

Dear [Author],

Thank you so much for sharing your manuscript, [*Title of Your Book*]. You've created a compelling story with distinct characters, especially [the main character's name]. I've enjoyed reading and thinking deeply about all the story arcs that make up her story.

In crafting this developmental editing response to your book, I've considered traditional story elements (plot, structure, character development, dialogue, narrative voice) as well as your visit to our class. Your reflections on the book's origins and development, your discussion of different characters' motivations, and your overall intentions for the manuscript are front of mind.

One of the aspects you'll find me focusing on throughout the letter is consistency. In my experience, inconsistencies can throw off a reader, sometimes without the reader fully realizing why, and clearing those up can have a disproportionate effect, making a manuscript feel more whole and cohesive and ready for publication. If there's a theme to this letter, it's consistency.

I'd also like to share my age with you, as it's different from that of many of your other letter writers in the class. I'm forty-five, born in 1981, which puts me squarely in one of the age-group audiences you talked about. My parents are around Eileen's age. Hopefully that helps situate some of my feedback.

Speaking of age, I know that was one of your questions: were we interested in reading a story about older people? All I can say is it never occurred to me not to be. Eileen is an interesting character, and her age is important to the story. There has been some discourse, both in larger contexts and in smaller reading circles, about how main character ages are skewing so young these days. Reading a book and finding a protagonist in their thirties can be rare, which speaks to the need for more stories across broader ages and generations. Your voice, and your expertise that you bring to your writing from your years as a therapist, are important.

I hope you find these editing suggestions helpful, and I wish you and your book all the best!

Chrys Buckley

Plot

Plot Overview

I'm going to start by giving a fairly detailed reflection of the plot, so you can see if this matches what you were intending as the highlights and overall skeleton of the story.

In February 1995, sixty-nine-year-old Eileen Bishop takes her husband Bert to treatment for alcohol addiction at the insistence of their daughter, Jennifer. Though Bert pleads for Eileen not to leave him there, she does, feeling it is the best choice for everyone. She goes to spend time with her sister where they sort out their mother's will. When Eileen returns home, she finds urgent messages from the treatment center on her answering machine and discovers that Bert has died during alcohol detox.

Bert's death sets off a chain of events. Eileen's children, Jennifer and Jeffrey, show up and want Eileen to sell her house and move to a retirement home. Eileen wants to stay in her home with her cat, Felix, her two-doors-down neighbor Shirley, and her memories of Bert. However, when she looks through Bert's papers, she finds that her financial situation is a lot worse than she thought. She doesn't know how she can stay in the house but refuses to show that financial anxiety to anyone.

After the funeral when everyone has gone home, having not convinced her to sell her house, Eileen deals with her grief and her uncertain future. She continues to struggle with her sister, Mitzi, over aspects of their mother's estate, leans on Shirley, reminisces about her past with Bert, and drinks. Throughout the story, we see Eileen drinking quite a bit and justifying her drinking. About halfway through the manuscript, it becomes clear that Shirley is concerned about Eileen's drinking and makes conscious choices to drink less herself around Eileen. Eileen sees Jennifer with a man who isn't her husband, Alex, visits retirement homes with Shirley to check out the possibility, and reunites with a man from her past. All the while, she continues to drink and eat her grief.

When Eileen's granddaughter, Sarah, comes for a visit, something Eileen has wanted since the beginning of the book, things go awry. Eileen and Sarah go over to Shirley's and Shirley serves herself and Eileen non-alcoholic wine. Eileen has to go pick up meds since she left hers at Mitzi's but stops at the liquor store first. She buys two mini-bottles of brandy and drinks both in the parking lot. Then she gets in a fender-bender. The cop that approaches her turns out to be one of Jeffrey's friends from childhood. All the while, Eileen blames everyone else, especially Shirley and her non-alcoholic wine.

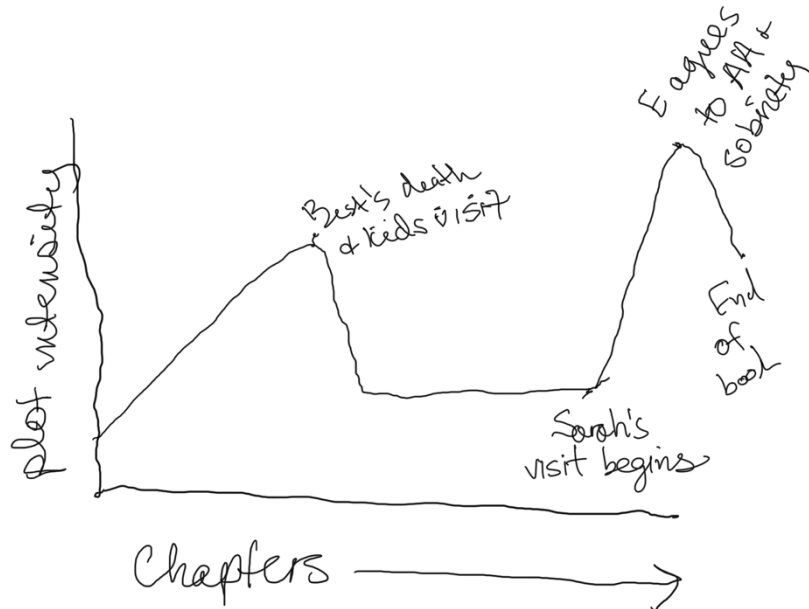
In the fallout from the car accident, with the intervention of Jeffrey's friend, Eileen is forced to confront her own drinking. She is very resistant at first, doing the bare minimum required, but she eventually comes around. She also tells Jeffrey about her financial precarity, and he helps her sort things out: she will move in with Shirley, and later Jennifer will buy Eileen's house. Eileen reflects on the good parts of her life with Bert and appreciates pieces of him she had forgotten, like his green thumb for gardening, and comes to a place of peace with him.

Plot Structure

A lot of the plot is clustered around the beginning (mid-Feb 1995, centered on Bert's death) and around Sarah's visit and the car accident around mid-August. Those sequences get several chapters in a row, and the chapters follow each other closely in time. These sections, chapter 1-9 surrounding Bert's arrival at treatment, death, and funeral, and chapters 21-28 focusing on Sarah's visit and the fallout from the

fender-bender, feel like they get a closer, dilated, almost protracted focus while the plot in between these sections and at the very end reads as more distant and loosely held.

It makes sense for situations with high intensity to get more focus, especially the death of a loved one that's complicated by contradictory emotions about the person who's died and feelings of self-blame. But the unevenness in focus makes the plot feel uneven, too. Instead of a straightforward plot structure of overall rising action to a climax and denouement, the plot intensity is bimodal. Below, I've hand-drawn how the plot structure currently reads. (Please excuse my horrible drawing skills.)



Underscoring the unevenness in the plot structure is a deeper tension: The manuscript has an internal tug-of-war going on about whether this is primarily a story of grief over the death of a loved one that is complicated by alcohol use (of both people), or if this is primarily a story about alcohol addiction and recovery with the death of a spouse as the catalyst.

From your email to Katie, as well as your talk with our class, I sense that the latter is more in line with your ultimate intentions for the novel, that this is Eileen's story of going from a bitter, judgmental predisposition, hardened by her years of marriage to an active alcoholic and her own drinking problem, to personal redemption and change for the better. Because this feels like your clear preference, I'm tailoring my plot structure advice to that story arc.

Here are some ways to strengthen the plot structure and align it more clearly with an arc of Eileen's personal development and redemption:

- Establish Eileen's normal life at the beginning of the book. The vast majority of the novel takes place in Eileen's regular, everyday existence, in the home she doesn't want to leave with Felix and the sleigh bells on the door and Shirley two houses away. However, we don't get to Eileen's house or to meet Shirley until Chapter 5, and by then these aspects of typical life are already upended by the news on the answering machine.

- Perhaps instead of opening on the train ride to Pendleton, you could open with a chapter set at Bert and Eileen's home before they leave. That way, we could still see the Bert and Eileen dynamic, and Shirley could be there as a friend so that she's introduced earlier and we could get more of her dynamic with Eileen right out of the gate. An added benefit of this approach would be that because we've spent some time with Eileen (and others) in her beloved house, the reader will feel more attached to it and have a more visceral understanding of Eileen's desire to keep it and the affront of her children trying to sell it out from under her.
- Condense the rest of the Bert storyline. If you start with an "at home" chapter that still showcases how Bert and Eileen interact and the anticipation of Bert's treatment, you could cut most of the train chapter – what might be more powerful is to end this new first chapter with a scene of Eileen on the train, aligned with how the story came to you and the first image you had of Eileen, so it serves as a powerful "button" at the end of the first chapter - and go directly to dropping Bert off at treatment. Another thing you could do to condense this section is combine chapters 3 and 4, which both take place at Mitzi's, into just one chapter.
- In the chapter where Eileen drops Bert off at treatment, bring the part about them asking Eileen to stay for family programming, and Eileen's refusal and her thoughts about why she refuses, into the scene. As it is now, we learn about it in the next chapter as Eileen complains to Mitzi, and it would be more powerful for the reader to see the scene play out. This is a crucial moment, the first inkling that Eileen has her own drinking problem and rationalizations for it.
- Similarly, the chapters following Bert's death could also be condensed—for example, you could combine the chapter of the kids' visit where they try to talk Eileen into selling the house with the chapter of the funeral and the chapter of the after-funeral chat with Shirley into one chapter—so that the beginning has story arc momentum but doesn't get quite so lost in the Bert of it all and focuses more squarely on Eileen and her disposition and dilemmas.
- Move Sarah's visit to earlier in the book, perhaps around the midway point. To do this, you could cut or condense some of the intervening chapters, especially if they don't amp up the story's momentum.
 - The characters at the quilting group never recur, so that chapter could be cut, or its most important elements – like how clearly Eileen's judgmental nature comes through here - could be moved to another chapter and happen just between Eileen and Shirley.
 - The subplot with Charlie, too, feels out of left field, to the point that in later chapters Charlie feels like an extraneous mention. That storyline could be cut entirely or perhaps hinted at toward the end to hint at a potential happier future for Eileen. Or, alternately, the Charlie subplot could be developed more consistently and directly interact with Eileen's alcoholism and her angry, bitter disposition and have its own arc.
- Expand the ending section. If Sarah's visit and Eileen's fender bender are moved to the midpoint of the book, there will be more room to explore Eileen's recovery. As it is now, it feels a bit rushed: Eileen has the accident, is forced into treatment, discloses her financial situation and anxiety to Jeffrey, she suggests she live with Shirley, and then suddenly everything is fixed for Eileen with her drinking and everyone in her life.
 - For awhile after the accident, she is still in denial and blaming others, especially Shirley. This feels realistic and important, and like it needs more room to breathe in the story. You could dig into this more, especially with your counseling experience.

- Could you add a clear turning point for Eileen after the accident, where she stops fighting the treatment, relinquishes her denial, realizes she is an alcoholic and that Bert being a heavier drinker doesn't mean she doesn't have her own problem, and commits to sobriety?
- Give us more of what that recovery journey looks like for Eileen, including the hard parts. Show her working on her relationships with the loved ones in her life. These things take work to repair, and it would add to the believability of the ending to see some of that develop.
- Make some of the ending a bit less tidy. It does now have a feeling of "suddenly, everything was fixed" in a way that doesn't ring realistic. It might read as more earned and believable and contribute better to the feeling you want to leave readers with that change is possible if some of the change is hinted at more than achieved.

Scene and Aftermath

One recurring issue I wanted to draw your attention to is that often in the aftermath of a scene, we will learn about something that happened or was said in a scene but that was never shown. This can be a bit disorienting for the reader, leaving them wondering if they missed or misremembered something, and can make the plot feel disjointed. Putting these details that are revealed in aftermaths into the scenes themselves will read smoother and contribute to rising tension.

Here are a couple of examples:

- In Chapter 5, after learning of Bert's death, Eileen remembers specific words from Bert pleading with her not to leave him at treatment center that weren't in the dialogue of that scene, but this could be part of the scene in chapter 2, and would feel more immediate there and then would have more emotional resonance later when Eileen is thinking back on the scene.
- Similarly, after we see Bert's letter and putting it down as if she has reached the end, later in the same scene Eileen refers to parts of it that were never on the page.
- In the chapter after Jennifer's visit, we learn after the fact about tense words exchanged between Jennifer and Eileen that occurred as Jennifer was leaving. It would heighten the tension if the reader saw and experienced those tense words in scene instead of reading about them later.
- We don't know there was family programming at the treatment center that Eileen rejected until Eileen tells Mitzi about it after she has left. The dynamic of her turning down family programming, and her justifications for it, would hit so much harder in scene.
- After the accident, in the "Surprise Visit" chapter, it's not revealed until six pages in that Sarah is no longer there. In passing it's revealed that Eileen took Sarah back on the train and had a quick, tense drop off in Hood River. This could have been its own chapter that explored the Eileen, Sarah, and Jennifer dynamic post-fender-bender! Additionally, a few chapters later, in "The Letter," it says that Jennifer picked up Sarah unexpectedly on her way home from Salem. Either way could work, but right now the two versions of how Sarah's visit to Eileen ended contradict each other. Whichever you go with, having it play out in scene could be so powerful.

These are some of the bigger examples that dissipate the mounting tension by being mentioned or reflected on in the aftermath rather than shown in the moment they happen, and there are also smaller

moments of this same tendency. I suggest doing a read-through of your manuscript with an eye for this specific tendency, and each time you come across something that happens in a scene but is revealed later with Eileen thinking back on it, consider putting the words or events or revelations into the scene where they happen.

Character

Eileen's Arc

When we first meet Eileen, she's carrying a lot of resentment over Bert's drinking and how it has impacted her life, especially her relationship with her grandchildren. As time goes on, we learn that she is judgmental about just about everyone and everything, like it has become a habit, and there is a real undercurrent of bitterness. Eileen has tense relationships with everyone in her family except Sarah, and even that gets tested when Sarah goes the least bit outside of Eileen's picture of her as perfect. Eileen is in serious denial about her own alcohol use, and her modus operandi is rationalization for all her choices. After the fender-bender, some heartfelt conversations with her son and her best friend, and going to some AA meetings, Eileen has moments of piercing through her rationalizations and being honest with herself and her loved ones.

Because so much of the plot is about Eileen's relationships and her inner turmoil, the same bimodal graph of the plot also applies to Eileen's character arc. There are several chapters between Bert's death and Sarah's visit where we get a lot of Eileen being judgmental about everyone around her, especially women's appearances, whether it's her sister or a friend or a waitress she's never met before. These chapters also have several instances of Eileen justifying her drinking or her food choices. It can feel a bit one-note because not much is changing or developing during this stretch of chapters.

So in many ways, my plot suggestions are also character suggestions. If you can condense or cut some of the chapters in the first half of the book to get to the fender-bender sooner, the reader will still get Eileen's sense of stuckness and will also get to the first inklings of change quicker.

Similarly, that will leave more room for Eileen to develop a bit. What is Eileen's emotional rock bottom? What gets her to accept that she's an alcoholic and that she needs to change? In the last handful of chapters, there are glimpses of acceptance, and it feels real that they're interspersed with her going back to denial, but eventually it has to feel that she is solidly in a different place emotionally from where she began, that more than just the living situations have changed.

Eileen's relationships with other characters could play into this too. We see some evolution in her relationship with Bert and some reframing of her memories of him. She makes peace with Shirley, but theirs had been a fairly short-lived contention. What about her relationship with Jennifer, which feels the most fraught of all? Consider adding scenes toward the end that show the evolution of that relationship. These should not be tidy – at the moment, the ending with Jennifer feels too neatly tied up in a bow by Jennifer buying the house – as these two have had a difficult relationship for decades, but there should be hints that things are changing, even if the hints are small.

Mitzi as well, who features prominently in the first half. Eileen does seem to appreciate her more as time goes on, and there is a shift to their sister relationship that felt so calcified at the beginning. Could you bring Mitzi into the final stretch of chapters, perhaps have Eileen and Mitzi reach a détente over their mother's will and possessions? Nothing over the top or that could read as insincere, but something that lends a touch of hope.

Bert's Characterization

Bert is an interesting character in that he's hardly present on the page because he dies so early in the story, but other characters have such strong and conflicting views of him. This can make Bert a confounding person, and my advice here will focus on clarifying Bert on the page.

In your visit to our class, you talked about all the different dynamics around one person's drinking and how they can ripple through a family. I loved hearing that because it was meaty and complex and insightful, and this aspect could be explored more thoroughly in the book.

As it stands now, as a reader I don't feel like I get a good sense of what Bert was like when he drank and how that affected the rest of the family, but Bert's drinking underscores everything in the story. From Eileen, we mostly get internal reflections along the lines of "poor, sweet Bert" and she chastises herself for being hard on him. Especially after he dies, he is often portrayed as sympathetic, quiet, very loving to Eileen, and a sad, tragic story. Jennifer's diary is full of vitriol that doesn't quite comport with a sweet, sad Bert. Jennifer resents Eileen for not protecting her from Bert, but it's unclear what she needed protecting from: was it from feeling rejected by her father when he shut himself away in the study? There are a few references to Unpredictable Bert, but it's said that he never yelled, wasn't physical, didn't lay a hand on anyone, and seems to have just been quite and sad, so it's hard to picture what Unpredictable Bert was like.

Consider adding flashbacks that show Bert in the throes of his drinking. There are several musings and reminiscences about Bert throughout. Some of those could be substituted with glimpses into what it was like when both kids were living at home still and Bert was drinking and Eileen was thinking of leaving him, which she references a few times. What was a typical or enigmatic episode from that time period? How did his drinking affect Jennifer so that she wanted to get out so desperately? How did Eileen feel back then? A more current episode or two, from what things were like just before the start of the book could also help contextualize Eileen's frustration with him in the beginning, how fed up she is. A scene of (instead of just references to) what happened the Christmas before last when the kids were there could also give more context to all the family dynamics around Bert's alcohol consumption.

It could be helpful to have some flashbacks to around Bert's DUI and forced retirement as well.

Eileen's relationship with Bert's drinking also could use some more dynamism and deliberate arc. Right now, she's frustrated with him until he dies. After that, she often hits the same notes when she thinks about Bert: He's poor, sad Bert, she should have been easier on him, she shouldn't have left him at treatment after he begged her not to, he was really such a sweet man. This repetitive note about how she remembers Bert undercuts the ending because it doesn't feel like there's been an evolution and the final scene of her talking to Bert doesn't feel that different from previous ruminations on Bert.

It could work better if Eileen's feelings toward Bert lean into her frustration and anger with him. Again, that will help the reader get a sense of Bert's drinking making Eileen's life difficult. If some flashbacks include Eileen yelling at Bert or venting her frustrations, her recriminations will hit home harder. Consider letting it take more time for Eileen to get to her peace with Bert, for her feelings throughout the book before then to be messier and contradictory, for Eileen to struggle with feeling angry with someone who has died. Then the garden scene will feel like a revelation and a coming to peace, and the graveside scene will be a fitting conclusion.

Jennifer

In many ways, Eileen's most challenging relationship is with Jennifer, even though it's Bert who shares the book title with her. The mother-daughter dynamic is complex and could be given more weight and

focus. One way to do that would be to cut, condense, or combine some of the chapters, especially in between Bert's death and Sarah's visit, that don't involve family members. The Charlie chapter and the quilting club chapters have already been suggested in the plot section, and some of the AA and Al-Anon meetings and retirement home visits could also go. They bring in too many people who are never heard from again, and they distract from the family dynamics at the heart of the story.

A bit more development could also happen toward the end of the book. There can be a hint at healing and change in the Eileen-Jennifer dynamic without it being magically resolved. Putting a scene or two on the page about how Jennifer decides to buy Eileen's house and how Eileen reacts to that choice, maybe even a quick scene of Jennifer moving in, would help this relationship feel more fleshed out and evenly distributed in the manuscript.

Quick Notes on Other Characters

- Sarah is eight at the beginning of the book, nine when she visits Eileen in the summer. Yet she reads much younger in her dialogue and her actions and her demeanor. Consider making her six in the beginning, and perhaps seven during the visit.
- Shirley is Eileen's age at the beginning of the book, but around the midway point (Chapter 18 "Independent Living"), she's a decade younger than Eileen.
- Similarly, Mitzi is two years younger than Eileen in the beginning of the book, but then in Chapter 17 "Skamania Lodge," Mitzi is four years younger than Eileen.
- Mitzi is a great character, and she gets lost along the way and is barely present in the latter half of the book. Are there ways you could bring her in? Could Eileen visit her on her way to or from picking up or dropping off Sarah? Could Mitzi visit Portland? Watch out also for inconsistencies in how many marriages she had and what her ex-husband's name were: I found at least five different names, and I think she was only married twice!
- You do such a great job at character description. I could picture everyone so clearly!

Narration and Dialogue

The narrative voice in this manuscript is very much merged with Eileen's voice since this is written in a very close third-person limited Point of View. Eileen's voice in narration feels right in that it matches her character and is consistently aligned with Eileen's state of mind.

Watch out for some brief POV slippages:

- On page 70, it slips into first-person POV for one sentence.
- On page 89 (bottom), the phrase "the warmth felt by Eileen" feels like a POV slip, even though it isn't. This slight disorientation is likely because of the passive voice here used for the main character.
- On page 98, there is another one-sentence slip into first-person POV.
- On page 163, it slips into Shirley's POV briefly.

- On page 229, we're told that a man's name is Joe, but Eileen hasn't met him yet and has no way to know his name, so this too feels like a POV slip. Perhaps he could be wearing a name tag? Or introduce himself to Eileen?

Another narration thing to look out for in revising is repeated phrases. The most salient one is that Eileen says "for Pete's sake" both out loud and internally all the time. It often happens several times a scene, sometimes more than once within a paragraph. Consider deleting about half of these and varying the rest according to Eileen's stress level. Maybe "for Pete's sake" is what she says in the everyday frustrations, and it quickly escalates when things are more tense. Or maybe "for Pete's sake" is what she says aloud while her inner monologue is stormier.

An example of where you fold in a colloquialism really well is Eileen's use of "falderal" – it's sprinkled in here and there, giving Eileen's inner and outer dialogue some flavor and specificity, but it's not overdone.

Setting

Locations

Your use of Portland as a setting is well done and lovely. You incorporated so many classic Portland locations, as well as some from the past where the book is set.

One thing to consider is that some readers won't be as familiar with the Oregon landscape, so won't have a good sense of where Pendleton is or how long the train ride is, or where Hood River is in relation to the other places, or what or where is Skamania Lodge. These could be addressed with quick phrases or sentences to situate each place for the non-PNW readers.

World of AA and Al-Anon

From the first chapter, Al-Anon is a part of Eileen's life. Later, she goes to AA meetings as well as Al-Anon meetings. Because I've known a lot of people in recovery (and probably a bit from being on the older side in my class), I was familiar with these references. But a lot of my classmates weren't. Some were confused and thought Al-Anon was another nickname for AA. This is really helpful information on what potential readers might need explained. Here is a short list of AA and adjacent related terms that would be worthwhile to spend a bit of time explaining for the unfamiliar reader:

- AA – spell out first time
- Al-Anon – how it's different from AA, what its tenets are
- Serenity prayer – you excerpt bits of it in lovely ways, but it is presented as if people will already know it, and some might not
- The Steps of either org
- Qualifier in Al-Anon

Bert's drinking timeline could also be elucidated more clearly. Eileen describes him as a born alcoholic, but at other points it sounds like he didn't start drinking until later in life.

Chronology and Timelines

Tending to the chronology and timeline consistency has the potential to have the biggest impact on clarity and cohesion of this manuscript. Taken individually, any of these are minor, but each one caused some confusion, had me looking back to previous chapters, and contributed to an overall feeling that things were tangled. Timeline inconsistencies then ended up having a disproportionate effect on the manuscript as a whole, which means addressing them should have a similar sized ameliorating effect.

Anachronisms

There were a few anachronisms that jumped off the page, and luckily they're easy to fix!

- The TV shows Eileen mentions wanting to come home and watch – *The Sopranos* and *The West Wing* – both premiered in 1999 so wouldn't have been around in this story set in 1995. Consider substituting these shows with mid-1990s shows. *The X-Files*, maybe? Or the original *Law & Order*?
- At the second retirement home that Eileen and Shirley visit, Rita (who shows them around) asks for an email address. This struck me as off. My family grew up in the suburbs of New Jersey – not far from where *The Sopranos* is set, actually! – and had kids in high school in the '90s, and we didn't get the internet or email addresses until 1997. In 1995, the internet and email were still newfangled things we heard about on morning radio shows, and not yet things that everyone had. It seems unlikely that someone would be asking two older ladies for their emails in 1995. Could she ask for a pager number instead? Eileen and Shirley could react to that.

Timeline Inconsistencies

The biggest timeline inconsistency is Eileen's age and birth year. The story is set in 1995, and it's established early on that Eileen is 69 years old. That means she would have been born in 1926. She is described as having been a child during World War II, but would have been in her mid to late teens. Later she describes losing her virginity on her college graduation day in Bert's '56 Chevy, but it would have been 1948. In the scene where Eileen first visits Bert's grave, she finds her own headstone with just her birth year and it's 1934 but should be 1926.

Similarly, there are discrepancies in how long she and Bert have been together, and how long they have had the house, and what years Mitzi was where and whether the time period (ex. Haight-Ashbury free love days) matches what Mitzi's age would've been at the time.

To help make addressing this a bit simpler, I've put together a list of what year things would have occurred. This way, you can use this list to adjust the manuscript accordingly. Or, if you ever chose to change the time setting of the novel, you could simply add across the list. For example, if you chose to situate the book in 2005 instead of 1995, you could add 10 to every year in the table and still have a guide to your timeline.

In making this timeline, I went off of first established mentions of ages, years, and timeframes. So if the first thing said about Shirley's age is that it's similar to Eileen, that's what's in the table, even though that changes later in the book. How long Bert and Eileen have lived in their house is similarly based off of the first time it's addressed.

I hope this list can serve as a helpful guide.

Timeline List

1926: Eileen is born (if 69 in 1995)

1928: Mitzi is born (2 years younger)

1934-35: Eileen's family lived in a shack for a year

WWII years (not specified): winters in Portland during WWII years - described as if Eileen is very young but she would have been 15 in 1941 and 19 and in college in 1945

1944: Mitzi has abortion in Seattle at 16 (is this realistic given legalities?)

1946: Mitzi graduated high school and married Denny/Chas (extrapolating from it lasting two years and ending around the time Eileen graduated college)

1948: Eileen graduated college, Mitzi's first marriage broke up, Mitzi ran off to San Francisco, parents chased Mitzi and they all missed Eileen's graduation, Eileen lost virginity to Bert in Chevy on graduation day

?: Mitzi gets remarried, wedding in Vegas, Eileen and Bert attend, Eileen stops speaking to Mitzi for a year

1950: Bert and Eileen buy their house on NE 45th in Portland

1956: Jeffrey is born (he is 39 in 1995)

Circa 1970: Eileen and Shirley become friends when Shirley moves in (25 years by 1995)

A few years later (1973ish): Shirley's husband Hank dies

1985: Tommy is born (10 in 1995)

1990: Bert got fired from Allstate for a DUI

Christmas 1993: Bert barricaded himself during Sarah and Tommy's visit

Christmas 1994: Jennifer didn't let Eileen and Bert see the kids, Eileen and Bert spent Christmas alone

Around New Year 1995: Eileen's mother died - Eileen sat with her after a heart attack, not clear how close that was or not to the mother's death

Mid-Feb 1995: **Book begins**, Eileen takes Bert to treatment, spends time at Mitzi's, goes home, gets message Bert has died

March 1995: Funeral

Mid-May 1995: Eileen's trip to visit Mitzi and sort out house ("The Quilt")

August 31, 1995: Eileen's reading about a "man in your future"

Mid-August 1995: Sarah's visit and all that ensues

Coming on Christmas 1995: **End of book**, Eileen talks to Bert at his grave

Quick note: On page 246, Jeffrey says, "This is 1996," but everything else in the book solidifies that it is still 1995.