

MEMENTO VIVERE



Virginia K. Anderson

*A Collection of Poems by
Virginia K. Anderson*

Edited by Emma Peters

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Four Generations:
Virginia, daughter Ingrid,
granddaughter Sheeva,
great granddaughter Emma
(editor), December 2002

INTRODUCTION:

A METHODOLOGY OF MEMORY

The Archive of Memories across the Street

I'm sitting across from my nana in her living room, drinking coffee and eating the cookies she made the night before. The house is quiet. The living room looks frozen in time from when I was young, though perhaps there's a different throw blanket on the chair by the piano or some newly bought coasters for our drinks. My baba comes in every so often to offer me a plate of sliced fruit, Persian candy, or a piece of the Baklava he made last week. I remarked to my nana that her mother knew how to capture a memory in words with simplicity and warmth, just as she is able to capture memories of her mother right now in the same way. Nana looks at me for a moment and grows quiet. I see tears gather in her eyes. She nods, and tells me that in five years time she knows she will remember me sitting across from her in my pale blue shirt, drinking coffee and listening to her. She says she will remember the bee buzzing by the flower outside the window behind my head, which she watched flit from petal to petal, as she walked me through the life of the woman who loved, nurtured and raised her. At this very moment, my nana creates poetry out of the anticipated memory of the present moment, just as her mother did. Nana's mother and my granny, Virginia K. Anderson, captured her life through poetry which now acts as one of the many avenues through which we are able to remember her.

I was four years old when my granny died, so my memories of her are sparse. One of the ways that I've gotten a glimpse of who she was is through reading and reflecting on some of the poems she wrote and that my nana, her daughter, kept and arranged in a binder. I've always felt drawn to my granny's poetry; perhaps because of the way she writes about our family that captures our essence perfectly, or simply because of her poetry's inherent beauty and poignance. Either way, a surreal feeling would always wash over me as I read her poetry and encountered truths that I seemed to know but could never verbalize. It felt as if her words came from inside of me as well, as if they'd formed me before I'd ever read them. I would read her poems and feel that my granny was sitting

right beside me, reaching through the time and distance that had kept me from knowing her tangibly, and making herself known through her verse. For these reasons and more, I felt it was necessary to honor my granny's works through a collection of poetry. I wanted to present her writing in book form to further establish her as the poet she was and to give more people the opportunity to get to know her and her words.

To discover more deeply who my granny was, I spent a summer making regular visits to my grandparents' house and sifting through relics and documents of the past that began to tell a story of Granny's life and my heritage. With each day spent exploring the words and remnants of a life I wasn't there to personally witness, I found myself participating in the practice of remembrance. Sitting on the Persian carpet on the living room floor and looking through a trunk that was kept in my Nana's closet which held pieces of my granny's life, I felt the sacredness of this practice which she too participated in through her poetry. Poetry which memorialized those whom she had loved and those she had lost, those who have passed, and those who came before. Poetry which captured the smell of her grandmother's garden, times sitting around the table telling stories with family, the golden leaves of fall, and everything else that should be held dearest in this life. The meaning and significance of these poems were only enhanced by the objects I found within my nana's trunk. Each tangible object that I touched and turned over felt as though I was uncovering parts of her life. The hole-punched first drafts and the rejection letters collected in a binder representing her acceptance of faults and determination despite obstacles in the way. The list that she kept of every book she read each year since 1953, revealing her organized and systematic nature. The highschool newspaper clippings of every article she wrote are saved in her childhood scrapbook, showing her affinity for writing and memorializing her work even at a young age. The smudge of ink on the revision of a haiku, showing how she had to simultaneously write while picking up her child who is throwing a tantrum. The coffee rings around the letter she sent to a publisher that speaks to how tired she may have been in the morning because she stayed up late the night before sewing a dress for her daughters. I spent careful days and countless hours examining these documents and letters and books and pictures and scraps of her life because she kept these things to help preserve who she was. Merely looking at these objects was not enough; I had to read and study the words she had written on most of these objects to truly uncover who she was. Amidst all of these things, I tried to collect all of the poetry I could. Each time I walked over to my nana's house across the street there was a new poem between the pages of an old Bible or hidden in a scrapbook from years ago. The words spilled from every crevice of the objects of my granny that are left, just as they overflowed when I talked with those who were closest to her.



Ingrid and Virginia, June 1967



Ingrid, Evan, Virginia, Ellen,
Laura, and Aunt Nancy in
their kitchen in San Francisco,
1960

A SHARED REMEMBRANCE

It was important to me that I didn't only collect and read the poems from my granny and attempt to remember her in solitude, but that my recovery of her was a collaborative process with family that knew and loved her. I had already planned on interviewing my nana, and I created a set of standard interview questions that included information about her background, personality, values, character, etc. We spent one of these interview sessions talking through these questions and anything else that came up, and we spent another interview session going through every single poem I had collected thus far. I was lucky to be in such close proximity to my nana so that anytime a new question arose or she had another anecdote or tidbit to share, I could talk with her at a moment's notice. These conversations felt extremely important and full of weight as we created space to honor and remember someone whom we had both loved. My nana conveyed that she too was grateful for this time that we had to slow down from the hustle and bustle and look back in appreciation, lament, and love. As I shared this significant time with my nana, it occurred to me that perhaps I should get into contact with her siblings to broaden the collaborative nature of this project and to honor my granny to the greatest extent. Because of the family members captured in her poems, I knew I wanted to interview her other beloved children: Laura Grossman, Ellen Anderson, and Evan Anderson.

I asked each of these family members the same questions, one of them being: What are your memories of your mother writing while growing up? My great aunt Laura wrote in response, "I wish I could tell you that every evening I saw her laboring over her writing. I don't think I ever saw her write. (That doesn't mean she wasn't doing it right in front of me, with paper in hand, or in her head)." My great Aunt Ellen replied saying, "She was always writing. Writing to earn her Masters in English Literature, letters to the Editor, articles, recipes and book reviews published in 'ladies' magazines, verse for her family, notes for her church program and newsletter." My nana's answer is closer to Laura's as she stated, "I don't remember her writing while I was growing up. Now that you're making me think about it, I'm considering the possibility that she did her writing when as babies and toddlers we were sleeping, and when we were in school. She had solid, reliable systems for everything." My great Uncle Evan responded saying, "I wasn't too aware or interested in Mom's writing, though I knew that she was passionate about it. I come from a family of writers on Mom's side, her parents and brother, and two cousins who are published, prolific novelists."

As I moved further through the project, I realized that the widely differing answers to my same questions revealed the nature of memory. It's messy and nonlinear, confusing and contradictory. We cannot always create fact and objectivity from memory, but does this take away its value in being remembered? My granny has a poem titled "Grounding" that describes the phenomenon I witnessed in the piecing together of these shared memories. In this poem, she describes remembering relatives who have passed away with her brother. This poem encapsulates the grounded feeling of a shared remembrance despite the uncanny way that memories don't always align with one another:

you alone can reach back in time
to happenings I know
not always remembering the same way
or even the same things
but in essence we find agreement

I have found through this process of uncovering more of my granny with others, that despite the inconsistencies, contradictions or missing pieces, there is truth and grounding to honoring these puzzle pieces of the past.

Where do my own puzzle pieces of memories fit into this project? The memories which I've managed to retain of my granny include her pink bathroom, an easter egg hunt in her backyard, and the vague recollection of her smile looking down onto me. I cannot tell if these are crafted from the retellings of her life which I've heard over the years, or the pictures that I've seen from the Thanksgivings and Easters which we used to spend at her house. Does it truly matter whether these come from my own hazy memory or from the words of others inviting me into theirs? Yet these words feel close to me, as if they are the roots from which I have grown. One of these roots of connection to her lies within a poem where she mentioned me by name, speaking to my great grandfather, who passed away before I was born:

Roxie was five-and-a-half,
Emma Grace three-and-a-half.
Roxie said, sadly, "Oh, he died."
"Yes, I know," said Emma Grace.
 "I used to talk to him."
"What do you mean,
 you talked to him?"
"All the time,"
 Emma said quietly.

My granny was deeply affected by what could be interpreted as a child's naive babbling, and captured it in her poem in a way that gave dignity to my curiosity. I don't remember talking to my great-grandfather or this conversation, but reading this poem makes me feel connected to him, to my family and to their memory in a significant way. While this memory isn't my own, I'm able to adopt it and hold it close to my heart as it connects me to my heritage.



Virginia, October 1973



Virginia and her mother
Hazel, 1927

FEMINIST PRESERVATION

The uncovering of Virginia K. Anderson's works directly relate to the phenomenon that revered female authors such as Virginia Woolf and Alice Walker describe as the loss of potential art and literature from women throughout history. This loss may be a result of a lack of female education, or a lack of acknowledgement and preservation of their works. With this project I am engaging in a literary feminist scholarship that preserves the life and work of my granny as one of the American women poets of the twentieth century. Her work is part of the literary tradition of Californian women poets, and helps to capture and record parts of California women's history. Yet something unique about my feminist project, which I discovered, is that Virginia K. Anderson was in the midst of this same feminist scholarship for most of her life, whether she would have recognized it as that or not. From the age of fourteen she kept a scrapbook which included notes from the boys she went out with, pictures that she took of herself in tap shoes, poems she wrote of her first heartbreak, and every single school newspaper that her writing was published in. My granny continued this habit of preserving bits and pieces of herself and her moments in American history throughout her life. It seems as though she kept every version of every piece of her writing that she could. Virginia K. Anderson was doing the work of feminist preservation by making the decision to preserve her own life as an American woman by recording memory and experience through her poetry and prose.

In my granny's poem "The Good Wife," she observes the "model wife": demure and modest, who transforms after she gets behind the wheel of a car. The good wife is no longer constrained to the confines of her title and is a more confident and bold version of herself as she "shifts gears precisely" and "purrs around curves with the sureness of assurance." My granny made meals, cleaned the house, sewed clothes for her children, and offered nurture and love towards her family. She also wrote with a fervor, earned her masters degree in literature while raising four children, worked as a church secretary and at an underground abortion clinic. She observes "the good wife" in writing but lived a life that was larger than just meeting the expectations of a wife at the time. While she loved being a mother and a wife, she didn't apologize for venturing outside of those roles and pursuing other hobbies, community, education and varied ambitions.

After doing some digging into our family tree, it seemed that Virginia K. Anderson's inclinations to memorialize her own life were not new, but may have been inherited from a line of ambitious women who valued the preservation of our family history. There is an extensive genealogy that dates back to 1786, begun by Dorothy Z Milhouse and Hazel A. Stewart (her mother). My granny's mother Hazel was a writer as well, and recorded moments of my granny from her childhood. In a journal entry on my granny when she was a toddler, Hazel writes about granny asking her, "Who turn lights out?" because she was confused that it was dark after the sun went down. My granny seems to use her own recorded words from childhood as inspiration for a poem on the changing colors of leaves in autumn and the unlikely hope that can occur after tragedy with the title: "Who Left The Light On." Since her mother Hazel participated in the feminist literary tradition and preserved this moment from my granny's childhood, Virginia K. Anderson was able to continue the tradition that her mother began, seeing the value and significance in conserving memories through writing.

FINAL THOUGHTS

In piecing together these shared memories, the essence of Virginia K. Anderson remains intact. The collected memories of Virginia K. Anderson gives a rich overarching memory of her love and zest for life. Anderson's words continue to live on and impart wisdom to my family to this day.

Ellen: "She gave us all—kids and husband—absolute, undying, unconditional love. She gave us the best of herself and then expected us to get on with it and be the best adults we could manage."

Laura: "She definitely had a confidence about going forward with whatever felt important to her."

Ellen: "She was so strong. She faced all life squarely in the face. Every joy, pain, disappointment"

Laura: "She was so human. She embraced life."

Evan: "Mom, and Dad, gave me and my sisters unconditional love."

Nana: "She handled it all. Life and death."

My nana shares her words of grief about children growing older as I and my cousins get taller and go off to school, her descriptions of laughter and stories told with my family in the backyard remind us to cherish and treasure the times we get to spend together, and her expressions of the heartbreak of loss and grief provide comfort as we feel less alone in the face of suffering. I am forever grateful for the impact of my granny's life and poetry on my family and me. I hope that recording her poetry here in this project will serve as a means for others to value women's writing and the memory and legacy that it carries.

In the process of uncovering my granny's life and sharing memories of her with those who knew her best, I was able to learn that she memorialized in her poetry that life is precious despite its difficulties. Her work continues to be a testament to her admonition: "I encourage you to respect words, to love them, to know them."



Virginia on the day of her graduation from
San Francisco State, June 1965

BIOGRAPHICAL HEADNOTE

Virginia Kaufman Anderson was born on March 7th, 1922, on the Kaufman family farm located near Gray, Iowa. She was the firstborn child to her parents Hazel and Walt Kaufman, and her only other sibling Harold Richard Kaufman was born four years later on November 24th, 1926. Anderson grew up in the height of the Great Depression and lived nomadically, often sleeping in tents, as her family moved from place to place depending on wherever her father could find work as a carpenter. Despite her impoverished upbringing, her mother made sure that wherever the family went, Anderson would have consistency in education. Regardless of where they moved, Hazel Kaufman found schools for Anderson to attend and libraries for her to visit. Both of Anderson's parents were writers and instilled the love of literature, writing, and general expression of thought into their children as they grew up. Anderson's brother Harold wrote of their homes that "magazines and books were always available in the Kaufman house, even if money was in short supply for clothes." Anderson had also grown up in a household where opinions and expression of thought were valued. Her husband Bill said of his wife's family, "You weren't respected if you didn't have an opinion, [and] you needed a justification for your opinion as well."



Virginia and Bill, early 1940s

Anderson expressed her opinions and experiences by writing poetry as early as fourteen, and continued to write throughout her high school years. She wrote for the school newspaper, and her involvement with the school theater group led her to write a play titled *S. O. S. Cupids*, which won a play-writing contest. Anderson also learned French in high school and grew to love the language as she kept in contact with a French penpal and eventually would take further classes in French years later in Berkeley. Her love of words, books, reading, and writing sustained her during her childhood, and continued to grow and flourish as she became older. Anderson graduated from Evanston Township High School in 1939. She chose to go to Central YMCA College in the fall of 1939 to study psychology, as this was one of the few colleges in the country where women and other minorities could attend alongside white male students. This was also the place where Anderson met and fell in love with her future husband Bill, whom she left college to marry in 1942.

After their marriage, Bill got a position as a Congregational pastor for ten years in Milton, Wisconsin, which is where they had their first child Nils in 1945 who tragically and unexpectedly died less than a month after birth. They had their next three children in Wisconsin: Ingrid in 1947, Evan in 1950, and Ellen in 1955. Anderson's husband eventually got a psychology position at San Francisco Council of Churches which caused them to move to San Francisco where Virginia gave birth to their last child, Laura, in 1958. Anderson was a stay-at-home mother from 1947 until 1975, when her last child Laura graduated and moved out of the house. Her love of these experiences spent watching her children grow and develop is caught in many of her poems and prose that recall these cherished moments of mothering. . Although Anderson found great purpose and value in being a mother, she also spent four of these twenty-eight years finishing the last year and a half of college she had missed out on completing when she left early to get married. In 1965, Anderson received her B. A. degree in literature from San Francisco State University. In those months spent completing her college degree, she further cultivated her knowledge and passion for writing . Not only that, she also worked at the church St. Francis in San Francisco and Trinity United Methodist in Berkeley as an administrative assistant off and on in the years after they moved to these places in the 1960s and 1970s on. In the position of administrative assistant at both churches, she worked with the more underprivileged individuals who came to the church for help and resources . These individuals often became the subjects of Anderson's writings. She wrote about them because, as she said, "I would take most of them home with me – emotionally at the close of the day, and could make them leave only by writing about them." Anderson also did volunteer work at the Society for Humane Abortions in San Francisco during the 1960s. This was an underground organization

which worked to give women access to information and resources for abortions, pregnancies, and women's healthcare in general. By 1971 she was venturing into work as a docent in the Fine Arts Museums in San Francisco where she led tours in French.

Although Anderson had written poetry since she was fourteen, she wrote most consistently and seriously in the late 1960s. The motivation for this creative period was a result of reading and studying *An Introduction to Haiku* by Harold G. Henderson. In 1970 she put out a collection of her own haikus with the help of her husband as calligrapher and his sister as linocut illustrator. Starting in 1974 and up unto the last year of her life in 2005, Anderson was publishing her poetry in art history magazines, poetry anthologies and collections, cookbooks, children's textbooks, local newspapers, and other various publications. She moved to Berkeley in April 1976, and continued her work as a docent now at DeYoung and Legion of Honor Museums and worked more extensively on her writing. In 1984, she put together a simple book for family members called *Black Patent Leather* that draws upon childhood years in Iowa and South Dakota. By 1985, she helped to found "Trinity Poets," a monthly poetry workshop that was based in the Trinity United Methodist Church. There she met with fellow writers to create a community of writers and to continue to improve her own poetry.

In the empty nest years, after her children had moved out, Anderson and her husband happily spent the later years of their lives together until Bill passed away on May 28, 1995 due to a brain hemorrhage. Anderson experienced great grief after losing her life partner, but her commitment to life and the love she had surrounded herself with from friends and family sustained the years spent without her husband. She continued living in Berkeley and kept up with her previous involvements in her church writing community, kept working as a docent at the DeYoung and Legion of Honor Museums in San Francisco, and steadily wrote and published poetry up until the last few years of her life. In October of 2005 she was presented the Jack London Award for Outstanding Service to the California Writers Club. She passed away on November 4, 2005 at eighty-three years old, leaving scores of poems, prose, and the love she cultivated in her family as a lasting testament to the beautiful life she led.



Virginia with her great grandchildren in Ingrid's backyard, 2004

I've chosen to title this collection of my granny's poetry as *Memento Vivere*, borrowed from the title of one of her poems written later in life. This Latin phrase translates as "remember to live" and is embodied throughout the content of many of her poems. For this reason, I'm opening this collection with the poem "Memento Vivere," in which Anderson depicts remembrance in the midst of the sweetness of life, in hopes that readers would join Anderson as she travels back in her memory.

Memento Vivere

The terrace is empty, silent.

The chairs are tipped against the table,
the umbrella shaking in the wind
its fringe trembling.
An oak leaf bounces across the flag-
stones.

Empty, did I say?
The shadow of the Sunday painter
is at the table, studying the scene,
drawing with pastels, frowning.
Other shadows move onto the terrace
through the gate
around the corner of the house
stopping on the small bridge
to watch the creek.

I sniff the jasmine, remembering all..
savoring the remembering...

Silent, did I say?
As I muse, echoes of voices
float round my head
scraps of good talk
jokes between mouthfuls of food
confidences shared.
Children dart between the tables
laughing
adding sparkle to the echoes.

The smallest one huddles
behind the rhododendron:
“Granny, find me!”

Published in *Blue Unicorn*, October
1980

REMEMBERING CHILDHOOD



Virginia and friend Lillian King, 1927

depression child

cornmeal mush for dinner
hand-me down, ill-fitting clothes
for bed, a mattress on the floor

but library books cost nothing
and fantasy was free
my reading, dreams unlimited
richness in a time of poverty

From *Black Patent Leather*, 1984



Virginia, 1927

Exploring Proust

It is the fragrance of lilacs,
a gentle, unassuming breath,
that sets me down by the
farmhouse in my grandmother's
garden.

Yes, I know about Proust; I
know now.
He raised to his lips a spoon
carrying tea-soaked madeleine
and the past was recaptured for
him.

He wrote of this before I was
born
(we shared the earth for less
than a year) and I read of it
decades later
knowing by then what he meant
...

for whenever the scent of lilacs
brushes across my nostrils
itre-createsme into that child in
my grandmother's garden ...

Memory

I walked alone at midnight
In a garden where no birds sing;
But the image of you in my heart
Made the royal green canopy ring.

I heard your sweet voice in the
willows,
I felt your soft hair in the fern,
I saw your dear face in the moon-
light;
But once gone, you will never
return.

“Come back,” I cry, “from the
silence.
Come back to me out of the years!”
Say “I love you” and tenderly fold
me
You are gone and I have no more
tears.

I stood alone at dawning
And watched the still, rising light;
But I heard the sound of your
footsteps
As you faded away with the night



Virginia,
March 1937

Written in 1937, poem found in
Virginia's childhood scrapbook.

Tiny Transformation

Little Sam
smoothes the leaves with his
fingers
steps closer to the low branches
turns around
moves backward into the bush
looks to left right above
at the leaves surrounding him—
at last stands stockstill,
his quiet inward smile
saying:
I am a tree.

Published in *Brk Branch Poetry*
December Potluck



Virginia's great grandson
Sam, 1994



Virginia and great
grandchildren Sam and
Charley in her backyard in
Berkeley, late 1990s.

Farm Girl

We went back to the Iowa farm
where I was born
so my brother would be born there,
too
and for a while I was a farm girl.

I helped Grandma gather eggs
drew close to her sheltering skirt
as the straining chickens bobbed
around us
shrieking
helped her call the mud-caked pigs
 soo-ee soo-ee
clung close to her again
as they were approached snuffling,
poking —
they were as big as I was
some of them.

I rode the crowded school bus
into the little town
fell in love with the boy on the next
hill
sat on his spotted pony.

I wonder if Harry still lives there.

From *Black Patent Leather*, 1984



Virginia, 1928

Azara, 10, homeless

Her little brothers bubble, explore
like a pair of puppies
as I warm soup, brew tea in the church
kitchen
for their sick mother.
But Azara watches the boys,
moves slowly, somberly,
at last raises bleak eyes
as she raises her arm toward me.
Do you know why my sweater
is all covered with
these leaves?
She looks down.
because I have to sleep
on the ground
under dirty blankets.

And my breath catches in my throat
Remembering how it feels
to be ten years old: Am I
pretty? Do people
like me? Will someone
someday
love me?

Published in *Trinity Tower* October
1987, *Pegasus Anthology 6*, *Trinity Voice*
1991, *Street Spirit* September 1996,
Street Spirit October 2000



Virginia, early 1930s

REMEMBERING HERITAGE



A hand-painted plate
from Ireland that Virginia
had hanging on the wall in
her house.

The Bundle

There were no oft-repeated anecdotes
or chilling stories of The Troubles told,
no family proverb – spirit shadow-box
in which to see, translucent, times of old.
The inner life of earnest Quaker quest
had thinned to independent humanist.
A family tree took form when I was
grown,
with leaves that ring like harpsound in
my ears: Armagh, Antrim, places I've not
known.
My links with Ireland are fragile, sparse.
I've but this painted china plate where
glows
a creamy buttercup, a blush wildrose.

So that's my bundle, small indeed, and
rough, yet filled with Celtic truth. It is
enough.



Virginia and Grandpa Steere, 1927

Grandpa Steere

He really looked like a grandfather
gray hair comfortable faded
mustache
eyes set deep in wrinkles always in over-
alls on the farm no-nonsense cap pulled
over his ears.

He showed me the sky-high pines
with amber sap on the trunks
hacked off a chunk with his knife
and gave it to me to chew.
"Better than Juicy Fruit," he grinned:
I didn't think so, but I chewed.

And he taught me how to sit on the
stove
when the fire had just been kindled –
how to howl so it would get warm.
And it did get warm.

My mother told no tales like these.
He must have been a different man –
stern with his daughter
gentle with his granddaughter.



Uncle Ernest, 1910/20s

Uncle

His eyes, his wavy hair were shadowed
brown
As were those of his sisters; they would
smile
And say dark seamen from the wrecked
Armada ships
Had got to Irish shores and stayed awhile.

His origin was black midwestern soil
But Iowa's fertile furrows could not hold
His restless spirit after he was grown.
He traded fields for ocean's yielding plain,
Became a sailor like those men of old.
For years he wandered on the wine-dark
sea,
Recited poetry to fill the hours
That measured by degree the long night
watch.

His visits home were few but splendid.
The tall, lean form in navy-almost-black
Enchanted us with passages of verse
And gave us shining pebbles from Ceylon.
With scatter-rug thrown on his back he
changed
Into some creature he had seen and heard;
And though we knew, my brother and
myself,
That this was Ernie, what was real was
blurred.

One final, fateful time he came - to die
Of drink and weariness at thirty-eight.
Our mother held her sorrow deep within,
As hard and hurting as a blackened flint.

Perhaps none but my brother and myself
Can still remember Ernie's too-brief life.
I would, before his memory has fled,
Let fall the tears my mother could not shed.

Published in *Poetry Organization For
Women*, 1984



Virginia and her brother
Harold, 1944

Grounding

Now that they are gone
they who were always there
since before we were

and though others have joined us
and others have been born since

you alone can reach back in time
to happenings I know
not always remembering the same
way
or even the same things
but in essence we find agreement

that gives a reference to the past
a grounding.



Emma in Virginia and
Bill's backyard in their
home in Berkeley on
Easter, 2004.

On Easter Sunday

After they'd searched for eggs
and filled their baskets,
they wandered back into the house
and to the TV room.

Here were shelves with photos
of someone, books he'd read,
a pipe he's used, examples of
his calligraphy framed and
hanging on the wall-

Roxy was five-and-a half,
Emma Grace three-and-a-half.
Roxy said sadly, "Oh he died."
"Yes I know," said Emma Grace.
"I used to talk to him."
"What do you mean,
you talked to him?"
"All the time,"
Emma said quietly.

REMEMBERING
BEAUTY



Benny O'shanna, Harold,
and Virginia, June 1935

Creation

The indomitability of the life
spirit:

Winter night: a bird, absence,
Heedless of the sun's
Sings into the dark.

And the steadfastness of God's
world:

Once more wild flowers fields
Splash with color roadside, fields,
And hills – as always.

Old earth, wrinkled, scarred,
Has gifts for us, and wisdom.
Our task is to learn.

Published in *Upper Room Images*,
1976

Into Winter

Now, just now
the streets are touched by Midas
with gold-leaf fallen from trees,
exactly half the golden leaves, I'd guess
– the rest still cling to branches –
and briefly – for this moment only?
gold below and gold above
are mirror images

Later
gold storm-stripped from the trees
and scattered below
these gaunt silhouettes
 with leafless limbs
will reflect their gothic shapes
 softened, made more gentle
in the gleam of rain-glossed streets.

Published in the *California Quarterly*,
Summer 1982



Bill and Virginia, October 1942

Yes, I... While You

Yes, I saw Stonehenge shadows lengthening
and touched a ruined Roman wall in Wales,
beheld in lively threads the rendering
of Norman conquest through the English dales.
I met Monet's impress at Giverny
and paused upon the bridge within his park,
delighted in the Cherbourg fishery
beneath a rainbow's brightly-colored arc.
I watched the Dovecot weavers' magic pace,
perused the pound with London's taxi-men,
skimmed here and there upon the old world's face
from patterned past to present day again,
 while you kept house and cats. In daily frame you
 saw our trees transformed with autumn flame.

Lemon Tree

Nascent and ready-yellow
on the same tree
Aubergine new leaves
and lush dark-green ones
Delicate fragrant blossoms
and graceful sturdy branches
Eureka!
I would be a lemon tree.



Virginia in front of her house in
San Francisco, late 1950s

The Good Wife

in every way she is
the self-effacing wife
demurring when we praise
 her cooking
deferring to his opinion
 offering her own with apology
 then slipping into the background

until she gets behind the wheel--

Her spine stiffens. Chin thrust forward,
she shifts gears precisely
swings out of the driveway
shoots down the mountain,
familiar route for
 shopping errands.

She purrs around curves
with the sureness of assurance
slows for dips
 hidden from me
shifts to low and accelerates
 at the start of an unseen climb
slows for a blind
driveway.

 I look closely:
 is there a small smile on her lips?

 back home
stepping from behind the wheel
sagging slightly
murmuring something about tea
 she vanishes into the house

Spring Meander

Pope Valley

Hanging
from bare branches
shaggy parasite moss
sinuously drapes, festoons them
like shrouds.

Lakeport

Leaving the flower bed
pushing into the lawn
violets show their true colors—
not shy.

Yount Cross Road

Grape stumps
rain-darkened, gaunt,
stand with limbs akimbo
in wild mustard's yellow blossoms
knee-deep.



Virginia, Harold, Benny
O'shanna, June 1935

Jam Sonnet

I rearranged my jams again today –
Strawberry, rhubarb, marmalade, fresh mint
Translucent amber, glistening rosy tint –
All my creations; my inventions, they;
On one shelf I set empties fresh as May,
All shapes and sizes, giving not a hint
That once they held an artichokey glint
Or stood in lowly peanut butter's sway.
I choose one beauty for our breakfast toast And one for
giving to a well-loved friend.
Some chunks of wax, a handful's worth at most, I toss
into a can, and that's the end!
And thus uncouth disorder disperse From this one corner
of the universe!

Published in *Women's Circle Home Cooking*, November
1988

Autumn Meander

Poplars quivering gold
walnuts butter-yellow
beside live oaks resolutely
black-green.

Grape leaves glow vintage red,
tranquil yellow, bold bronze – touched
with a gold-tipped poplar brush for Fall.

Weathered
by sun, wind, rain
to gentle silver-grey,
this Autumn gift warms my doorstep:
pine cone.

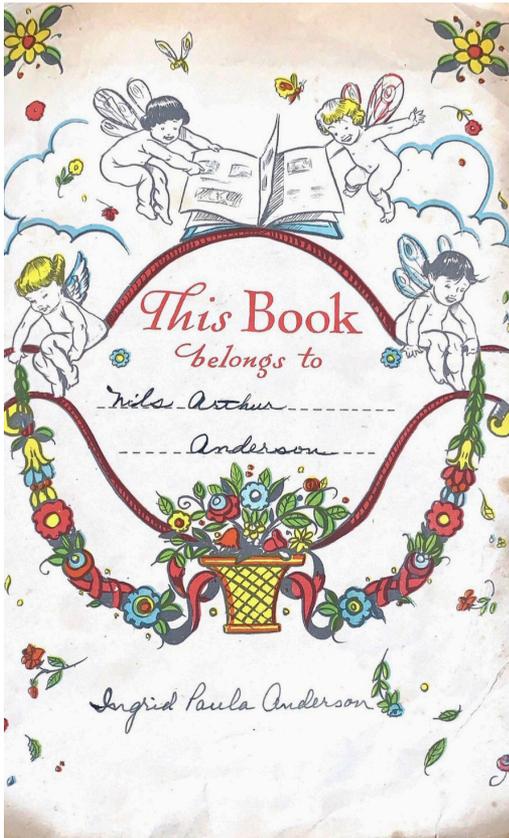
As We Grow Older

We must --
while there's yet light --...
paint out on the terrace
wash brushes sit with friends
yet light.



Virginia and Bill in their
house in Berkeley.

REMEMBERING IN GRIEF & HOPE



The Baby Book of Nils Anderson, the first child of Virginia and Bill who tragically passed away in 1945. The book was then used for Ingrid after she was born in 1947 (see her name underneath his).

Fledgling

What do birds do
when they lose a fledgling?
How do they cope?

While moving a ladder
Bil tripped over something on the ground.
It was a small wounded jay
and his foot crushed it to death---
completed its ordeal.
Now he understood why two adult jays
were circling and crying
as he reached for the ladder.

We gathered up the tiny body.-
feathers still warm, little head drooping—
and put it in loose soil
alongside the fence.
We were both crying.
The jays were crying,
perched on the power line,
on the oak branch.

"We're sorry, we're sorry.
I explained tearfully. "Please don't
keep calling and looking for him.
He's gone."
We, too, lost a fledgling,
many years ago;
this brings it all back.

By Heart

when each of the children was small
and cradled awhile in my arms
I thought let me learn this by heart
to live it again when they're grown

so I closed my eyes
intent on the little self
breathed it in sniffed it
slid my nose over the cool
skin over the threads of hair
smoothed the soft-firm arms
smoothed and pressed the soft-
firm legs held tighter for
a long moment and heard
the light breathing felt
the little heart beating

and I thought I had learned it by heart
and I thought I could live it again
and I thought



Virginia and her daughter
Ingrid, August 1948

Who Left The Light On

Heavy rain all morning
so gray outside
it's gray inside.

I'm startled
as I enter the bedroom –
“Who left the light on?”

but I'm alone in the house.
The glow comes from the window
from outside the window

where a Japanese maple
and a dawn redwood
stand side by side.

And then I remember
how leaf by leaf
and needle by needle

they turn a warm russet each the same radiant red
until at last

just before they drop
the leaves, the needles,
both stand transfigured

glowing in the midst of rain
rendering back the light
they had received from the sun.

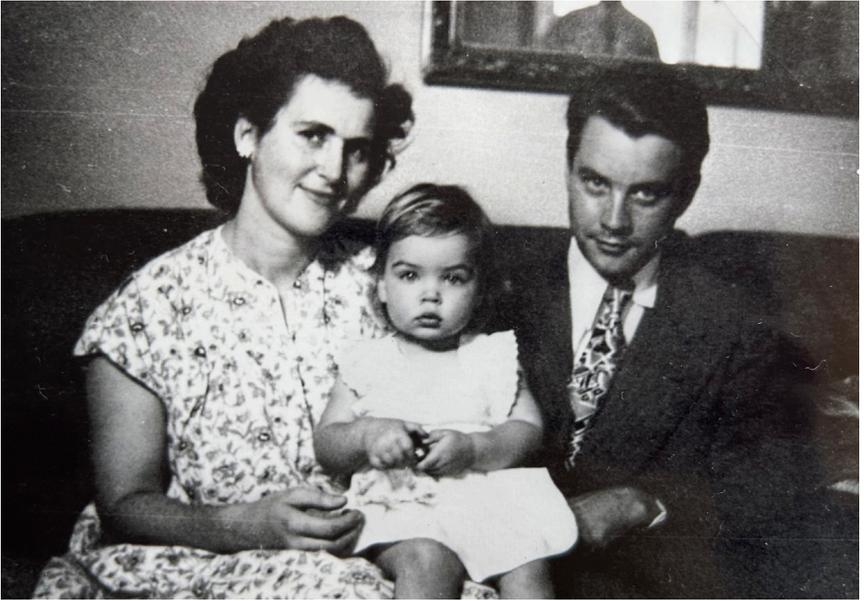
And again, as each year,
I silently thank
whoever left the light on.

Enough

When the nuclear winter
sets in
will someone still hear
within
Schubert's music
Du bist die Ruh'
you are stillness
you are peace...
come in to me
and close
the door quietly
behind you...
After we have vaporized ourselves
and our children
will anyone be left
to ponder Whitman's words
I celebrate myself, and sing myself.
And what I assume you shall assume.
For every atom belonging to me
as good belongs to you...

Why aren't Schubert, Whitman
enough?

Published in *Wordsmith* 1992



Virginia, Ingrid, and Bill,
1948.

Thanksgiving Day

most of us were around the table
eating, laughing, talking –
all the things we do at that time –
when suddenly the dining-room chandelier
went out.

We were startled. The lights were on
in the hallway, in the kitchen.
Had all three bulbs died at once?
"Shaeda, flick on the wall switch.
Maybe someone bumped it."
She did; the chandelier stayed dark.
We looked at each other, wondering.

Ingrid whispered, "Is it Daddy?
Is he here?"
It was a year and a half
to the day
since he'd left us.

Then the light came back,
all three bulbs. And all was as it
had been, except for our wonderings.

Several days later I came into the kitchen
and checked the time: 4:16. I began
to busy myself, glanced at the other clocks in
the house, and my watch, read 4:01.
Why had that one zipped ahead?

Are you here?

I reset the clock, and now I watch it
every so often, and wonder...

There Were Roses Here

There were roses here
earlier, in June,
trembling in the breeze,
reaching through the gate,
offering their scent.

Once, remembering
there were roses here
I came by again---
found some drying buds,
saw a petal drop.

When more time had passed
I returned and---yes---
there were roses here---
petals filled the path,
branches all were bare.

When the petals go---
blown away with wind—
little then would tell
there were roses here.
I took what I could,

dried them on a screen,
placed them in a bowl;
now they fill the room.
I can sniff them and say,
“There were roses here.”



Bill and Virginia, early
1940s

Where Are You?

I walk through the house—
your books on the shelves
your paintings on the walls
your music tapes sweetening the air
and out back
the clivias glowing
as they did
when we moved in
twenty years ago

table and chairs waiting for —
— remembering —
family times
times to laugh
times to share

and you're here. You are here.



Virginia and Bill, March
1968

in a dry time

there is blessing
in waking to the sound
of gentle pats of water on
windows
of sibilant wheels
on water-slick streets
of rushing water in backyard
creek

fling open the window
breathe in the freshness
cup your hands to receive
the manna
see it glisten in your palms
sip it with dry lips

Published in *Poet's Dinner*,
March 13 1993

REMEMBERING IN
THE PASSING OF TIME



Bill and Virginia visiting Sweden

Winter's Edge

We're at winter's edge, he said.
The dogwood has shed its leaves
another storm's on the way, and

could barely keep warm all last
night. He turned from the win-
dow,
rested his loving gaze on me.
There

were crinkles around his eyes,
pewter
lights in his brown hair. Yes, I
mused,
we were hardly aware that Spring

was upon us when busy Summer
took over with all that had
to be done. But we have been

blessed with a aureate Autumn.
Yes, I said, now we're
on the edge of Winter.

At First She Had Paper Dolls

dozens of them
carefully cut from the comic page
each Sunday.
Their names, their ages
were recorded on their backs
and they were folded by family
in pleated paper
and kept in a cigar box.
After she married she had
a real family to manage a husband
and children one by one
not a paper family but flesh
warmly raw delicately potent
precariously poised

all of irregular outline
scribbled unpredictably
with their unique credos
and rarely consenting to
classification.

Now with children grown, gone,
leading lives distinct yet linked
her husband paints in oils
abstracts fantasies dreams
and she works with words to
organize her impulses
manage her thoughts
on paper.

Virginia's children
Evan, Ellen, Ingrid,
April 1956.



Virginia,
Ingrid, and
Virginia's
grandchildren
on Easter,
1986.



Accident On The Bridge

The flashing sign alerts us, slows us
we creep and stop
creep and stop
at the urgent need of unknown
unseen victims.
We are all mortal, I muse...
creep and stop...
I am mortal, I will die at last.
When did I come to know that,
at what age? I can't recall . . .
Instead to my mind comes
my granddaughter – was she four? –
when her cat died.
Poised at the bottom step
as I came in
she turned to me
with a look both wise and sad.
"Did you know cats die, too?"
she asked. I nodded yes
and watched her climb the stairs to her
room.

Christmas

Christmas
is surely past
tree denuded cast out
but I've tucked behind a picture
one sprig.

Generation

Cutting
last year's fronds
To make way for the next;
we'll watch for their curls to
unfurl
this spring.

Each Year

Each year
crabapple
blooms
open white-pink
rose pink
fragile short-
lived I savor
them
this day.

Friday Already

"Tempus fidgets"
my father used to say
when I was eight or ten
and I thought he said "tempest"
but I knew what he meant:
when he was young, time dragged
but now it rushed by.
How could that be, I mused.
In high-school Latin I learned
tempus fugit means time flies
but I still felt I was
creeping on gravel
with now and then a spot of grass
for rollicking.

Now I am older than he was then
and for ages I've marveled
at the years' months' weeks'
acceleration _
"Is it Friday already!" –
Is it that I'm busier
or more heavily laden?
More likely it's Marvell's winged
Chariot
bringing me in sight of the end
of my own tempus.



Virginia's father
Walt Kaufman,
1920s



Bill at his art studio,
1990s

Preparation

At 63 he said
I think of myself as dying.
I need to decide
how to go.

He sat for a long time,
studied the joins of the small box
made by his grandfather, rubbed the stone from Gotland
brought back by his mother
before his birth.

Then he gathered
 his paint
 his brushes
And stood before his easel.

Have All My Songs Been Sung?

Have all my songs been sung
wherewith my soul was fed?
No more upon my tongue
This all sustaining bread?
The muse to whom I've clung
has turned her back and fled.
Have all my songs been sung?
These questions weigh like
lead.

Though faint
like a bell barely rung
Her answer has come: this
plaint.

Published in *Authorship*, Winter
2001

After A Hundred Years

A friend once shared a poem with me.
This poem had elastic proportions
that stretched back to her early child-
hood
nearly fifty years earlier,
rebounded to the present
and intermingled ago and now
with pitiless imprecision
of what was when was who.

That was twenty years ago.
Today searching for something else
I found her poem, read it.

The pattern of perspectives
sprang to life once more, and
I was carried back
back to her childhood and forward
to when she gave me
the poem and forward again to today.
..

Some thirty years hence
will someone come across my words
by chance
and be caught in the reliquary-warp
that will be thrown
across a hundred years or so
by then?

night thought

remember me
I would tell my children
think of me talk about me
I would tell my grandchildren
use my recipes read my writing
so long as you do I will
live

when no one is left who remembers me
no family no friends
I will no longer
Live



Virginia in Ingrid's backyard, in her late 70s

AFTERWORD

Memories of You
By Emma Peters

a pink bathroom
a dining table on thanksgiving
easter eggs in the backyard

this is all I have of you on my
own
sometimes I try to find memories
and cannot tell if they are mine
or from pictures I have seen

I do not remember you as you
were when I was young
but I read the words
and I look at the expressions
of those who knew you well
recounting
the way you knew whether or
not a comma was needed in a
compound sentence
or how to jar raspberry and
plum jams
your endless generosity in their
weaknesses and failings

I look at their wistful eyes as
they remember you wanting to
be remembered
and I know you
I really do



Virginia and
Emma, 2005

Appendix A: Questions Asked of Family Members during Interviews for the Biographical Headnote

What do you know of your mother's childhood?

What was it like for your mother to grow up in the Great Depression and how do you think it affected her later on in life?

How would you describe your mother's personality?

What did your mother value?

What was important to your mother?

What do you remember of your mother writing while you were growing up?

Your mother was a housewife yet very active in other areas of her life.

Can you tell me any more about this? How did she juggle raising a family while staying involved in other activities?

Is there any other information you think would be valuable for this project? (A poem you think is significant, pictures that might be helpful, any other information that gives insight into who she is, etc.)

Appendix B: The Archive

The poems which I've included in this collection were chosen based on their relation to the theme "Memento Vivere," but they do not reflect the full extent of Virginia K. Anderson's writing, and the extent of the archival research done to uncover her poems. Listed below are all of the poems I was able to find in my research. I have respected the capitalization conventions and spacing format that Anderson used in her original manuscripts throughout this collection. I have also included the publication information I was able to locate for some of them.

Chronological Listing

- “Memory” written May 1937
“Untitled” written in February 1938
“Creation” in *Upper Room Images* 1976
“California Seasons” in *CO* Spring–Summer 1979
“A Haiku” in *Anthology of the Bells* 1979
“Earth Notes” in *CO* Fall 1979
“Memento Vivere” in *Blue Unicorn* October 1980
“Yes I··While You” in *California Quarterly* Summer 1982
“After a Hundred Years” in *CO* Fall/Winter 1982
“Friday Already” in *CO* Summer 1983
“Long-ago Friends” in *Black Patent Leather* 1984
“depression child” in *Black Patent Leather* 1984
“Uncle” in *Poetry Organization For Women* 1984
“Farm Girl” in *Black Patent Leather* 1984
“Princess and Peasant” in *Tournaments Illuminated* Spring 1985, *Pegasus Anthology* 1990, *Pegasus Anthology* 1992
“Azara, 10, homeless” in *Trinity Tower* October 25, 1987, *Kendall Hunt Pegasus Anthology*, *Trinity Voice* February 1991, *Street Spirit* September 1996, *Street Spirit* October 2000
“Jam Sonnet” in *Women’s Circle Home Cooking* November 1988
“The Good Wife” in *Alameda Poets’ Tidings* 1989
“Contrast” – in *UM Review* June 1989 & March 1990, *Street Spirit* October 1996
“Communion” in *UM Review*, March 30, 1990
“Berkeley Meander” in *CS PS* July Contest 1st Place, July 1990
“Anguish” in *Bristol Banner Books* 1990
“On Museum Walls” in *Shuttle Spindle & Dyepot* October 1991, *Blue Unicorn* Vol. XX October 1996
“Enough” in *Wordsmith* 1992
“In a dry time” in *Poet’s Dinner* March 13, 1993
“Reply to Petrarch” in *Potpourri* July 1993, September 1993
“The Bundle” in *West of Ireland Anthology* Autumn 1993
“South Dakota Sisters” in *Anderie Poetry Press* 1994
“Walking the Walls” in *Blue Unicorn* Vol. XIX January 1996, February 1996
“Frank” in *Street Spirit* October 1996
“Grammar Lesson” in *Street Spirit* November 1996, *And Then Anthology* Vol. 9 1999
“Shelter for now” in *Street Spirit* November 1996
“Grounding” in *Verve* October 3, 1997
“Have All My Songs Been Sung” in *Authorship* Winter 2001
“Walkers Only” in *BPWA Newsletter* Winter 2002–3

“Exploring Proust” in *Bibliophilos* Summer 2003
“Tiny Transformation” – in *Brk Branch Poetry December Potluck*
“Across”
“Angels Camp”
“After more than…”
“A Funny Thing Happened”
“decompensation”
“Blizzard”
“Haiku”
“How can we tell…”
“Ground Zero”
“Reject”
“Oxy Moron”
“Memory’s Album”
“Teacher”
“Sisters”
“Saturday Night Movies”
“Black Patent Leather”
“Untitled”
“Long-ago Friends”
“There Was A Tree”
“Yount Cross Road”
“Old Town Alexandria”
“Around 2 a.m”
“More than one way”
“His Name Is Fred”
“Steven”
“Winter’s Edge”,
“Who Left The Light On”
“Where Are You?”,
“There Were Roses Here”
“Thanksgiving Day”
“At First She Had Paper Dolls”
“As We Grow Older”
“Accident On The Bridge”
“Christmas/Generation/Each Year”
“Into Winter”
“Fledgling”
“Spring Meander”
“Preparation”
“On Easter Sunday”
“night thought”
“Autumn Meander”
“By Heart”
“Grandpa Steere”
“Summer No Winter Yes”

Alphabetical Listing

- “Tiny Transformation” – in *Brk Branch Poetry December Potluck*
“Across”
“Accident On The Bridge”
“After a Hundred Years” in *CO Fall/Winter 1982*
“After more than…”
“Angels Camp”
“Anguish” in *Bristol Banner Books 1990*
“At First She Had Paper Dolls”
“Around 2 a.m.”
“As We Grow Older”
“Autumn Meander”
“Azara, 10, homeless” in *Trinity Tower* October 25, 1987, *Kendall Hunt Pegasus Anthology*, *Trinity Voice* February 1991, *Street Spirit* September 1996, *Street Spirit* October 2000
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“How can we tell…”
 “His Name Is Fred”
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 “Memory’s Album”
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 “Teacher”
 “Thanksgiving Day”
 “There Was A Tree”
 “There Were Roses Here”
 “Uncle” in *Poetry Organization For Women* 1984
 “Untitled”
 “Untitled” written in February 1938
 “Walkers Only” in *BPWA Newsletter* Winter 2002-3
 “Walking the Walls” in *Blue Unicorn* Vol. XIX January 1996, February 1996
 “Winter’s Edge”,
 “Where Are You?”
 “Who Left The Light On”
 “Yes I…While You” in *California Quarterly* Summer 1982
 “Yount Cross Road”

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I'd like to thank Dr. Bettina Pedersen for taking on the role of mentor for this project. Your wisdom, academic expertise, and encouragement have been essential for this collection. Thank you for reminding me of my academic and creative capabilities when I have felt stuck and disoriented in this process. It's because of you that I have had a tangible framework for this project to be put into. Your passion for providing a platform to female literary voices is inspiring and has sparked a similar passion in me that is fundamental to this work. Thank you to the other members of my committee, Dr. Katie Manning and Dr. Karl Martin for participating and encouraging me in the process of this project as well. I am so thankful to have had your creative and academic input which has been significant for this scholarship.

Without the help of my good friend Anna Riedlinger, this collection would have remained in a google doc, double-spaced with Times New Roman font. You have the stylistic eye that I don't, and I am so grateful to you for working on the graphic design for this collection.. To be able to see my Granny's work in legitimate book form has been one of the most beautiful parts of the project, and that is mainly thanks to your help.

Thank you to Ingrid Afshar, my Nana, who has taught me since I was young to value my family and their memory. You have been an example to me of what it means to honor those who have come before us and that is a lesson I will never forget. Thank you for keeping the memory of Granny alive and inviting me into your memories of her. I will forever treasure the moments we have spent talking about Granny and her life in your living room. I am also so grateful to Ellen Anderson, Laura Grossman and Evan Anderson for participating in this project and sharing memories of their mother with me. I'm honored to learn about her life and character through those who loved her most. It's been wonderful to talk with all of you and put together the puzzle pieces of memory.

I'd like to thank my parents for providing me with an opportunity to try out every major under the sun until I stumbled upon my old friend: literature. I am so lucky to have parents whose endless support has paved the way for me to eventually embark on this project.

Lastly, I'd like to express my deepest gratitude to Virginia Anderson herself, my Granny. It has been an incredibly special thing to know that someone I'm related to has written these poignant words of beauty, grief, love, and remembrance. I am so thankful that I have been able to learn from the rich legacy of your life. I hope that this collection would have been to your liking.

