



Joan Frances Pask

September 30, 1932 - July 21, 2024

Joan Frances Pask 1932-2024

Our mother, Joan Frances Pask, passed away early in the morning of July 21, 2024. She was born in Portland, Maine, on September 30, 1932, to Albert Elton and Helen Elizabeth Gorman. She spent her early years in her beloved Maine, including a few months in snowy Presque Isle, where her mother, a believer in fresh air for infants, pushed her in a picturesque baby sleigh carriage. Even after nearly seventy years spent in other places, Joan still considered Maine to be her true home: she never lost her accent. She grew up in the Oakdale neighborhood of Portland, attending the Nathan Clifford School, where she remembered sledding on the hill in the back of the school during winter days. Joan's family lived in an apartment at 244 Woodford Street, then later on Dartmouth Street. The family included her parents and younger sister, Patty, along with her mother's young sister, Frances, and her grandmother, Delia Offen: her adored "Nanny." Joan's "Nathan Clifford School" poem, written when she was 86, is dedicated "to my beloved baby sister, Patricia Cook":

On the way back from school she and me
had a Victory Garden near our house
and a laddered playhouse built
upon a tree.

And wild iris that grew
So far as everybody knew
In watery puddles.

Joan always remembered the woods, lakes, and meadows of Maine, as well as the seasons: Maine nature was her measure of what nature ought to be. Although she loved all wildflowers, Maine wildflowers reigned supreme with her; and all her life she returned again and again, sometimes in her poetry, to her delight in the tiny, intricate, “fairytale-like” flowers that had captivated her after the long winters were over. She liked their old-fashioned common names, which made them sound like small, fairy people: Jack-in-the-pulpit, Dutchman’s breeches, Quaker ladies, Lady’s slippers, Bleeding hearts.

Touching
dutchman’s pipes with narrow stems
pink hearts
with centers bleeding,
the Irish setter
sienna soft,
who joins me in my reading

During World War II, Joan’s father spent a couple of years working for Canadian Pacific in Chicago. His family lived with him in the Edgewater neighborhood while Joan and her sister Patricia attended Catholic school. Returning to Portland after the war, Joan attended Deering High School. She was a big user of the local branch of the Portland Public Library during her time in high school. Her parents encouraged her reading, buying her a multi-volume set of world’s classics that she kept all her life. She was delighted to discover that many of the classics were racier than anything she had yet encountered. Part of the joy was in knowing that her parents weren’t in on the secret.

After high school, Joan went to art school at the Philadelphia Museum School of Art. She worked in the art department at Macy's and Wanamaker's in Philadelphia, and long remembered painting murals on the walls of the children's department at one of her employers in Philadelphia. After her father was transferred to Dallas in 1955, she joined her parents there. She briefly attended Southern Methodist University, but she already saw herself as too old for college and never felt like she fit in at SMU. She was always, in her view, an outsider in the deeply conservative south.

Joan met Albert Bollinger Pask at a party in Dallas in 1958. In her wedding album, whose "How We Met" page juxtaposes Joan's free-flowing, calligraphic cursive and Albert's neat, blocky, architectural handwriting, Joan described running away from her "slightly intoxicated escort" at one party and dropping in at another, where she and Albert were introduced. Albert remembered watching her in fascination:

"Late in September - at the last Pool Side Party of the season at the Tropicana Apt, where I lived, I caught sight of a pretty girl flinging her hands around in a ham-actor fashion. I watched for a long time until I became so curious that I asked Jim Gibbons who the girl was. He gladly gave me some facts about her; then he suggested that I come in and meet Jo An. Because the meeting was without flirtations, she had assumed I was not interested in her. If she had only known that it was something special for me to go out-of-my-way to meet a girl! I got Jo Ann's telephone no. from Rita and called Jo An in a couple of days for a date. And do you know that she was expecting my call!"

Joan and Albert were married at Christ the King Catholic Church in Dallas on April 18, 1959. After their honeymoon at Western Hills Lodge in Sequoyah State Park in Oklahoma, and a road trip to Taos, they lived at 4328 McKinney

Avenue. Joan recorded Albert's first anniversary gift in her wedding album:

“ . . . a pair of black Bermuda shorts, black slim-jims and a straw hat (to wear in the M.G.) I went to a shower for Margot Frantzen that evening, but baked an apple pie (his favorite!) for dinner.”

She also described several ambitious, contemporary, home decorating projects, including a “work-table bar combination.” In different ways, the couple deeply appreciated art and design. Joan loved vibrant colors and fabrics, and bold or intricate patterns; while Albert, more emphatically over the years, in reaction to all that color, was a minimalist who admired Scandinavian design. He was also a skilled carpenter, who later built bookshelves and cabinets in every room of the couple's home and created a gorgeous and completely nonfunctional violin for his son:

“Albert is planning to build a couch with steel legs strapped together and covered with blocks of upholstered foam rubber - in the center will be a block of wood to be used as a table.”

“Albert and I are planning to make a mosaic coffee table after an abstract painting by Klee.”

Underneath her decorating ideas, Joan outlined her future plans:

“We hope eventually to build a duplex, or a quadruplex, with enclosed patio. . . and eventually build another home with rent proceeds”

“I would like to take typing and shorthand, brush up on my drafting, study some interior design (on my own), and eventually help Albert in his work”

The couple moved to Richardson in 1961 where they raised their children,

Kevin and Jenny. As a newly energized boomtown attracting Texas Instruments employees in the 1960s, much of Richardson west of Central Expressway still looked like raw, depleted Blackland prairie farmland. The neighbor a few doors down kept a horse. The Pask household was overrun with field mice, some of which were kept as pets and fed Lucky Charms (Kevin sometimes stealing a Lucky Charms marshmallow from the mouse cage). Joan started a garden with her favorite “Queen Elizabeth” roses and fragrant purple irises, which she cut for vases every April. She drove the children to look at cotton fields over in the wilderness where Plano began and cut cotton stalks for decoration and instruction when the bolls ripened. She and the children went for nature walks along the creeks, gathering pecans and pretty leaves in the fall. No child’s nature collection, no matter how messy, or odd, or even disgusting, was unwelcome in the house. All of nature was grist for teaching and learning. Joan was also notable in the neighborhood for the spectacular art events she organized for her children and their friends. One Easter she invited children over to dye traditional Ukrainian Easter eggs, using an hours-long wax-resist process that required a special stylus, melted wax, and three or four dye baths. Her piñatas took days to create from ripped up newspapers, glue, and balloons, and they were always stuffed with candy—and so solidly-made nobody could break them blindfolded. Her annual Christmas gingerbread house project filled the whole living room with sticky little gingerbread houses drying on cardboard in various stages of completion, leaving pools of sugar glaze and crumbs. For Thanksgiving, she invented a Magic Turkey who brought gifts to children. At New Year’s she developed her version of a king cake, a rich and heavy sour cream pound cake with fortunes written in verse wrapped around tiny prizes and hidden inside each slice. She relished the holidays, and parties, and brunches with her friends and family. Meanwhile, Albert, who had given up on Scandinavian design as the family home decor grew more and more whimsical, built a gigantic, masterfully-carpentered hutch for his daughter’s pet toads.

Joan worked as a commercial artist in her early years in Dallas, and as her children grew up she went back to college and university to earn a BA degree: first at El Centro College downtown; later at North Texas State University (as the University of North Texas was then known); and finishing at the University of Texas at Dallas in its early years as a degree-granting institution. During this time, she worked as an art teacher for children in all grade levels at a Richardson Catholic school, and she later wrote and illustrated a newsletter for a sales company. She created some of her most striking commercial artwork, hand-drawn newspaper advertisements generally only a few inches square, for North Haven Gardens' second location in Richardson. While Joan was employed as a temp worker at a small Dallas company, she and another temp, Donna Soliday, struck up a friendship. As Donna (now Donna Skogen) remembers their meeting, "I had recently moved from the East Coast where Joan spent most of her childhood. We both loved art museums and listening to classical music. I admired the fact that she wrote poetry and was a fine artist. I invited her to join a yoga group I was attending, and soon we were making plans frequently to do things together." Joan relied on Donna's empathy and calming presence during a friendship lasting over 45 years.

Segregated Dallas had shocked Joan when she arrived in the city in the 1950s. She had never before seen separate drinking fountains for whites and blacks, and the reality of this injustice angered her. Throughout her life, she enthusiastically volunteered her time, as well as her skill in creating marketing artwork, to support progressive causes. She was active in the First Unitarian Church of Dallas and the League of Women Voters of Richardson. She collected for UNICEF. She canvassed door-to-door for Sissy Farenthold's campaigns for governor of Texas in the early 1970s. Well into her eighties, she was helping eligible families insure their children through the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). Many of her years-long friendships developed through her involvement in the community

Joan also made lasting friendships with instructors and fellow students at UTD, where she studied literature and creative writing in the late 1970s. One of her professors steered her away from short story writing but encouraged her to write poetry. Poetry became one of her keenest pleasures. From the very beginning, her subjects were the people she loved and her childhood in Maine:

Nanny made me
a Snow White dress
when the nights began to freeze
with a stand-up collar
on my cape
and polka dots
on my puffed sleeves.

I wore it to my
elementary school party
and at trick or treating
too
with my long beige skirt
and a pumpkin

and my patent-leather
shoes.

Joan inspired both of her children with a love of art and literature. The family spent, for example, many summer days at the Greenwood Hills Community Pool, with a picnic lunch. Kevin vividly remembers her reading Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* aloud after lunch one day to pass the thirty minutes almost universally required in those days before one could return to the pool after eating. Joan was a tireless, dramatic storybook reader,

and bedtime could almost always be pushed back for a dozen more readings of *A Fresh Look at Cats*, or another Uncle Wiggily story. She loved the drawings in children's books as much as any child; and she was quick to notice a child's interest, careful to pause at that one page of McElligot's Pool that was crammed with pictures of comical fish, and leaving it open for as long as it took for the artwork to be examined from top to bottom.

After the death of her father, Joan cared intensively for her mother and later for her husband, Albert, as he declined with Alzheimer's. Probably her greatest joy in later years was her four grandchildren, Emma, Rosa, Violet, and Ingrid. She loved and fostered their creativity and their relationship to nature. She took care of Rosa and Ingrid, who lived nearby, enrolling them in dance and art and martial arts and gymnastics classes, while fostering their friendships through playdates and parties. She even hosted her own art classes for the kids, teaching them about contour lines and cross hatching and drawing things upside down. Joan loved attending Rosa and Ingrid's school events. She was always there to help them with homework problems, no matter the subject or the difficulty level. As a savvy educator, she made reading a treat, taking her grandchildren to the library or Borders or Half Price Books to pick out a book. Rosa and Ingrid amassed a sizable book collection in all the subjects that fascinated them, one book outing at a time. After the bookstore would come macaroni and cheese and brownies at Boston Market or Luby's, or a dinner at home with Nana's famous home-baked desserts. And, of course, a spoonful of cod liver oil and a helping of children's vitamins. Joan was thrilled to be a grandmother, and to create again the child-centered world of art, nature, and fantasy she had lived with her children. Rosa fondly recalls stuffing her face with candy sprinkles while embarking on hours-long gingerbread house building projects and sitting out on the driveway coloring with chalk. Emma and Violet loved visiting their grandmother, escaping Canadian winters to play in Joan's backyard, decorate cakes, and explore new Texan wild and domesticated plants. They also always looked forward to

packages that Joan sent, especially those that had New Year's fortunes in them, written in her beautiful handwriting and necessarily covered in stickers.

Those who wish to honor Joan's memory are encouraged to contribute to a local charity organization. Joan's favorite charities were the League of Women Voters of Texas and the Network of Community Ministries, which helps the Richardson area community with food, clothing, job assistance, and outreach to the elderly.

Tribute Wall

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“ I met Joan when I was in high school with her daughter Jenny. Joan included me in museum trips, art-house movies, and house parties with an international guest list and menu. Relating to people from all of the world came naturally to her. Her home was colorful, eclectic and full of handmade objects; everyone was welcome and made to feel at home. She loved opera, classical music and spending time with her friends. She exposed me to so many new people and experiences.

One of the most constantly creative people I have ever known, Joan stayed busy writing poetry, tutoring children, baking desserts, and making art. I can remember attending a Dallas-area Democratic Labor Day Bring-A-Dish celebration. There were hundreds of people there — each having brought a dish to share. I came back to the table raving to Joan about the most amazing Italian Cream Cake that she HAD to try — did she want for me to bring her a piece before it was gone? No need, she had baked it!

Joan had a well-developed and recognizable mid-century drawing style that was instantly appealing. Completely hand-drawn and hand-lettered in pen and ink with woodland creatures and fanciful plant scapes, she created idyllic worlds on paper.

With strong feelings about topics of social justice, women's rights and educating and protecting children, Joan stayed politically active. Even late in life she participated by writing postcards in support of candidates and causes, and communicating with her elected officials.

I will miss her warmth and hospitality, political camaraderie and open-minded approach to life. I will never forget her many kindnesses to me and my family.

Carol Klee - September 03, 2024 at 02:59 PM

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jennyduncan.pask@gmail.com - September 07, 2024 at 02:54 PM

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Yes—that sour cream pound cake!

jennyduncan.pask@gmail.com - September 07, 2024 at 02:55 PM