



Susan Louise Kaufman Thomforde

A book of memories

Susan Louise Thomforde was born in 1956 in Teheran, Iran, at the American Army Hospital. Her parents, Winifred Hemingway Thomforde and Philip Thomforde, had met in China and were living in Iran due to Phil's work with the United Nations. Suzie was the last of five siblings, the others being Charlie, Anne, Hugh, and David.

The family moved to Rome in 1959, and Suzie grew up there, attending the Overseas School of Rome. (Later when her son Jeff would tell his linguistics class that his grandmother was a native speaker of Mandarin and his mother was a native speaker of Farsi and Italian, his classmates would not believe him.) The family often held Quaker meeting in their home.

Suzie attended Earlham college, graduating in 1978. She attended nursing school at St. Louis University, and then moved to Boston to work at St Margaret's Hospital and Boston City Hospital. In Boston she lived at the Beacon Hill Friends House and met her husband, Rick Kaufman. They married in 1981. They moved to Salt Lake City, where Suzie earned her master's in nursing at the University of Utah and became a Certified Nurse Midwife in 1984. She was inspired to the career by her aunt, Isabel Hemingway, who was a midwife in China and Turkey. They returned to Boston, and Suzie worked at St. Margaret's Hospital and Quincy Hospital before joining the staff at the North Shore Birth Center in Beverly, MA. Suzie and Rick have three children, Jeff (29), Rose (27), and Alice (25).

Suzie was an active member of Fresh Pond Friends Meeting and a board member of Cambridge Friends School. Over the course of her career Suzie helped with the birth of 1083 babies, the last of which was her granddaughter, Lily Kaufman Wise. She coauthored *The Complete Illustrated Birthing Companion*, published by Fair Winds Press in 2013. After a struggle with ovarian cancer, she died at home in January 2015.

Family

I have so many wonderful memories of Suzie, it's hard to know where to start. So instead I'll mention something I've been thinking about. In the last week or so before she died, Alice was reading to her from *An Old Fashioned Girl* by Louisa May Alcott. She read one passage that seemed to me to describe the essence of what was so wonderful about Suzie. I'll quote pieces of it here.

"And Polly didn't think she had done much; but it was one of the little things which are always waiting to be done in this world of ours... a kind little thought, an unselfish little act, a cheery little word, are so sweet and comfortable, that no one can fail to feel their beauty and love the giver, no matter how small they are... this is the simple magic that binds hearts together, and keeps home happy.... She loved to do the "little things" that others did not see, or were too busy to stop for; and while doing them, without a thought of thanks, she made sunshine for herself as well as others."

Rick Kaufman (Suzie's husband)

Dear Suzie:

I only have a few pictures from India to send along, but anyone who has visited your house knows that sending pictures there is like sending coals to Newcastle; your wonderful pictures everywhere.

But I do have memories to send along; memories of when you, Hughie and I were the small fry and we would put in puppet shows for our parents; of playing jacks, hopscotch and chinese jump rope; of going on camping trip as a family and being part of a well oiled machine that could assemble a camp site including tents, air mattresses and boiling water for supper in 20 minutes. Memories of climbing in the Appenines; singing while washing dishes; bicycling in Rome. I remember going into your room after you were hit by a car in Rome and wondering if you would be back; and you were, and running around a year after breaking your leg in two places, your spirit indomitable.

And later memories of visiting you at various homes and becoming aware of how you were always busy; knitting, delivering babies, organizing, painting, campaigning, helping your kids, cooking, cleaning, even after you got sick; you made a full Thanksgiving meal for 10 people 3 months before you died. Our friend Marian Holland wrote a poem for our father Phil about how heaven is perfect and how Phil will be unhappy because there will be nothing to fix. When you get to heaven, if there is nothing to do but play the harp you will be very unhappy. But no, you will be down on earth being a guardian angel, showing that other side of you which is fiercely protective of those you love. I remember going to soccer games with you and Alice where you would have to turn away from the game lest you see a call unfavorable to Alice and shout abuse at the ref. Protective of your profession, and of your patients, of your parents and of your kids, and yes, even of your siblings; I got some choice words of advice during one Tennessee visit

when I was in a low state and not only me; you were the one that friends and family went to for sage wisdom..

You fought against the forces of c-section and of Scott Brown.

You knew all the words to all the songs and made sure we sang all the verses.

Contra dancing together, taking trips and making meals in Cortona, working in the garden, and then the two weeks you came to India to visit Kathryn and myself and we ate hot food and shopped in bazaars and climbed among trees filled with monkeys and rode in buses that passed trucks on blind hairpin turns.

The memories can't replace you, Suzie, but they are what we have so we will make the best of them.

Much love,
Davy (Suzie's brother)



Here is my first memory of Suzie - she was shortly to be born, we were riding in the stationwagon en famille in Iran, coming back from somewhere, must have been between Feb and early April, 1956. We (us four siblings) were lobbying for "Susan" for the new sibling. (I don't remember any boy-names - but how would we know ahead of time?) Winnie wanted Louise.

But for some reason we were all saying that we wanted Susan. And Susan she was, so we must have prevailed. Susan Louise, that is. Winnie must have just liked the name Louise - I don't associate it with family. I was six or just seven at the time, so the rest of us were proportionately younger.

And Davy, Hughie, and Suzie, the "little kids." These may be from letters or later stories or they may be my memories. The Little Kids would play taxi in the yard in Iran (so before January 1959 when we left), Hughie and Davy pulling Suzie around in some vehicle or other, Suzie saying "yavash, yavash" which meant "slow down, slow down" in Farsi. Because whenever they went in a real taxi, that was what Winnie modeled. Or the little brass monkey named "Hi."

Suzie's source of power - it must have been hers, as she would grant D and H the privilege of temporarily having Hi, highly coveted. Later we got a much larger stuffed toy chimpanzee, "Big High."

Oh, and the library book. Either Anne or I had to take a library book back to school. Iran again. Must have been us as we were the only ones in school. Suzie could not yet talk, at all. But everyone was frantically looking and we were in danger of missing the school bus until someone noticed Suzie pointing or otherwise indicating where the book was, up high where she could not reach.

Skip to when Suzie got hit by the car crossing the Via Cassia (fifth grade?) and was in a body cast for ages. And we went on a picnic to Tuscolo (I think) where there was a roman theater, her stretcher with her on it perched in the rear seats of the microbus. And when we got there we ran off, to play tag or some other game, and she was left with the grownups (maybe it was a meeting group, there were additional grownups). But then we came back and started carting her around on the stretcher, at a run as I remember. I have no idea why she didn't fall off. And some adult told Winnie "they are going to kill that child." But we didn't - nor did Winnie think we would, apparently.

But Little Kids or Big Kids, we were a unit. And I feel we still are. Camping at Mallnitz, that magical spot we happened upon, I remember Winnie and Phil strolling off to settle the accounts and when they came back we had totally dismantled the campsite. And that was normal. I may only remember this as I think Winnie or Phil commented on it, in comparison to the neighboring family where the parents were doing all the breakdown and the kids were Not Helping. Walking on the high alps at Mallnitz is the only time I remember giving Suzie a piggy-back ride.

Suzie had multicultural experiences very early. I have unfocused recollections that in Iran (i.e. before early 1959) when the Iranian woman who cleaned for us, Esmat (who also lived in our house), would go out on our street to socialize with the other women she would take Suzie along - little blond child to contrast with all the little raven-haired Iranian babies. When she was still in the being-carried stage. And Suzie was the only one of us siblings to go to Italian nursery school. She and her American friend Piera from down the street wore the little white nursery-school smocks (grimbule) and sat at their little desks and copied little patterns of colored squares on graph paper that the teacher would model. (Sounds a bit like knitting patterns?) And heard Italian all day.

When we went on family trips - day trips for picnics, longer camping trips - some of us would bring along friends but Suzie was the one most likely to.

Charlie Thomforde (Suzie's brother)

I guess my earliest memories of you, Suzie, date back to life in our big house in Rome. It would have been 1960, when you were 4 and I was 5: We played with large cardboard blocks in the living room. They marked our respective territory on the floor. Once, on a morning when Daddy, Anne and Charlie were around, we placed the blocks in rows in front of the sofa, then got out our large atlas and played an involved travel adventure. Do you remember the special occasion when we lined-up the blocks to mark individual pens for baby rabbits, but as soon as we exclaimed about the droppings somebody returned them to their outdoor coop? I guess I can best recall times which included some heightened excitement -- for example knees-to-knees, facing you, sitting comfortably in the small space *behind* the second seat of Addie's gray VW beetle. I had a good view through the rear window and you and I laughed at people in other cars who waved and laughed back. It was an enjoyable moment together, embraced by Addie, confident of our welcome in the small car with just enough room for the seven of us. I knew Momma and Daddy loved us equally. I knew we were well-liked, safe and whole.

Many years later you spent a long time with one leg suspended toward the ceiling with metal pins sticking out of your heel and knee, in traction, in an upstairs room at a hospital behind the murone across the street from the end-of-the-line bus stop. Either Momma or Anne were always with you. You had been crossing the via Cassia and a speeding car hit you. For months, I recall, Davy and I walked to the Ospedale Fatebene Fratelli after school to bring things from home and to visit you and Winnie. I felt pleasure in eating your left-over "hospital noodles" as you dozed and Winnie knitted by the window. I feared you would die, but Momma and Daddy assured me you would walk again (and they were right).

Our close, supportive relationship probably began during long evenings spent at home, as a family, often with Momma reading out loud. Our companionship was cemented by long camping trips, as a family, to Palinuro, to the Abruzzi, to Mallnitz, and through Yugoslavia, and Turkey, where each of us contributed tangibly to our gypsy ways. I remember feeling filled with pride one day when we set up camp under the threat of rain. By that point in time our usual jobs were well defined, and we worked so easily and cooperatively together. It was exhilarating! Our nourishing interdependence continued through high school: Do you remember popping the black-heads off my back and shoulders while standing at the bathroom sink? We were study companions, learning French together. We participated in that energetic bicycler's group on Sunday mornings. [That was when the streets of Rome were most deserted.] We loved biking the hilly 10 kilometers into town to our meeting place, at Piazza Navona, loitering there until the half-dozen of us gathered, then working the next few hours under Mr. Ceen's tutelage, studying art history in context in one or another Rione of Rome. Hitchhiking to or from Earlham College we learned some winning techniques! Do you remember the time we caught our trans-Atlantic flight a day early because we made it from Philadelphia to Montreal in a single ride? Oh, I do wish you could still hear me asking that question! But you have died. Dear Suzie: You died too soon! We could have spent so many more good times together! I feel your loss to my core.

May you rest in peace.
your brother,
Hughie



Memory is such a selective thing. One person can be very clear about parts of a story while someone else is equally clear that things happened quite differently. I hesitated to write this first story because the memories of others were involved and might think I was confabulating. But at least the beginning is a collaboration of Davy's memory as well as mine. The other two stories are mine alone now. Suzie is not here to disagree!

Suzie was someone with strong convictions about how things should happen and a passion for making things go forward, getting things done. She was also passionate about family, about keeping people connected and preserving a strong sense of family identity. She made things happen.

#1 - Winnie had been sick that spring. First she was in the hospital with a UTI but while there began not eating well and generally being very weak, so weak that when she was released the doctors were unwilling to send her home but instead sent her to Wharton Nursing Home. While there she continued to not do well, not eat, be listless, dehydrated and too weak to stand. Davy was living in Tennessee and so had been around a good bit. By early June both Suzie and I came down to see what could be done. Davy, Suzie and I were clear that if Winnie could go home she would do better. Suzie was clear that it had to happen. We met with the nursing home administrator, Dick Braun, a long time friend of Winnie and Phil's as well as the local doctor. It was a hard meeting as he said that in his professional opinion the chances of her successfully leaving were remote, about 10%, because of the difficulties of managing at home in her weakened condition.

There was nothing like telling Suzie that she could not make something happen to make her determined that it would work. Davy remembers that we told the doctor we were going to sign her out anyway. I remember that we just put her in a wheel chair and walked out the front door.

So whether it was hijacking or AMA, we left, Winnie in a wheel chair across the parking lot, up the hill to the water tower and down Upper Meadows Road to the house! Suzie was passionate that things would be better at home, that being with Phil in her own house surrounded by her own things would be the drug that Winnie needed to pull back into the world. And when Suzie was passionate about something it generally happened!

Within hours Suzie had organized a hospital bed and commode, had them delivered, settled Winnie into her bedroom, and had her drinking from a straw, more than she had done in weeks. Within days she was able to stand with help and move from the bed to her wheelchair. Within weeks she was able to move from the wheelchair to her chair by the window, looking out at the pileated woodpeckers come for suet and listening to the chimes on the porch. It took many weeks before there were suitable caregivers for Winnie and Phil, but that was due to Phil's reluctance to have anyone help him rather than to a lack of passion and conviction on Suzie's part. Winnie defied the doctor's prediction of 90% failure and lived at home for several more years.

#2 - Anyone who was ever in Winnie and Phil's house in Pleasant Hill, TN knows what a packrat Phil particularly was. In the house in Rome there was more limited space for him to collect things, although the Taj Mahal in the backyard was built to provide space for some of his collectings. Very little was thrown out. It might be useful some day! I particularly remember the old plastic swimming pool that had been bought in Washington DC before we ever moved to Rome that went from the big house at via Cassia 701 to the smaller house down the street and finally to Pleasant Hill, leaks and all. It might come in useful some day. The house in Pleasant Hill soon became the repository of Useful Things ranging from pieces of picture frames and random sizes of glass to be used for framing to boxes of rope, some of them too short to really use, to an amazing collection of tools, all catalogued according to size and shape. As well as toasters that just need a little fixing to be perfectly good and handles in case you needed a handle. Blankets too frayed to be used on beds but might be helpful if you ever wanted to pad something and more rags than an army could use to clean up a massive oil spill.

The garage was full of enough plastic yogurt and cottage cheese containers for all of Pleasant Hill to start plants; hundreds of old chop sticks to use to support seedlings, enough garden tools to outfit a farm, wood that might be useful some day, roofing supplies just begging to be used, metal fence posts in case you had something that needed supporting, empty cardboard boxes in case you needed to pack something up, and a boat, upside down and hanging from the ceiling, that had not been in the water in twenty years.

The upstairs of the house was also full, although in a more decorative manner. The long-playing records that had been the music we grew up with in Teheran and Rome. Louis Armstrong, Beethoven, Sound of Music and Old Man River. All sorted and in a shelf made specially to hold them. Sheet music enough to outfit an orchestra. Parts for repairing violins. Books about China, history, novels, bird identification, and pest control.

As Phil and Winnie became more elderly the collections did not shrink but they did become more random and somewhat less organized. This was the house that Suzie and I went to the spring after Phil died with the task of deciding what to keep, what to give away and where, and

what was trash. We had decided that Suzie would drive down to Philadelphia and leave her car there, driving together in our larger van the 700 miles south. The van was so we could bring things back. Her car was so that she could then transfer what she had brought back for the trip further north to Medford. The drive south was uneventful. We talked, listened to story tapes, talked some more, and drove without talking in comfortable silence. We talked about the task ahead and what we might find, how we might make decisions and what Phil and Winnie would have wanted. It was clear that Phil would have wanted as much as possible to be given to someone who could use it. It was also clear that there was more than anyone could want.

I don't even remember where we started. It was probably the basement. I just remember at the end of the first day ending up in the kitchen scrounging for supper supplies and staring at each other in amazed exhaustion. What were we going to do with everything? As we kept sorting through in the following week, working flat out for seven or eight hours at a time, some things were easy. After we went through the sheet music sorting out what we wanted to keep (any string and clarinet music), we found the name of the man who ran the music program at the local high school. He came and took the five boxes of the random sheet music (a whole box of how to learn to play the piano) and the instrument repair bits, enthusiasm and gratitude in every word as he picked the boxes up. Other things might have ended up in a dumpster in another family, but not here. We took vanload after vanload to the Good Samaritan, the local thrift organization in Crossville. We took vanloads to the recycling center, everything from metal fence posts to boxes and boxes of old plastic containers. We sorted out metal from plastic and glass, making sure that everything went into the proper bin.

But where this story is about Suzie is in the interactions between us every day that week. We worked steadily and doggedly for hours without stopping but without hurrying, sometimes telling stories about growing up, sometimes working in companionable silence. We figured out a system where by if we were not sure whether or not to keep something we would ask the other. If either one of us said "Keep" it was kept. If we both said, "It goes," then it went. No negotiation, just accommodation. We stopped every evening to go for a walk. We walked down to the stream most of the time, down through the paths that Phil had made and neighbors had kept up. Down along the stream and back up to Lower Meadows. Or we walked up around the circle, remembering when Phil and Winnie had moved there and were the second house. We remembered the kids playing Capture the Flag under the pine trees and coming back with poison ivy. Every evening we ended up at the house again to make supper, eat in companionable talk or silence depending on how exhausted we were to head off to bed early to read and sleep.

We worked steadily for a week, gradually making sense of the boxes and piles, clearing off the driveway of the old wood going to the recycling center, making sure that the boxes of books went to the book sale, and that the neighbors who were going to come and get tools had come and gone, tools in hand. The house was not empty by any means but we had made a start and it felt satisfying. We truly could say that we had found a use for almost everything, something Phil would have wanted. And we had had a good time, being together for the first time in years, maybe ever since we were grown up, without the press of small children to be fed and cared for. Or teen-agers to be ignored or not, as need rose.

The end of the week we packed the van with everything we were taking home to our respective houses. For Suzie it was family photo albums, quilts, and cloth among other things. For me it was sheet music and the music cabinet that Phil had used to organize tools in the basement. For Abby it was the pileated woodpecker carving, the little wooden rocking chair, the camel bell and the dollhouse. And drove the eleven hours back north to Philadelphia.

#3 - My last story is also my own, since Suzie is not here to disagree with me. It is the summer in Cortona after the house was officially ours. Suzie and Rick and assorted kids were there as were Lee and I and assorted kids. The house was the same as it had been every summer with Madeleine's murals of the Bayeux Tapestry, the china in the cabinet, the tablecloths in the drawers. But now it all belonged to us! For Suzie and I it was the summer of our introduction to the Italian system of home ownership from insurance to garbage collection. Suzie and I spent what seems in retrospect like weeks of going to Arezzo and to the Commune to deal with the mondezza to the police to make sure that everything was in place, to set up the insurance in our names, standing in line after line. Since we were going to need to speak as fluent Italian as we were able while making these things happen it made sense that we just speak Italian to each other. We had always spoken Italian to each other in bits and pieces but never for unending hours, from sitting in waiting rooms waiting for the secretary to the secretary to the secretary to driving around Arezzo looking for a street address that seemed not to exist. Every time one of us lost concentration and reverted to English the other one would respond in Italian and get us back on track. We listened to Italian pop music on the radio for respite. In the offices as we explained what we needed and learned what we had to do we took turns speaking; as one of us became tongue tied and at a loss for words, the other would jump in. The pay off came when we were asked repeated if we were Italian expats, in other words not foreigner expats but Italians who lived outside of the country, the ultimate compliment as far as we were concerned!

Anne Thomforde Thomas (Suzie's sister)

Shortly after Stephen (my first) was born, all of the family arrived (at least those within reasonable distances) – from Boston, Philadelphia and Tennessee. It was a Friday and I received a call from a doctor at St. Christopher's Children's Hospital who was calling about a blood test that was done shortly after Stephen's birth. The doctor who called said that the test results indicated that continuing to feed him breast milk could cause severe brain damage, among other things. I should bring Stephen in as soon as possible, but when I asked about that afternoon, his comment was that the office was closing soon for the weekend, so I should call on Monday for an appointment. Then he hung up the phone. I was very upset, and Suzie came to my rescue and based on her experience said, "Goodness, that is ridiculous. And that the doctor had no sense relaying that kind of information over the phone." She was right of course and I was so relieved that she was there.

Family always came first. Holidays, Cortona, NEFFA, family vacations, camping, Red House/Tree House, cups of cappuccino and glasses of wine...there have been so many times together, and I feel so lucky to be a part of Suzie's family. Many special memories continue to come to the surface that keep her close.

With Love,
Laura Thomforde (wife of Suzie's brother Charlie)



I love Suzie's commitment to family loyalty - to siblings, spouse, children, extended family, and even distant relatives! I love that she faithfully called Phil after Winnie died. It takes a sacrificial love to reach out that much! I admire that and strive to reach to my loved ones with the same dedication. I love remembering all the times that she and my mom Anne worked together to facilitate our shared family vacations. When I remember my childhood, those family vacation times are the highlights! I love that we grew up feeling so close to Suzie's family. I'm so grateful she shared in making that a priority for all of us.

I love Suzie's energy for making spaces beautiful - painting walls, cleaning windows, tidying, putting up photographs. I remember when she all came to stay at my grandmother Dorothy's for Dan and my wedding. She directed cleaning Dorothy's house *and* the meetinghouse where we had the ceremony. I knew that I could count on everyone to help - and that's in part because she shaped our family ethic that way. We Thomfordes are all born helpers and I love that about us, and Suzie too. I learned from Suzie to tidy up the house every evening (especially when you have small children!) so the mess does not get out of hand. The next time I'm energized to wash our windows, I will think of Suzie's energy for making places beautiful.

I love that Suzie spent her vocational life supporting women through one of the most significant experiences of their lives - childbirth. Though I haven't gotten to experience giving birth yet, we have Suzie's book on our shelf and will return to it when the time comes! It's pretty amazing to discover a vocational calling that gives you so much joy for so long in your life. I hope to give my life to work that is a meaningful to my heart as midwifery was for Suzie.

I love and share Suzie's zeal for vistas - beautiful views. I remember stopping along a roadside in Italy on the way to southern France just so that Suzie could take in the view. It takes a special kind of presence in the moment to be able to stop what you're doing to appreciate beauty. Suzie had the gift of presence - to her feelings, to her family, and to beautiful things around her.

The last time I saw Suzie at Christmas, she made me a special gift. She had sewn a colorful pillowcase for our Christmas present swap. I wanted it, but didn't end up with it (naturally others wanted it too!). After the game, she told me she'd make another one for me! It's now our bed and reminds me of Suzie daily.

Susanna Ballard (Suzie's niece)



When I try to write about Suzie, I realize that she was many-faceted, difficult to categorize. Here are some of the sides that I appreciated in her very complex character.

Suzie the Chameleon: She was at home wherever she went. In America she was completely American; in Italy, Italian. When she came to visit for just one week in India, she became Indian.

Suzie the Wise Woman: Whatever question or doubt we had, we could always go to Suzie and receive an honest, balanced, wise opinion. Whatever Suzie did seemed appropriate, even things that others of us could never have gotten away with.

Suzie the Matriarch: She and Anne have for the past several years led the Thomforde clan in many of our decisions. They didn't need to force their opinions because they made all of their decisions seem so natural and sensible; we all willingly followed their lead.

Suzie the She-Bear: She was fiercely protective of her family and friends, and woe be to anyone who unjustly criticized or discriminated against them!

Suzie the Storyteller: She was keeper of memories. She knew the words to all the family songs, she knew the sequence of all family stories, and she remembered the names and important facts about all the family friends and even acquaintances.

Suzie the Peacemaker: Perhaps this was related to her position in the family of youngest child, but she always had the ability to wage peace between warring factions.

Suzie the Cheering Section: Whatever her family and friends were attempting, Suzie was there to encourage and applaud.

Suzie the Contented: She could see and enjoy all the small and simple wonders of her life. She was happy to be happy, and never created drama where it didn't exist.

Suzie the Industrious: She loved to be busy and useful, always active with one project or another.

Suzie the Crusader: When she saw something wrong, she worked to fix it. When she saw opportunities for better leaders, she worked to elect them.

Suzie the Courageous: She was always fearless, but when she got sick Suzie became courageous. She became the strong one who helped all of the rest of us through her illness. She became a hero.

Kathryn Hunter (wife of Suzie's brother David)

From a letter written to Suzie:

The feeling that is strongest is a sense of awe and gratitude for the honor and privilege of being your sister-in-law and coming to know you over the past 12 years, since you welcomed me into your family. My first strong memory of you was dancing with me at a contra dance – I felt like I had found a long-lost sister -playful and a little mischievous like me – and both of us perhaps with mixed feelings about sharing Hughie. And considering how close you and Hugh have been since childhood, I appreciate the ways you must have influenced him, including how he relates to women with love and respect.

I am also in awe of how you gave birth to and raised three beautiful, compassionate, and gifted children who are already making big contributions to the planet, as you have. And for your service as a midwife working with Wisdom and compassion to support mothers during their labor, and being the first human face their babies saw when they arrived – a face that expressed a loving welcome that I am sure made a life-long impression.

And for your supportive interactions with your nieces and nephews. I remember just a few weeks ago over Christmas in your kitchen when Susanna was sharing her angst about children who suffer abuse – you offered words of wisdom and comfort that I believe helped her put things in perspective. And I appreciate you being there for Nathan this past year as he moved out of Arkansas and navigated his first serious job. I know that your hospitable spirit and shared conversations have helped him adjust to the changes.

Rebecca Kilmer (wife of Suzie's brother Hugh)



Niece Abby and great-nephew Spencer in a bee vest knitted by Suzie

One of the many, many things that I thank Suzie for, and am glad that I was able to tell her, is the relationship I have had, these many years now, with my brother Rick. There was nothing bad about our relationship before Rick's marriage to Suzie, but there wasn't much relationship either. Somehow, who Rick became for me bloomed, as it had not earlier, in the garden of his and Suzie's marriage.

Stephen Kaufman (brother of Suzie's husband, Rick)

There must be many young mothers who will always remember her with love and gratitude for her help in birthing healthy babies. That legacy will last many, many years.

Nora Hunter (mother-in-law of Suzie's brother David)

One thing I remember about Suzie is her bits of Italianness even after many years in the States, like the way she held her knife and fork. She drove with Roman vigor and wasn't fond of hesitant drivers. A few months ago a visitor asked Suzie for her pesto recipe, and Suzie carefully detailed the ingredients, repeatedly spelling out P-A-R-M-I-G-I-A-N-O to the bemused visitor rather than speak that Anglicization "parmesan."

Julia Wise (wife of Suzie's son, Jeff)

She was such a loving and positive spirit and will be missed by so many whose lives she touched. We were privileged to have known Suzie; she will always be an inspiration to us.

Stewart and Cora Wise (parents of Suzie's daughter-in-law Julia)

When I think of Suzie, my first thought is of an irresistible feeling of sunshine and warmth. She was so welcoming of us at each visit, folding us (and all visitors, I am sure) into the family. The impact of how she loved and treasured her family was so clear, as was how she nurtured in so many lovely ways, encouraging individuality and creativity in all forms. Even in her illness, she lived on the bright and positive side of life. After visiting we always reflect on how delightful it is to be with this wonderful Thomforde/Kaufman family.

Susan Bell (Suzie's second cousin)

Susie was loving, kind, and welcoming. She welcomed my husband and I into married life by quilting and stuffing and sewing us a wedding pillow. Our kids were welcomed into life with handmade quilts, the squares decorated by many cousins, managed and sewn up by Susie. On every visit I was warmly welcomed into her home in Boston, where I marveled at its happy busyness. Susie, Jeff, Rose, and Alice (Rick was able to stay in one place) bustled about among games, sewing, sports, knitting, cooking, laundry, music, and dance, all being done seemingly at once. I am sure that Susie, and her amazing forward moving energy, was the root of the buzz. I am so sorry that she is gone and so thankful that her spirit lives on in all who love her.

Claudia Truesdell (Suzie's second cousin)



From family friends:

I got into the Thomforde family in the summer of 1982 when Winnie and Phil invited me to visit them. I met with Anne at the Stone Barn (?). She was a beautiful young girl to me, just like

Susanna from their latest family letter. I only heard about Suzie then, as a Goddess! I saw a picture of her too, being worshipped in Rome. That was when she got into some accident and had a broken ankle/leg (Sorry that I don't remember exactly where it got broken but she was in a cast). Her siblings would not want to exclude her from all the fun so they put her up high as a Goddess, and they all paid their salutations to her! My recollection of that picture was full of sunshine with Suzie smiling like a Goddess!

I met Suzie and Rick in Utah, when Winnie and Phil kindly helped me to organize a bus trip to visit them, and to see the US at different places. Winnie called Suzie and explained what I'd be wearing so they could pick me up from the Greyhound station. The first time I saw her I felt she was like a Goddess! As beautiful as Anne! She told me she had chosen Utah to obtain her master's degree in nurse-midwifery because they had a very good, if not the best, such program, and she wanted to be able to help women directly. She told me that not all doctors understood women's needs and as a midwife she would be able to offer her help directly to women. That was what she did for the rest of her life!

I became a regular member to join the family gathering during Christmas time for over a decade. Every time I was with the family I would hear something about Suzie's 'crazy' working schedule. It was basically concerning individual women who needed extra help when Suzie was off duty. She would give up everything and go to the center to help. So visiting her parents, Winnie and Phil, was a real break for her. But she did not take the time to rest; instead she was always busy helping children and Winnie. I felt the whole Thomforde family was the same, all so caring for people, not only in the family but anyone who needed help. I felt so welcome and was truly grateful to have so many brothers and sisters.

Usually doing dirty dishes is a job that no one likes, but not at Winnie and Phil's big family gathering. People would always get together to help do the dishes while singing. Suzie's voice was very special, so pure, lovely, and soul-touching! I always enjoyed listening to her singing. Once she sang a song so heart-warming that I wanted to learn it. But being a slow learner I wasn't good at it. To my surprise, Suzie sent me a cassette tape of the song after I returned to Boulder, Colorado! The song was very nice and beautiful, but it lacked Suzie's touch. I'm sure all of you know it, the lyrics is: 'May there always be sunshine. May there always be blue sky. May there always be mama. May there always be me!' Suzie's pitch on 'Mama' was especially touching to me.

I felt she had inherited a Chinese tradition, which most urban Chinese don't have now. She was strong and hardworking, and tried to save everything possible to protect the nature. She used to wash plastic bags for re-use while in college, which was so ahead of all the current trend that her friends could not understand it. Like Winnie and Izzy, she always knitted and/or sewed, and always found work to do around the house. She seemed to enjoy all the chores, and cooking for several dozen people was fun for her! She had a marvelous way to sew effortlessly. The last time I went to Pleasant Hill when both Winnie and Phil were there, I saw her making something like a night gown for Winnie. It was finished in no time, and Winnie's reaction was: That was an elegant dress! It made Winnie very happy!

Suzie did all the right things to bring up her children, sometimes more strict than Rick, it seemed to me. But her loving nature drew everybody close to her, and her children are so successful because of the model she and Rick set up for them. I also felt very comfortable and well-cared for around Suzie and the whole Thomforde family.

With Winnie and Phil's international experience, the whole Thomforde family has a big heart to embrace international culture and to help international students (me included of course although I still consider myself part of the family, like one of their siblings)! Suzie was no exception. She and her siblings took over the tradition of making Chinese jiaozi – dumplings at family gatherings, just like a Chinese family would do. If I remember correctly, she and Anne have both opened their houses to international students, and even after some caused accidents they still continued to offer their help.

Suzie enjoyed nature and loved travelling. She was so brave that she took white water rafting while pregnant! Of course she didn't tell the instructor about that when they set sailing. When Jeff was only a tiny baby she and her whole family went to China. The climate was not always accommodating (hot) but she managed so well with a baby and had a lot of fun visiting Winnie's first home in Shanxi. I remember that she once said she would love to travel around the world, and to go back to China for another visit. I will remember her in Beijing the next time I go back to see my mother.

Anyhow, I have so many fond memories of Suzie! But I just cannot put everything done to describe her. She was like sunshine and a warm spring breeze that offered a welcoming comfort for everyone, me included. I will always treasure that.

As I write this email Suzie's song was ringing in my head. May she enjoy the happy reunion with Winnie and Phil.

Liang Tao

I am so sorry that Suzie is gone. She was a part of my life and family always. From when I was a tiny child I remember her and Rick visiting the house at Warwick Road, talking and playing games with us late into the night. When we first visited the States as a family in 1999 she welcomed us into her home and spent a beautiful day with us at the beach. Most recently we saw her at Camuccia for Phil's birthday. I will remember her as a spirited, dedicated, resourceful woman with a positive outlook, a keen mind and a heartfelt devotion to her work, family and loved ones. I will miss her a great deal.

Tom Fassnidge

Suzie just had a way of being delighted with the world, as she experienced it! Our trip to Italy and especially, Cortona, offer up a warm, wonderful memory, that is full and rich over 25 years later. Eating our first fried flowers, and watching Isaac, hands covering cheeks, as older ladies in black, would approach for a loving, pinch. Thank You Suzie and Rick, for that invite!

Suzie also had a warm and Spirited, Quaker presence, that continues to touch my heart.

Blessing and Love for you, your extended family, and many others who will miss your wonderful mom...

Greg Williams

We always enjoyed her lively contributions to any gathering, her singing at Passover - among other occasions - here deep love of family and friends, and her love of the work of bringing new lives into the world. She got such joy from watching you all grow, engage in life and love, work and play.

Eliza Blanchard and Ralph Child

Suzie was a remarkable person, someone whose devotion to her family, her friends and her work is to be admired. Her zest for life was infectious.

Stephanie (Urbana) and Mitchell Greenblatt

As a child, my first memory of your family was singing with your mom at your grandparents' house from Rise Up Singing. And I remember having coffee with her soon after I moved to Boston. She was enthusiastic to share her memories of our families in Italy. Later I liked seeing the photos of you as kids growing older lined up in the shell-shaped piazza in Sienna. I joined her at her midwifery practice in Beverly one day when we rounded on new babies in the hospital and saw prenatal visits. She was an inspirational midwife. She was on Ben and my marriage cleanness and wedding planning committee, and one of the main reasons we felt so close to Fresh Pond Meeting. And she was an exemplary mom (and grandma) to you all. Seriously, I hope I can balance motherhood and caring for patients with as much love and grace as she did.

Hugs,

Liz Baltaro

I was thinking about Suzie all the time since getting the X-mas letter - thinking about what I would like to say to her about missing her and about the influence she has had on me, and that my time with your family has had on me. I felt stymied, and wished that I could just spend time with her and with all of you and not have to put into words what in some ways has always more about just being together! I wish I could have found the words, but more than that I wish I could have been in her lovely presence again. And she carries on in all of us. Being with Alice 3 summers ago was so much like being with her - uncanny. And I know I channel her myself when I need to buck up and get something done with a cheerful attitude and loving attentiveness to those around me. In fact, it was because she was so loving that it was/is so easy to be infected with her drive, enthusiasm and grace. The thousands of times I have had to pick up toys with my own children have been easier and more fun because of the hundreds of times I picked up toys with Suzie. I imagine the same will be true for my children's children. We grow up and our tasks get more complicated - if we can carry Suzie's influence through all of it, our lives will be that much better. I miss all of you. I miss her.

Alice Robinson (former au pair to the family)

She made a huge impact on me (as did you Rick), you let me into your home and made me feel like part of your family. The respect and love you had for each other always gave me a warm feeling and made me determined that when I got married it would be to someone who made me feel like you made each other feel. I saw the way you were with the children, and I learned so many things which I used when I had my own children. The time-out on the stairs worked great.

I am so grateful to have spent the week with you all in June. It was like I'd only been away a short while. Suzie and I got time to chat about family, life, and about her illness. She told me she'd had such a wonderful life and felt so loved but just didn't want it to end. An amazing woman, I loved her so much.

My heart is with you all.

Lisa Pearson (former au pair to the family)

Suzie was such a lovely presence....I have fond images of her calmly knitting in the swirl of a singing party, egging everyone on to the next song to which, of course, she knew every word to every verse. Sweetness and light and dignity with a healthy dose of fierce passion.

Paul Bochelmann

My memories of Suzie begin in 2007 when she and I co-chaperoned Great Meadows' trip to DERT [Dancing England Rapper Tournament] in 2007 [with Rose and Alice's rapper sword dance team]. What a wild and wonderful trip, and what a calm, good-spirited, flexible co-chaperone she was. We had such a wonderful time! Her smiles and wonderful outlook on life - even in the midst of adversity in recent years - are something I loved with each encounter.

Jane Culbert

I'm looking at the Boston Globe on-line and saw something that brought memories flooding back of another of MANY times Suzie and Rick have been there for Jonathan and me. Here's what the Globe says right now:

"More snow has fallen in Boston in the past seven-day period than in any other week on record, surpassing a milestone set nearly two decades ago. According to the National Weather Service, the city has logged 34.2 inches of snowfall within seven days, the most since modern record-keeping began in 1890. The previous highest snowfall period on record was Jan. 2-8, 1996, when 31.2 inches fell."

It's that last line that hit me. During the first week of January 1996, Jonathan and I moved from Arlington to our house in Newton between frigid snowstorms not unlike the ones we've had lately. We didn't use movers...or I should say, we didn't use PROFESSIONAL movers. When the battery on our U-Haul quit, Suzie and Rick were there with jumper cables. They were there with shovels to clear walkways and stairs...at both ends of the move. They were there as we strong-armed all of our junk through the falling snow.

The kitchen floor in the new house was a mess. No problem. Suzie taped together a newspaper template and she and Rick laid new linoleum. We put in a new washing machine off the kitchen,

so Rick drilled a hole in the floor and put in PVC pipe so it could drain into the cellar wash basin. Need your outlets grounded? Suzie knew how. Broken window? No problem for Suzie. (This fall I had a baseball through a front window covered with cardboard for months until I found someone to fix it...)

There wasn't anything that Suzie couldn't do. Earlier this fall, Jonathan was wearing his favorite sweater, one that my mother had knit for him years ago. It had several tiny holes (moths?), but Suzie took it and a day later it was returned with all the holes fixed perfectly.

It's not all the doing and fixing that I'll miss -- although that was great -- but the cheerful 'can do' attitude that always made me feel happy and confident that there was little beyond repair. Weeks before Molly was born, I remember confiding in Suzie that I was a bit scared of childbirth. She reassured me by looking me squarely in the eye and calmly reminding me, "Barbara, you've done difficult things."

I try to remember those words as we all navigate these recent days.
Barbara Howard

Of all the people I've known, Suzie is the one who got the most genuine pleasure from doing things for others. It was one of the fundamental pillars of her life. When she and Rick would come to stay, I would get up in the morning to find the weeds pulled, or the trashcan cleaned. Even when she was very sick, she would clean the fridge, knit socks for people, help any of the kids with anything, or patch my jeans.

She took that same spirit into how she treated everyone. In the 34+ years I knew her, I never saw her be less than kind to anyone. She did this without being bland, or saccharin, or phony, or holier-than-thou. She had (and voiced!) strong opinions, people she liked less, rules she disagreed with and would happily break. We never talked about it, but I guess she thought that everyone deserved to be treated with kindness and dignity, and so she did. Every single time. She was a very special kind of teacher: I learned a lot from her without her saying a thing. Eventually I started asking myself 'what would Suzie do?' if I thought I wasn't being nice enough to someone.

She showed that it is possible to have the most impact without shouting the loudest. And her smile would light up the room.

Suzie, I love you, and you'll be in my heart forever.
Ellen Bridle

As a friend, Suzie embodied the word she so freely used, "Lovely." I so appreciated her lively spirit, enthusiasm and good-naturedness, warm hugs, sweet singing voice and, of course, singing parties! Suzie's efficiency when doing most anything seemed to be deliberate, to leave room for what was most important to her; family and friends. She lived her life with simplicity and grace, and shared of herself generously. I regret falling out of touch and miss her terribly.
Sue Silveira

I still don't have words for what has happened in the last weeks. My thoughts are still confused, so what I first did to structure them was to think in facebook posts about her, such as "True friends [such as Suzie] share their family, their home, their home away from home and their stories with you."

I also immediately thought about Cortona and looked at all the pictures. I do remember one situation on the patio in Cortona: Suzie is sitting in the shade organizing our trip to Lucca and I am just hanging out doing nothing as usual (in my memory Suzie always works and am always sitting around being lazy). Someone is saying something and I crack a joke – as I sometimes do. Suzie turns around, looks up from her knitting and says: "Daria, I am so glad Rose brought you to live with us and you are here with us in Italy." Here I am: sitting in wonderful Cortona, not paying for the vacation, hating to cook and not even being keen on cleaning (I am doing dishes from time to time though), feeling like a complete freeloader, and Suzie makes me feel more welcomed than anyone has ever done before in my life.

This situation was so typical for Suzie! She really allowed me into her life, made me feel as if I am part of her family and shared her family, houses and her life stories with me. I cannot express how exceptional and generous this is. I am and always will be truly grateful for her friendship, her stories and the opportunity to get to know a person who is a true role model! (I realized that Suzie is probably the only role model I've ever had in my life, but it also makes sense: choose your role models wisely ;). Suzie is a perfect choice!).

Daria Schnipkoweit (Rose's friend who lived with the family for some months)

I see Suzie in Marion at the Treehouse, barefoot, wearing a long, loose, patterned dress with her gray hair clipped up on the back of her head. She is settled in at a jigsaw puzzle, concentrating, but also chatting quietly with Alice or Rose or Anne. She is walking briskly around the island with Rick enjoying the air, the sea and the view. She is eating on the porch with her family and assorted siblings and their spouses and nieces and nephews gathered 'round a table bursting with good food. She is participating in a strings concert, feasting her eyes on the players and singing. She is rushing back to Medford or from Medford full of the excitement of delivering another baby, full of confidence and joy. She is hanging with Anne, two peas in a pod in their long dresses, talking, perhaps, about Italy or reminiscing about Phil and Winnie. She is smiling at Lily, the beautiful new grandchild. She is sharing stories about Jeff and Julia and Rose and Alice and, this past summer, helping plan Alice's wedding. She is laughing a bit self consciously, but joyfully, at how her whole family (and more) live together in the newly-painted-red house on Wyman Street: Can you believe it? And who feeds them all? Why Jeff brings home Google's extra food! She is building community and giving pleasure to others wherever she goes. Her optimism is contagious. As she would say: "Lovely".

Mary Smoyer



Memories from Rome

I was a classmate and friend of your mom's throughout high school, and so very sorry to hear of her passing. We did track together (see photo—I'm bottom right with boots, and your mom is top send to left), gymnastics, shakespeare festival, and since our whole class was so small (maybe there were 40 or so of us), we hung out together a lot. Here are a couple of photos from some of our yearbooks. Your mom was always kind, caring, and friendly to everyone.

Carol (Herz) Parsons

My memories of Suzie are as a bright, cheerful, energetic high school student. I knew your wonderful family well, your amazing grandparents (Winnie and I were colleagues at Overseas) and all Suzie's exceptional siblings.

Linda Davidson

We were friends in the 70's in Rome. We had lots of fun in classes and in theatre and the track team. She has been and will always be a sparkling spirit in my memories of those magical years in Rome.

Regan Melone (OSR '74)

O, the lovely Thomforde family diminished by its baby girl ... my heart weeps for all of them and at the memories of this sweet, gentle, kind, infinitely gracious young lady and her wonderful parents and brothers who graced our school and lives with their presences not too many years ago ...

Tony Brophy (teacher at Overseas School of Rome)

I have many fond memories of Suzie and Hugh from Rome in the 1970's. Confidence, effervescence, optimism, earnestness, honesty and a very sunny disposition just about every time I saw her. I suspect she touched many, many lives beyond her friends and family.

Kevin Treakle



Suzie's high school yearbook picture, with beloved terrier Teleri

We had many connections with the family. Suzie was 14 and in 9th grade, as was our daughter Robin. They were very close friends. (See the picture!) We truly treasured the family and valued their friendship. It was our first time living abroad, and Winnie was a wondrous mentor and guide for me. Dan, of course, was very involved with the high school and with all the Thomforde kids (including the ones he had in class). We shared many political and social positions and concerns with the family. Also, Dan and I had worked for several years with the American Friends Service Committee and shared the values and ethics of the Quakers -- which added another dimension to our friendship. We've known Rick and his siblings for about the same length of time -- so we really do go back a ways. We feel that it is wonderful to continue to be part of the family, and you are all very dear to us.

Joan Kunitz



In the early 1960s, my family became neighbors of the Thomforde's when my parents moved our family to Rome, Italy. As an agemate of Suzie, we attended elementary school at Overseas School of Rome (OSR), located within walking distance of the Villaggio (Village) where our families lived. I was a painfully shy child. On the first day of First grade, I arrived at OSR and immediately felt lost and overwhelmed at the seemingly chaotic mass of children attempting to determine which of the classrooms we each were assigned to. In response, I immediately retreated to a nearby shadowed corner, remaining standing there, in tears. Soon thereafter, Suzie approached me, extended a friendly and reassuring hand, then guided me from one classroom to the next until she located my assigned classroom and made certain that I found a desk to settle into. This same process repeated during the first day of school over the next several years. In 1968 my family left Rome. One of my older sisters maintained limited contact with Suzie, but I did not. Decades later, as the Internet age facilitated people locating friends from the past, I

managed to learn that Suzie had become a midwife and was practicing in the Boston area. In a sense, learning of Suzie's chosen profession was not a surprise to, as I could imagine the beauty and sweetness of Suzie gently ushering into this world newborns, as she had guided me in my moments of distress, many years earlier. These wonderful memories continue to touch me. I will always remember them and remain grateful for Suzie's kindness.

Tom (Tomas) Earl

Suzie and I were great friends during my one high school year in Rome. We both played guitar and sang in the musical, "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat" at OSR. We stayed long hours after school rehearsing with the whole cast and crew.

Suzie, Huey, a few other students, and I rode our bikes many kilometers every Sunday morning with Allan Ceen (teacher at OSR) who showed us all kinds of cool places in and outside of Rome.

I have fond memories of bringing my children to the singing/music parties at the Thomforde/Kauffman home and to attending Suzie and Rick's 20th anniversary party, contra dancing at the Scout House.

More recently, Suzie and I went hiking in the Estabrook Woods in Concord and got completely lost. We honestly could not find our way out, so Suzie called Rick who got on the computer and tried to identify our whereabouts, and I called the Concord Police to see if they could help us. As it turned out, Suzie and I chose to follow our own intuition and finally we emerged from the woods, even in time for Suzie to make it to her doctor's appointment. (To their credit, the Concord Police called me much later and asked if we got out OK!!)

As a potter, I loved that Suzie chose to come to my exhibit in Dec. 2013 to select a bowl to give as a gift in the family Yankee Swap, and I cherish the trip that she and I made that month to NYC to have a mini-reunion with three other OSR "girls" from our 4th grade class.

Carolyn Dittes

I was a guidance counselor at OSR (from near Syracuse, NY) from 1970-73. Hugh, David and your dear mother were in school while I was there. I did not know your uncles or mom that well, but they were highly thought-of by the faculty as ambitious, bright, and selfless students, with broad interests, and warm hearts. Your grandmother was a tireless worker in the school's parent-volunteer brigade. Mrs. Thomforde was forever bustling around campus doing some sort of project simply because that's what a parent with a high regard for her children's education needed to do.

The most vivid image of your mother, was this engaging, high-energy teenager with curly hair and a genuine, infectious smile that would light up a room. Suzie was always smiling. And even if she suffered, I could bet my bottom dollar, that Suzie never lost that radiant smile.

One of my most memorable experiences during my three years in Rome, has had a lifelong impact on my spiritual life. (And because you know how precious your mother's time in Rome and OSR was, I am compelled to write to you), Although details are fuzzy after 40+ years, I'm certain that your mother's family had an important part at a Friends Meeting I went to on a sunny spring Sunday on a Roman hillside. It was my first experience sitting on the grass with a group of people who were eager to open their ears, minds, and hearts in silence together. I've looked back and understand that my being drawn to - guided imagery as a church youth group leader, Native American sweat lodges, Buddhist meditation in a men's group, and now Contemplative Prayer with my church family - all had it's beginnings, thanks to your Quaker grandparents. Thank you, Thomfordes!

I am sorrowful about your loss, and reach out to each one in your family who grieves your mother's passing. I pray that God will fill the empty spots in your hearts with thankfulness, love and peace. And fill your mind's eyes with images of Susan's bright smile.

With sincere regards,
Jim Fox

I grew up with your mother and her family in Rome. My family's first few months in Rome in 1961 were spent hosted by the Thomforde family.

My father, Darwin Solomon, and aunt and uncle, Joseph and Toni Stepanek, were present at your grandparents' wedding in Changsha, China. So we had a strong family connection all the while we were in Rome. Perhaps you know that many of those in your family's Rome circle at that time had met in China.

I last saw your mother at the first OSR reunion in Rome in '97 or '98. We has spent so much of our growing up together – camping families together at Capo Palinuro; playing capture the flag, with Siena Palio flags, up and down the street of the Villaggio Americano. Swimming (splashing is more the activity) in the Thomford pool, summers. Swimming a Lago Bracciano, and sailing in your uncle Hugh's Lugbug. How many summer week-ends making ice cream, watermelons, playing recorders one summer with Susan and her cousin Mariel, playing basketball for OSR while she cheered, feeling the sympathy pain on hearing she had been hit by the car on the Via Cassia, building snowmen the two times it snowed while we were in Rome, Twister, new year's parties with all of the Villaggio families, trick-or-treating at the doors uncomprehending Italian families, watching in fascination as the Vincent Price movie "The Last Man on Earth" was shot on our street, hiking the valley below our street... Wow! What memories!

David Solomon

I met Suzie in the third grade at OSR in Miss Conklin's class. I arrived in April, nearly the end of the school year. Suzie and some other girls made sure I had someone to sit with at lunch and

someone to play with at recess, the two most important times not to be alone in the life of a “new” kid. I do not remember who the other girls were, but I do remember Suzie. She had the biggest smile, the most tubular ringlets, the greatest sweaters (even back then I was a budding yarnie), and I loved her voice. It was unique, warm, and to me seemed completely void of any identifying accent, both in English and Italian.

I was, and am, a terrible speller, and in school it was a great and constant source of embarrassment to me. When I wrote Suzie notes, as we were apt to in those days, I spelled her name with a ‘z’ instead of an ‘s’, because that was how it sounded to me. I think we were in middle school when she told me she spelled her name with a ‘z’ because she liked the way I had written it. I can still feel the warmth and gratitude of the moment when she told me that. It was not wrong, it was better.

Alongside the definition of enthusiasm, there is a picture of Suzie. When she got excited, she kicked her leg or legs behind her and put her hands around her nose and mouth and squeezed her cheeks. A squeal was generally emitted at this time. Or, if it was just, too, too much, she would jump up and down, squeeze her cheeks and squeal. It is not surprising that she became a cheerleader for our basketball team. “Dai! Dai! Forza! Forza! Vinci! Vinci!” They cheered in English, too, but I don’t remember those. Suzie was the Energizer Bunny when it came to cheering. She would cheer for OSR, then run down to the other end of the gym, where the Italian team we were playing sat, and cheer for them. As I recall, not all the girls did this, but she did get a couple others to cheer with her. When I asked her about it, she said it was so the other team wouldn’t feel bad. That’s Quaker competition for you! ;-)

I think Suzie was my mother’s favorite houseguest. Suzie loved food and would polish her plate clean with bread and always thanked Mom for the wonderful meal. Then, she would proceed to, excitedly, tear her paper napkin apart in her lap, and little by little, eat it. Many years later, when we were adults, I recalled this memory to her. She remembered, paused, and said, “I think I still do that sometimes.”

Suzie and I were in many classes together. The one I remember most vividly was Italian II. I was taking Italian II for the second time because I had to. Suzie was likely taking it again following her collision with a car. So in 7th or 8th grade, we ended up in a class that was mostly high school juniors or seniors. It was embarrassing just to walk in there. We sat in the back corner together. I guess we passed because I do not remember having to take it again, but I cannot imagine I learned much. Suzie would have been fine on her own in that class, but she kindly sat with me, each and every day.

I loved going to the Thomforde home in Rome. I remember a big room lined with books and a couple couches, and musical instruments, or their cases, propped up here and there. They were the kind of couches you could curl up on and no one would care if you sat on your feet or perched on the arms. They had a big, round dining table that seemed able to sit five to 25 people easily. It was warm and inviting, and when I grew up, I wanted my house to be just like that. I was invited to go camping with Suzie and her family over spring break sometime in middle school. We slept in tents, had campfires, helped cook, and ate lots of good food. Mrs. Thomforde

read to us several times each day. Maybe it was only twice, but it seems like more to me. There was a book for us girls, and a book for the boys, Davey and Hugh. I don't remember what the books were but they both captivated me. Mr. Thomforde listened, too, and I loved the feeling of the whole family involved in this quiet activity. Later, I often thought of Winnie when I read to my own girls, especially when we got to chapter books. Although we didn't often go camping, we did always have a book we read together, and took it with us anytime we thought there might be a chance to read a bit.

Suzie briefly told me about being a Friend when we were in school. She described meeting in different family's homes on Sundays, and sitting in a silent circle. It was intriguing, but I did not have much occasion to think of it again until about a year after my family left Rome. We left at the end of 9th grade and lived in Caracas, Venezuela for one year. It was decided that I should go to a boarding school in the states to finish up high school and prepare for college. I went to George School, a Friends School in Newtown, PA, for my junior and senior years. In my junior year, my co-op job was in the faculty day care center, something new at the time, on the GS campus. Someone wrote an article about it for the Georgian, a newsletter for parents and alumni, and took a few pictures. Little did I know that I was included in one of those photos, or that the Georgian would arrive, as usual, at the Thomforde home, where Phil, an alum, or maybe Winnie or even Suzie, would spot my picture. Suzie sent me a letter at the school and we stayed in touch ever since. At George School I learned about silence, reflection, integrity, service and more. In fact, several years later, I would join the Religious Society of Friends, marry in the Meeting, raise two children in the Meeting, and spend my career teaching in Friends schools. I am not sure I would have had such an interest in Friends had it not been for the little Quaker girl with ringlets, kind eyes and warm smile I met in Rome.

Con amore,
Leslie Mitchell

I was so sorry to hear about Suzie's passing. She had very kindly sent me news of your family the last two Christmases and I was very happy to receive it as I always used to get letters about the family from your grandfather, Phil, soon after he retired. I used to work as his assistant at FAO in Rome, at the time when FAO was starting up relations with China. It was a very happy period of my working life. Once Suzie and Rick came over to see Phil and Winnie and stayed a night in my flat in Rome. And later Suzie kindly sent me copies of the biographies of Phil and Winnie.

I have now returned to England, where I am living in Forest Row, East Sussex (between London and the south coast). I feel happy and privileged to have come to know your family and I feel close to you all in your loss.

With affectionate greetings,
Jancis Browning

I have to confess that despite knowing that Suzie was struggling with cancer, and a more aggressive one at that, I was still shocked when the news came that she had died. I guess the

impact was hard because it shook my foundation. Growing up, as we were lucky to do, during the Golden Years of living in Rome, Italy – as Americans – when our country was rising to great heights, we had a perspective of immortality on some level, along with the innocence that accompanies youth. As I aged, I always felt my soul to be where it was in that delicious bubble of time, where I draw upon many fond memories.

Suzie had grace, even in those days. She was a kind, thoughtful, caring playmate who opened her arms to us, and we spent many hours engaged in wonderful escapades using our imaginations, role playing, and cardboard bricks. We flew airplanes, or we were airline hostesses (when it was a calling and the flights were luxurious and not the mass haulers of sardines that they are today). We alternated between the roles of student and teacher, fostering a love of education and learning. We got together spontaneously with other siblings and neighborhood kids and played kickball, tag, softball, “Mother May I,” British Bulldog, Capture the Flag, hide and seek, and many other assorted group games. We watched chickens running around Suzie's backyard and ponds being dug on the front lawn. I went with her on family outings to the lake. I spent the night. I watched as her brothers and sisters learned to play musical instruments and sat spellbound while Winnie read books to us aloud, knitted sweaters for the kids, or baked.

Suzie was the kind of playmate every kid dreams of having in the neighborhood. I remember visiting her laid up after the car accident on the Via Cassia, when she had to stay home from school for months with a huge metal rod in her leg, in traction. She never complained and always seemed so cheerful. They were different times, and due to our family circumstances, we didn't get to continue our friendship while we were still there. We moved back stateside.

I saw Suzie again, many years later, when my daughter, Kiernan, graduated from college in 2013. She was still the Suzie I remember and cherish in my childhood memories. She made a difference in my life that was huge, and despite my being sick as a dog when we had that last visit, I could see she was still the beautiful person I had played with and held dear as a child. I admired her courage and resolve and her upbeat countenance around her health challenges. I wish we could have had more time to reminisce about old times and dig up the pictures, etc., but it was not to be. I only know that for Suzie, that visit helped bring her some closure, and I know that when we meet again, we will have a grand time revisiting those wonderful, fun-filled days of youth in “The Village.” The bonding that we created then will continue to be part of what sustains me the rest of my life and will continue to give me memories that help to keep her alive, for me, until that day comes. I was really blessed and feel honored to have had the gift of someone so precious as Suzie in my life.

Suzie left her mark on me, and she impacted my life in a huge way. She will be missed, but not forgotten, as long as I have those precious memories. The world lost a good, kind soul. God Bless her.

Sue Michau (nee Earl)



With Rose and Winnie in Italy, 1989

From Earlham College

I met your mother when we were both on Earlham's study-in-France program. I was a rising sophomore, and she was a rising senior. She was a wonderful travelling and studying companion. From her, I learned the term "sage-femme," which means midwife, but translates literally as "wise woman." How appropriate! Suzie and I reconnected at Uplands, home to Winnie and Phil, as well as my parents and in-laws.

I remember the sparkle in Suzie's eyes, and her cheerful demeanor.

Jenner Mandel

I was so sad to hear the news of Suzie's passing. She was a dear friend of mine from Earlham College and was one of the most influential people in my life there. We lived on the same hall Freshman year and I was only at Earlham for two years, but we corresponded regularly at the holidays and kept up. I was always so sure that I would visit her but sadly I never did. I so much enjoyed hearing about her lovely family and all the rich events and wonderful people that made up her life.

To me, she was a joy to be around, she exuded happiness--she had such a love for life, for others.

You knew that she had a keen intelligence and a strong sense of herself and she made you feel stronger just being around her. Of all the people I have met in my life, she would be the first one I would think of who I would most like to be like. She was who I wanted to be, but could never be. I admired her so much and I am so sad that I never lived close enough to her to visit and to get to know her family. I am comforted by the knowledge that she had such a giving life as a midwife and enjoyed such a lovely family and had the loving life that she deserved.

Ellen Weber

Suzie was one of the friends I shared a house with during my last year of college. I didn't know her well until we all joined together to make a household. She was one of the three "Susans," along with me and Sue Silveira, living on our side of the duplex—and a fourth Susan used to join us for dinner!

I remember Suzie as a cheerful, happy friend and housemate who was proactive and always ready to help find solutions, both in relationships and in more practical matters. She was lively, full of verve, industrious, and fun. She was the chief baker in a household of erstwhile chefs—we all took turns cooking meals—but she would also bake four or five loaves of delicious, wholewheat bread each week, just for the love of it, which allowed us both to save money and eat heartily. Somehow, I thought of her as our kitchen manager, she who was in it so often and took to organizing it for the rest of us. She was also the one who orchestrated the Sunday evening meals, which were a hodgepodge of all the leftover bits throughout the week, thrown into a pot and dressed up to create one final meal before we started our rota of dinners again on Monday. So I'm grateful for the "mothering" gifts that Suzie contributed to our one-time family.

Suzie had such a good and wholesome and optimistic attitude towards life. She had no stomach for sarcasm and reacted against it. I had grown up thinking it clever, somehow, but from her I learned to see it for what it was and try to avoid it.

I remember Suzie as living at a high level of joy, and she would easily get so excited that she would put her hands to her cheeks as if unable to contain it and laugh out loud. For her, things were so often “lovely”, a word she was using long before I would ever have thought to, though now “lovely” has become part of my vocabulary too.

I envied her close family relationships, with sibling(s?) at the same college, and though scattered around the world, they all somehow kept close. Over the years, I've exchanged yearly Christmas/New Year's greetings with her, keeping up with the changes in her life and feeling her continual delight in her children, even though I only saw her twice after graduating—once when she visited me in Chicago in the late seventies, and once at her home, probably in the eighties (?).

It has been a blessing to have such a faithful, long-term friend, even after my move to Japan, and then to Thailand for the duration. Whereas I have “dropped off the radar” of most of my other US friends, Suzie, having grown up in Rome, seemed used to global living and connecting. I feel she must have understood me as part of her network that spanned the globe, and my distance did not faze her.

I was not aware that Suzie had been struggling with illness until her latest letter, and I'm sorry I didn't have a chance to connect with her at least once before she passed away. I will miss her loyal friendship and the beauty and goodness of who she was.

Sue Offner
Chiang Mai, Thailand

Suzie and I were college friends, housemates, and temporary roommates while at Earlham College in Indiana. We shared science classes together and each eventually entered the medical field. After graduation I returned to California, she to the East Coast, but we visited each other from time to time and shared our lives long distance. We each married. She had kids, I didn't. The bond lasted and we each talked about the choices and results of each of those choices, being intermittently jealous of each other's lives. She had the family, I traveled. I remember listening to her sing “Streets of London” while cooking at our student house. It made it feel like home. I was delighted when she taught me to play it on the guitar. I remember her “Pizza Rustica” and always looked forward to her nights to cook. I remember her laugh, her sparkling yes, and her covering her mouth with her hands in delightful laughter. I remember her playing guitar and singing folksongs in groups on the porch. I remember playing Frisbee together as we ran down The Bowl (lawn) at Earlham. I remember her studying long into the night in our shared room and being amazed at her dedication to her nurse midwife goal. I wore earplugs and an eye mask and slept.

I remember lively conversations and debates with housemates around the dining room table at Earlham. Her liberal and Quaker beliefs.

I remember her and Rick's wedding and spending days getting to know her wonderful family. Everyone poured in and slept on couches and the floor. It was such a lively and loving group. Musical talent abounded.

I remember the former house she and Rick had and her taping drywall while Jeff and Rose took naps.

I remember visiting when the freezer died and she had spent hours cooking thawed chicken with the childcare helper. I was envious of her cooking skills.

I remember visiting to attend contra dance weekends.

I remember the look of her eye glasses on her face.

I remember her wonderful holiday photo pages and letters of the family doings. It always included a short handwritten personal note.

I remember her warmth, generousness, and openness to share thoughts and emotions despite our living so far apart.

I remember the last time I saw her in 2003 at an Earlham reunion. She was still as lively and warm as ever and it was like we had never been apart.

I will miss her so much. I will remember her forever.

Sue Rennels

From Fresh Pond Meeting and Cambridge Friends School

I feel so lucky to have known your Mom as a parent and Board member [at Cambridge Friends School]. She gave so much to our community. But, what I am holding right now is her smile that was so warm and welcoming. I so looked forward to turning the corner while the book sale was being set up and finding her sorting through books. I was always met with that smile and the chance to catch up on all of you.

Laurie Tennant-Gadd (board member at Cambridge Friends School)

Suzie was a wonderful person - vibrant and caring. Her love for all of you was so great as was her joy sharing her life with you.

Phyllis Keenan

On the Administration and Stewardship Committee, Suzie had the unique ability to be both an analytical and motivating leader, and a presence radiating peaceful love loud and clear.

Gail Charpentier

I have so many memories of your mother at Fresh Pond Monthly Meeting. I remember when your grandparents (your mother's parents) would join us at meeting for worship. Your grandfather was so attentive to your grandmother. When she sat in the chair, her feet did not touch the floor, so he rolled up his coat and put it under her feet as a foot stool for her comfort.

It touched my heart to see his tenderness. When I spoke to your mother about it, at the time that it happened and again more recently when I was visiting this summer, she beamed. Her love of family was so evident. She told me, several times over the years, how important family was to

her and also how important it was for you and your siblings to have relationships with all of your relatives, the many cousins, even in Italy. She loved having everyone all together, playing games, knitting, singing, eating and hanging out. I think of your mother when I drink lemon herbal tea. I very rarely drank tea of any kind until about a year ago. During one of my visits with your mother at your house, she brought down from the shelf the beautiful tea box abundantly filled with assorted teas for me to select. When I told her that I wasn't much of a tea drinker, she let me look over all the varieties that she had in the box. I think she picked the "I Love Lemon" tea that day and for lack of a preference, I picked the same tea. I found the lemon herbal tea to be delicious. We had a lovely visit, it was a day that Suzie was feeling up to a visit and we talked about many things. I really liked the tea and ever since, I keep a box of I Love Lemon herbal tea in my cupboard. I have thought of your mother when I drink this tea, especially during the past month.

Another fond memory is your mother's longstanding attendance at women's group. She came when ever her work schedule permitted it. Women's group has been meeting since 1989 and your mother was a faithful member since she started coming to Fresh Pond. Her regular participation helped anchor the group and brought those present a sense of caring, positivity and patience. She is already missed at women's group. Your mother was a remarkable woman. She will not be forgotten by those that knew her, her kindness lives on in all of us.

Lynn Taber

My heart goes out to you and all your family. You've suffered such a great loss. You've also had such a great gift and blessing - having Suzie in your family and in your lives. She was a person who had such grace, warmth, generosity, and love for so many, and most of all for her family. Her gifts to all of you live on in each of you, and in the people whose lives she touched.

Sasha Lauterbach [Librarian at Cambridge Friends School]

I will always remember the evening she hosted my "Welcome to Fresh Pond Friends" supper. New in town, I felt enfolded by her gracious welcome. Suzie volunteered to host the welcome supper for me after I transferred membership from North Branch Meeting in Wilkes-Barre, PA to Fresh Pond. When Wally and I arrived, we woke her up. She had been up all night with a patient. But Suzie was such a gracious host, we soon felt at ease and enjoyed a delicious supper with assorted family members and house guests. Cathryn Oliva-Simmons contributed a huge salad. Phil Veatch had volunteered to bring the dessert, but Alanna was ill and he did not come. No problem, said Suzie, as she took some special ice cream from the freezer. I will never forget my welcome to Fresh Pond Meeting!

Bev Williams

From her life as a midwife:



With a patient in 1991

The Midwives' Midwife

You'll hear this phrase when speaking of Susan. In the Midwife world Suzie was Susan. She was an extraordinary midwife, dearly loved and widely respected. I was incredibly fortunate to have Susan as my preceptor when I was a brand new student midwife over 16 years ago; she was my teacher, mentor, role model, colleague and dear friend.

Susan embodied the kind of midwife I wanted to be. She was wise, skilled, quiet, confident, considerate, graceful, and efficient. There was a sense that if Susan was there, you were in good hands. As a teacher and a mentor she taught me to trust: to trust birth, to trust women, and to trust myself. She modeled patient care that was always respectful and kind. Her hands were skillful, graceful and efficient, and always busy. Whether she was knitting in the corner, making a sock appear before your eyes, or suturing a patient, or just popping in an IUD, Susan could do it more gently and quickly than anyone I've ever met. She rarely sat, always using her time to take care of any number of chores, tasks or projects. Working a shift with Susan was the best. She'd call you only when she knew she needed you, and she'd work right alongside you, except that half of the time, by the time you thought to do the next chore, you'd turn to find that she'd already done it. We were allies with our bumper stickers for candidates and the courage and willingness to stand up for what was right. When it was really important, when someone she cared about was being wronged or a policy would be harmful to our patients, Susan would raise her voice and fiercely fight the good fight! And she was the midwives' midwife in that so many

midwives, nurses, and docs when having babies of their own, asked for Susan to special them, to be their midwife.

Susan caught over a thousand babies. She cared for thousands of women and their families. Imagine those thousand plus babies that were so fortunate to be welcomed to this world by the loving and sure hands of Susan Thomforde; what a gift to receive at the beginning of one's life. One doctor we work with suggested we rename the birth center for Susan, whether the birth center itself or a library or garden, she is a part of the North Shore Birth Center. Recently, I had one of those perfect births. You know the rare one that everything goes just beautifully. It was a crisp clear winter night, a third baby for a lovely couple. The tub is warm, and this birthing mama while working so hard is truly ecstatic in her husband's arms... the baby slides out all is right in the world. There was Irish fiddle music playing and as the labor progressed, I felt Susan so clearly right behind my left shoulder; she just stood with me, as we appreciated that exquisite moment of life unfolding beautifully on its own. Part of her mighty spirit is in those walls, a wee part will always be in me. There are all of us here who will carry a bit of that spark, there are some 1300 babies growing and grown who have been touched by her, the world is a better place for having known the gift of Susan Thomforde. I am certainly a better person, and a more gifted midwife because of her presence in my life.

To her family that she loved beyond everything else, I thank you for all the sacrifices that you made to her passionate and time consuming career. It is no easy thing to be married to a midwife, to have your mom always running out on call in the middle of anything and everything. Thank you for sharing her with so many of us near and far, young and old. Her life was an exquisite gift, she is missed deeply everyday.

Eva Wax (Suzie's coworker at the North Shore Birth Center)



My thoughts are with you and your family. Susan was a dear and wonderful person. I have missed her physical presence at the Birth Center, but her spirit has been and will continue to be there daily. In the time since she stopped working, almost every time I went to the hospital someone would ask after her. I feel so blessed to have known her. She taught me so much about being a midwife, as well as a person. I wish you all much comfort on your journey.

Warmly,

Reina Dastous (Suzie's coworker at North Shore Birth Center)

I have had the honor of working with a very gifted midwife for over 20 years. She is missed sorely.

The other day while I was at the Birth Center watching the white wonder of snow that seemed endless, I thought of Susan. I actually think of her often lately when I am at work. We have some flowers, a lovely photo and a candle lit (battery operated) 24/7 as a gentle reminder of her presence.

So, the other day, another midwife and I were talking about whether we would have to have all babies born at the hospital, since the walkway for transferring mothers in labor still had snow on it. The hospital had not come to shovel yet.

I then went on to tell the story about the day Susan was determined to clear the walkway during a snowstorm. I had a shovel in my car I gave it to her. I watched and shook my head. There was no way on the planet she was going to be able to shovel the amount that was there. She tried,

made a small dent, came back inside feeling somewhat defeated. We laughed and knew what we needed was a plow! That was Susan. She was a tremendous human being, as we all know.
Linda Anne L'Abbe ((Suzie's coworker at North Shore Birth Center)



At a celebration of Suzie's career, summer 2014

I enjoyed the celebration of her life last summer at the birth center and it was a heartwarming testament to her amazing life and career. I gave birth at Beverly Hospital to both my sons, but used NSBC and the midwives for my prenatal care and delivery. Susan delivered my first son. It was a difficult labor. She came in at "the shift change", in the morning, after a night of hard labor. I will never forget that I reached 10 cm at 9am and that Griffen wasn't born till 1:11 pm. I pushed for over four hours. Not fun! Susan was amazing, and while I value the expertise of all the midwives at NSBC [North Shore Birth Center], your mom just had a SPARKLE and a bed side manner that was incredible! I have NO DOUBT that any doctor would have given up on me after a couple hours of pushing and would have rushed me in for a C-section. Your mom never wavered. Even when the machine started alarming because the heart rate of my baby was dropping, she was able to regulate it quickly by adjusting my position. She was so supportive and tirelessly optimistic through the whole process. I am so grateful for that experience, and for her. Your mom was also a loyal customer of my art calendar which I designed for ten years - She always had it displayed in her office and it made me happy to see it when I saw her for my appointments. :-)

Ursina Amsler

I worked with Suzie back in the Quincy days (early 90's) and enjoyed seeing her for dinner with other friends until we left Boston six years ago. Her wonderful annual letters have kept me informed of your entire amazing family. Clear your mom touched so many lives in addition to the thousands of families who were blessed to have her wonderful care as a midwife.

Marcia Snyder

I heard from Eva of Susan's recent passing and was so very sad. She and Eva supported me as I delivered my only child, Caleb, in 2008. She just felt right to me as a midwife during check ups and I felt it an answer to prayer when she and Eva, my two favorites, were the midwives on call the night that I went into labor. What a loss to the community!

Melinda Corey

Albion, Maine (formerly Rockport, MA)

(From a letter sent to Suzie)

I wanted to write to express my deepest love and thankfulness to you for your part in bringing my favorite little buddy safely into this world. We were patients of yours last year. You gave us nothing but love and support through our 9 ¼ month journey together. Just wanted to thank you again for being our amazing midwife. Your care was wonderful.

Karen Conant



Susan and two Weisskoff babies, Zoe and Leo, at a Birth Center anniversary party, 2005

Susan caught my second and third children, Zoe and Leo Weisskoff. Zoe's birth was wondrous—could not have been more perfect! Susan was quietly supportive of whatever I wanted to do, or ended up doing, which meant that I was squatting/half standing on the bed, hanging on my husband, howling, when Zoe flew out.

When I was pregnant with Leo, I asked if she would be willing or able to come in for his birth, since she had caught Zoe. She said she would if she could, and wrote down in my chart to call her. I understood how special she was that she would consider doing this. On the day of his birth, when I arrived at the Birth Center, I reminded them to check my chart for her note. Linda Anne looked, called Susan, and reported back to me that though she was supposed to be seeing patients in Lynn that day, "Susan can come in for a while." My husband Robert and my doula Jane swear that they watched me process "Susan can come in for a while." Shortly after, Susan arrived. I then went from 2 cm to 10 cm in a very intense hour and a half and pushed Leo out in two pushes. I was squatting on the floor, crouched between my husband's knees. I have no idea how Susan got down there to catch him, but it didn't faze her. Then all too soon she had to leave, but at least I had gotten that baby out while she was there!

At my 6-week visit I gave her a small sculpture of a squatting birthing woman, and she said, "That's you!" I saw it on her shelf on subsequent visits; if you've seen it, know that it represents a birthing woman who has found a safe and sacred space to bring her baby into the world, under Susan's watchful care. I'm sorry that the oddities of our healthcare system didn't allow me to see her more often. She will always hold a special place in my heart, and I am sure that is true for the countless women and families whose lives she touched. She had the rare gift of making people feel totally at ease; what more could a woman want from the person who cares for her during one of life's most significant passages?

Ann Marie Lindquist

Mother to Sophie, Zoe, and Leo Weisskoff

(From a letter sent to Suzie)

For you, you were probably just doing your job - something that seems to come so naturally to you AND that you were very good at. For us, you made me feel so comfortable and at ease...you helped create a beautiful, warm and joyful beginning for both my children's lives and our life as a family. I love your outlook and your incredible positive energy that just fills the room when you are there!

Karen Burnett

Even though I only knew Suzie from my having my three daughters with the North Shore Birth Center, she certainly made an impression on me and I've never forgotten her (though it's been 13 years since I was pregnant with my last child). I didn't even know people called her Suzie - I always knew of her as Susan! She was of course so warm, never judgmental, and of course focused on her patients/clients, and didn't toot her own horn.

Anne-Seymour St. John

When Jeff and I were first engaged to be married, a five-year-old friend asked me, "Are you and Jeff going to have babies?"

"I hope so," I told her.

"How will you have babies?" she asked.

I paused, wanting to be sure I got this right. "What do you mean?" I asked.

"You know," she explained, "Some people have them in the hospital...or at their house..."

With relief, I told her, "Jeff's mother is a midwife, which means she helps women have their babies. So I hope she'll help me."

Years later, Suzie and I were both very glad that this plan came to pass. I received care at the Cambridge Birth Center from Suzie's friend and sister midwife Ellen Lapowsky (who had been present at the births of Jeff and Rose!) Five days after my due date, it was apparent that this was The Day. Jeff, Suzie and I drove in to the birth center. When the midwife examined me and announced I was almost ready to deliver, I staggered into the hall to tell Suzie the good news. Although she herself was exhausted and pained from her illness at that point, I remember the joy and excitement on her face.

We went upstairs, and Ellen Lapowsky came in (although it was her day off). With Jeff, Suzie, and Ellen assisting, I got into the tub and Suzie began talking me through the process. She knelt by the tub, coaching me to push "long and strong, long and strong, good good good good, you're doing so well!" It wasn't long before Lily, Suzie's first grandchild, slid into the world and Suzie lifted her into my arms. While Jeff and I snuggled with our new daughter, Suzie cut the cord.

I'm so grateful that the timing worked out the way it did, though I wish Suzie and Lily had more time to spend together. Over the last year, Suzie often looked down from the sofa (which was her command center during her illness) to where Lily was playing on the rug. "Aren't you just the best?" she would ask Lily.

Julia Wise (Suzie's daughter-in-law)



With granddaughter Lily, 2104

(From a letter sent to Suzie)

I can't imagine any words that could possibly express how thankful I am for the incredible birth experience you helped me receive. Life for you goes on and you continue on, helping other women build wonderful memories, but that day for me remains somewhat frozen in time. I look back on it and treasure how intimate it was and how you made me feel so special like I was your only concern at that point. When my baby came into the world, it was a precious moment that required only love and bonding and had little to do with medical attention. Having been to a hospital birth since then, I appreciate my experience even more. I will always remember the peach sheets, the calm atmosphere with dim lights, the welcome feeling, your excitement. I'll remember it all and be forever grateful to you for sharing it with me.

Marriah Morrison



With Barbara Howard, Jonathan Kaufman, and a brand-new Molly Kaufman in 1992.

From the Boston Globe

Susan Thomforde, 58; delivered more than 1,300 babies

By Kathleen McKenna GLOBE CORRESPONDENT FEBRUARY 06, 2015

Born in Tehran and raised in Rome, Susan Thomforde settled in Greater Boston and became a nurse-midwife who helped bring more than 1,300 babies into the world during a 30-year career at area hospitals and birthing centers.

Colleagues thought of her as a “midwives’ midwife,” said Eva Wax, who worked with Ms. Thomforde in North Shore Birth Center at Beverly Hospital.

“Every midwife who ever had a baby wanted to have Susan there,” she said. “And we all wanted to be the kind of midwife she was. She had this calm confidence, a real peace about her, and she was always quiet and encouraging in such a lovely way.”

In March, Ms. Thomforde assisted at what was her last childbirth before retiring because of illness. The baby, Lily Kaufman Wise, was her first grandchild.

Known to all as Suzie, Ms. Thomforde died of ovarian cancer Jan. 18 in her Medford home. She was 58.

Along with delivering babies, nurse-midwives provide prenatal, post-partum, and gynecological care. Ms. Thomforde also taught and gave lectures to nursing students at Tufts University and other schools.

She coauthored “The Complete Illustrated Birthing Companion: A Step-by-Step Guide to Creating the Best Birthing Plan for a Safe, Less Painful, and Successful Delivery for You and Your Baby,” published in 2013 by Fair Winds Press.

Working 12-hour shifts, Ms. Thomforde was often on call and headed to the delivery room when a patient went into labor, said her daughter Alice Williams Kaufman of Medford, a medical student at Tufts.

“That meant we couldn’t go too far,” Alice said. “So she might pack us a picnic lunch and we’d take it somewhere between home and work.”

Ms. Thomforde’s children were always expected to help out at home, though she did not assign specific tasks, Alice recalled.

“She’d say, ‘I don’t want you to have chores. I think it’s more important for you to grow up to be people who are helpful in general,’ ” Alice said. “She loved her family, and she loved having a family that would help each other out without being asked.”

The youngest of five children, Susan Louise Thomforde was born into a family of caregivers. Her father, Philip, was a relief worker for the United Nations when he met her mother, the former Winifred Hemingway. A cousin of Ernest Hemingway and the daughter of missionary workers in China, Winifred served as Philip’s translator.

Ms. Thomforde was born in Iran in 1956 when her father was working for the UN organization UNESCO. When she was 3, her family moved to Rome, where her father worked with the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization.

She attended the American Overseas School of Rome and then moved to the United States to enroll at Earlham College in Richmond, Ind. After graduating in 1977 with a combined degree in biology and psychology she completed a one-year accelerated nursing program at St. Louis University.

Degrees in hand, Ms. Thomforde moved to Boston, where she worked as a labor nurse at Malden Hospital and Boston City Hospital.

In 1979, she was introduced to Richard Kaufman by mutual friends. They married in 1981 and moved soon after to Salt Lake City where Ms. Thomforde, who used her husband’s surname as her middle name, graduated from the University of Utah in 1984 with a master’s in nurse-midwifery.

The couple then returned to the East Coast. Their three children were born in Randolph and the family eventually settled in Medford. She worked for St. Margaret’s Hospital for Women in Boston and the Center for Women’s Health at Quincy Hospital before joining the staff at the North Shore Birth Center at Beverly Hospital.

Barbara Howard of Newton, whose three children were delivered by Ms. Thomforde, said her longtime friend brought common sense and comfort into the delivery room.

Although “people associate midwives with no intervention, no drugs” during childbirth, Howard said, “Suzie was not like that at all.” Howard recalled that when one of her babies was stuck in the birth canal, Ms. Thomforde reacted by administering “a very nice epidural, just enough so we got through it.”

Wax said that when the situation called for it, Ms. Thomforde moved patients from the birthing center to the nearby hospital “without drama, and without pausing. You always knew you were in good hands with Suzie.”

Ms. Thomforde's husband, Rick, a social worker, said she was "very warm and loving" and that she "always liked to be busy."

An expert knitter, Ms. Thomforde was famous among friends and relatives for the many pairs of socks she stitched. After her death, recipients of her colorful creations posted photos on social media websites showing the socks.

"She probably made me eight or 10 sweaters," her husband said. "She was always knitting, or cleaning, or fixing something. When we went to somebody's house for dinner, she always ended up doing the dishes."

Ms. Thomforde also spoke French and Italian, and enjoyed traveling to Tuscany, where her family has a home. An avid reader and gardener, she campaigned for President Obama and US Senator Elizabeth Warren, and often attended Quaker worship gatherings at Beacon Hill Friends Meeting.

In addition to her husband, daughter, and granddaughter, Ms. Thomforde leaves another daughter, Rose Hemingway Kaufman, and a son, Jeffrey Thomforde Kaufman, both of Medford; three brothers, Charlie of Yardley, Pa., David of Whittier, Calif., and Hugh of Pleasant Hill, Tenn.; and a sister, Anne Thomforde Thomas of Philadelphia.

A spring service will be announced.

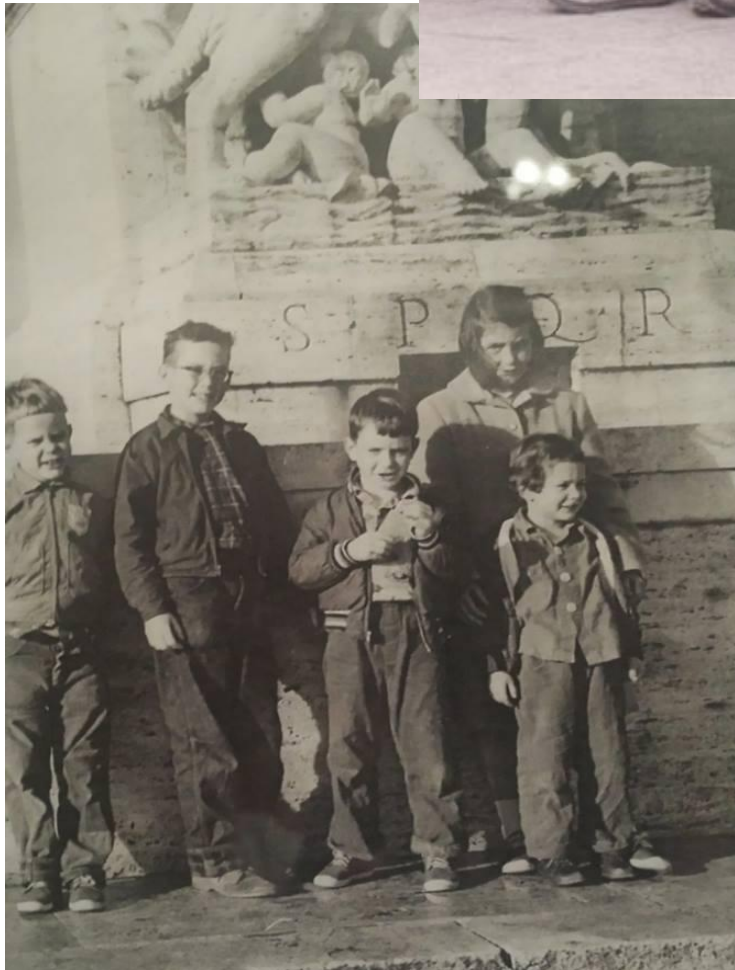
"As midwives, we're all teachers and therapists in a way," Wax said. "Suzie was certainly a teacher to me. She was such a unique and extraordinary person. We'll miss her forever."



at the beach, 1960



Charlie, Davy, Suzie, Hugh,
Anne in Iranian clothing



Davy, Charlie, Hugh, Anne, and Suzie in Rome



1969, in Gibraltar?



Graduating from nursing school at St. Louis University. Her caption on this photo in the photo album reads, "The hats were outmoded even then."



in Gubbio, Italy with Phil and Rick, 1981

marrying Rick, 1981





with newborn
Jeff, 1986



with newborn
Rose, 1987



with newborn
Alice, 1990



with Rose and niece Susanna, 1989



Plaza della Rotunda with Jeff and Rose, 1989



Suzie, Rick,
Alice, Rose, Jeff in 1992



with Alice, 1992



with Winnie in Bluemont



with Rick in Cortona, 1998



at Jeff and Julia's wedding, 2009



in Marion with Rick, 2013

#suziesocks

My first (indirect) encounter with Suzie was through her knitting. I had recently met her son, Jeff, and was very interested in knowing more about him. At a singing party on a snowy night, he took off his rubber boots to reveal warm hand-knit socks on his feet. I thought, “Someone who loves him made him those socks. It’s probably either his mother or his girlfriend.” Luckily for me, it was his mother!

It was the first of many pairs of Suzie socks I would encounter. She made as many as two dozen pairs some Christmases, which my reckoning is a sock a week. She also knit sweaters, vests, and the warmest double-layer mittens anybody has ever worn. All this and mending them once they had been well loved!

Many of the early socks had striped designs, but in later years Suzie began making fancier designs with stars, animals, and plants. Some socks had special icons for the wearer—fish for her brother the ichthyologist, and bicycles for cycling enthusiasts!

Julia Wise

