry and have children in my 40’s? Would those children have had Harry Potter birthday parties with wand-decorating stations and broomstick flights on a backyard zipline? Would I drive 40 minutes to another state to take my child to a particular day camp where he might possibly “meet his people?” Luckily I’ll never need to know...

Ellen and I shared a home during a particularly challenging year in her life. Unfortunately I’m now facing similar challenges in my own. So these days I also find myself thinking about Ellen and taking strength from the memory of how she persisted in living the life she loved. Enough said.

I’m glad to have the opportunity to remember and reconnect on the occasion of this special milestone birthday. Ellen, may you have many more years of friendship, food, and joy!

With gratitude and love,

Leeanna Varga

Samantha Tan

Dear Ellen,

I first read about Tkanye in the summer of 2000 while I was visiting my dad in Perth, Australia. I was looking for a place to stay that Fall, while attending the Masters program at the Harvard Ed school. After reading the description of Tkanye, I decided that that was the last thing I wanted (too many people, too many animals) and arranged to live with two strangers somewhere in Central Square. Of course by divine arrangement that place caught fire and burnt down the day I arrived in Cambridge, just 3 days before

the start of term. I still remember the sunny day you drove up in your blue Volvo sedan to pick me up at the Ed School for an interview with you and Alexander. I immediately felt at home, welcomed, happy.

I stayed for 10 years. We shared so many conversations, meals, projects, dinner guests including an ex-president of Ecuador. We all loved Ani who lay down in the middle of cross walks when she felt like it. Of course them came Nala and Zazu. Watching you raise Hannah and Aviva convinced me motherhood could be fun. We talked a lot about childbirth. I saw you prepare meals for your students as you stayed curious about them as learners and as people. I watched you allow your kids to be themselves as long as math was involved. I watched and admired as you made countless quilts for babies, new couples, graduations, farewells. I rescued Alexander's iguana Calypso from his window ledge when he couldn't because his arm was broken and his friend Jose who was also in the house said "me and iguanas, No!" You were composting and using cloth grocery bags decades before it was cool.

You've been present in Darshan's life from the beginning as his Boston grandma, you and Ilene "LaLa and Lili". You've attended his birthdays, concerts and learning fairs, he's been a part of your classes at Simmons (together with Mochi his mini golden doodle who almost stole the show). You helped him sew his first pillow.

I've been in Boston for 23 years now and I lived with you at Tkanye for almost half that time. You've been family and friend, counsel and creative companion. You are one of the most generous humans I know, generous with your time and creativity, generous with your home and friendship, generous with your curiosity and positive regard. I am so grateful to have met you and to continue to have you in my life.

Happy 75th Birthday dearest Ellen!

Love,
Samantha & Darshan

In September of 2002 I became all too familiar with Walnut St, specifically the hilly stretch between Bow and Highland. As the months went on, my angry feelings at the daily climb up the hill were only matched by the boredom of the daily slip and slide down the hill after school. Days turned to months, and my hatred for this walk to and from high school only grew.

The only bright spot in this misery was this awesome blue house with purple trim. It had these hanging macrame plants, and the car in the driveway was COVERED in peace signs and lefty political slogans. With the war in Iraq imminent, my backpack was covered in similar buttons and stickers. I knew these must be my kind of people.

Every day, on the walk home, I thought of who these people might be. I'd seen a girl who looked about my age (she was!) biking around in Union Square, and sometimes going into that amazing house. I was positive that kindred spirits lived in this house.

So one day, as I was walking home on a miserably rainy cold day, I finally decided, it's time, and I rang the doorbell. I don't even remember who answered it anymore, all I know is I was right, this house totally had my people! From that day on, for the rest of high school, if I saw Ellen's car loaded with bumper stickers in the driveway (and sometimes, even if I didn't) I would knock on the door and say hi. The quilting, the crafting, the grapefruit to get over the cold I always seemed to have when I came over (didn't learn about my cat allergy until years later), that amazing blue house with purple trim became an oasis on my way home from school.

Sure, I could talk about Ellen coming out to support me my senior year in our Broadway Review (seriously, I am still amazed she came out to voluntarily watch high school students butcher songs from musicals and did it with a huge smile on her face), the HOURS of conversations we had as I jumped on the education path, leapt off the education path, and found my way back into education after all. I could talk about the way her daughters' and my connections have only grown stronger over the years. I could talk

about the way that seeing her in the neighborhood brings me so much joy, or the way she makes me feel like a capable educator every time I talk shop with her.

But I settled on that story of meeting her and all the amazing folks of the house, because it speaks to the amazing Oasis Ellen is for me. No matter what craziness is going on in the world, Ellen creates this calm space for me to work it through. Through the rain, snow, iciness, and even a few sunny days when we'd sit on the porch, the blue house with purple trim, the macrame hanging plants, and the car with fantastic bumper stickers is the home of one of the best kindred spirits out there.

Julie Fouhy

Dear Ellen,

If everyone lived their values as creatively, as thoughtfully, as honestly as you do, wouldn't the world be a better place? Few of us are capable of the high bar you set.

Long before we shared a few swims at Walden Pond, before we were both parents of children participating in the China Exchange program, we met when you were wearing your professor hat at Simmons. As that was the encounter, over 20 years ago now, that changed the direction of my professional life midstream, I go back to that moment.

Recently divorced, I enrolled as a student in your math methods class at Simmons with the vague idea that a degree in elementary education would make me more marketable than the BA in French that had landed me by default in the private school world. During the decade I had been at home raising my children, the digital revolution had transformed the classroom, so I was returning to an educational landscape transformed and sped up by the advent of computers and the arrival of the internet. On a more personal level, until that moment, I had existed in complete ignorance of my shocking level of innumeracy. This goes way beyond avoiding calculus in high school—I had skipped through all those years of school simply blocking out any thinking

that required estimation, ratios, basic data analysis, exponential thinking—any mathematical reasoning at all.

You introduced me to a completely new (to me) way of thinking about teaching young children. Through you, I started to understand how a deep knowledge of how numbers work would be required to BEGIN to figure out how to approach effective lessons with even the youngest learners. Faced with how much I didn't know and had never really thought about, initial embarrassment was quickly followed by fear and panic, when my Simmons classmates used not only computers but also basic math vocabulary with apparent confidence, fluency and ease. I remember getting up and walking out of math class one day, heading to the registrar's office with the intent of withdrawing from the degree program entirely. As your lesson plan already had everyone engaged industriously in productive group work (of course), you were able to follow me out of the room for a quick pep talk in the hallway, a conversation followed up in your office later, but basically ordering me back into the room. I followed you, sheepishly, reluctantly, and I'm so glad I did. Our conversations continued for years. For this I will always be grateful.

During the second half of my teaching career, years spent in Boston Public Schools, the question “what would Ellen do?” popped into my head daily, hourly, when with the challenges and complexities of teaching anybody anything.

You taught me to meet students where they are. You taught me the importance of making them feel safe and confident, creating environments that allow them to work at their own pace in engaging tasks designed to help them build knowledge and understanding. Methods modeled in your math class inform how I approach teaching anything. Acquiring the lens that allowed me to see and pay attention to the math that surrounds all of us in daily life changed how I see everything. It is a credit to you that my constantly developing skills and knowledge are not only useful, they are endlessly fascinating, delightful, interesting, provocative, leaving me wanting to know more. That is the legacy that you pass along to all of us who were lucky enough to know you as a teacher, a mentor and a friend.

Happy, happy birthday!

With gratitude, much appreciation and love,

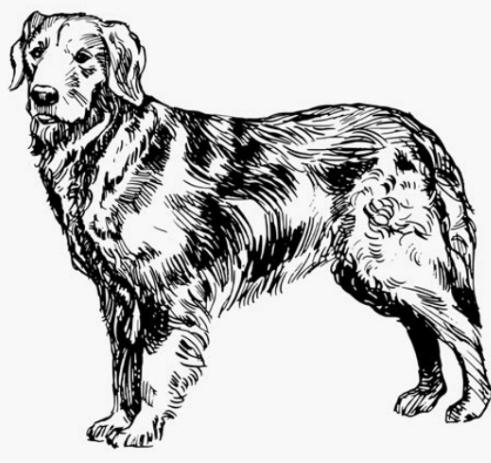
Julie Fouhy

Peter, Victoria, and Kay

We moved to Prospect Hill in January of 2003. In early spring, the neighborhood held a cleanup and gardening get together in Prospect Hill Park. Our offspring Kay was five. We attended, hoping to get to know some of our new neighbors. While we were planting, Kay became engaged in an animated conversation with a pleasant looking grown-up person. Kay and the pleasant looking grown-up person planted tulips together while they chatted. So it was that our family first became acquainted with our neighbor Ellen.

Ellen and Kay became fast friends. They created beautiful crafts projects together. With Ellen's guidance, our whole family got involved in several quilt making adventures (we vowed NEVER AGAIN after each one).

For several years, Kay was lucky to have the experience of being a guinea pig in Ellen's math education classes. We remember that Ellen and her two daughters, Hannah and Aviva, gave generously of their time tutoring our neighbor's daughter for free. And it's a small world: turns out Ellen's brother was our friend Sarah's high school teacher. Also Ellen was Victoria's best friend Miriam's former camp counselor.



We moved across the country a few years ago and miss all the wonderful feasts at Ellen's place for various holidays or "just because." All of the dropping-in to each other's houses back and forth over the years—so many wonderful memories. Every time she walked Ani by our place that dog would lay down in the middle of the street. She would refuse to get up until Ellen agreed to bang on our door for a visit. There was

always a rawhide chewy waiting for her. And of course a fruity tea for Ellen. We know we will never again come across a neighbor and friend like Ellen.

Ellen is indeed a force to be reckoned with—the first time we saw her car it seemed to be held together with political and bad ass bumper stickers.

Ellen lived up the street from us (or we lived down the street from Ellen, depending on how you look at it) with her two daughters, a big, friendly yellow dog—very stubborn—and an indeterminate number of cats, rabbits, other critters and graduate students. All these disparate beings coexisted and even thrived together harmoniously. Such harmonies rarely arise spontaneously or by accident. They spring from soul to soul. The prime harmonious soul in Yohalem house was, and no doubt still is, Ellen's.

Maggie Leary

Happy birthday Ellen!

So many of Ellen's delightful qualities come to mind. I think of her musical laughter and the sense of joyful curiosity with which she navigates life, asking good and generative questions along the way. Ellen is a beautiful person. She is a brilliant educator with an artistic spirit. Ellen is thoughtful and brings kindness to all matters. She helps to create beauty and harmony around her: in her home, in the classroom, in the greater community, and world-wide as she travels or welcomes people into her life. She fosters learning and discovery, and her own life continues to unfold in that spirit even when embracing life's challenges, both cultivating wise counsel from others and offering her own.

One of the values Ellen embodies is inclusivity. She not only talks the talk in her professional capacity, but she walks the walk in life. I know this deeply and personally because of how openly she embraced me after I married her ex-husband several years after they had separated. Becoming a blended family is



a common experience with many challenges. What is uncommon is the grace, kindness and sense of inclusion Ellen brings. I am deeply grateful for her friendship and partnership in creating our blended family. We are included in each other's hearts and homes. Together with family and friends in celebration we raise our voices singing a fitting refrain, "There is room at the table for everyone..."

Much love and many blessings to you Ellen.

Pam

We have a unique relationship with Ellen. She is our *machateynista*, and we are her *machatunim*. These are Yiddish terms for the parents-in-law of a couple. Ellen informed us of our new status with a big smile on her face when our son Ben and her daughter Hannah decided to get married four years ago.

We met Ellen a few years before Ben and Hannah got married. I was immediately struck by her gregariousness. It was easy to be comfortable around her. She took the initiative in suggesting ways that we could get together—a meal at Tkanye, for example—and we would reciprocate by suggesting a dinner at a restaurant. It wasn't long before we were friends. The process was simple and straightforward, a refreshing contrast to how challenging I've sometimes found it to make friends as I've aged.



We bonded further over the arrival of delightful Eve in 2020 and delicious Ada in 2022. They are the first grandchildren on both sides of the family, and we are all over the moon in love with them. Ellen and I have long phone calls to report on our visits to Seattle. The three of us shared a trip to Seattle last summer so we could take care of Eve together while Hannah was giving birth to Ada. Ellen had the idea of making photo board books about Eve as she grows, and we've had a good time working together on these. Ellen is all about making connections and strengthening ties, so of course we included photos of relatives so that Eve would recognize us more easily when we visited. We are currently working on Ada's first book.

Marty and I have enjoyed visiting Ellen at Tkanye. It's really a special living arrangement. Everyone works cooperatively, but Ellen is the glue that holds the household together. She keeps tabs on everyone, and is philosophical about the confidences shared with her. "I've heard it all," she's told me several times. But it's very much a reciprocal situation. Ellen has people

around who can help her with various tasks. And there's always someone to talk to. I know there have been the occasional challenging moments, but mostly I see it as ideal for Ellen, who thrives on social interaction.

I admire Ellen in so many ways—her determination to do everything she can to tame and slow down her Parkinson's, her good humor and cheerfulness, her genuine caring and concern for others, her thirst for new adventures and opportunities to learn. We feel fortunate to have her in our lives!!

Marty

In the fall of 2018, I realized that it had been many years since I visited the team that works for me in Hyderabad. Pam and I decided that there would never be a better opportunity for us to visit India together. We planned our trip around the annual festival of Carnatic music in Chennai that runs from mid-December into January. During one of our visits with Ellen, we mentioned our plans to her. With delight at the coincidence, she told us that she would also be visiting India at about the same time. One of her former housemates was getting married in Delhi and she had been invited to the wedding. Moreover—and here coincidence verges on the ridiculous—another former housemate's family lives in Chennai, and having visited their daughter at Tkanye and gotten to know Ellen, they had invited her to visit them while she was there. We compared calendars, and amazingly the dates of her side trip overlapped with our last day in Chennai. So we made plans to meet her for lunch.

On the appointed day, her host family drove her to the restaurant we'd chosen, a wonderful place that had been recommended by several of our Indian informants. (In case you're ever in Chennai, it's called *Mylai Shri Karpagambal Mess*, in the Mylapore district. Their motto: "We don't have branches!") We had an excellent lunch of the best dosa ever, and as always when you're with Ellen, the conversation was brilliant.

It was a surreal experience to see her there. But to me, the most remarkable thing was that she had formed a relationship with those two young women

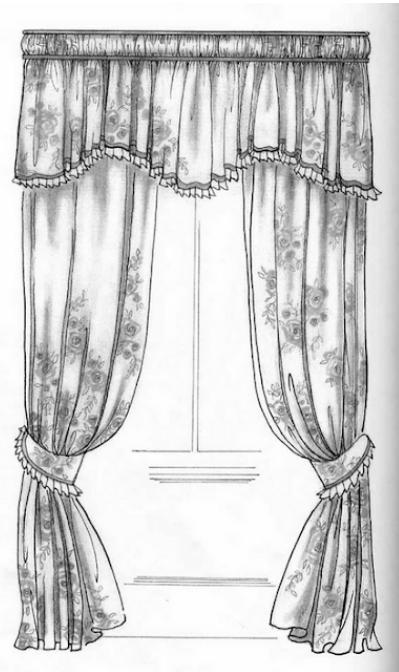


that transformed her into a member of their families. She was their mom away from home, and she stayed in their hearts long after they had moved away. Because of those relationships and scores of similar ones, Ellen's life has a richness of connection that most of us can hardly imagine.

On a different note, being of a mathematical bent myself, I am charmed by the way Ellen's professional interest in math manifests in her creativity and sense of humor. It's not every grandmother who asks to be called "Mom Squared!"

Hilary Caplan

I met Ellen in 2008 when I started grad school at Simmons. After being in a couple of her classes, frantically running to her office after one particularly fraught class I taught (conveniently next door), and being part of a group of my classmates who wheeled her in her desk chair to class when she first experienced sciatica, I am pleased to say we became friends. This happened at an amusingly fortuitous moment while I was taking Ed Psych and we developed a long running joke about Piaget, conservation of mass, and filling leftover containers. Our friendship has taken many forms over the years, but from the first moment I had her in class, I knew I would always think of her as the teacher I hope I can be. She helped me make curtains for my (overly large) classroom windows so I could create a calmer environment beneath the florescent lighting. Her modelling of creating lessons bent on justice guided me to do so myself when a student made some outlandish remarks, and at the same time she showed me the gift that student had given me of forcing me to rewrite my unit. As my mother once said "Ellen's is a good place to be if you want to be engaged," though the fact that she said that at her speech at Paul and my wedding made the comment prescient but funny. She brings wonder and discovery with her everywhere she goes, and I am so glad to have her in my life.



Beverly Matthews

Dear Ellen,

My very best wishes on your 75th birthday. It has been such a joy to get to know you through book club. I always enjoy your insightful and unique perspectives. I have also loved hearing about your fascinating journey through life, from the early days in NJ, to travel, to crafting, to adventures with your roommates in your quirky but wonderful Somerville home. Always, your amazing love of learning, and love and appreciation of people from all walks of life shine through.

I wish you many more diverse and wonderful adventures!

Love,
Bev

Isis Espinosa

I received a phone call at around six or seven PM from a number with an area code I hadn't seen before. I was 17 years old at the time on my way to a college on the other side of the country that I hadn't visited before.

I just got my first cell phone as my going-to-college gift so I answered excitedly. It was a woman asking for me: "Hello, can I please speak to Isis Espinosa, this is Ellen Davidson calling from Simmons College." I said, "Hi, yes, this is she."

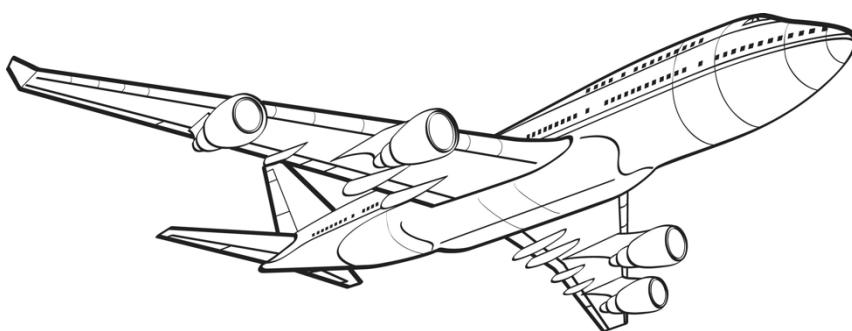
"I'm your advisor." I didn't know what to say to that, because I had no idea what it meant. "I am wondering if you're still planning to attend Simmons College, because I see that you haven't registered for any classes and today's the deadline to register," she stated in a warmly concerned tone. I embarrassingly responded, "Yes thank you so much for calling. How do I register?" Ellen offered her support and registered me for all of my classes.

(Funny thing is, Ellen was in the Education department, and I am pretty sure that I had applied as an “Undeclared” or “Pre-Med” Major so I am still not sure how she ended up as my advisor, but I am super grateful for that coincidence.)

Once she registered me, she sounded more curious about my background and started some small talk. Then she asked, “So, when are you planning to fly out here to Boston from California?” I gave her the date and she responded, “Oh, interesting, you’re flying in a week before the residential campus opens... Do you have someone picking you up from the airport and somewhere to stay?”

I felt my heart race and immediately felt worried about what I was going to do. I tried to keep my cool and to be as honest with her as I could: “Ellen, I had no idea that this was the case. Thanks for letting me know. I am not sure how I almost missed this deadline today and that the residential campus is closed up until then. I have no family or friends there, but I am sure I can stay at a hotel or something.” She did not hesitate to offer to not only pick me up from the airport, but also offered the guest bedroom at her house. I was so relieved and couldn’t believe that this phone call had just happened.

There I was, on an airplane alone, from San Francisco, a six hour flight to Boston. I had no idea what I was getting myself into. I was nervous and self-conscious about my decision considering that I had already started on the wrong foot. That being said, I told myself, “I am one lucky person to have had someone like Ellen call me.” Once I landed, I had no idea who I was looking for, besides a woman with her daughter, Aviva, around my age with a sign of some sort. I found them.



helped me move in while all the other girls were getting help from their parents, family members and friends. If it wasn’t for Ellen, this would’ve been one of the saddest moments of my college memories.

Next, Ellen drove me to Target to get things ready for my dorm and

Since then, I've considered Ellen to be a second mom to me. At that time Aviva was also headed to college in New York, so in some ways, Ellen was able to be there for me while she got used to Aviva simultaneously starting her new journey at Columbia University.

One day, I was lost in Harvard Square with a friend. Something told me to call Ellen to ask for directions (this was before “smart phones”) and she said, “Hey, so I actually live pretty close by, how about I pick you up and take you back to campus.” My friend, Phuong, was like, “who is this woman? An angel?! You’re so lucky she’s your advisor,” and I said “I know.”

I keep these memories close to me and any chance that I get, I am always eager to share my stories of Ellen. She's a great example of what it means to make this world a better place—by being kind, showing acts of kindness, and not expecting anything in return.

Thanks to you, Ellen, I've become a better person and happy to offer what I can to those who are in need when those opportunities arise. The way I met you has had an incredible impact on who I am as an individual in this world. Happy Birthday, so glad that there are people like you in my life and the lives of others!

With so much gratitude,
Isis

Jesse Kirdahy

I first met Ellen as my advisor at Simmons. I guess the Ed department saw my activist-academic background and figured they knew which way to send me. (They were right!) I think we were a good match for one another, and Ellen has provided an ear and an open mind for as long as I've known her. Not a ton of answers, though, because more than anything else, probably, she has asked me the questions that I need to be considering when facing professional or personal challenges. Sometimes hearing her questions have confirmed I'm on the right track with my own wondering, often they have forced me to address something I've been avoiding, and always they have made me feel that Ellen truly cares about me. I feel very lucky to count Ellen as a friend.

I find Ellen's values, beliefs, and attitude toward people and persons aspirational. She has a profound sense of social justice that I see her practice on macro and micro levels, from the big picture of seeking to address systemic inequities in power structures through education and political action, down to the individual level of meeting everyone at their own level, giving them the space to be themselves, and to get to know them for who they are, and *finding joy* in her relationships with people. It is hard to align oneself in this way when so many social and economic forces disincentivize empathetic and socially minded behavior, and I am *so impressed* by Ellen's commitment to living her values. I wonder how much of this is personality, and how much is practice. Maybe I should just ask. (Ellen?)

I think about the ways Ellen has been important to me in my life, and then consider how many literal hundreds—probably thousands—of other people she has been similarly important to. I really believe she does critical work for the world. *Thank you, Ellen.*

Karyn Wang

Dear Ellen,

Beloved teacher of Theodore, Winston and Eleanor Stoll! We wish you a very happy birthday celebration and appreciate all the fun, creative and brain stimulating activities you have shared with us.

Best Wishes and lots of love,
Stoll Family



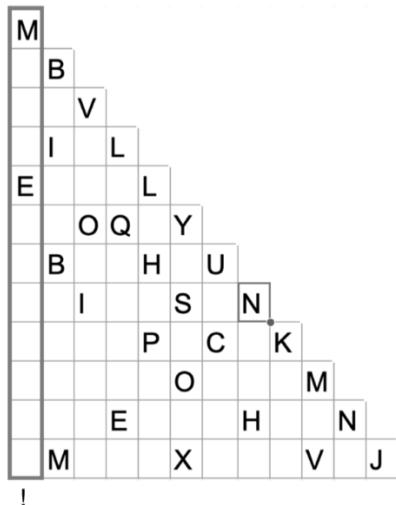
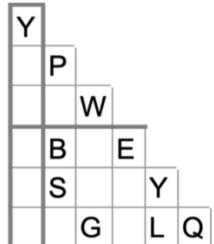
The Ditkoffs

Dear Ms. Davidson,

Happy birthday! Your talents are legendary in our family, and we are so grateful that all three Ditkoff children got to meet you. *The Number Devil* especially was so formative in our family life, because it was “the first book I read that really matched how I felt about math,” as Anya recalls. We are also grateful that you’ve become a family friend, Ellen! Over the years we have treasured visits to you in Somerville, visits to Simmons, and our many, many Zaftig lunches. In honor of many more happy, healthy years to come, we created a small Fibonacci cipher for your enjoyment.

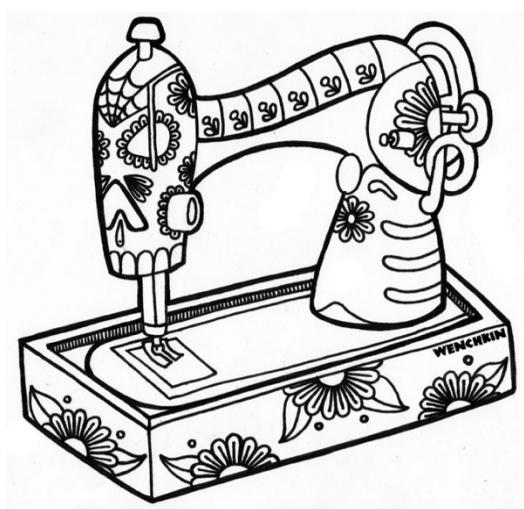
Love always,
The Ditkoffs

~ Anya, Zachary, Elijah, Susan, and Joseph ~



Before I moved into Tkanye in 2011, I met Ellen in the context of a roommate who did not exist. Ellen was visiting Aviva at Barnard and had come over to visit our apartment, where we mentioned our roommate Johnny, who was never home and therefore we described as “not existing.” It was not until several years later, after I was living with Ellen, that she learned that Johnny was, in fact, not an imaginary friend as she had assumed. Ellen is so genuine, and so playful, that *of course* her instinctive interpretation of this moment was that anyone could (and should) have an imaginary friend or two, and I appreciate this so much about her.

Living with Ellen at Tkanye helped me grow into the person I am today. I loved our talks over dinner about education, social justice, and math. She listens and somehow manages to reframe conversations until they’re both deeply meaningful and sometimes hysterically funny at the same time. I also think of her every time I have the opportunity to teach anyone anything because her approach to understanding where a person is coming from has so completely shaped mine, and I am grateful for it. I also think of her every time we make popovers, fill leftover containers, or hear the phrase “oh, dear.”



My Ellen-acquired knowledge of quilting even came in handy just yesterday! When I am faced with a challenging problem, especially one that involves multiple perspectives and/or considerations for social justice, I often think about “what would Ellen say about this?”. My imaginary Ellen, though, can never match the real one. Our ongoing friendship is such a joy every time we talk, and I am only sorry that our distance apart prevents us from our regular weekly swims at the Sonesta.

Ellen and I met in September of 2011. I was new to Driscoll School, and a major benefactor of all of the hard work that Ellen put into transforming the school. Her teaching was simultaneously current and nostalgic: she was clearly immersed in the field, and up to date on education practices and reform. She also incorporated holistic, child-centered pedagogy that reminded me of a time before the advent of ‘No Child Left Behind.’ It was beautiful to witness. In her part time hours, she seemed to accomplish what others required full-time hours to do.

Most impressively, she did so with passion. Ellen modeled for me how to lead with love, and a deep, intellectual curiosity. I relished listening to her ask questions in meetings. She cared about the students, the teachers, the parents, and everyone in between. She had a fire lit under her, and all times.

Ellen used the faculty room as her office. She’d sit at the table, with her lesson planner in front of her. Every year, she bought the same planning book: “Planning to Change the World: A Plan Book for Social Justice Teachers.” I can’t imagine anything more fitting.

Ellen retired from her professional obligations in waves, and Driscoll came first. It was sad to lose our regular time together at school. I remember telling my curriculum coordinator that Ellen’s retirement was not just a direct loss of service, but also a schoolwide source of inspiration. When people saw her in the hallways, they were reminded of things they could do! They were reminded of content connections they could make. They were reminded of projects, and the importance of pushing student thinking deeper and deeper. An icon!

In the years she has left Driscoll, Ellen has been great about keeping in touch with me, even when I find myself consumed by the mundanity of raising small children. She asks me great questions—her hallmark!—and seems to enjoy one of my favorite pastimes, which is thinking deeply about who my kids are, as people. My kids love Ellen, too! They enjoy getting together with her, often at playgrounds around Somerville and Cambridge. They will ask for her, too. “Mama, hasn’t it been a while since we’ve seen Ellen?” They think her house is magical, and they are, unquestionably and unequivocally,

correct. There's something about both the vibe Ellen has cultivated and also her unfailing warmth. She somehow balances the roles of caretaker and companion, even while facing her own health challenges. I'm so proud to call Ellen a friend. (And I look forward to the next time we get together!)

Lio Perez

Gosh, I'm a sentimental one. I just started to write and my eyes immediately filled with tears of love and gratitude as I recalled my most cherished feelings and experiences with Ellen. I had the fortune of living at Tkanye the year between college and medical school—a wonderful transition time in my life circa 2011.

I had never lived in a home where the world of ideas and artistic creativity took center stage in conversations. (Ellen also introduced me to vegetarianism, composting, communal living, fun and quirky traditions, and all sorts of delightfully artistic and hippy experiences that were foreign to me given my Cuban cultural background). I had certainly never met someone with Ellen's unique brand of boundless curiosity. In fact, as I type this, I hear her characteristic "Oh..." when responding to any story of mine, simultaneously acknowledging the importance of what I had said and making it clear that she was curious to hear more. There is a particular generosity of spirit and loving engagement that characterizes Ellen's curiosity—perhaps one of the ways she loves best. It always communicates a sense of: you matter, I am interested in you and in your life, both external and internal... events and feelings. It touches me to tears to remember how novel this was for me, and how in some ways Ellen fulfilled an unconscious wish/need I had for a particular maternal presence that my own mother was never able to provide given her culture and specific psychology. As a man with a fondness for depth of ideas and depth of feeling, it was a tremendous blessing for me to experience Ellen's capacity to engage with both lovingly and consistently.

But as I write this I remember another way in which Ellen has loved me, and others, so very well—her beautiful capacity for sympathetic joy. She has always truly rejoiced with my joys, joined me in my excitement for my dreams and hopes, cheered me on and mirrored the strengths and beauties she saw in me. I could write so much more, so many specific stories, but my

musings thus far are making me realize that what I cherish most in Ellen has already come forth—her generosity of spirit and her capacity to love. I feel fortunate to have had the honor and gift of meeting and being loved by such a gem of a human. Ellen—I love you so much, and I am so grateful, especially for the formative role you played in my emerging adulthood years. I wish you the happiest of birthdays, and may we all be blessed by your presence for many years more.

—Lionel (Lio) Perez

Markrete Krikorian

I first met Ellen when I came to Boston for grad school in 2011. I connected with friends I knew from Columbia like Aviva, Ali, Mike and Paul. Mike and Ali put together dinner parties and I used to hang out with Mike and Paul because we started a band together for a short time! In 2011, Mike and Ali invited me to Passover at 30 Walnut. It was so much fun to chat with an interesting group of people, be part of such a creative house run by Ellen and housemates. After this, Aviva and I became friends and would go for walks and grab bagels from Bagelosaurus :). I came to some dinners at the house and hosted several new years parties at my condo where I really enjoyed spending time with Aviva and Ellen.

Towards the end of grad school in 2016, I suggested my partner at the time consider living in the house and through him got to know Ellen and be part of the 30 Walnut community even more. I loved it! I met some of my closest friends during this time like Anandana. It was so fun cooking for the house and seeing the community evolve with new housemates.

Ellen is so closely interwoven with my experiences at 30 Walnut. She's a hostess supreme and creative soul whose generosity is so clearly



demonstrated by opening her home to people from all walks of life and needs. There are few places where so many can feel at home; the world is a bit better with Ellen and the house community.

Happiest of happy birthdays, Ellen! Grateful for all our times together and look forward to celebrating with you soon.

Lydia Shriner

Dear **ELLEN**,

I am thrilled to write to you on the occasion of your 75th birthday! What a cool milestone! Alive long enough to have many wonderful relationships and experiences, and to have learned what matters and to heck with the rest. I am so grateful to have been part of your journey. Here are some of the things that make you such a special person to me:

Enthusiasm for teaching and for children—an amazing teacher!

Love for learning—a perpetual student, too!

Listener extraordinaire—you've been there when I've needed to vent about the school, the teachers, the administration, and well, anything, really.

Excitement for food and travel—always love talking about both these topics and, of course, sharing a meal with you.

Not only did you change my children's lives, but you have been a good friend and a real mensch. You connect with and care about other people. That is a gift. You lead your life according to your principles and on your terms. That is a choice.

Happy Birthday, Ellen! I'm looking forward to many more opportunities to share dishes and dishing with you.

Much love,

Lydia

I met Ellen through our book club in about 2013. My first impression was “what a vivacious, warm, people-loving, intelligent and humanistic person—truly one of a kind!” This impression was amplified when I visited her truly unique, vibrant, “communal” home, where she has brought people of all ages and life experiences together to live, eat, play, and work together—a bit of a throw-back to the 1960’s utopia communities—right in the middle of Somerville, MA! A magical-feeling, Victorian-style, composting oasis. Over the years, these feelings continued to deepen during monthly book clubs. Ellen’s passion for issues related to women’s rights, racial justice, equity, as well as stories of self-actualization and committing to the greater good were revealed in her book recommendations and her insights during our discussions. And also, while she discussed those serious issues thoughtfully and compassionately, she also did so with a wonderful sense of humor and engagement. I was always impressed with her passion for teaching too, and how important her students were to her. Ellen is a truly an amazing human being who is not afraid of living an authentic and principled life that is also full of laughter, wonder, vibrancy, and good.



Nathan Einstein

Dear Ellen,

My first time visiting Tkanye was for one of your annual Rosh Hashanah celebrations. After a long day laboring over problem sets, amidst a stressful period pursuing a career change, the homely communalism of that gathering even now brings a feeling of warmth. (I recall decamping to your study later that night with a friendly cat at my side!). I had little understanding at that point what a central role you played in maintaining that annual tradition, the community assembled for it, and the home in which it took place.

The following year, I abruptly found myself in search of a new living situation. After spending much of my young adulthood moving itinerantly between sublets, the house was really the first place I truly felt comfortable settling into, with support and belonging that I so craved. It was during that period that I witnessed firsthand the role you played in welcoming an ever-evolving cast of house members, upholding unwavering values of collective support and responsibility. These values even withstood—in fact, were maybe best demonstrated during—instances where house members faced health crises or diagnoses of terminal illness.

In the years since leaving the house, I, like so many others, repeatedly reassemble around your Rosh Hashanah gatherings, still basking in the same communal warmth that first drew me. What was initially a community that you co-founded with a small group of families has clearly grown, through decades of your dedication, into an ever-growing community spanning many generations and walks of life.

Wishing you all the best on your 75th birthday!

Sunny Schettler

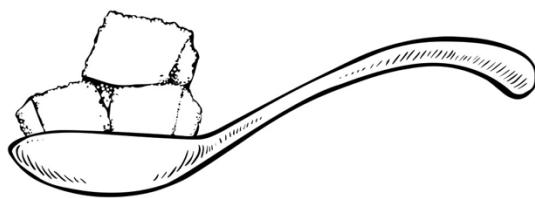
Ellen came to me as a fitness coaching trainee in 2016. I'm Tall and she's *small, so we make quite a pair training at the gym, outdoors at parks, on my patio, and maybe once on Zoom... thanks, pandemic! Ellen is very determined to stay strong, so we went to all lengths to keep training in person outdoors in all seasons for twice weekly sessions in these last 7 years. I'm blessed to see her challenge herself, grow more stable, and become even more resilient as she improves with age.

Ellen is always ready to laugh and chortle about life's little inconveniences, but she's never a complainer. Ellen really values her friends and family, so I've heard about her daughters (all good things!), her housemates (all wonderful people, so helpful to her!), and her many friends over the years. Ellen also often asks me about my life, appreciating a mutual friendship.

She's also very forgiving even when things in her life are a shambles elsewhere—for example, on many home repair projects, she'd say, "the contractors really tried to get things done on time, but you know how that goes." After weeks without a fully functioning bathroom I'd ask, "How can you stand it?" Ellen can just laugh it off and say it's pretty awful at times, but can you imagine a midnight wake-up with nowhere to "go"? I'd be so stressed I could burst into tears.

Nonetheless, Ellen persists to smile through the worst inconveniences and challenges life can bring. Through it all, good and bad, Ellen thinks most of the world is full of nice people, and she believes in their goodness of heart to help or respond when needed.

I admire her greatly and am so thankful that she's "Not made of sugar, so won't melt!" as she quips with a smile anytime it's likely to rain on us outside. She's a great trainee, supremely kind and gracious human, and a dear friend. Happy Birthday and many more to the amazing Ellen!



Marcia Goldensher

Truth be told, I didn't immediately warm to Ellen when we first met. I was too busy being miffed.

She appeared one morning in a yoga class I had joined not all that long before. I was barely starting to feel oriented, included, like I had a place—and this new person appeared. I am not, by nature, a fan of Change.

Not only that, but it became apparent that *she* wasn't new—she was returning. The rest of the class knew her. They welcomed her back. Somehow I found this additionally disorienting.

I doubt that Ellen had any awareness of any of that. Being Ellen, she was friendly and inclusive from the get-go. She cheerfully noted that our winter jackets were the same color and we were at risk of taking the wrong one. We agreed that we could likely prevent that if she used the lowest hook on the coat rack and I the top one—which is what would have come naturally anyhow. We indeed never swapped coats.

With Ellen informally facilitating the evolution, we—the members of the yoga class—developed a routine of lunching together after class. We gradually evolved into a support group that has continued to grow and morph as we each and all ask of it, even as the pandemic moved the class out of the real world. Several times she instigated get-togethers that fostered community and kept many of us in touch, especially including while the world seemed to be on hiatus.

Ellen and I have become blood products donation buddies (who has those?). We've gone to a funeral together that we later realized neither of us would have quite gotten up the nerve to go to alone. We still keep tripping over yet more people that we both know. (How is it we hadn't known one another already?) Ellen has taught me, by example, to be more flexible and adaptable.

Change, I guess, can have its positive attributes after all.

And I'm long since done with being miffed.

A Biennial Connection: Ellen and I

In the quiet corners of my life, I remember a satisfied smile. It was in the kitchen of an apartment Arjun and I had just rented. As I surveyed the orderly scene I'd created, a smile curled at the corners of my lips. Unbeknownst to me, I had channeled Ellen's flair into this domestic chore—labels and arrangements akin to the shelves in Tkanye.

It was in 2017 that our paths converged as she opened her home to me during my Fellowship in the States. In those days I discovered more than just a room to call my own. I discovered a family, kindred spirits, and a treasure trove of creative inspiration in her. It was amidst this newfound camaraderie that Ellen and I forged a bond, driving around to see the best-lit houses during Christmas and celebrating Hannukah together when the world seemed to sleep. Every evening that we lit the Menorah, I gleaned not only the art of teaching but also the wisdom of letting life unfold in its own time.

Two years later, Ellen traversed oceans to grace my wedding in India. Adorned in a saree, she danced to Punjabi and Bollywood rhythms, seamlessly blending traditions and cultures. She became my bridge between worlds, introduced as “family in the USA”. My parents and brother often look back on the time with great fondness too.

Time flowed, bringing me back to the States once more. A daunting recovery post-surgery left me grappling with the challenges of physical rehabilitation. Amidst this uncertainty, Ellen's patient guidance wove a lifeline with the gentle click of knitting needles and the soothing rhythm of purling yarn. Gather Here, a shop after Ellen's coop love, became the backdrop for this new chapter. Here, she assumed the role of a knitting guru, unraveling my twisted threads, helping me pick the right twines and the intricate patience of teaching an injured hand to try.

Her circle of friends, vibrant and diverse, welcomed me with open arms. In their warmth, I found a sense of belonging that transcended borders and boundaries. Even in my travels, I spot earrings Ellen might like, and think of her fondness for fabric or a story. Even oceans away, she is an enduring

presence in my life. A quick message seeking advice on lesson plans or fun activities, and she is always gracious and forthcoming.

As I reflect on the tapestry of our friendship, I realize that Ellen's influence extends far beyond our shared interests. She's a constant reminder that life is an ongoing adventure, and the pursuit of knowledge and new experiences knows no bounds. Quilting, sewing, and more await on the horizon—all under the gentle tutelage of this remarkable mathematics educator turned life mentor.

In the pages of my life, Ellen is a cherished chapter, a beacon of light and wisdom. Her presence is a testament to the enduring bonds of friendship, transcending time, place, and circumstance. As she marks three-quarters of a century on this Earth, let us celebrate not only the years she has lived but the countless lives she has touched, mine included. Ellen makes us believe that the world is a tapestry of endless possibilities, waiting to be woven into a grand adventure.

Clementine Cummer

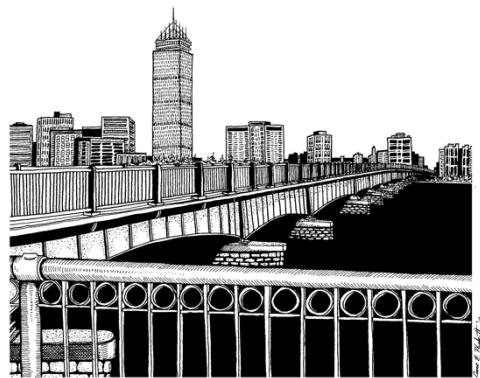
Dear Ellen,

In honor of your love of numbers, and our shared love of odd numbers, I offer 3 mini recollections of you that give me joy.

1- Back in the “before time”, when we had yoga class in the mirrored basement room at BI, you would often arrive just as we were getting settled. You had a favorite spot in the corner to the right of the door and I always saved it for you. You would arrive full of warm energy having just walked from your office at Simmons. You were often wearing a loose-fitting dress—your preferred work clothes but awkward for yoga practice. You would drop your things by your mat, pull on shorts, and pull your dress off over your head. All the while, greeting everyone and expressing your pleasure and relief at having arrived. I was always happy to see you and appreciated the warmth and ease that you brought with you. You helped me to remember that yoga is a way to connect more fully and joyfully with what is meaningful to each of us. You helped me to be more present and open myself—both in class and in the wonderful lunch gatherings that you organized after class.

2- Not long after my daughters and I moved to Arlington in the midst of the pandemic, you asked me if Magda would be interested in being interviewed about her experience at the Carroll School. You wanted to record the interview and share it with a class you were teaching at Simmons on working with different abilities. Magda had met you several times at BI and you had always been friendly with her. She agreed to the interview and we made plans for you to come over. I knew you would be thoughtful and respectful. None the less, I felt protective of Magda, concerned that she would feel somehow inadequate. You arrived on a warm sunny day and sat together, “socially distant”, in our backyard. From inside I couldn’t hear your conversation but I could see your body language. You were both relaxed and seemed at ease with each other. I could see Magda’s face and she was smiling. I could tell she was working hard to be in conversation but she was also feeling good about it.

3- During the pandemic, you and I often went on walks together around Fresh Pond or along the Charles River. Our conversations during those walks were my favorite part of our outings. Along with rich conversations about education and supporting diversity, we often talked about our kids and parenting. You were always interested in how Magda and Gigi were doing and how single parenting was for me. You shared with me once about how you and your two daughters used to take vacations together when they were young. You described how you would take unstructured road trips to no place in particular, exploring as you went and following your collective interests. These trips, as you recalled them, sounded delightful—the perfect antidote to structured school life and a wonderful opportunity to connect with your daughters. I admired, as I still do, your willingness to relinquish control, support group experiences, and take pleasure in discovery!



Happy birthday Ellen! May you enjoy many more years and may you continue to find delight and connection, even in the midst of challenges.

With love,
Clementine

At one of my first Tkanye house meetings, we sat around the dining room table after dinner, debriefing on the quality of a potential new housemate who we had recently interviewed. Tired from a long day, the conversation drew on. Attempting to add clarity to the discussion, I recommended we hold a vote to decide what to do.

Usually happy to let the group govern themselves, Ellen interjected with a rare firmness in her voice: the decision must be made by consensus. If we could not reach consensus, then we would keep searching. Ellen is rarely one to lay down rules, so we followed her lead and continued the conversation. Eventually, we powered through the search process for a new housemate, finding one we all could support.

Forever a teacher and servant leader, Ellen taught me the value of consensus. Having grown up in a politically active household, voting seemed fair and clear, so I was originally skeptical of the ambiguity. But Ellen's way of doing things helped us all feel heard and fostered the open communication key to Tkanye's success.

Jake Patterson

Ellen is closest person I've met to a wizard. The fictional master wizards I read about as a child were mostly tall bearded old men but I stand by my statement. Wizards carry themselves with a quiet wisdom, a presence of kindness, and a twinkle in their eye. If you've spent even a few minutes with Ellen you can easily see that magic.

One thing I appreciate about Ellen is that she often responds to challenges and annoyances with a slight amusement. When my parents planned a dinner, if things went wrong there were flashes of worry or anger. When things go wrong at a much more complicated Ellen dinner, the reaction I've seen is "Oh Dear" quickly followed by problem solving or acceptance.

I'm always amazed hearing Ellen's personal and professional accomplishments. I'm very biased, but my favorite is one of her daughters. I'm incredibly lucky to be married to Aviva. The love and parenting that Aviva and Hannah received undoubtedly influenced the strong, independent,

deeply caring, smart and creative women they are today. I love hearing the stories of the unconventional community that Jim and Ellen built and that they raised their daughters in. While I love my parents and how I was raised, hearing about and seeing the forward strategies in Aviva's life has been inspiration to me and the prospective journey of being a parent.



I don't think I have anything more significant to say. Since my first meeting with Ellen, I felt accepted and welcomed by her—which can be unusual with the parent of a significant other. I forever will and continue to appreciate the kindness and support she has shown me and my family (especially as we dealt with Billy's death). And I continue to be impressed by her strength and resolve of character.

Liz Patterson

Ellen, you hold a very fond place in my heart. I am grateful for our friendship and appreciate you and enjoy being around you. Thank you for all your love and support and kindness and for checking in on me over the last several months. You helped me through a difficult and painful time. You were my rock during Billy's Celebration of Life. Sitting next to you and knowing that you were there for me helped me get through that long, heart-wrenching night.

Thank you for accepting Jake into your life with open arms and for supporting and loving him. I am grateful for your wonderful daughter and the joy and love she has given to my family. I am so happy that you both are part of my family now!

I really admire your strength and your boundless energy and love of learning. Your outlook on life is inspiring. Happy 75th birthday to an amazing woman and a dear friend.

Love,
Liz



Elaine Kohen

Hi Ellen,

Happy 75th! I really have enjoyed working with you as a Simmons Supervisor. I love listening to all your great stories, comments and lots of juicy questions! You are a stellar educator and you should be proud of all the wonderful teachers you have inspired!

To Good Health and Happiness,
Elaine Kohen

Ben Ewan-Campen

Happy Birthday, Ellen! I still remember like yesterday when I knocked on your door during my first campaign for Alderman in 2017, and you told me that you were a Thoreau-In-Vermont parent—I knew at once we were good as family and have felt like that ever since. You bring such joy and meaning and sense of community to our neighborhood, and I am so happy to be your neighbor and friend. Here's to many more!

Dave Patterson

Comments on a Rare Gem

I first met Ellen in Boston when Jake and Aviva were seriously dating. I forget if they had moved to Nashville yet. We all had dinner and I will never forget that night. Ellen was warm, gentle, kind and had a remarkably droll sense of humor. Absolutely type of person that I would want my son to have as a mother-in-law. When I was visiting Nashville, Aviva and Ellen took off to a doll-making conference in Kentucky; don't get me started on where I can go with that. In 2022 we lost Billy. We were all still in shock during his memorial and, it was not until I watched the tape that I realized that Ellen showed up for this event; for this I will always be grateful.

Allie Girouard and Brendan Kelly

**From Allie + Brendan
(Summer / Fall 2019 - Present, 2nd floor, farthest room on the left)**

Thanks so much for giving us a home in the pandemic and beyond. We will always remember in the early days when you were so dedicated to making the cloth masks—it certainly made scary pandemic walks much more cheerful to be wearing masks with carrots and cats.

Rachel Crosby and you had a small production operation. The birthday scavenger hunts will live on in legend, as the way you made an isolated un-community birthday society-situation into one that was homey and lovely.



We've learned so much from you about being creative and crafty in many types of situations. Now Brendan even knows how to use a sewing machine. We both have our issues with our childhood homes, and this has been a home that's been truly supportive and helped us grow. Without this house, we would have never met, which would have been a bummer. Thanks for everything.

**From Orianna + Ashalia + Peppercorn
(Spring 2020 x2 / January 2022 - Present, Whole house except for Emily's room)**

Thank you for this nice home. It has many nice places to sit and nap and throw up. We especially like your old chairs, and will try to scratch them less if we can remember and we will make sure Allie and Brendan reupholster them every few years. We love relaxing in your room and hope you continue keeping your door open all the time, and maybe even consider doing it at night so we can have slumber parties and yowl together at midnight. Meow meow.

E llen,

I met you in approximately early 2017. Aviva and Jake had decided to move to Nashville, and Aviva and my Anna decided that I should take over for Aviva with trimming Nala and Zazu's nails and then accompanying you for mani-pedis every six weeks, as you had been doing with Aviva. Anna and Aviva had been friends for a few years, having met when they both started working at the JCC Kaleidoscope summer camp, and I had gotten to know Aviva in part through her often coming to our house after work to watch The Bachelor/The Bachelorette with Anna. Aviva was and remains the most energetic and creative person I had ever met, and I was eager to meet you, her mother, and have the opportunity to get to know you as well.

From August 20, 2017, through June 26, 2020, I came to your house every six weeks-ish to provide cat nail services and then walk or drive to Nail Spa Excel for our own little bit of pampering. Throughout our time together we would chat about our lives, our children, our work, and our hobbies. I always admired how busy, involved, and competent you were; how you also took time to ask and listen about me and my family; and how fun and creative you were with nail polish colors! We shared some confidences and a lot of laughs. Going together to a Farm to Fiber event at the Boston Public Market after nails one day was an especially fun outing, complete with sheep and sheep smells on a cold and rainy day, and I am still working my way through all the yarn I purchased



that day. Our nails outings came to a halt as COVID set in and venturing out became riskier, but we have seen each other since then and kept in touch in other ways. It was a thrill to have you and one of your housemates join us for Anna's wedding in September 2022, and I look forward to future get togethers.

Happy birthday, my friend!

With love,
Stephanie Kasok

Simon Chase

Ellen! Happy 75th Birthday!! This is such a momentous day, and I'm so glad everyone can come together to celebrate your presence in their lives; everyone cares about you so much. There are so many things I appreciate and admire about you. Here are some of them:

Your presence! Your curiosity, good humor, and positivity with others makes for a wonderful kind of radiance. You are always willing to extend compassion, patience, and understanding to everyone you meet, no matter where they are. In conversations with others, you always focus on what matters; small or unimportant things don't bother you (messes, quirks, annoyances, status, wealth).

Your amazing style! I am always delighted by your color choices, wild earrings, spectacular dresses, and sewing projects.

Your support; you are willing to do things for other people, and be patient and supportive of them where they are. Many of our conversations around my family have been so helpful for me; so has having a place to go when I'm sick or sad about things (especially around my father's passing). I hope that the repair and adaptation work has been enough to make up for this support. (And the laundry...)

Your vibrant, gigantic circle of friends, family, and colleagues who all love you; you are surrounded by so many people, from so many circles. Your walks, trips to see people, and commemoration projects are wonderful to see. (It remains difficult for me to keep everyone's name straight; most updates about your friends have to start with a reminder of who the person is.)

Your acceptance and perseverance in working with your illness; Parkinson's is so much to deal with, and you have met it with so much grace and acceptance. I've learned so much by witnessing your determination to keep going with your life, travel widely to visit family and friends, come in and out of ability, find communities for support and understanding, and ask for the help you need. It's remarkable to see someone be so positive and refuse to suffer.

I am so glad I have you in my life, and I hope we can continue to work and grow together—even from far away.

Simon

Donna Greenberg

Ellen and I met for the first-time last January on a Civil Rights trip run by Road Scholar, an educational tour company for people 55 and older. At the last minute, my travel companion became ill, and I decided to go "solo." However, I was quite anxious about traveling alone. And then, on the first day I met Ellen, who also came by herself on this trip. From the moment we sat on the bus together, we immediately "clicked!" We found out that we had a great deal in common. For starters, both of us went to Jewish socialist camps and knew the same union and civil rights songs. But more incredible, both of us teach at universities and



mentor student teachers (I supervise elementary education and Ellen supervises mainly math). We both have taught courses in special education as well. Many people on the trip thought we were lifelong friends. Some thought we were even sisters, although outside of both being short Jewish girls, I don't see much resemblance!

We continued our friendship after the trip and started a group on Zoom with other members of the trip to discuss the various Civil Rights issues that unfortunately still plague us today.

Ellen and I also share an interest in knowing more about the Crypto Jews of



New Mexico—Jews who came from Spain after the Inquisition, but who either converted or kept their Jewish identity hidden. When I found out that Road Scholar was offering a trip to Santa Fe that focused on the Crypto Jews, I asked Ellen to join me. That trip was cancelled, but we decided to go on another Road Scholar trip to New Mexico anyway. Prior to that trip, Ellen arranged for us to stay with friends in

Albuquerque who were the most gracious hosts. We also managed to find our own tour guide who specialized in the history of the Jews in New Mexico.

I value Ellen's friendship a great deal. I have come to know Ellen as a warm, kind, and caring friend. She has some amazing interests such as weaving, cooking, and folk music just for starters. I admire Ellen's incredibly positive outlook on life. She tries not to limit what she does, despite her physical challenges. I look forward to traveling with her again soon and sharing many more adventures together.

Donna Greenberg

Appendix

October 6th, 2024

Larry Davidson

So, Ellen, I've known you for your entire life. There's no shortage of topics I could include in this document. Three of these topics stand out. I'm sure you're wondering what they are. (Why three? Just because... it's *always* three.)

So here's my list of your top three characteristics, each being a separate topic:

- You are a world traveler.
- You are a well-known hostess.
- You are a social justice warrior.
- You are a skilled crafts person, always doing some task with your hands.

All right, all right, I guess that's four, not three. Well it just goes to show that you're always doing something, actually three or four somethings at the same time.

And now...let's take each of these one by one.

Everyone knows you as a world traveler. We could ask where you have been, but it might be easier to ask where you haven't been. Antarctica, I suppose. And you've never been an if-today-is-Tuesday-then-this-must-be-Belgium sort of person: from Mexico to Norway to India to Alaska to the wilds of Cambridge, you've traveled all over and have even lived all over.

I can't imagine!

Well, I can imagine it, but I could never do it.

Second, when I say that you are a well-known hostess, I don't mean that you are prominent in the society pages! But I do mean that your friends and relatives know you in part for your dinner parties and your welcoming spirit to all and sundry. Clearly you



inherited that gene from our mother, including the grapefruit baskets and the centerpieces at dinners.

Finally, you are definitely a social justice warrior. Although you and I are fairly close politically, your actions are very different from mine. I was never interested in joining Martin Luther King's March on Washington in 1963, and I didn't join you and our mother there. It's not just grapefruit baskets that show that you are your mother's daughter.

All this, of course, makes me conscious of our similarities and differences. We both are math teachers, we both are readers and writers, we always got along as kids and as adults, and I'm sure we could easily find more similarities if we looked for them. But there are plenty of differences as well. Both of us inherited many characteristics from each of our parents, but, as I said above, where I am primarily my father's son, you are mostly your mother's daughter. An oversimplification would be that I am overwhelmingly left-brained, whereas you may be mostly right-brained but in reality are probably evenly balanced.



(I want to acknowledge the valuable assistance of my speech language pathologist, Devin Violette, in writing this document. As most of you know, I suffered a traumatic brain injury six months ago. One of its consequences was that I can no longer write fluently and fluidly, but Devin helped me enormously and I was eventually able to write these 500 words.)

Laurie Prendergast

I first met Ellen Davidson in the summer of 1980. My good friend Barbara Schewendtner had invited me to work at Camp Thoreau-in-Vermont as a dishwasher. Ellen and I quickly fell into conversations about crafts, teaching, and social justice pedagogy. And baking bread and vegetarian cooking and contra dancing. When Ellen learned that I was headed to Hampshire College in the fall, Ellen introduced me to Hampshire faculty member Gloria I. Joseph, who would become one of my mentors for the next 30 years. That one gesture changed my life forever.

I continued working at Thoreau, and we continued exploring various crafts together—we had many adventures where we saw something interesting and figured out how it was made and then tried it out ourselves. I don't think I have ever had a friend as curious and ambitious and confident as Ellen when it came to "making things." I still have one of the first quilted boxes I made in her house in New Paltz, in 1982, inspired by a quote from a draft of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*.



I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it.

While at Hampshire, Ellen and I stayed in close touch, meeting in New Paltz for epic craft sessions and conversations about teaching and pedagogical strategies and structures. These

conversations became the foundation of my work as an organizer, as an educator, and as changemaker. We did not always agree, but I learned and practiced the power of deep listening and how to expand my thinking while still staying true to my values and principles.

I moved to Cambridge, then Somerville, after college. Ellen continued to be a dear friend and a confidant, and we spent time together as she started an independent school where she met Jim and I met her brother Larry and upped my pun game...

Those early years of friendship became a beacon of what might be possible, as Ellen guided me on my path. She hired me to illustrate her co-authored book, *Open Minds to Equality: A Sourcebook of Learning Activities to Affirm Diversity and Promote Equity*; walked me through the process of getting a series of jobs in educational tech; encouraged me to apply for a job as an adjunct teaching art education, to get grants to support my community art projects, to learn to cross country ski—I ended up doing a teaching apprenticeship as a backcountry freeheeler—to explore whatever whenever and however. I knew no bounds; Ellen’s acceptance of me with all my dreams and ideas and contradictions kept me moving forward when so many others placed obstacles in my way or tried to tell me that I should dream a little smaller, expect more disappointment, anticipate rejection. I don’t think Ellen ever challenged my confidence that I could not do something I wanted to do. There are no words that can express what a profound gift that was and is.

I moved down the street from the Walnut Street home (into the apartment that Ellen had shared with Jim) and witnessed her chosen family grow. Hannah and Aviva gave me my enduring nickname—laurie pea/not pee—which I use to this day! I was always welcome at her house, and I often walked over when the events of the day were difficult or full of joy and laughter. I miss those days; and I miss those days of laughter and food and having a neighbor down the street, always ready to talk in the early morning and into the night.

Much love to you, my dear friend.

Of all the lessons I learned from Ellen, the most important one was: if God gave me a car, it was so that I could give rides to other people.

I heard this wisdom from her many times as I sat in the passenger seat of the little blue car with all the bumper stickers. Between 2012 and 2017, I lived at Tkanye two separate times. Since this was before the Green Line extension, I was often at the mercy of my terrible bus karma. Except on the mornings where Ellen's timing lined up with mine, and she would give me a ride to Central or Porter or Lechmere, or — best of all, when I worked at Children's — just bring me to Simmons with her, so I could hop out at Avenue Louis Pasteur and just walk the last few blocks to the hospital. We'd known each other since I was born, but it was in the car on the way to the T that we got to know each other as adults for the first time. I learned a lot of other things from her while we lived under the same roof — how to make curtains out of bedsheets, that everything is better with a cat, that grocery shopping can be fun, that intergenerational friendships might just be the solution to most of the world's problems — but nothing else that seemed quite as important or as far-reaching.

I have a long way to go in my life and my career before I can be the kind of mentor Ellen is. But I think the best way to learn along the way is to do what she did: to give rides to people, both literally and figuratively. Sometimes that means picking up my co-resident at the airport on Christmas Eve when her flight has been cancelled, and sometimes it means finding time to give the medical students (hopefully) useful feedback even on a day when I want to scream. I hope that someday my little red car will be as covered in bumper stickers as hers is, and that by that time, I will be half the teacher she is. Sometimes life's greatest lessons are imparted at the weird bend in the road by Toscanini's, in between exclamations of "who are all these people?" (directed at the other cars on the road). I'm grateful to have received them.

Happy birthday, Ellen! I am so lucky to have you as my non-biological aunt. The world is a better place because you are in it.

Love,
Laura

Helen Guttentag

My claim to fame is that I hired Ellen to join the Simmons faculty many years ago when we needed someone to teach the elementary math methods course. We soon realized that Ellen had so much more to contribute to our program, and she quickly became a fulltime faculty member in our Education Department.

Ellen is a gifted teacher, and her commitment to supporting her students, whether as their teacher in one of her courses, or as a supervisor during a practicum, made her a favorite with students and faculty alike.

She was also a valuable colleague, as we navigated all of the changes in teacher preparation and the field of Education through the decades. Her focus was always student centered and helped all of us to keep that front and center in all of our decisions.



Ellen and I retired at the same time in the spring of 2019, but Ellen just couldn't stay away, and has continued to work part-time at Simmons ever since. We have continued our friendship via coffee and lunch dates, and I do hope we continue to do so for many years to come.

Happy 75th Birthday, Ellen!

Fondly,

Helen Guttentag

Ben Plotkin-Swing

The community that is centered around Ellen and her house is so longstanding and convolving that I would not believe such a thing is possible if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes. I don't really understand how it works, but it has been fascinating to see the place and its people evolve over the years that I have bounced in and out of Tkanye. Certainly it has had a big effect on my life, not least because it nurtured and launched into life my beautiful wife, Hannah, who has brought the grace-amidst-chaos that she learned growing up to the tasks and joys of our own daughters. When we get the chance to visit our kids' Mom-Squared in her home, we are welcomed not only by a loving grandmother but also by a space that embraces, entertains, and offers tempting opportunities for mischief. There are so many layers of people and things inhabiting the house that it is a testament to the woman at the center holding it all together.



Snehal Bhatt

Dear Ellen,

What a difference one person can make in a life! You walked in, with a warm heart, an infectious love of learning, and a belief in the power of eternal curiosity and you gave these kids a place to explore and grow like no other.

“I do not know what my school life would have been like or who I would have been without Ms. Davidson”...both kids have said, so many times in so many different ways.



At this milestone, we honor you, we thank you, we salute you... and most of all, we love you \times infinity to the infinity power squared.. ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️

Love,
Maya, Rohan, Snehal
and Geary Sekhar

Gil Snyder & Micki Sausen

7.5 Things We Learned About Life From Ellen

It was clearly evident in Clementine’s Dynamic Yoga practice that Ellen is a person who loves to laugh. Soon we noticed that she displayed a statistically unusual affection for math. One day while listening to her retelling of a professional life story we did some simple math of our own and

deduced that she was a, wait for it...math teacher. It turns out that Ellen has been a force of nature in the calculating community for many years and its developing aftermath.

We've learned a lot from Ellen since those early days. In honor of this august 75th birthday celebration, we wanted to offer up a short list of 7.5 keen insights and life strategies we've gained from Ellen that we have felicitously incorporated into ours. So here we go. In no particular order, here's our list.

1. Did you know that Ellen takes most of her vacations to Times Square? No, really! Well actually, no, not really! It could be true-kinda fits? Her vacations are actually epic: Montgomery, Alabama, Sedona, Cuba, to name a few. 10,000 steps-a-day surveys with social justice as a theme. We should all be as good as Ellen.
2. As we've come to know her over time, Ellen is a big reader. She loves good books of all kinds. At our yoga practices, it's not unusual for her to mention a piquante detail about the relationship of English to Yiddish literature with a side of math facts to round things out. She even clarified a long standing question we've had in our family about the function of positive and negative integers. I finally understand that a double negative in English is bad, but in math, it's a positive. Thank you, Ellen.
3. Cogitating on seminal theoretical problems like Fermat's Theorem, or on practical applications of, say, a Fibonacci series can strengthen one's calculating acumen. It's good for trips to the supermarket, she says. Why, just the other day, Ellen told me she had one remaining proof toward finally solving the age-old question about "Why the chicken crossed the Möbius strip." Her answer? "To get to the same side." Brilliant!
4. Ellen is brave and makes her opinions on the issues known up-front. Just look at the back of her car, where pithy summations of critical social issues on bumper stickers reign. She is a great friend who fills her students and colleagues with human compassion. She has some good advice there too. She taught us never to pick a fight with a 90° angle. It turns out they are always right.
5. And, speaking of always being right, have you ever noticed that there's something about subtraction that just doesn't add up?
6. Ellen is all about sharing and caring. Her rambling wood-framed Somerville aerie is home to a lively assortment of housemates. She wrangles

the whole operation with Rubik's cube precision. She is as crafty with a quilting needle in creating functional artworks for this communal abode, as she is with numerators and denominators for wrangling plumbers and their ilk.

7. There is an old saw about Pirate Captains and Math Teachers and what they might have in common. As the observation is made, it turns out they both are known for leading their crews to find "X". Ellen is relentless in her commitment to the welfare of the next generations and to helping everyone find the treasures of "X" for themselves.

0.5. The Prime numbers "7" and "5" bracket the "n" for this milestone birthday. How appropriate that is in describing the unique qualities of Ellen, the math teacher, and Ellen, the friend, with such confidence in human goodness, she makes us all better.

Happy Birthday, Ellen!
Gil + Micki

Hayley Walker

I met Ellen in 2021, when I moved into Tkanye and we became housemates. I began to know her as the matriarch of a miraculously decades-long-running living community full to the brim with lore and whimsy.

Just a couple of months after moving in, I was running a marathon, my first. "Should we all go watch?" Ellen had said. As if driving to another state at 6 in the morning to run around watching a bunch of other people run around was the most natural thing. But the whole house drove out to Rhode Island to cheer me on anyways. I felt incredibly supported, and in awe of the community Ellen had become the steady constant of.



Ellen is an experimenter. I started a project sewing pants with Ellen's machine, under her guidance. I knew she was a teacher, and it was the first time I really experienced her teaching style.

It surprised me when she gave no initial instruction. She encouraged me to tinker and figure it out on my own, giving tips. When I asked a question, she didn't hesitate to admit not knowing sewing jargon on the pattern instructions. "Ellen, what does this mean?" "I don't know." "So what do I do?" "Try doing what you think it might mean, and if that looks weird we can try something else." Ellen isn't a perfectionist, and treats any outcome equally as a learning experience. Failure is charming, because it usually happens in a delightfully surprising way.

Ellen is a ritual-maker, upholding traditions that bring people together. I found so much meaning and comfort in the Jewish celebrations at Tkanye. Even when there wasn't an existing tradition, we made up our own. But she is also a questioner, and her spontaneity and open-minded nature responds with a sense of humor to anything unexpected. ("The toilet is not enthusiastic about being a toilet"; "Huh. It seems my shoes have walked themselves away.") Then, to the cat: "Now where do you suppose they might be?"). The way she shares her traditions generously and remains open to change and newness is really special.

Happy 75th Ellen! I'm so grateful to know you.

Warmly,
Hayley