

## Reunion 2009

The following poem, "Lessons" was written for and recited at the 50<sup>th</sup> Reunion of the SJC Class of 1959 by its author, Patricia Horn O'Brien.

### Lessons

Speech was not an elective.  
Notwithstanding that, we sat  
mute in our seats, Mr. Water's ablutions  
pouring over our uncertain selves.

Never mind, he said, that you know no one  
and days unfold in a whirl of unknown  
corridors and unfamiliar rooms. Never mind  
winter seems to be coming so soon.

Never mind you all are strangers. Before you can say  
it had been your intention, one day you'll hear  
a laugh down your dormitory hall and you will  
know whose laugh it is. One day you'll hear

Footsteps behind you on the stairs and know  
whose feet tap just that way on stairs. You'll know  
her shoes and how she keeps a pack of Winston's  
in her blazer pocket. How well she plays bridge.

You'll know she's been homesick and how she  
writes home more than once a week. From the end  
of the "A" you'll spy a dot on the horizon and know  
with certainty her name. Her major. Her way

With a hockey stick. But we never thought  
we'd know these row-upon-row of faces,  
so different and yet so like our own: women  
just beginning. How could we know anything

But what we brought: our own history.  
Our fears. Our dreams. How could we know  
what true friendship means. Or how friends  
turn into family. But winters' lessons at last



Brought it all home: we learned to know  
one another as directly as we began to know  
ourselves, our reflections in the mirror somehow  
now reflections of our friends as well.

Fifty years have passed since that day in June  
we said *Goodbye!* By now there's barely a lesson  
life hasn't given us to learn. And now, one more:  
how to  
live with silence where friends' voices used to ring.

But even where the silence reminds us of our loss,  
we remember our four years together, sometimes as if  
just yesterday we were headed for the Pines,  
sometimes,  
as if a dream, with its echoes of laughter. Of voices  
in the hall.

--Patricia Horn O'Brien '59