



What have you left undone,
unspoken, stuffed inside a drawer?

Who was he
those last two years
after his wife died at age 89?
Did he stroll around the block
without her holding his hand
linked arm in arm?
Did he wake at 8:30
go downstairs to the community room
drink coffee with the guys?
Were any of the guys still alive?
Each time I called, another death.

All that was left was furniture
clothes with stains
kitchen ware
a year's supply of toilet paper
a brush and comb
a ring lost behind a dresser
Zane Gray paperbacks
An embroidered sampler
waiting at the bottom of her sewing basket,
beautifully folded and wrapped in paper
bright with names
from a young woman's first job.
When was the last time she looked at it,
remembered her youth
Before she married, had children, owned a home,
survived the orphanage, the Depression,
two world wars, breast cancer,
and adultery?
"Water under the bridge"
The bravery of her
the audaciousness
"I will leave with the boys"
and only her eighth grade education
They stayed together
for 68 years.

What have you left undone,
unspoken, in boxes collecting dust?
What embroidered cloths
can you not let go of,
recycle, give away,
sell, donate, destroy?
Will you read that book one more time?
Wear your grandmothers' rings?
Host a dinner party for twelve?
Listen to the records and CDs that chronicle your life?
Warm yourself in the quilt
made by your grandmother and mother
shredded by your cat?
And who have you not thanked
for their kindness and patience and joy
for their love of reading and music and art
for their energy and work and thoughtfulness
for phone calls and notes and conversation
for sharing a meal, a movie, a game of cards
for walking in sunshine and rain
listening to rants and reflections
and just sitting together in silence,
just holding your hand?

Who are we when all of our friends are dead,
when all the people who have known us longest
are in graves or ashes or returned to the sea?

Tell me, what have you left undone?



Itoshi

In the documentary "Pets" an older woman uses the word "itoshi" to describe her pet, a cat that gives her much comfort and companionship since her husband's death. She said that English does not have this word. It is more than love, it is gratitude for another's being.