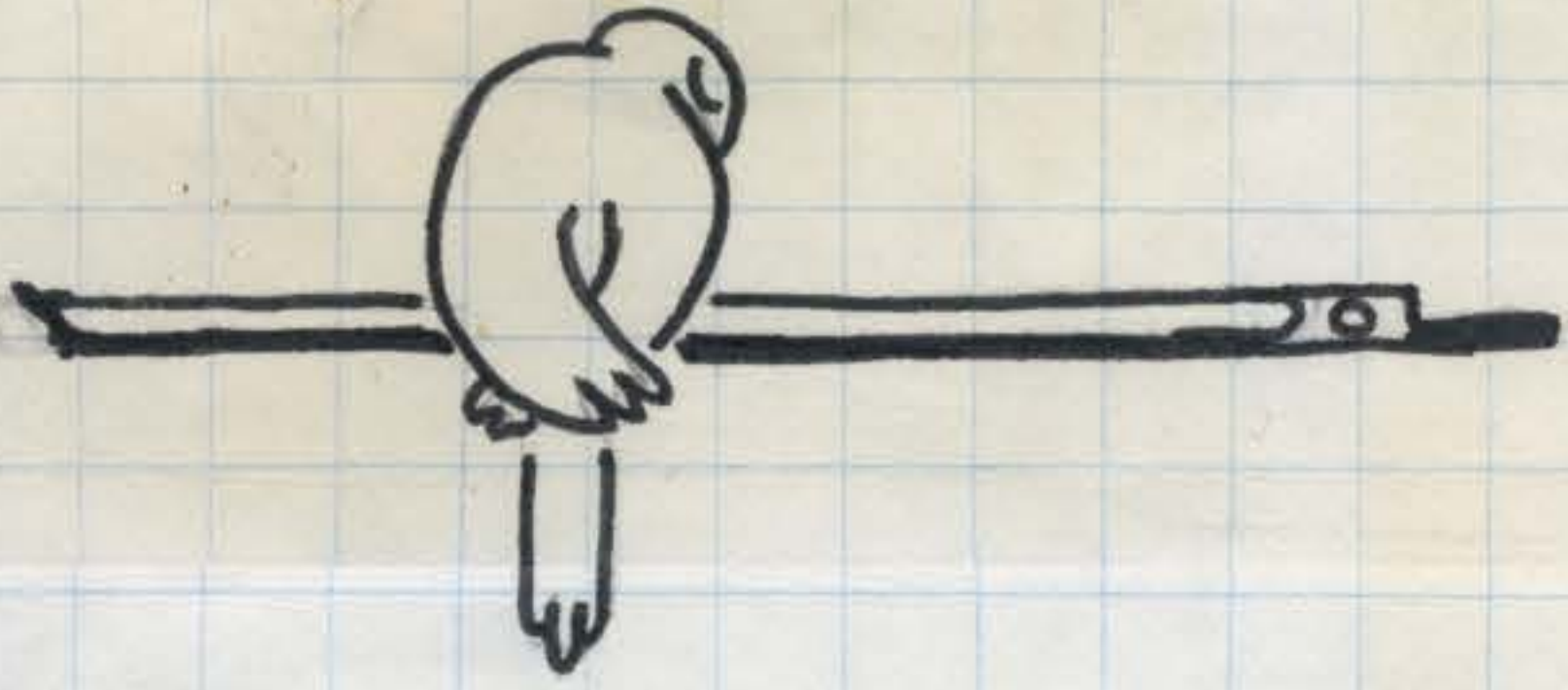


THE EMPTY NEST NEWSLETTER

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"No lark more blithe than she"



LEAH MIRIAM HILLER LOWENSTEIN

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A Portrait of Drive and Dedication

Leah Lowenstein is the ultimate role model. She has, in her twenty-three year career, lectured at Harvard, treated patients, conducted research, published voluminously and risen higher in academic medicine than any woman in memory. Until she resigned last August as dean of the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, Lowenstein was the only female in this century to head a coed medical school. How did she manage to do it all? "I didn't analyze, I didn't stop to think or ask how am I going to manage. I just did it," she says.

Lowenstein's departure from Jefferson when she became seriously ill last spring, after less than a year on the job, was a shock to many of her colleagues and a blow to the position of women in medicine. "It's a disappointment to women because it's harder to think of making progress when you don't see anyone out there who has achieved the goal," says Kathleen Turner, special assistant to the president of the Association of American Medical Colleges.

Now 53, Lowenstein is recuperating at her home just outside Boston, where she lives with her husband, John, a professor of biochemistry at Brandeis University. Despite her illness and the consequent setback to her career, she remains optimistic, poised and resolute.

If that sounds remarkable, so does Lowenstein's career to date. Her fifteen page curriculum vitae bulges with honors, medical society memberships and increasingly prestigious positions. But then, as she points out, she got off to an early start. "When I was eight or nine I decided on medicine—probably an irrational childhood decision," she says with a smile, adding, "But unless you were that dedicated you didn't make it to medical school."



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Drive and dedication—especially to education—ran in the family. Lowenstein's father was a successful poultry wholesaler who had been forced to leave school and work to help support his family after the third grade. When he was in his sixties he returned to school to get his degree. Her mother worked as a secretary to Jane Addams, the pioneering social service worker who founded Hull House, the noted settlement home in Chicago. When she was middle aged, Lowenstein's mother decided to earn her bachelor's degree in social service.

Lowenstein completed college at 20 and medical school at 24, receiving both those degrees from the University of Wisconsin. She met and married her husband John during her internship in internal medicine. They soon departed for Oxford, where Lowenstein com-

pleted a doctorate in biophysics (medical science). The couple returned to the United States and Lowenstein did her residency at Beth Israel Hospital in Boston.

At 29 she had the first of her three children. "I was considered terribly old at the time," Lowenstein says. She soon realized that to take time off to raise her children would short-circuit her career and she continued working, as she did when her two younger sons were born. "In my day the woman who left the field to raise children for a year or two never got back in. Never," Lowenstein says. Her eldest son Charles is now a student at Harvard Medical School, her second son Andrew is a senior at Yale and her youngest son Marc is a junior at Harvard.

With her cache of impressive degrees, her piercing intellect and her personable manner, Lowenstein was able to climb swiftly up the academic ladder. From 1965 to 1970 she was an associate in medicine at Harvard Medical School, where she studied renal diseases. In 1971, when she was 41, Lowenstein became an associate professor of medicine at Boston University Medical School. A couple of years later, at the height of the women's movement, she headed the committee investigating the status of women at the medical school.

Lowenstein proved adept at administration. "It's interesting, satisfying and quick," she says. "It's good every once in a while to be able to see a problem and be able to solve it immediately."

University officials were impressed with her work on the investigating committee. Within a year she was made assistant dean, and in 1979 became an associate dean. In 1982, she accepted the dean's position at Jefferson. "I don't think if I were a man my career would be all that unusual," she says. "As the only woman I sort of stick out like a sore thumb and it's embarrassing." The next female dean will probably be a little less embarrassed. For by breaking the path to the top, Lowenstein has made it easier for the women who will follow. —Eden Graber

MEDICA
TO DEDICATE
ISSUE # 3 TO LEE

Medica, a new magazine for women practicing medicine, was to have had Lee on the cover of Issue # 2, but the news broke on Nobel

prize winner Barbara McClintock, and so they wrote a new lead article and featured Barbara McClintock on the cover. Medica editor told me that Issue # 3 will be dedicated to Lee, "with picture," so I rather expect the cover of the Spring issue will be the one above. This writeup was part of a longer article on women in academic medicine. The reporter made many errors. Pa Hiller never went back to school, for instance, and Lee never said the sore thumb bit, about "embarrassing." Lee never was embarrassed, nor did she ever give thought to whether she stuck out or didn't stick out. Lee was Lee, and just

went on being Lee, whatever group she was in. She read this article, and enjoyed it, and laughed. They missed a bet by not quoting her more in the larger article. Besides saying that she resigned at Jefferson, they quote her on women's medical education: "Any time you spend less time on something it's considered a second class endeavor," says Leah Lowenstein, who has tried to institute part-time residency fellowships through the NIH. "Someone who has been through a part-time residency program may end up knowing just as much. But they are regarded as not having done it the right way--the intense way." [Now that sounds like Lee.]

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The road goes ever on and on - Down from the door where it began - Now far ahead the road has gone And I must follow if I can, Pursuing it with eager feet Until it meets some larger way Where many paths and errands meet - And whither then?
I cannot say.

(Tolkien)

I sit beside the fire and think of all that I have seen - Of meadow flowers and butterflies in summers that have been. Of yellow leaves & gossamer in autumns that there were - With morning mist and silver sun and wind upon my hair. . . . I sit beside the fire and think of how the world will be, when winter comes without a spring that I shall ever see. For still there are so many things that I have never seen. In every wood, in every spring, there is a different green. . . . I sit beside the fire and think of people long ago, and people who will see a world that I shall never know. But all the while I sit and think of times that were before, I listen for returning feet. - And voices at the door. . . .

(Tolkien)

. . . I'm sick for the laughter, the laughter of trees;
I'm sick for greenness alive on the breeze - -

And there's no one here to talk to - -

And there's no one here to talk to. . . .

Do you believe in green? In green?

In green?

(from The Endless Pavement by J.J.)

I try to write of Lee, but what can I say? What can anyone say? A person so wise, so good, so loving, so able, of such beauty and joy and gaiety that no superlatives can describe her. She was a whole person in every aspect of her life - as a daughter & sister, friend, wife, mother, musician, doctor. Her depths were unfathomable. I am thankful our paths crossed, there in the cello section of Music Clinic at the University of Wisconsin, when we were high school kids; and that we have remained close and caring friends through thirty-eight years. Lee, it hurts to lose your incredible greenness from this earth. I cannot cease from listening for your footsteps, and your voice, and the music that was you. It is lonely here without you.

Lee died of cancer. She had breast cancer in 1970, but after surgery went on immediately about her business: "If you let anyone know, in medicine, your career is over," she told me. She had some recurrences in recent years, which were controlled, and about which she was silent, but last winter it spread to her spine, and by summer she was forced to resign from Jefferson. She fought the disease with incredible spirit and courage till the end - the week before her death she was in Dallas as head of the American Heart Association. And she had been scheduled to visit me in Springfield on her way home from New Orleans, the week after her death.

Lee's Family

Continued on next page.

There will be a memorial service for her at Boston University on April 29.

Her family funeral was March 9. It was a terrible, wonderful weekend, filled with pain and suffering, and the strongest bonds of love and bravery -- and even laughter. I got to re-know, and love, her sisters Neppie & Judy, whom I'd last seen when I was her matron of honor, and some splendid relatives I'd never met, and her sensitive and caring doctor, Charles Troy. Her mother Sarah and her sister Cookie I have seen regularly over the years, and love them deeply. There were rich moments throughout the weekend that I will forever cherish.

The service was a simple one, at the grave. Her asked to be, and was, buried in her maternity dress. We all huddled together, wrapped in blankets which whipped around us in a gale-blizzard, with the chill factor at least 30 below. As if the whole earth were raging at losing her. John, Charles, Andrew and Marc each spoke briefly; John read a poem of Edna St. Vincent Millay's, from a volume her had given him. At the finish we took turns shoveling the earth into the grave, and so numb we could hardly walk, returned to the cars.

The entire weekend it seemed as if her would just be coming down the stairs, her voice ringing w/ joy at seeing us all, or coming into the kitchen, or sliding onto the piano bench. Her presence was with us, her very self seemed just around the corner in the next room. The house was charged with her. It still seems a false rumor, a big mistake, that someone so vital, and so needed, could be gone.

I am writing this in church on Easter Sunday, letting the service flow around me. I know the Jewish faith does not believe in an after life; I am not sure what my own belief is. But it seems impossible that such a life can be over forever. I pray there will be a time when we will be with her again, and with the other beloved souls in whose deaths a part of us have died, and by whose beautiful lives we all take courage to live our own lives more wholly.

Dirge without Music

by Edna St. Vincent Millay

I am not resigned to the shutting away
of loving hearts in the hard ground.
So it is, and so it will be, for so it has been,
time out of mind:
Into the darkness they go, the wise and the
lovely, Crowned
With lilies and with laurel they go; but
I am not resigned.

The answers quick and keen, the honest look,
the laughter, the love, —
They are gone. They are gone to feed the
roses, Elegant and curled
Is the blossom. Fragrant is the blossom. I
know. But I do not approve.
More precious was the light in your eyes
than all the roses in the world.

Lovers and thinkers, into the earth with you.
Be one with the dull, the indiscriminate dust.
A fragment of what you felt, of what you knew,
A formula, a phrase remain, — but the best is lost.

Down, down, down into the darkness of the grave
Gently they go, the beautiful, the tender, the kind;
Quietly they go, the intelligent, the witty, the brave.
I know. But I do not approve. And I am not resigned.