

# ONE BEAUTIFUL LIFE: A SONG FOR JEAN

Emma Langley



Jean and Emma at a climate justice rally organized by the Youth Climate Action Club (including May's and Ziysah's children), across from Peterborough City Hall, 2022

This song is a letter to Jean. I wanted to say, “Thank you” and “I love you.” It is a song of gratitude for a friendship that has profoundly shaped my life. It shares glimpses of memories of this friendship forming. Jean to me felt like a friend, a mentor, a teacher, and a grandparent all at once. The song touches on how generously and vulnerably she shared a reflective process near the end of her life, modelling that listening to oneself is deeply interwoven with listening to others. It is ultimately about the love and power of an ancestor—how her ongoing presence in my life continues to guide me, a beacon. It is about one beautiful life, powerful in its singularity, and almost unfathomable in its reach and connection to so many others.

I am so grateful that I was able to continue to grow my friendship with Jean and to have many more visits and conversations with her after the research project ended. The end of the song jumps ahead several years to one of these visits, which happened at Christmas time, about a year before Jean passed, and shortly after her 100th birthday. It was in sitting with the memory of Jean’s goodbye, “Go and have a beautiful life,” that the idea came to me for the chorus “And one beautiful life / leads me to mine.” Jean had a way of alluding to her mortality every time I saw her, in laughter. This carried a different sentiment—a finality, a grace, and a sending off.

A final note: the song came out in 3/4 time. At first, I wasn’t sure why. One night I was working on it, listening back, and found myself waltzing around the kitchen. Jean always said to find time to dance, even in the kitchen after dinner. And there I was! Thank you, Jean.

I love you.

# One Beautiful Life: A Song for Jean

Sitting with you in the afternoon  
Winter light in your living room  
Time is still as sips of tea  
And your love is a story you wrap around me

You're looking back, you're looking in  
With stillness, at this life you have lived  
Do you know the light you give  
Do you know how you've blessed me and I carry it

And one beautiful life  
Leads me to mine

On our last visit, I was leaving your place  
You knew, and you left me with this parting grace  
You held my face, with tears in your eyes  
You said go and have a beautiful life

And one beautiful life  
Leads me to mine

Listen to Emma's song here!

