

For Nancy Woods

On Her Funeral the Day Before Mother's Day, 1993

We flip slowly through these brown pictures of you,
 young like me--- even younger,
other children of your family scattered about you
 like tumble-down stones of some
 mud-mortared chimney
 searching across years
for a house to warm.

The friend you bore me
 to meet at fourteen and
 grow to love in our dorm-rooms at college
points, "This is so-n-so; this is Uncle so-n-so; this is Mom..."
I'm sure I won't remember all the
 family names I've heard and linked to faces
 this weekend,
but on this day before Mother's Day
 I'll remember you who gave birth to two boys,
 but raised a ring of children,
 piling us--- friends of your labored-for children---
 around yourself,
inviting us to listen to your laugh, rusty as a
familiar tin cup beside
 the spring of your humor--- your
 gentle wisdom.

You have connected us with your voice,
 making occasions to call or write,
 birthdays and births;
you have lashed a sturdy cord around each one
and pulled it taut to draw us close
 and hold us firm,
and still you held, sure as a mother's hands,
when you fell suddenly
 and we have come together here, pulled by
 the weight of your love.

Look at this monument of love---
 these faces gathered around you
 more lasting than granite,
 your sons, the cornerstones:
We dip the cup here
 where your laughter pools deep, and we
 remember.