

# Mindfulness in the city: Unpacking regrets



Through regret we realize what is really important in life

**Caroline Ishii**  
Columnist

OTTAWA — I have a motto of living life with no regrets. It has served me well, learning languages, exploring the world, approaching strangers, taking risks, and following passions.

**What is regret?**  
According to psychologist Melanie Greenberg in *Psychology Today*, “regret is a negative cognitive or emotional state that involves blaming ourselves for a bad outcome, feeling a sense of loss or sorrow at what might have been, or wishing we could undo a previous choice that we made.”

I felt smug with my motto of no regrets until I heard bestselling author Daniel Pink speak about

his in-depth research into regrets for his book, *The Power of Regret: How Looking Backward Moves Us Forward*.

Pink says everybody has regrets, it's part of the human experience. What is most important is to deal with regrets intentionally and positively and not ruminate over them.

He says, “if we learn what people regret the most, we also understand what they value the most. And so, this negative emotion of regret gives us a sense of what makes life worth living.”

**My regrets**  
Pink's comments inspired me to look at my life more closely for regrets that I tried to forget or hide because I felt guilty.

I let someone take the fall for my mistake because I couldn't speak the truth. I didn't say anything when a colleague was mis-

**Aunt Helen's dinners**  
Near the top of my pile of regrets is not going to one of my aunt Helen's Easter dinners.

My aunt would make large feasts for major holidays like Easter, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. She would invite family, friends, and neighbours to come to eat. She would spend days making different dishes covering a massive table in her kitchen.

One Easter dinner, no one came. We couldn't be bothered. Our family was in the west end and too tired to travel downtown. I'm not sure what happened with the others.

My cousin and I still remember this because we regret it. She was alone in her house with all this food, and no one came. It's heart-breaking thinking of this now. How did she feel? Lonely, sad, and abandoned?

If I could change things, I would go to her house, even if it was only her and I.

I didn't understand then what makes people truly happy. It wasn't so much about the food, but her way of saying, “come see me, let me feed you and know that I have some value. Because for me, this is love.”

**Being Caroline**  
I have not regretted the life I have



PHOTO COURTESY: CAROLINE ISHII

**Caroline's aunts Betty (left) and Helen (right). Both loved cooking and sharing food. Helen was exceptionally good at baking bread and cakes.**

lived. Even though I had a hard childhood and growing up had its twists and turns, I wouldn't be writing to you now if I had changed anything.

I love the Canadian TV series *Being Erica* (2009-2011), filmed in Toronto. It's about a woman who has a chance to redo things that she regretted from the past by time travelling. However, she discovers that changing some-

thing in her past affects other events along the way.

What can we do with regrets? Regrets are normal and, in fact, our most common negative emotion, says Pink. So, what do we do about them?

Pink believes that addressing regrets can be transformational. “To me, regret clarifies what's

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*“I have not regretted the life I have lived... I wouldn't be writing to you now if I had changed anything.”*

treated to avoid making waves. I was annoyed and snapped when my father asked me for what seemed the hundredth time when we were going out for dinner.

The dominant emotions in regret are shame and sadness, says psychologist Maria C. Lamia in *Psychology Today*.

# Living with COVID: To mask or not to mask?



Exploring the history of mask-wearing in Japan as mandates are lifted

**Dr. Ailin Oishi-Stamatiou**  
Columnist

Masking has become a politically polarizing issue today. To mask or not to mask is the divisive question debated in political circles in North America today.

If you've received a second or third dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, you might question whether masking is even beneficial. Masking mandates and social distancing protocols differ from country to country depending upon vaccine rollouts and current levels of COVID, making things confusing for the public. But just because protective pandemic public health measures and mandates are lifting across Canada doesn't mean that COVID has miraculously disappeared.

In the early stages of the pan-

demic, the World Health Organization (WHO) praised Japan for its swift and effective curtailing of the virus spread achieved simply by promoting mask-wearing. Masks work to suppress pandemic spread not by protecting the mask-wearer but by preventing the infection of others by the wearer.

Despite Japan not having instituted a legal masking requirement, a voluntary near universal mask usage has been observed.

Why is this? To understand, we must look to the past. In Japan, masks are worn daily for many reasons, and there is no stigma associated with mask-wearing in Asia. During the winter influenza season, masks are worn to prevent the spread of cold and flu. During the spring and autumn seasons, masks are worn to prevent seasonal hay fever allergies that affect 30 per cent of the population. Others wear masks

made from persimmon tannins and silk cloth called “Fukumen.” In the Meiji period, a 3D-style mask with a copper wire mesh filter was used. Today we know that copper has anti-microbial properties.

In 1923, the Kotobuki mask made by Uchiyama Takeshoten was first registered as a trademark product in the aftermath of the Great Kanto Earthquake. People in the Tokyo and Yokohama region wore the masks to protect themselves from ash and smoke inhalation. With innovations in manufacturing techniques, the wired mask, the white gauze mask, the pleated mask, the flat cloth mask, the disposable mask, and 3D masks have all made their debut.

After influenza outbreaks in 1918 (Spanish flu) and 1934, mask-wearing to prevent cold and flu spread became widespread. By then, mask-wearing

was a long-established practice that helped protect Japan in the 1968 pandemic, SARS in 2003, and H1N1 swine flu in 2009. Mask-wearing became linked with being a good citizen doing one's duty to protect their country, family, and community. The Japanese government didn't need to apply fines or strict mandates to enforce masking, instead relying on public health campaigns



PHOTO CREDIT: MIKI Yoshitomo from Sapporo City, Hokkaido, JAPAN, CC BY 2.0 via Wikimedia Commons

**Wearing a face mask has become a politically polarizing issue in North America. In Japan, masks are worn daily for many reasons.**

promoting the Japanese culture of co-operation, consideration, and obligation making the cultural acceptance of mask-wearing easier.

In Canada, we went from nearly zero mask-wearing pre-COVID to 80 to 90 per cent compliance these past two years, which was a big behaviour change. Perhaps in the future, mask-wearing can become a normal societal practice or etiquette, not associated with cultural stigma or political divisiveness. Masks have become

a stylish fashion trend rather than just a functional healthcare product.

Today they come in all shapes, colors, materials, and designs. Some are waterproof, repel odours, block UV rays, heat up, or cool down. In the end, it comes down to doing what makes you feel comfortable based on all the available scientific data and statistics. But, we should be able to wear a mask without judgment if that's the choice we make.

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*“In Japan, masks are worn daily for many reasons, and there is no stigma associated with mask-wearing in Asia.”*

to hide their acne and breakouts or simply if they're having a bad makeup day.

The first reported mask usage was around 150 years ago, in the 1870s, in the mining industry. Factory and coal/silver mine workers utilized masks to prevent dust inhalation. They were



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My wife and I visited B.C. internment camps in May and June 1944. We also went to Vancouver and visited Japanese farmers in southern Alberta. In the fall of 1946, we went to see the condition of our countrymen in Eastern provinces. In the winter of 1947, we visited self-directed relocation places in B.C. In the summer and fall of the same year, we went to Vancouver three times to deal with school affairs, and in the fall of 1948, we went to Eastern provinces also concerning school.

Wherever we went, we were welcomed greatly. I rejoiced and proudly thought how well the seeds we planted over the past 30 years sprouted.

In Canada, all the properties owned by our countrymen in the defence zone were forcefully sold by the government. Only our school building remains. However, because our countrymen no longer live in Vancouver, there is little possibility for our school to reopen.

As I wrote above, our countrymen only lived in B.C. before the war. But now they are dispersed all over Canada and are now thinking of establishing themselves where they are. They stopped thinking this is a temporary living, and rather, they are there permanently.

Consequently, they are now seeking good housing and buying nice furniture. Their daily diet is also changing from rice and miso



PHOTO COURTESY: NIKKEI NATIONAL MUSEUM

Hanako and Tsutae Sato in Magrath, Alberta; 1942-1952. Circa 1942. Tsutae and Hanako Sato fonds. Nikkei National Museum. Accession number: NNM 1996.170.16.21.

to bread as the main staple. As the Nisei (second generation) is becoming the centre of society, the main language is changing from Japanese to English.

Our countrymen in the United States were also forced to relocate during the war; however, their land, houses, and businesses were protected by order of the government.

Therefore, they were able to return to their land after the war and continue to carry on their

businesses. Now they are developing magnificently in that country. On the other hand, in Canada, the base our countrymen developed for over 50 years was uprooted and destroyed. Consequently, our countrymen's recovery and development in Canada are slow.

Above, to express my gratitude and to inform you.

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Translation of NNM:  
1996.170.1.13.13

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perseverance, Manitobans finally accepted them as people. It is interesting to note that Jewish and German companies hired most of the Japanese workers. Perhaps they had empathy for the plight of the Japanese.

Today, as I watch the Russian invasion of Ukraine on television, I think back to the experiences of my family and the Japanese community and wonder how Russia's aggression will impact Canadians of Russian descent. There is overwhelming support for Ukraine from the Canadian government and Canadians in general. Will this translate into indiscriminate actions towards Russian Canadians, as some people will blame them for the actions of their ancestral country?

There are differences in the present scenario from the situation with the Japanese Canadians. In 1942, Japanese Canadians in B.C. did not have the right to vote and were not considered citizens. Secondly, the Japanese became easy targets because of their visibility in the dominant white society.

On the other hand, Russian Canadians will have the protection of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to maintain their basic rights from any government actions towards them.

Also, Russian Canadians look more like the white majority of Canadians, and it would be difficult for Canadians to differentiate who is Russian and who is

not. No doubt there will be acts of racism and harassment directed toward innocent Russian Canadians because they become easy targets and scapegoats for what Russia is doing to Ukraine. For example, Chinese Canadians became victims of racism because of the perceived origin of COVID-19. As a result, anyone who looked Asian was the targets of verbal abuse and other violence.

It is in times of crisis that the freedoms we cherish and take for granted can be quickly eradicated by the actions of those who want to blame and expound hatred towards others because of their ethnic association.

Many Russian Canadians are condemning the actions of Putin and expressing their loyalty to Canada, but unfortunately, not all Canadians will appreciate this.

There likely will be attacks upon Russian Canadian institutions and individuals because it becomes a "blame game." Unlike the Japanese Canadians, today, we have the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that will give some protection against severe violations and interventions, but this is no solace for the victims of racism.

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This article was originally published on the CBC's website, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/japanses-canadian-urges-canada-to-not-repeat-racism-1.6405254>

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important to us and instructs us how to do better," says Pink.

He says that thinking about our regrets, talking about them, and—when possible—doing something about them can help us improve our decision-making, boost our performance, and deepen meaning in our life.

Tools for regrets

Pink discussed with psychotherapist Amy Morin on her *Verywell Mind* podcast three ways to turn regrets into opportunities to develop mental strength.

**Disclosure.** Sharing your regret is helpful because negative emotions are painful and menacing. When we convert them into words by writing or talking about them, it helps us understand them.

Morin says you can't do anything about the past. But the more you try not to think about something you regret, the more you might be haunted by it. Think about a few regrets, and acknowledge them to yourself or someone else.

**Self-compassion.** Based on the self-compassion research of Kristen Neff, associate professor of educational psychology at the University of Texas, self-compassion means giving ourselves the same kindness and care we'd give to a good friend.

Morin says most of us struggle to be kind to ourselves. We're often much more critical of ourselves than we are of other people. If you beat yourself up for a mistake you made, stop and ask yourself—what I would say to my

friend right now? In this way, we can learn and grow from experiences.

**Psychological distance.** These techniques allow us to take a step back, giving ourselves the ability to solve our problems without emotions. Pink says you can talk about yourself in the third person. You can use distance in time—what do I want in ten years? You can ask—what would you tell your best friend to do?

**What's love got to do with it?** What about doing things for others even if we may not want to? Like going to my aunt Helen's dinner when we didn't want to be bothered.

I believe it's about love. When we love another, we do things for them that we may not want to because it makes them happy.

Acknowledge that you are choosing to do something, even when you don't want to do it. Otherwise, anger and resentment often arise through side comments and actions that are not kind to the person we are doing the so-called good deed for.

Knowing that we are in control and we have the option not to do it is love. Doing it because we would later regret not doing it is self-love.

Aunt Helen revisited

After moving away from Toronto, I would visit my aunt Helen when I was in town. I would ask her out to eat Japanese food in her hood, which she loved. I would send her postcards from wherever I travelled. I would ask her for the recipes I loved and copy them from recipe cards in her crowded kitchen.



PHOTO CREDIT: CAROLINE ISHII

A family gathering at Caroline's aunt Betty and uncle Roy's home with lots of delicious homemade food. Pictured are Caroline's cousins, including some visiting from the U.S., and neighbours from down the street. Caroline is in the striped shirt, fifth from the right.

I sometimes called her long distance to see how she was doing. She would be concerned that I was spending money on a long-distance call, so most of the conversation was her telling me to hang up.

Maybe these actions were my way of making up for the times I couldn't be there for her.

I believe she knew I cared about her and loved her, at least I hope so. After a bad fall at her home, my sister and I visited her when she was in the hospital.

As we were leaving, she

grabbed my hand firmly, looked into my eyes, and said, "continue travelling and do lots. I wanted to travel but didn't do much, but you do it, okay?" I said yes and that I loved her, or maybe that was only in my mind. We didn't really say

never say I love you, and you must guess what love means. That was mine, and I believe many others.

Over time, you learn that actions are more important than words, and perhaps there was love more than you realized.

Life with death

I was too young in those days of my aunt's dinners to know why we do

things for people we love. We are irritated by someone and hang up the phone abruptly, slam the door as we walk away, or fume about

*"In all its awkwardness, mediated by food and quick phone calls, and through regrets, I can see now that there was love."*

"I love you" in our family. I believe there are two kinds of families. The ones that say I love you all the time to each other. Those are the kinds you see on TV and in the movies. The other

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Aoki identify and vocalize her artistic visions and find her voice as a dance artist.

“I want to engage with the community. I want to share my process and myself, so it's a really beautiful gift that she's helped me uncover,” says Aoki.

“The skills she's helped me [develop] through this residency are essential to engage and connect with a wider audience beyond myself.”

To create *In The Woods*, Aoki worked with a team of Japanese Canadian artists. Along with Tanabe and Nakagawa, she worked with costume designer Laura Fukumoto and dance artist Shion Skye Carter as a creative consultant.

At the core of the dance piece is Aoki's collaboration with Yonsei composer Cait Nishimura. Nishimura, also an environmental conservationist, introduced Aoki to the concept of *shinrin-yoku*, or forest bathing, central to the dance piece.

*Shinrin-yoku* bridges the gap between ourselves and the natural world and is a form of eco-therapy developed in Japan. Not a walk, hike, or exercise, *shinrin-yoku* is about expanding one's awareness of nature. Without a direct purpose or path, one uses their senses to guide them through the forest and become aware of their surroundings and self in nature.

First in Queen's Park in New Westminster, and then Mount



PHOTO CREDIT: LESLIE KENNAH

Dance artist Jennifer Aoki will be performing a work in progress of *In The Woods* created during Dance West Network's 2021/22 Re-Centering/Margins Creative Residency at Simon Fraser University Goldcorp Centre for the Arts on April 20.

Fromme in North Vancouver, Aoki challenged herself to be completely aware of her body in nature and use her senses to guide her.

Stepping away from the everyday distractions of life, she noticed the mushrooms sprouting out of the earth, how the wind moved the leaves, and how she could feel the breeze on one side of her face but not the other.

“Once I learned about the history [of forest bathing], about

how it was deeply rooted in Japanese culture, I found it as a way to connect with a culture that was lost. So my experience of it was just so delicious and delightful,”

*“I'm hoping that people who witness our work reconnect with the natural world and maybe think beyond,” says Aoki.*

says Aoki.

These experiences and discoveries in the forests became the seed of Aoki and Nishimura's collaboration. They would meet

through online sessions to improvise and create choreography and music together, based on their separate experiences in the forest, Aoki in Vancouver and

Nishimura

in Waterloo. After each collaborative brainstorming session, they would

individually develop these ideas further.

“Through our conversations and our journeys together, we've helped each other make decisions

within each other's art forms,” says Aoki.

“I found the sounds she brought helped elevate and hone and clarify my movements and quality even more. When we came together, it was not like water and oil. It was like water paint.”

Aoki and Nishimura's journeys into nature sparked larger conversations about their shared ancestry, acknowledging the history of the land, their impact on it, and who was here before them.

Aoki hopes audiences will feel a connection to the forest through her work and feel inspired to experience nature for themselves. The first step in wanting to protect the environment is to experience, feel and understand it, says Aoki.

“I'm hoping that people who witness our work reconnect with the natural world and maybe think beyond,” says Aoki.

“I think that taking steps toward climate change can look different for everybody. But I think that just through opening and reconnecting and seeing the value of protecting the land and the resources is one piece of the puzzle.”

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For ticket information for Dance West Network's Re-Centering/Margins Creative Residency showcase visit, [rb.gy/ozklqb](https://rb.gy/ozklqb)

Artists will share performance clips and conversation online on May 4 at 2 p.m. For details visit [www.dancewest.net](https://www.dancewest.net).

Learn more about Jennifer Aoki at [www.jenniferaoki.com](https://www.jenniferaoki.com).

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from the transcript of that speech,

“Thanks to Emi Tsuyuki, who diligently went through our membership list from the time of our club's inception. She compiled a list of 35 members, and would you believe it, there was only one name who no one knew her whereabouts. That member was a Mrs. Fraser who joined the club in 1957.”

The museum's archives is fortunate to have received meeting minutes, treasurer's notes, and a membership list for the WIMO club as part of the Tanaka Family Collection. Upon review, there is precisely one mention of a Mrs. Fraser in the club's meetings notes for 1957.

The minutes for Thursday, Oct. 24, mention the club was “honoured with the addition of two new members, Mrs. Tanabe and Mrs. Fraser, who were introduced by our president.” Nineteen members in total were present at this meeting.

The WIMO Club membership list in the collection's holdings begins with 1959, and Mrs. Fraser's name is absent. Could it have been that her membership lasted from the October of 1957 to before 1959?

Where, indeed, is Mrs. Fraser?

The other members of WIMO are listed below, along with the year they joined the club, if available. This list was compiled by Emi Tsuyuki for the WIMO Club's reunion, with the names of members up until the year 1999: Asai, Sachi (1961)

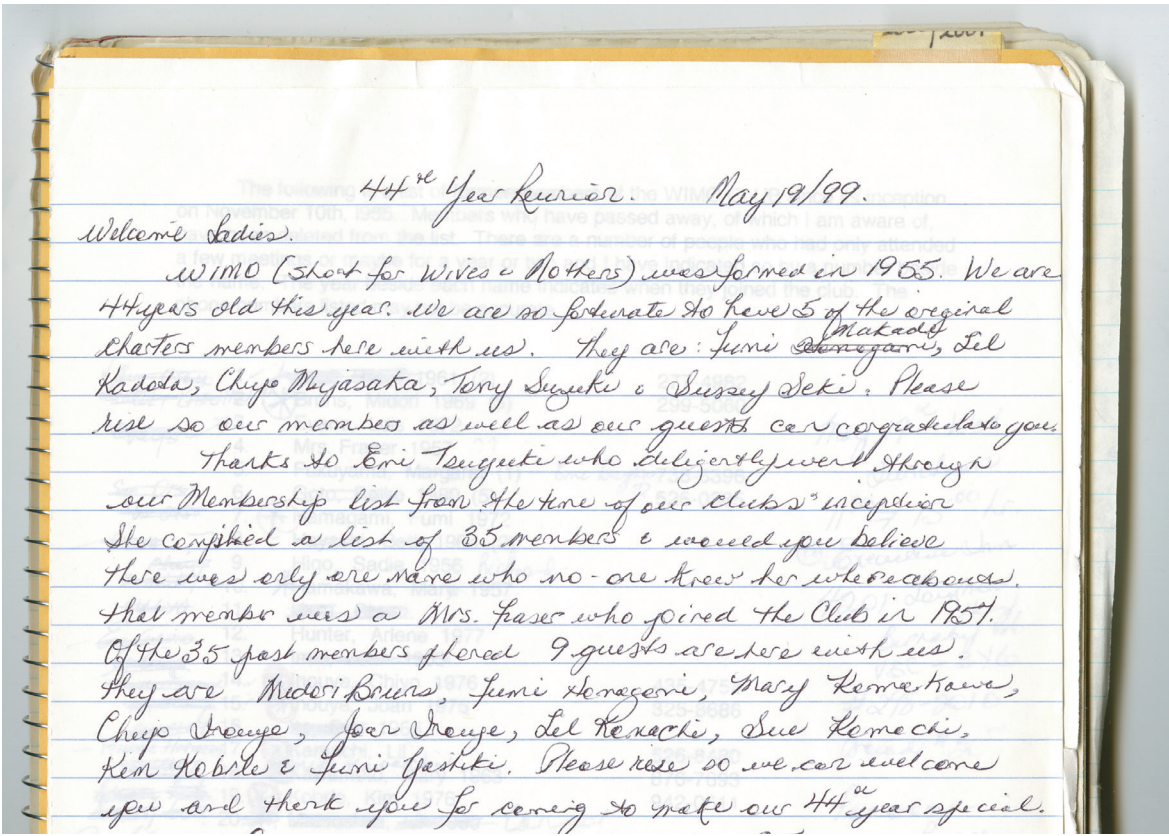


PHOTO CREDIT: NIKKEI NATIONAL MUSEUM

Title: "WIMO Club Notebook 1983 to 2003." Collection: Tanaka Family Collection. Repository: Nikkei National Museum. Accession Number: 1997.8.15.2.1.29. Year: 1999.

- Bruns, Midori (1969)
- Evans, Lois (1972)
- Mrs. Fraser (1957)
- Fukuyama, Margaret
- Goto, Reiko (1980)
- Hamagami, Fumi (1972)
- Hayashi, Betty (1964)
- Higo, Sadie (1956)
- Hamakawa, Mary (1957)
- Hara, Sherri
- Hunter, Arlene (1977)
- Imai, Joan (1963)
- Inouye, Chiyo (1976)
- Inouye, Joan (1976)
- Ito, Sue (1966)

- Kadota, Kiyoko
- Kamachi, Lil
- Kamachi, Sumi
- Kawamoto, Mary (1963)
- Kobrl, Kim (1976)
- Matsushita, Lil (1990)
- Miyagawa, Harriet (1977)
- Miyazawa, Toyo (1965)
- Nakashima, Lucy (1966)
- Nasu, Shirley (1956)
- Nishiguchi, Amy (1966)
- Sasaki, Jackie (1969)
- Shiho, Eva (1967)
- Tanaka, Mickey
- Tasaka, Martha (1975)

- Wakita, June (1973)
- Yashiki, Fumi (1979)
- Uyesugi, Sue (1960)
- Uyesugi, Amy
- Nasu, Kime

If you were a member of the WIMO Club or knew any of the members, we invite you to contact us at the Nikkei National Museum and share your memories and stories of the group.

Explore more from the Tanaka Family Collection at [www.nikkeimuseum.org](https://www.nikkeimuseum.org).

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From REGRET P. 11

them afterward. Or we can't be bothered to go to dinner. We say next time.

We think people will be around forever. But we learn over time that this is not the case. People we love die before we can tell them how we feel, or we didn't know it would be the last time we would speak with someone.

That's why I've been approaching life with death. I ask myself, will I regret not doing this later in life or before I die? If yes, I do it! If not, I don't do it or proceed with caution.

I imagine it's the last time I will interact with someone before they or I die. It may not be true, but what if it is? This changes everything, and I have fewer regrets.

What is love?

The conversation I had with my aunt in the hospital was our last. She died shortly afterwards.

I was in NYC getting ready for a birthday dinner when I got the call from my sister. My heart sank, and I cried profusely, repeating in my head the last words she told me in the hospital.

Aunt Helen's death on my birthday had special meaning for me. I felt she was saying, "I know you're travelling and doing lots. I'm happy for you."

At my birthday dinner, I toasted aunt Helen for what we had given to each other. In all its awkwardness, mediated by food and quick phone calls, and through regrets, I can see now that there was love. I am grateful.

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