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### Letter from Jill Makagon to Ann Hopkins, May 26, 1993

Jill Makagon

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May 26 93

Dear Hoppy,

Perhaps you think me unforgivably rude for not having returned your call a month ago. I didn't want to call you because I was so busy, with end of semester papers (in the last week of the semester I had over 100 papers to read!), final exams, final grades, etc., that I knew trying to coordinate a call would be difficult. Every minute I was awake, and I was awake most mornings by 3:30 or 4:00, I was reading papers, or so it seemed. The day after I turned in my final grades I flew to Birmingham to visit my mother and step-father, and to participate in the surprise 80th b'day celebration (her b'day is not actually until July) my sister and I had planned for her. The celebration was a great success. My mother was, in fact, completely taken by surprise, and her long-term B'ham friends thrilled that we had managed to keep the event a secret. I met my niece's fiance for the first time (they are planning a wedding in Nov.) and saw my nephew and his wife, my sister and her husband, my mother and Alex, for the first time since Oct. 91, when we all gathered in Cleveland for my nephew's wedding. I missed Jael and Holly and Jim but they did just fine, as I knew they would, without me.

And so, I did not respond to your call. I was not in a very good frame of mind. Call it overtired. Call it depressed. Call it what you will, not good excuses. Just reasons. I wouldn't have known what to say. Our situation is really quite straightforward. We are financially stretched. We are broke. At age 50, I am virtually broke. Yes, I am making more money than ever, and yet cannot keep up with expenses. Ironies abound. If we were in the US we might not have to pay \$1150 a month for a 2 bedroom, 2 bathroom apt. Nor, perhaps, would we have to pay private school fees. Most public schools, certainly those in the district we live in, in Hawaii are notoriously poor. But here we are. Why are we here? Because I got a job here. I didn't get a job on the mainland though I applied to enough places. I consider myself very fortunate to have gotten a job at all. I lectured for a year, last summer was not paid, except for a summer school class I taught, a position unexpectedly opened up because a full-time instructor resigned due to ill health, I applied, and I got the only available full-time position, teaching 5 composition classes. The job is very demanding. Teaching 5 classes and participating in and chairing or co-chairing various committees, plus trying to write a book with 2 colleagues (given no release time to do so because of budget "crunches"), and having to be observed 4 times a year by colleagues and superiors, not to mention conferencing with students, plus all the other expectations placed on community college instructors at least at this institution all mean that, as you well know, one is a little busy.

In addition, being a mother of 2 young children, doing most of the shopping, cooking, chauffering, cleaning, laundering, etc. Well, not much time to think about what is going on. The fact that my husband works very hard--he is a realtor here, in a flat market--and has many excellent ideas for projects does

not necessarily mean that he is bringing in a salary. We have been living on my salary and have had help from my mother--without which we would surely have been out on the streets living in a tent. Or in the U.S., someplace where neither of us had jobs. It's complicated. Why? Our children are great. They see their friends at their respective schools who have large homes, and many comforts. We live in a small apt., they share a room, our son sleeps on a futon on the floor. None of this bothers us or them particularly, and as Jim often points out when I say the apt. is too small, most people in the world would be ecstatic to live where we do (and I agree), we are aware that Jael would like nothing more than to have a dog and that Holly would dearly love to have a cat or a rabbit, or any furry creature really. And we simply can't do that. We do have a mouse, but though he is very nice he doesn't quite fit the bill. We are aware that we both work hard and have little to show for it. Our car is 11 years old, and rusting away and we are in no position to buy a new one. Not that we care much about cars, but we know it will give out, and then?

The reason why Jim is not earning a monthly salary has to do, of course, with the nature of his job. He has sold one house in a year. He has prospects, yes, but a house that was in escrow just fell out of escrow, just bad luck for us, not for the prospective buyer, and there is no guarantee that the prospects he does presently have will materialize though of course we hope they will. This drives my mother crazy. A man must support his family, no? Should he find a menial job, if he can't find a decent paying job? Perhaps. He applied for several positions that he was probably overqualified for. Nothing. He will look again. What does a 50 year old former teacher, media consultant who was doing very well in Samoa, producing annual reports for the Am.Samoa gov't and the Am Samoa power authority, writing speeches for the gov., producing all sorts of planning publications for the Land Grant, do when people want to hire younger men? People who have made a decision to stay put, and most of our friends fall into that category, are looking forward to nice retirement plans, and are comfortable. We took a risk, moved to Samoa, to find a good place to raise Jael, and later Holly. We found a fine place. Perhaps we stayed too long. The children miss it. I miss having a cleaning woman come once a week, paying \$100 a month rent, and having help and support for the children when I wanted and needed it. I have no support system here. But Jael and Holly are in good schools. Holly can pursue her ballet interests and perform in the Nutcracker and delight in the experience. Jael can be on a track team and discover he has a beautiful voice and participate in his school choir, and take Latin, and play water polo and walk to school. Holly says Honolulu is "boring." Why? Because we live in an apt., she has to be monitored, and she has no real playmates in the apt. (Her only playmate on our hall has a father who was in jail for a year and who has been known to be in possession of firearms so we can't let Holly play in her apt.) She has to be taken here and there whereas in Samoa she was free to run down to her friends' house and not be observed at all times. She still hates wearing shoes! In Samoa the children had close adult friends among the

adults who lived in the building we lived in, and people at the college; here there seems to be an invisible barrier between children and adults. Our kids are used to talking to and doing things with adults. They miss that. We have a few, but not many, friends. Our neighbors are very private and mostly older folks.

What will become of us? I don't know. I truly don't. We will continue to try making it. My mother has very generously offered to pay Jael and Holly's tuition next year, though she is dead against our indulging them (her view) by sending them to private schools when she knows we cannot afford to do so. That will help. Unless Jim starts making more money, we will keep scraping by. I try usually not to think about what might happen. I still dream. (Holly and I want very much to go to Paris and visit Monet's garden.) But I find depression and sometimes panic a more common part of my days than I have ever before experienced. Even when I work hard. That is just a reality. Julie very kindly offered to send me some money. But I do not want to take money from her. I'm sure she is very thrifty, but why should I do that? I may have to. But you know part of why I don't write people or want to talk to people is because I am bothered by my own foolish pride. I don't like being in this situation. I could, yes, pretend I am not. Why don't I? Why do I tell you about my financial difficulties? I think largely because they so infiltrate my life. If it were just Jim and me this would not be a problem. But Holly is only in 2nd grade. Jael in 7th. We have a long way to go, and no way at this point of even considering paying for their college education. They will have to find their own way. Perhaps not, by then. But probably so. I don't indulge them, but I like to be able to do things. They know we are strapped, but not the extent to which we are strapped, thank goodness! They want very badly to move into a house. Damn it. I want to be able to give them at least that. But are they deprived? No, not in some very important ways. Perhaps they are in ways we cannot possibly measure now. Perhaps they were better off in Samoa in a not so great but not so bad school, without all the benefits of the activities they can partake of here. I don't know. Cannot know. Just now. Just yet.

Enough. Basta. This is just be way of explaining why I haven't been quicker to communicate.

I wonder how you are doing. Julie usually keeps me posted, though summarily to be sure. When you have a chance, call me again. Or perhaps once I know you've received this letter, I'll try calling you. I didn't want to have to talk about any of this stuff I've mentioned in the letter on the phone. Too tedious. Too difficult.

I **would** like to know how you and your children are. Do you see anyone from Hollins? Do you have any plans to visit Julie this summer? Do you have any sense of how she is doing? Pru Grand, whose mother, ironically (!) once had an affair with Jim's uncle, and whom I have met on the Vineyard from time to time, filled me in on the events of the 25th Hollins reunion. She told me that she had a great time, but she did mention that in her converstions with Julie Julie had been very "negative." I

visited Julie briefly the summer of 90 and didn't find her negative at all, on the contrary. I don't know quite what Pru's reaction means.

I am in my office, and can be reached here (734-9180), probably most mornings, next week except for Friday, when Holly is out of school early. I have a lot of preparatory work to do for the fall, and I am enrolled in a Literature Institute--for which I have to read books and do some writing. I plan to try to be with Jael and Holly as much as possible in the two weeks they have off, before they attend summer school. What I'd love to have done this summer is to skip school altogether and instead take off for the Vineyard and do nothing but eat lots of pasta and pesto and see family and friends. Get our little yellow VW back in shape and toot around visiting people. Perhaps next summer.

Take good care of yourself, and do call or write when you can. And I am sorry about this harangue.

Love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Julie". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.