

Introduction

Some people may find information included here “oversharing.” But ignorance is not bliss. I often heard my mother say “Other people’s families aren’t like ours,” meaning that other families didn’t experience as much discord or dysfunction. She felt that way because she grew up in a family and a society where people kept their sorrows to themselves. Her father was self-contained in the extreme, while her mother was a cheerful extrovert. In spite of their many difficult circumstances, there was at least peace in the household she grew up in. Our family, in contrast, was often overcome by turmoil. As the primary recipient of her confidences, I have come to believe that sharing with friends and loved ones is preferable to suffering in silence or sharing your burdens with one single person.

- Ann Moss Joyner 12/20/2023

Karyn Mereness Joyner: A Life

Karyn Mereness Joyner was a child of the Great Depression. She was born in 1929 while her parents were living in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her father, Harry Mereness, was finishing his masters in business at Harvard . Her mother, Vera Moss Mereness, was attending Fanny Farmer Cooking School. Her parents had just returned from Japan, where they had met and married while her father worked for the American Silk Company (designing and supervising the creation of silk and wool oriental rugs in Shanghai, China¹). Her mother taught English at Kobe College for young women. Harry’s company had paid for his return and studies but went bankrupt after the economy crashed in 1929.

Karyn’s half-brother, Harry Mereness Jr., was 16 when she was born. He was the son of his father’s first wife, who committed suicide when he was nine. Harry Jr. lived with his father in Japan when he was 13, but in September of 1927, he returned to North America to attend boarding school.

In 1930, Harry Sr’s completed his masters with no job in sight. The family moved in with his parents in Milford, NY, where his father was a physician. This was short-lived, and the little family (baby Karyn and her parents) moved to Los Angeles. Harry Jr. joined his father’s new family in Los Angeles and attended high school in 1930 and 1931. On April 1st of 1930, the census listed the household as parents Harry and Vera, Harry's son Harry Jr. (16) & Karyn (10 months). Vera was pregnant and gave birth to Karyn’s sister Ann on August 31.

¹ Many he designed himself. Most used traditional Chinese colors and symbols and styles, but some were styled using colors and designs from the deserts of the American West. His granddaughter, Ann Moss Joyner, had design book but it was destroyed when her house burned in 2000.

Prior to his stint in Japan as a rug designer and exporter, Harry was a textile chemist. However, he didn't find work in either field in L.A. While the 1930 census listed Harry as a "rug and furniture importer," the 1930 Voter Registration records gives his employment as "secretary." The hopes for Los Angeles did not work out and Harry eventually moved back east to look for work. Vera and the girls stayed in Long Beach, surrounded by many extended family members.²



The textile industry, which had employed Harry Sr. as a textile chemist in the 1920s, had fled the northeast for the South, and Harry did not find a job in his field until after World War II. By 1932, U.S. unemployment was 32%. Karyn's childhood followed a pattern of moves back and forth across the country, from Long Beach to various cities in the East, as her father got various jobs in other fields - and then lost them. He was a stern, introverted man, who'd suffered the loss of his first wife and his sister, both from suicide.

The family lived in White Plains, NY; Washington, DC; Memphis, TN, and finally Charlottesville, Virginia.



Karyn started elementary school in Washington, D.C. when her father worked for the Consumer's Division of the National Recovery Administration, where he researched and wrote a report on the value of canned goods' grade vs. pricing. While in Washington, the girls attended the Easter egg hunt on the grounds of the White House.

In April of 1940, when Karyn was 10, the family had moved to White Plains, NY, where her father was "seeking work." He'd been out of work for 56 weeks and worked 8 weeks during that period. His occupation was listed as a "textile technician."

In 1941, at the age of 12, the family moved to Memphis, Tennessee, where her father worked as a

² In 1920, Vera's parents had sold up and moved from Magnum Oklahoma to Long Beach, California, and built a nine-unit apartment building on Atlantic Avenue in Long Beach, California.

Karyn Mereness Joyner 1929-2023

“superintendent” for the Chickasaw Ordnance Works, which was one of the largest gunpowder factories in the United States during World War II. Karyn attended high school in Memphis, and - although she could not carry a note when attempting to sing - she won a violin scholarship endowed by the Julliard School of Music. She once said she quit playing the violin when her professor told her she’d have to work on it all day - to the exclusion of other activities - if she wanted to continue to improve.

In Memphis, Karyn’s family had a little terrier named Topsy. Topsy ate something that made her foam at the mouth. Karyn’s mother, worrying that Topsy had rabies, told Karyn and Ann that the dog might be “mad” and shut Topsy up in the garage. Having heard the saying “Music has charms to soothe a savage beast,” Karyn thought that perhaps she could heal the dog by playing her violin for her, so she sat in the driveway and played.

Karyn enjoyed the train trips cross country, and recounted how the soldiers would flirt with her as they travelled for basic training or to ship out for overseas duty.

In 1949, Karyn’s family moved again. Harry took a position with the Institute of Textile Technology in Charlottesville, Virginia.³ Though already a senior, Karyn joined activities in Lane High School and assumed leadership positions, including the literary magazine and the American Legion Essay contest (which she won).

After graduation, Karyn attended William and Mary in Virginia for two years. She wanted to major in political science, but a professor in that department told her women could not succeed in that field. She transferred to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (which at that time did not allow women as full-time boarding students as freshmen or sophomores), and graduated with a major in political science.



At UNC, she joined the Pi Phi sorority and made several life-long friends - three of whom (Lila Ponder Friday, Rosie Varn Ruggles and Nancy Rigg Kollock) remained in close contact for over 70 years. Karyn soon met Charlie Joyner, a young man from Wilson NC who asked to borrow her notes, as he hadn’t bothered to take any (or perhaps he only said that to meet her).

Karyn was a serious person. Charlie was not. But clearly, opposites attract. At one point, he climbed up the fire escape onto the Pi Phi porch roof to serenade her for her

³ Karyn’s parents stay in Charlottesville until they moved to Myrtle Beach, SC about 1980.

birthday and bring her a late-night birthday dinner.

A columnist for the *Daily Tar Heel*, Charlie was a clever jokester who loved playing with words. A year older than she, he graduated and became a reporter for the AP (Associated Press) in Rocky Mount, NC. She was dating other young men during this period, but Charlie would show up on random weekend nights, without warning, and expect her to cancel her dates. She never told her daughter if she accommodated him. At one point, he sent her a telegram that said "Dilly-dallying doesn't pay. Love, Dilly-dallying." Of course, it was collect.



In spite of all this, or perhaps because of it, Karyn loved him. They were pinned in February of her senior year (and yes, the news made the *Daily Tar Heel*). It seems the couple found ways to be together, perhaps meeting "in the middle." Separate news-paper notes published one above the other in the *News & Observer's* "goings on" column noted that Charlie spent the weekend in Raleigh with his brother Ed, while Karyn spent the same weekend in Raleigh "with friends."

After graduation, Karyn took a job working for a professor at NC State University, which was closer to Rocky Mount than Chapel Hill, but the professor sexually harassed her and she quit.

In July, she and her sister Ann sailed to Europe and "did The Grand Tour." Upon her return, she and Charlie were married in December.

Charlie was a born entrepreneur (translation: he wasn't great at working for other people). However, he had no capital so continued to work in various newspaper jobs. Jobs at the AP and *Rocky Mount Telegram* were followed by brief a stint in Charlotte (where Chip was born in 1952), and then Wilmington. Karyn tells the story of their landlady in Charlotte, who promised to rent them her entire two-bedroom apartment, but never did move out.

Looking for a challenge, Charlie approached Tabor City newspaper publisher W. Horace Carter, who'd been shared the 1953 Pulitzer Prize for Public Service for his "successful campaign against the Ku Klux Klan, waged on their own doorstep at the risk of economic loss and personal danger, culminating in the conviction of over one hundred Klansmen and an end to terrorism in their communities." Carter had no jobs in his Tabor City paper, but had recently acquired a paper in Conway, South Carolina. Charlies and Karyn moved to Conway, where Charlie became the editor of the *Horry Herald*.

As children of the Depression, Charlie and Karyn were very careful with their money, but times in Conway were still hard. Karyn told the story of not always having money in the food budget on a Thursday, as payday was not until Friday. Karyn also remembered a time when they were living in Conway and Charlie lost his temper: She had purchased

Karyn Mereness Joyner 1929-2023

some potting soil for a flower pot, and he thought they couldn't afford it. Things got even tighter as two more children followed: Ann in 1954 and Howard in 1955.

The family was living in Crescent Beach in April of 1954, which was separated from the county's hospital in Conway by a drawbridge across the Waccamaw River. With only one car, the birth of their second child had to be carefully planned. Charlie was ready. As editor of the *Horry Herald*, Charlie printed a special edition of the paper to announce his daughter's birth, with a headline which read "Joyner baby spitting image of her beautiful mother." When you're the editor, you can use as many words as you like for a headline.

In October of 1954, Hurricane Hazel destroyed much of the coastline, caused hundreds of deaths and millions in damage. Charlie had driven Karyn, Chip (2, in diapers) and Ann (6 months, in diapers) to his parents' home in Wilson, NC. The little rental house in Crescent Beach only lost its chimney and porch. But as Charlie had to stay and cover the storm, he had to wait a week before rescuing Karyn and the babies. The storm also had hit Wilson, wiping out the electricity, so Karyn spent a week with her in-laws with two infants in diapers, no lights, no laundry, and no water.

Charlie soon realized that newspaper journalism was not going to support his family. While still working for the newspaper, Charlie went into partnership with a local businessman, and they founded the *Sun-Fun* magazine, a tv guide/tourist magazine for the developing resort of Myrtle Beach and The Grand Strand. It was not a sure thing, as at that time Myrtle Beach had a population of less than 5,000. Still, the magazine was a success and Charlie soon quit the Herald and went out on his own.

Karyn stayed home with the children until Howard started second grade. In 1962, she began to teach English at Myrtle Beach High School. MBHS was still segregated at that time. When four Black students enrolled in January of 1965, Myrtle Beach High School became the first high school in Horry County to integrate, 11 years after racial segregation in schools was declared unconstitutional.

Karyn soon ran into trouble for her "progressive" views. In 1967, the South Carolina Education Association racially integrated. An advocacy group which lobbied the legislature for better pay for teachers⁴, the SCEA was deemed a union by conservatives. After writing a letter to the editor in support of the group, Karyn was targeted by South Carolina State Representative James P. Stevens (who represented



⁴ Which was 80% of the U.S. average in 1969.

Karyn Mereness Joyner 1929-2023

Horry County). He called her a “fellow traveler” (I.e. communist) on the floor of the state Senate. Some years later, he apologized when the two were seated next to each other at a dinner function.

As a teacher, “Mrs. Joyner” was reportedly very strict and distant in her early years. She eventually “loosened up” a little while still challenging her students with her high expectations and no-nonsense manner. She was awarded numerous teaching prizes, but kept only one until her death: an engraved silver charm that simply said “4th Period.”

Some of her students continued to correspond with her until her death in 2023. Upon her death, many former students reached out to offer condolences, calling her “a remarkable teacher and person” and “my favorite teacher.”

“She was a hard teacher but a great teacher. I even got her to laugh a couple of times.” - Elaine Biddy

“...she was truly a wonderful teacher. She taught me how to think, not memorize, and to express those thoughts on paper - a very valuable skill!” - Muriel Mendel

“She was such an inspiration to so many of us. I had numerous teachers over the years that demanded the best from students, but none more so than Ms. Joyner. How grateful I am for her dedication and insistence that I always go above and beyond to be a better me. How fortunate we all were to have experienced her very special love.” - Vern Hearl

“I admired her SO!! She held the bar high and inspired me - along with so many. She wrote me a letter a few years back that I have kept in my bible. She left footprints on my heart.” - Mary Winter Teaster

*“I loved Mrs. Joyner. She made a difference in my life. She encouraged me to continue journaling, gave incredible feedback on my writing and gave me faith in my abilities.... Mrs. Joyner taught me to have faith, study and never give up.”
-Nancy Temple Floyd*

*“Her handprint is on every single piece I have ever written, published or not.”
- Nona Martin Stuck*

She pushed MBHS to offer advanced College Prep English, and used many advanced teaching methods in all of her classes. As one student noted,

“She was always so kind and supportive of us ‘less willing to learn English’ students.” - Terry Brown

As the only AP English teacher, Karyn taught all three of her children, each of which presented unique problems.

Chip, the eldest, was a jokester like his father, but less inhibited and more rebellious when faced with authority, which presented problems in the classroom.

Ann, the middle child, inadvertently also caused problems. Asked to make a presentation on "people or groups I admire," she talked early Christianity, and compared the Disciples to followers of communism in its purist form, noting that this was not remotely like communism as it was practiced in the political world. The distinction was too subtle for some in the audience. One of the students in the class (who happened to be running against Ann for Student Council VP) reported the talk to his parents, who contacted the Principal, and Karyn's job was in jeopardy.

Howard, the youngest, refused to read Dostoyevsky's *Brothers Karamozov*, and sat in the corner reading a different novel throughout that module.

Karyn urged her students to be active in the community. Charles Haynes⁵ once wrote her: "*You taught us all that we need to be engaged. When I once complained about the conditions of poverty in the black community of Myrtle Beach, you said: 'What are you going to do about it?' and that led to the founding of Community Service Council.*" The CSC was the first inter-racial club in Myrtle Beach High School and "Mrs. Joyner" was the club's faculty sponsor. Among other goals, it focused on raising funds for a park in Racepath, Myrtle Beach's segregated Negro neighborhood. She and her students were also instrumental in the formation of a similar club for adults.

As Myrtle Beach grew and prospered, so did Charlie's business. He'd become sole publisher of the *Sandpiper Magazine*, and eventually added *The Camptown Crier*. But household budgets were still tight. As children of the Depression, Karyn and Charlie had agreed to live off Karyn's salary and invest Charlie's. When client businesses did not pay or were late (a frequent occurrence with seasonal businesses), the family would eat out and buy goods and services "on the tab." At home, Karyn was an expert at stretching meals packaged for four to serve a family of five, including two teenage boys.

Karyn loved music, drama and art. She studied watercolors with Alex Powers and continued to paint for many decades. Although she'd quit playing the violin, she loved to listen to music and created opportunities to expose her children and her students to performances of music and drama. She was instrumental in bringing productions of Shakespeare to a local movie theater for special showings. In 1966, she drove Ann to Charlotte to see Nina Simone perform. In 1969, she took Howard and Ann to New York City to see plays and music and experience the city. Three vivid memories remain from that trip:

Both children were upset that she would not allow them to go barefoot or wear flip-flops in the city.

When they were unable to flag down a taxi in the rain after seeing Noel Williamson play Hamlet, Karyn jumped up and down in the street, yelling "Boo,

⁵ Founder of the Freedom Forum's Religious Freedom Center. As of 2005, Charles Haynes was the author or co-author of six books, including *The First Amendment in Schools* and *Finding Common Ground: A Guide to Religious Liberty in Public Schools*, resources that were sent by President Bill Clinton to every public school in the U.S. in 2000.

Karyn Mereness Joyner 1929-2023

taxis! Booo, taxies!" - mortifying her children, who cowered in shame in the theater's covered doorway.

When Ann approached and sat beside a homeless man in Washington Square Park, Karyn stood back and let them converse.

Karyn's support for her children was unwavering.

Throughout his life, Chip had a lot of difficulties, which manifested in various ways. He was expelled from kindergarten and later from two colleges. When Chip was young, his mother tried to find a key to his problems by consulting various psychologists. While she was always supportive, Chip's relationship with his father caused much turbulence in the marriage and in the family. While an adolescent psychologist labeled him "psychotic," he was later and more accurately diagnosed with OCD and Manic Depressive Disorder. He often self-medicated with alcohol and drugs, especially when he couldn't self-medicate with exercise (surfing and tennis).⁶

In addition to the family discord over Charlie's relationship with Chip, Karyn and Charlie suffered from disappointed hopes raised by the advent of feminism. While Karyn was ideologically a feminist, Charlie was not the least bit interested in "helping" around the house - inside or outside. Karyn was too invested in keeping the peace to fight over such issues, but she felt the unfairness of it very deeply.

In 1964, Ann suffered from alopecia from the family's stresses. Every night for years, she'd go out into the yard to wish on the first star, always for the same thing: a horse. Charlie said they couldn't afford it, but Karyn bought her one to give her a place to be after school each day. Ann has continued to have horses and donkeys throughout her life, and they continue to provide solace.

In the late 60's, Charlie was feeling flush and bought Karyn a used gold Lincoln Continental. She complained that she was embarrassed by the car (its size, color and ostentation) "every time I drive into the teacher's parking lot." She later replaced it with a Dodge Dart, much more her style.

In 1971, Ann decided to leave Myrtle Beach and high school a year early and applied to college. Charlie said "over my dead body." Though it meant losing her confidant and "best friend," Karyn helped her leave.

By the mid-1970s, as Karyn's hearing was deteriorating, she decided to prepare to leave the classroom. In 1977, she moved to Chapel Hill for a year to acquire a masters degree at UNC. Charlie drove up almost every weekend. Karyn enjoyed being back in class and they both enjoyed the cultural activities available in Chapel Hill.

⁶ Twice, when he quit drinking cold-turkey in his 60s, Chip precipitated major Depressive breakdowns such that he was unable to leave the house, drive or work.

Karyn Mereness Joyner 1929-2023

When she returned to Myrtle Beach, the County honored its previous agreement to employ her but gave her a position in Socastee, 30 minutes away from home. During her tenure there, one of her students was badly burned, and she made many after school visits to the student's home to support her. While she loved teaching in Socastee, the half-hour commute was wearing and her hearing continued to deteriorate. After a year at Socastee High, Karyn left teaching to become the curriculum coordinator for the County.

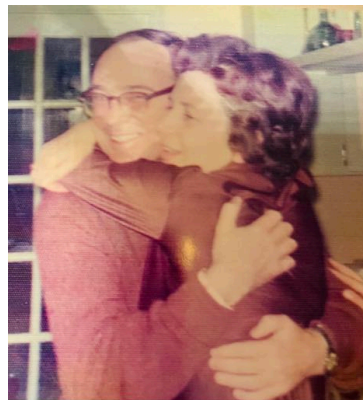
In March of 1979, Howard died of a drug overdose. On Dec. 31, 1981, Karyn's father died, followed by her mother three days later. In 1982, Chip was arrested for marijuana possession with intent to sell - his sixth arrest for pot. He was sentenced to 9 months at a prison farm in the woods of South Carolina.

Karyn was undone. She fled Myrtle Beach for the mountains, and Charlie agreed to go with her. He simply walked away from his publications without making any attempt to sell them. Charlie was 54; Karyn was 52.

Before this, however, Charlie had invested in real estate in the booming Myrtle Beach market and they had their savings from living on one income. This proved prudent; in spite of their early retirement, their savings was sufficient for 51 years.

Over the next three decades, both loved their life in the mountains. Karyn especially loved waterfalls, mountain wildflowers and butterflies. She was active in the AAUW, a Big Sister, a *guardian ad litem*, and president of her Unitarian Church's membership. Though a life-long Episcopalian, Charlie followed Karyn when she joined the Unitarian Church.

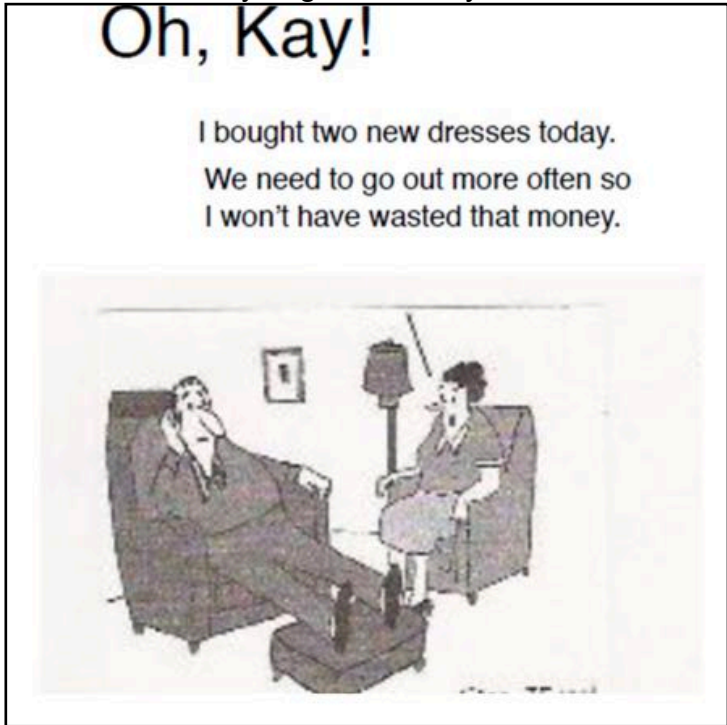
Both made many new friends in their new home town, and their relationship became much closer.



During this period, Karyn and Charlie made several trips to Europe, Canada, Maine, and the American West. They loved traveling, and once rented an apartment in Spain for a month, in spite of speaking no Spanish.

In 1993, Charlie began creating Joyner's Corner for Carolina Country and South Carolina Living magazines. Until Alzheimers forced his "second retirement" in 2017, he wrote "head-scratching puns, math and word puzzles, as well as satirical takes on well-known quotes for over 20 years.

Many of these were inspired by Karyn, who would occasionally (and usually unintentionally) come out with a zinger such as "Charlie, we're behind everyone in front of us." Charlie turned many of these into cartoons, sending them to family and friends, and eventually publishing them. Karyn would roll her eyes and insist that he made some of them up, but she was noted for brand of "Yogisms." Charlie told of the time when the two were driving and saw a "One Way" sign, and Karyn said "Oh! I always wondered where that came out." But that might have been one of his little jokes.



Charlie called these cartoons "Karynisms" when sending them to family, and "Oh, Kay!" (for the pun) when publishing them. One of these presaged the dementia that both Charlie and Karyn eventually fell victim to:



Karyn Mereness Joyner 1929-2023

In 2009, after a few health scares, Charlie and Karyn moved to Hillsborough, NC to be closer to Chip and to Ann, her husband Allan and their daughter Hannah. They lived close to Hannah's high school and enjoyed the proximity, but couldn't get a purchase in the community, due to the hearing loss they were both experiencing.

Ann had pushed them to consider moving to a Continuing Care Retirement Community (CCRC), which offer independent living, memory care, assisted living and nursing care. They were both adamant that they did not want to live surrounded by old people. In 2011, however, they moved to Twin Lakes, a CCRC in Burlington, NC. They immediately became fully involved in the community and truly enjoyed most of their years there. Karyn joined a book club and founded the Twin Lakes Literary Review, which continues to this day. Among other activities, Charlie walked to Memory Care every week to read his poems (some might say "doggerel verses") to residents and staff.

Charlie was diagnosed with Alzheimer's about 2012 and Karyn began to show signs of dementia about 2017. As time passed, both exhibited personality changes. He became more tractable and she became more impulsive, sometimes saying things that were socially inappropriate. While each noticed changes in the other, they denied such changes in themselves. Efforts to convince them to move into Assisted Living were met with declarations of "Over my dead body!"

One of the main reasons both gave for not wanting to move was that it would require giving up their dog. Moe was a rescue taken in by one of their vet's staff, given to Karyn, and spoiled rotten. He refused to be housebroken and ruined the carpet and a couple of pieces of furniture. He served as Karyn and Charlie's doorbell, since they couldn't hear the real doorbell. But he wasn't trustworthy. He'd pretend to hear someone at the front door and bark, but not go to the door. Charlie would get up and go to the door, and Moe would promptly jump into Charlie's favorite and now-warmed-up place on the couch. Karyn thought this was hilarious. Charlie never made Moe give him his seat back.

They agreed to move when the only two-room apartment overlooking the lake came available. Even then, at the last moment, Karyn tried to renege on their agreement to move. Son-in-law Allan appeared, and Karyn said, "Uh-oh." The jig was up.

Once moved into Twin Lakes Assisted Living facility, however, they loved their two-room apartment looking out over a large lake. Karyn spoke and wrote often of how much it suited her and what good care the staff provided. After she'd been there about a year, Karyn announced that one of the aides was her best friend. Every time she'd see Linda in the hall, she'd give her a big hug. Mom was not a big hugger (of folks outside of the family) but she LOVED Linda! How wonderful to find a new best friend when your world has otherwise shrunk so.

Chip's visited often. His main method of communication was to tease and joke, and he liked to take Karyn and Charlie out to eat. As Chip teased his mother - his normally-loud

voice projected even louder so she could hear - he often entertained the restaurants' other patrons. In May of 2019, Ann wrote the following about a conversation in a restaurant for Mother's Day lunch:

Mom: *"Dad, say something."*

Dad: *"I love you."*

Mom: *"No, something conversational."*

Me: *"Ask her what she wants for her birthday."*

Dad: *"Karyn, what do you want for your birthday?"*

Mom: *"You can take me to the department store and walk around with me and I'll find something."*

Dad: *"How about I just send you to the department store and pay for what you get?"*

Ann: *"Well but, you have the same credit card account, so that's just like every other time she goes shopping."*

Mom, looking disgusted, wrinkling her nose: *"I know!"*

Then Mom says, *"I should have my own money. No, that wouldn't do it. You should have your own money and spend it on me."*

Dad: *"I do spend it on you. I am **trying** to spend it on you."*

Mom: *"How much money do we have?"*

Me: *"Enough to last you at least another five years."*

Mom: *"Well, that just makes it more urgent."*

Me: *"Makes what more urgent?"*

Mom: *"That we die soon so you'll inherit some money."*

Chip: *"Well, ok, you can have another year or two."*

Mom: *"Then, how would we know when?"* [See note below regarding The Hemlock Society.]

Chip: *"Well, it would depend upon The Financial Situation."*

At other times, the family would sit next to the lake outside Karyn and Charlie's apartment and watch the swans and ducks. During one of these visits, Karyn said to Chip: *"I'm very suggestible"* and then continued *"That may be why you're here."*

Karyn enjoyed her alone time while Charlie was in Twin Lakes' Memory Care day program. She was less than happy, however, with the attention that Charlie got each morning as he helped to get ready. He loved the shower and - as his dementia progressed - would stay in the shower for up to an hour. Aides would have to coax him out and help





him dress. Karyn became extremely jealous, complaining the aides were “Sluts!” (Such behavior is typical of frontotemporal dementia.)

During this time, Karyn gave up her role as editor of the Literary Review, quit painting and read less and less. She did continue to write letters, however. In 2020, Ann wrote:

The other day, I was at Mom and Dad's apartment, and there was a letter to me. I opened it and put the envelope down. Mom writes about twice a day, on average. Today the letter was a bit different:

"Dear Ann, I found this envelope, stamped, open and torn, so I decided to go ahead and send it. I haven't any news so you can go ahead and get rid of it. Unless you treasure your mother's notes!"

Yes, Mom, of course I do.

I noticed that my mother's "stamps" are Easter Seals, but the Post Office doesn't seem to notice. About 10 of these have been delivered, thus far. Don't tell the Post Office!"

In spite of the confusion that reigned, Karyn and Charlie still bantered with each other:

After lunch at the Terrace during this period, Ann took her parents back to their apartment after lunch and Charlie sat on the sofa and asked her, “*Where are we going next? Are we going home?*” Ann said, “*This is your home. Do you want to go take a nap? Do you want to go lie down in the other room?*” Charlie said “*Not unless your mom does, because she won't know where I am.*” Ann asked her mother if she wanted to go lay down and take a nap and told her what her dad had said. Karyn replied, “*No! I know what he wants!*” And rolled her eyes.

Charlie asked Karyn “*Do we live here?*” Then he turned to Ann and said, “*I hope I don't outlive Karyn, because I can't live without her.*” Ann said, “*Is that the only reason?*” Her father said, “*No, but it's a good one.*”

Karyn asked “*Where is my car?*” Ann told her “*You don't have a car.*” Karyn laughed and said, “*That's terrible!*” Ann said, “*No, it's a good thing, because if you have a car you wouldn't know where it was.*” Karyn thought that was hilarious.

Karyn Mereness Joyner 1929-2023

In March of 2021, as the Pandemic hit the United States, Chip was briefly hospitalized for another major Depressive episode. He clawed his way back with the help of remote counseling and prescribed meds for his depression, anxiety and sleep disorder. During the months that Chip could not visit, Ann told Karyn and Charlie that Chip was traveling.

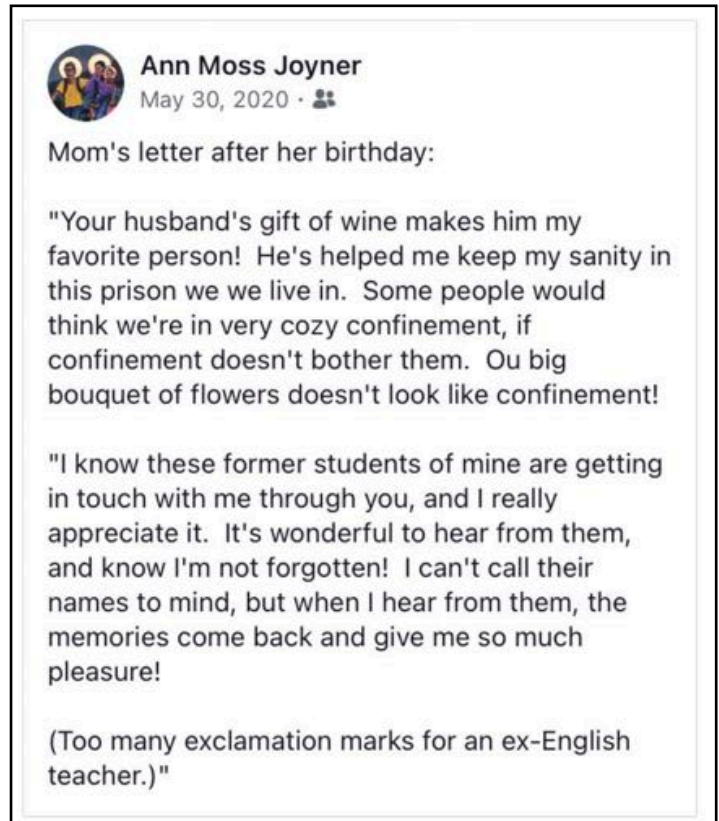
Across the country, Covid was hard for everyone “locked down” in assisted living or nursing care, but communication was especially difficult between Charlie and Karyn and the outside world. Because of their hearing loss,⁷ phone calls were almost impossible. They did not complain of the isolation overmuch, but it definitely affected them. In the beginning, Karyn seemed to remember and understand there was a pandemic, but as time went on, she lost that ability.

Visits during Covid lockdown were emotionally strained, and made more difficult by Charlie and Karyn’s hearing loss. Visits were initially through glass doors, with “conversation” enabled by dry erase boards. That “opened up” to outdoor visits on opposite ends of an 8’ table. Even then, family members all tried to keep our sense of humor - at least while in each other’s presence.

By May of 2021, Chip was able to visit again. Karyn wrote on the dry erase board: *“Will we ever be able to hug you? I am 90 and I may be gone or your dad may be gone.”* Chip wrote *“That a girl! Stay positive!”*

Both Karyn and Charlie stayed relatively healthy throughout the Pandemic, until February of 2022 when both became sick with the virus. It didn’t last long, but afterwards both were considerably weaker and Charlie’s heart was affected.

The move to Nursing Care was clearly necessary. For most of 2021, Twin Lakes staff attempted to have them move to Coble Creek, the Nursing Care facility under construction. Ann, as health and financial Power of Attorney, had refused. There were no double or attached rooms in the facility. When they finally moved in February of 2022, they were forced to have separate bedrooms for the first time in their 70 years of



⁷ They had hearing aids, but didn’t often wear them because they were uncomfortable, and because both lost them regularly.

Karyn Mereness Joyner 1929-2023

marriage. The first night there, Charlies slept in Karyn's room and Karyn slept on the floor. Permission was granted to put a daybed in Charlie's room and a sleeper sofa in Karyn's. They spent most days and nights together in one room or the other.

During their six years in Twin Lakes Assisted Living and Coble Creek nursing care, Ann and Chip visited at least once a week. Hannah visited often, as well. Visits were often filled with laughter, but emotionally draining as well.

Once again, Karyn and Charlie settled in. But once again, Karyn was jealous of the attention that staff paid Charlie. Ann suggested they lure Karyn out Charlie's room with offers of "a little massage" and that solved the problem.

At 2 a.m. on April 4, a few weeks after the move into nursing care, Chip drove his truck into a median guard. The truck was an antique, with no seatbelts or airbags and a steel steering wheel. He was killed on impact. It was not suicide, as he had his new Golden Retriever puppy with him. When Ann, Allan and Hannah cleaned out his house later, they found several months worth of his medicines, unopened. The decision was made not to tell Karyn and Charlie. Once again, if they asked about Chip, they were told he was traveling.

During this time, Charlie developed congestive heart failure. He died in his sleep on June 24. Commiserating with her over her loss, someone told Karyn that both Chip and Charlie had died. Until she died, Karyn knew and remembered that Charlie was dead, but she lost the knowledge of Chip's death about a week after learning of it. Her favorite mantra from this time until she died was "Charlie was such a sweet man."

Karyn had remained loyal to her marriage through 30 years of struggle and 40 years of contented devotion. As the Resident Services Coordinator of their assisted living facility wrote to Ann, *"Your parents so special and the love they shared was incredible. Few couples share such a unique bond."*

In August, Karyn fell and broke several ribs. She refused pain pills and physical therapy because - if she didn't move - she didn't hurt. After she healed, she used a wheelchair from that time forward. She could transfer in and out of it by herself, and "walked" herself around in wheelchair.

As her dementia progressed, Karyn created scenarios to fit the "facts" in her mind. At various times, she decided that Ann owned the nursing facility (she was proud of that); that Ann lived there too but never came to see her (not true on either count); and that her father lived there, that she had seen him, that he had given her a watch, and that he was ignoring her (also not true on any count). There was no arguing with her, but she'd eventually let each story go.

She occasionally made comments about the other residents, and some were amusing - although perhaps not to the objects of the comments.

Karyn Mereness Joyner 1929-2023

During lunch, she said, "You see that woman over there with the white hair?" "Yes, ma'am." "Well, she lives here. LIVES HERE." Pause. "She must be SO bored." I nodded, then said, "Well, what do you do in your spare time these days?" She looked thoughtful, and said "That's a good question."

She also continued to miss her dog. Ann found a note on Karyn's desk that said "If they would ever let me keep the dog - for an hour or two - I'd be glad." After finding that note, Ann wrote:

There is a dog that Mom loves. This little shitzhu, Bella (another Bella), accompanies her owner (who's about 75) every day when this woman comes to visit her husband in Coble Creek (the nursing facility where Mom and this lady's husband live). While they have lunch together, Mom gets to hold and pet Bella. It's as close to heaven as she gets these days.

Last week, Mom and I were eating outside, and Bella's owner walked by. I ran inside to tell Bella's owner about Mom's note. She laughed and told me that Mom had asked her to leave Bella to her when she dies. The lady said "Sure." And then Mom asked her "How long do you think you have left?"

It was never easy to tell if Karyn meant to be funny, given her lifelong role of the "straight man" to Charlie's and Chip's jokes and teasing, but he never lost her ability to laugh at herself.

In late April, Karyn asked Ann "Which of my grandchildren is so good with plants?" Ann said, "You only have the one," and pointed to Hannah. Karyn began to berate her for only having one child. And then Karyn asked "Have I only had one husband?" Ann said "Just the one," and her mother laughed, "It would be bad to forget a husband!"

In November of 2023, Karyn decided she was 100. Ann wrote:

Karyn "Do you know what today is?"

Ann: "No. What is today?"

Karyn: "I'll remember it in a little bit."

Pause.

"Or maybe I won't."

A bit later: "Do you know how old I am? I'm 100." (She not, but OK.)

Pause (possibly for dramatic effect, but who knows?)

"Being 100 is not as much fun as I thought it would be."

During this time, Karyn talked about her granddaughter Hannah and still recognized her, but had decided that Ann had two daughters. She complimented Ann on how her "daughters" turned out, and said she thought that meant Ann had done a great job raising them. She thought a minute and then added "But of course, I don't suppose they

Karyn Mereness Joyner 1929-2023

would have turned out so well if we hadn't done a good job raising you." To which Ann replied, *"Of course. All credit goes to you, Mom."*

Karyn was not often unhappy. She often complimented her room, the views, the facility and the staff. Her face would light up when Ann or Hannah would appear. She especially enjoyed massages, going to lunch at the cafe, eating on the terrace, "window shopping" at the Swan's Nest gift shop run by Auxiliary volunteers, writing letters to friends and family, and having her hair done. But she also stated - more and more frequently as time went on - that she was ready to "be done" with her life.

Charlies and Karyn were both members of the Hemlock society (a right-to-die organization) during its existence (1980-2003). They had completed both Do Not Resuscitate forms and very detailed Advanced Directives. Charlie's did not come into play, but when Karyn fell and broke her hip on December 14, 2023, she was very clear that she wanted to die. Surgery was agreed to in order to reduce pain, but by the 17th, it was clear that she needed Hospice care. The entire "process" was not the ending anyone would have chosen, but Karyn was not in pain and with her daughter and granddaughter when she "let go this earthly tether" to "become the wind." Like her mother, she had chosen her time to die, and willed her own death.

Karyn Mereness Joyner was a smart, funny, brave, loving, supportive and strong-willed woman, an excellent teacher and a role model for many.

Wrapped in a bamboo sheet, her body will be buried on her daughter's farm in Mebane, next to Charlie and Chip, to feed worms and the soil. Her grave will be planted with wildflowers and a redbud, to feed the the air and the soul of anyone taking shelter under that tree in the world to come.

