

Remembrances of Jean Le Mée



June 4th, 1931
—
June 28th, 2020

INTRODUCTION

I think that Jean would not be much in favor of a formal eulogy in his honor. Rather, I'm sure that he would prefer to share with you, his family and friends, some of his own writings that reflect his varied interests and some of the words of others that provided him sources of joy and inspiration.

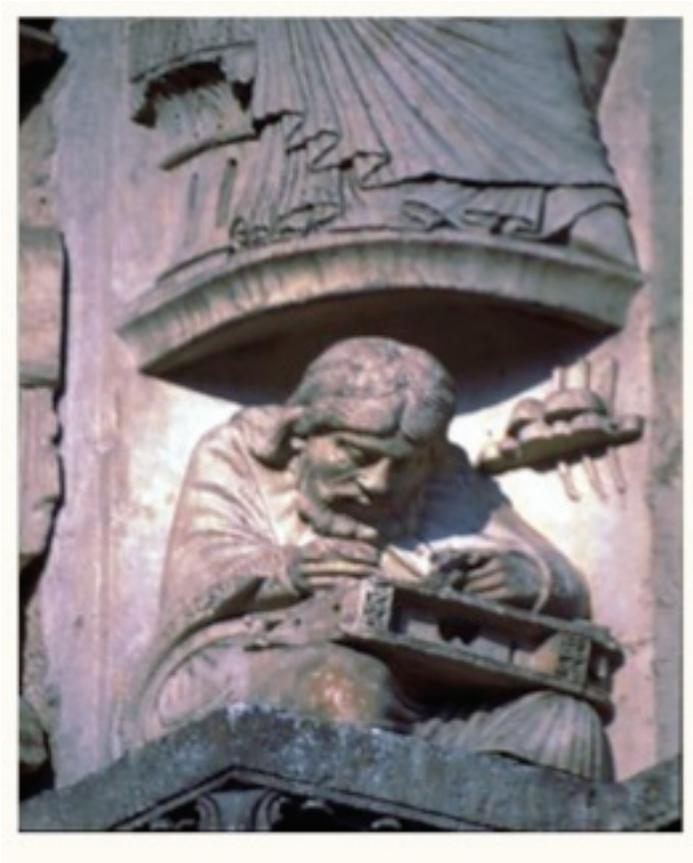
This booklet is dedicated first of all to God, to whom all his studies, projects, and translations, were referred and then to our daughter, Hannah Le Mée O'Connor and our son-in-law, Tommy O'Connor.

Hannah certainly inherits from her father his inquiring mind, his sense of fairness and justice, and his compassion for and desire to help others. Teaching has always been close to her heart almost from the moment she spoke her first word, "book!" She is particularly gifted in working with children having special needs and in speaking with their parents.

Jean was overjoyed that Hannah found in Tommy her ideal life partner. Bright, practical, and capable in many different areas, he has brought to her unswerving devotion, encouragement, stability, and a robust sense of humor, useful in facing the many vicissitudes of life he and Hannah have already gone through together.

One of the last thoughts Jean shared with me was his sure knowledge that "whoever or whatever is alive will never die." He would advise hopeful, attentive, and grateful participation in all of life's fullness.

—*Katharine*



Non nobis Domine,
Sed nomini tuo da gloriam.

*Not to us, O Lord,
But to your name give glory.*

—Psalm 115:1

JEAN'S DIARY ENTRY

Easter Sunday, April 13, 1998

In Church, at St. Paul's, Ten-thirty
service.

At the Offertory
Slightly to the right—by the
Pulpit—

I had this vision—
I heard not the music
But saw the sight:
The Holy Mother
—Full of Grace—

Danced for joy
With the other Marias
In anticipation
Of the Resurrection.
I could not make out the faces.
For they turned their backs to me
As they processed around
From left to right

In a slow sarabandic motion
Of great elegance and dignity
In their sari-like dresses
Which were neither blue, brown nor green
But a combination of all of these
Piquetées as it were
Of faded golden stars and flowers

Then, in front of them appeared
A frame
Giving off its own light
Like a fluffy picture frame
Rectangular and with rounded
Corners

Covered by
A wide band of shining white
Wool

Soft to the eyes and
Lovely to behold
And in it a figure formed
Which I was made to understand
Though I could not clearly see Him
To be
—The Son—

Qui tollis peccata mundi!
Oremus Te
Adoramus Te
And he blessed all
Silently

Qui tollis peccata mundi!
Oremus Te
Adoramus Te
And he blessed all
Silently

Though I saw not any gesture
Nor heard any sound.
As I stood there
And before I could see further
It all came to an end
Holy Mother!
Have Mercy!
Ora pro nobis
Benedicta Tu In mulieribus
Et Benedictus fructus ventris
Tui Jesus
Qui dixit
I AM THE RESURRECTION

BENEDICTINE CONNECTION

A little more than twenty-one years ago, while writing the “Chant” book, I had the miraculous good fortune of meeting Sr. Mary Donald Corcoran, O.S.B., who at that time was Prioress of Transfiguration Monastery in Windsor, New York. Sr. Donald and the other sisters warmly welcomed both Jean and me to their guesthouse and to their Benedictine Way of life.

Sr. Donald became Jean’s intellectual and spiritual companion, able, as she was, of moving with ease through any aspect - religious, philosophical, artistic, or historical - of the Christian Middle Ages. Meanwhile I found myself very drawn to the quiet, unpretentious atmosphere of “work and prayer” and the friendship and stability the monastery was offering to us. In short, we both became Benedictine Oblates, friends of the Order in general but particularly of this special place.

Jean always claimed that he was basically “a man of the twelfth century” but he could easily relate also to the wise Rule of St. Benedict written in the sixth. He greatly admired it for the great saint’s insistence on leading a life of devotion to Christ, simplicity, and, above all, humility.

Here are offered a few lines from this document, very ancient but always fresh and new, especially as translated by Abbot Patrick Barry, our mutual friend whom we had the privilege of meeting in person a number of times, and who demonstrated to us not only the possibility of living a Christ-centered life but also its fruits.

SAINT BENEDICT'S RULE

However late then, it may seem, let us rouse ourselves from lethargy. That is what scripture urges on us when it says: the time has come for us to rouse ourselves from sleep. Let us open our eyes to the light that shows us the way of God. Let our ears be alert to the stirring call of his voice crying to us every day: today, if you should hear his voice, do not harden your heart.

Don't get too involved in purely worldly affairs and count nothing more important than the love you should cherish for Christ. Don't let your actions be governed by anger nor nurse your anger against a future opportunity of indulging it. Don't harbour in your heart any trace of deceit nor pretend to be at peace with another when you are not; don't abandon the true standards of charity. Don't use oaths to make your point for fear of perjury, but speak the truth with integrity of heart and tongue.

Your hope of fulfillment should be centered in God alone. When you see any good in yourself, then, don't take it to be your own, but acknowledge it as a gift from God. On the other hand you may be sure that any evil you do is always your own and you may acknowledge your responsibility.

Keep the reality of death always before your eyes, have a care about how you act every hour of your life and be sure that God is present everywhere and that he certainly sees and understands what you are about.

No one should aspire to gain a reputation for holiness. First of all we must actually become holy; then there would be some truth in having a reputation for it.

After all, it is written in scripture that one who never stops talking cannot avoid falling into sin.

—Translated by Patrick Barry, O.S.B.
Former Abbot of Ampleforth Abbey, York, England

COLORADO 98

Up on a Hill
In the foothills
Of the Rockies
Among Aspens
Birches and Pines
Visions of Tuscany
Nel Mezzo del cammin
Di nostra vita
Though incongruous
But perhaps not
The deep dark green
Of Cypresses
The tan Hills
In the blue haze
and shades of
Leonardo are all here
The hum of the I-70
Chirping of birds
All is quiet on this
Best Western front
But for an airplane
 Tearing the air
With its re-actors
The hills are old
Were sea bottom
Eons ago
Yet a sense of precarity
In this world of unending
Change
Where
Mi retrovai per una selva
Oscura.

In this poem, looking across the Colorado landscape, Jean is reminded of the first lines of Dante's Inferno:

"At the mid-point of the path through life, I found myself lost in a wood so dark."

SIMPLICITY

There is great interest in complexity
There is virtue in simplicity
Simplicity does not equate with simplistic
The simplistic is obvious, sure, unrepentant
The simple rests on the subtle
The subtle is simple but not easily grasped
Its evidence eludes grasping
The tighter the grip the lesser in hand.

—*Jean Le Mée*

PROVERBS

Jean had a wonderful sense of humor but not often of the kind that produced what you would call “belly laughs.” His was much more subtle than that most of the time, often touched with a bit of irony. He particularly loved the *Fables of La Fontaine* and never tired of quoting from his wise and uncompromising animals and birds.

The events of the daily life that Hannah and I shared with him were often interwoven with homespun proverbs from both French and English. Tongue in cheek he would mention to me “the sailor who never went ashore in places he had never visited before” (I don’t know where he got that one!) or “the ant who spent all her summer time dancing around and never planned for winter.”

Although Jean’s ultimate choice was to become a citizen of the United States, he always remained close, not so much to the intellectual and political culture of France but to the way of life instilled in him during his youth in the countryside. As a young boy he spent summer days “à garder les vaches” (watching over the cows in pasture), free time that would allow him to learn by heart whole books of history, geography and literature. Working many hours on the farm taught him skills totally foreign to today’s youth.

Jean was very devoted to his mother, Thérèse Le Coq Le Mée. He loved the sparkle in her eyes, her delight in discovering in her garden the earth’s yield of carrots and new potatoes, her curiosity and pleasure in sitting for hours by the window reading the *Petit Larousse* (dictionary!). Like so many others who have come to this country from foreign shores, Jean found himself caught between two cultures in many ways but able to view people and places as would a “citizen of the world” rather than of any one specific place or time.

Here are a few of the proverbs that he often used:

Ce n'est pas à un vieux singe qu'on apprend à faire des grimaces.

*You can't teach an old monkey to make faces!
(You can't teach an old dog new tricks!)*

FUNNY

C'est en forgeant qu'on devient forgeron.

*It's by forging that one becomes a blacksmith.
(Practice makes perfect.)*

PERSISTENT

Deux avis valent mieux qu'un.

*Two opinions are better than one!
(Two heads are better than one.)*

MODEST

Patience et longueur de temps font plus que force ni que rage!

*Patience and length of time do more than force or anger.
(La Fontaine)*

PATIENT

Qui vivra, verra.

Whoever is still alive will see! (The future will tell.)

HOPEFUL

Petit à petit, l'oiseau fait son nid.

Little by little the bird makes its nest.

SYSTEMATIC

C'est toujours le petit qui trinque.

It's always the little guy who pays for the drinks!

REALISTIC

On n'est jamais si bien servi que par soi-même.

One is never so well served as by doing it oneself!

INDEPENDENT IN
THOUGHT AND ACTION

Chassez le naturel, il revient au galop.

Drive out the natural and it returns galloping!

UNPRETENTIOUS

Il n'y a pas de petit profit.

*There is no such thing as a little profit.
(Every little gain is important!)
Personally and with natural resources.*

ECONOMICAL

Il ne faut jamais dire "Fontaine, je ne boirai pas de ton eau."

*One should never say,
"Fountain, I will never drink of your water!"*

FORESEEING

Le mieux est l'ennemi du bien.

*The perfect is the enemy of the good.
(Leave well enough alone!)*

CONTENT

Le chat parti, les souris dansent!

When the cat's away, the mice dance!

CAREFUL

L'appétit vient en mangeant!

Appetite comes while eating!

ENTHUSIASTIC

LETTER written o Professor C.W. Tan, Dean, School of Engineering, The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art in support of Jean's candidacy for promotion to full professor, February 19, 1980

I have known Jean Le Mée for the last six years and I am proud to have this opportunity to second his candidacy for promotion to full professor.

Le Mée and I met accidentally when we surprised each other and a local bookstore by asking for copies of the *Rigveda* at the same moment. Not long afterwards, when I was analyzing the arithmetical content of its hymns (see *The Myth of Invariance*, Nicolas Hays, 1976), Le Mée's expertise with Sanskrit proved invaluable in opening my thought to the depth of meanings in that ancient sacred text. His own translations of the hymns (*Hymns from the Rig-Veda*, Knopf, 1975) command deep respect. I met him often in those early years at the public forums sponsored by Main Currents in Modern Thought where contemporary philosophical issues were discussed. Every encounter with this remarkable man impressed me more deeply. His breadth of interests is unparalleled among the engineering fraternity I have encountered.

But it is Le Mée's depth which impresses most. His long-term commitment to Sanskrit is unusual enough, and promises more interesting fruit in the future, but he is also intimate with music, his graphic skills are beautiful to behold and he teaches them with some passion, he has taught me fascinating things about the geometry of Platonic solids, and his personal and family life displays a rare balance of aesthetic and intellectual concerns. His gentleness and modesty mask an unswerving devotion to the good and the beautiful, and he has the courage to put beauty first. To know him at all is to feel enriched by the experience. A Jean Le Mée would be a rare person on any university campus. I can only hope that someday there will be time and opportunity for the two of us to collaborate in some way on a deeper study of the *Rigveda*, for that bit of ancient history contains important lessons for the kind of new age which Jean Le Mée and I bend all our effects to give a chance to be born.

Sincerely Yours,

Ernest G. McClain

Professor of Music, Brooklyn College of the City University of New York

LETTER from Peter Cooper

To the Trustees of
"THE COOPER UNION FOR THE
ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE AND ART"

Where Jean worked as Professor of Engineering for thirty-nine years.

The great object I desire to accomplish by the establishment of an institution devoted to the advancement of Science and Art, is to open the volume of nature by the light of the truth—so, unveiling the laws and method of the Deity, that the young may see the beauties of creation, enjoy its blessings, and learn to love the Being "from whom cometh every good and perfect gift."

My heart's desire is, that the rising generation may become so thoroughly acquainted with the works of nature, and the great mystery of their own being, that they may see, feel, understand and know that there are immutable laws, designed in infinite wisdom, constantly operating for our good – so governing the destiny of worlds and men that it is our highest wisdom to live in strict conformity to these laws.

My design is to establish this institution, in the hope that unnumbered youth will here receive the inspiration of truth in all its native power and beauty and find in it a source of perpetual pleasure to spread its transforming influence throughout the world.

II

My feelings, my desire, my hopes, embrace humanity throughout the world: and, if it were in my power, I would bring all mankind to see and feel that there is an almighty power and beauty in goodness. I would gladly show to all that goodness rises in every possible degree from the smallest act of kindness up to the infinite all good. My earnest desire is to make this building and institution contribute in every way possible to unite all in one common effort to improve each and every human being, seeing that we are bound up in one common

destiny and by the laws of our own being are made dependent for our happiness on the continued acts of kindness we receive from each other.

III

I trust the time will come when religion will be divorced from superstition, and the light of science will develop the laws and methods of Deity, showing a great and glorious purpose shining through all the wonders of Almighty power, by which knowledge shall cover the earth as the waters cover the great deep, when men shall know and understand the things on which their happiness depends. We shall then comprehend something of the heights and depths and lengths and breadths of that knowledge and love of God which passes all understanding.

IV

Please accept my heartfelt assurance of sincere desire that under your care thousands of the youth of our country may throng its halls to learn those lessons of wisdom so much needed to guide the inexperience of youth amidst the dangers to which they are at times exposed.

—Peter Cooper, April 29, 1859

WHY SANSKRIT?

As Jean was developing his “official” career in engineering at Cooper Union, the study of Sanskrit, the ancient language of India in which the Hindu Scriptures were written, was always giving him a nudge. He gave in to this gentle but urgent persuasion by taking all the courses in Sanskrit offered at the time by Columbia University and by studying the language by himself, as time permitted.

Always intensely interested in “words”—their roots and history—and in “grammar,” Jean went deeper and deeper into this source of all Indo-European languages. He often said that it would take many more lifetimes to begin to unearth the treasures of the *Bhagavad Geeta*, the *Upanishads* and the *Rig Veda*, principal sacred texts from around four thousand years ago!

Here is one of his favorites from the ‘Kena-Upanishad,’ a remarkable translation presented in *The Ten Principal Upanishads* put into English by Shree Purohit Swami and W.B. Yeats:

In this body, in this town of spirit, there is a little house shaped like a lotus, and, in that house there is a little space. One should know what is there.

What lies in that space, does not decay when the body decays, nor does it fall when the body falls. That place is the home of spirit. Every desire is there. Self is there, beyond decay and death, sin and sorrow, hunger and thirst; Its aim is truth; Its will, truth.

As air, though one, takes the shape of whatsoever it enters, so the self, though one, animating all things, takes the shape of whatsoever it animates; yet stands outside.

It is One, Governor, Self of all, Creator of many out of one. He, that dare discover it within, rejoices.

It is imperishable among things that perish. Life of all life, it though one, satisfies everyone's desires. Whoever dare discover this one within, knows peace. The spirit which pervades all that we see, is imperishable. Nothing can destroy the spirit.

Spirit was not born; it will never die: nor once, having been, can it ever cease to be: Unborn, Eternal, Everlasting, yet most Ancient, the spirit dies not when the body is dead.

It is named the Unmanifest, the Unthinkable, the Immutable. Wherefore, knowing spirit as such, thou hast no cause to grieve.

Once Jean had some command of the Sanskrit language he was very distressed to see that many of these texts, notably the *Hymns of the Rig Veda*, suffered from translations that were incomprehensible and bore very little resemblance in English to the sounds and feeling of the originals. Therefore, with meticulous care, he undertook a translation of twelve of the *Hymns* into English and French.

Here, in his own words is what he attempted to show:

"The Rig-Veda is a glorious song of praise to the gods, the cosmic powers at work in Nature and Man. Its hymns record the struggles, the battles, and the victories, the wonder, the fears, the hopes, and the wisdom of the Ancient Path Makers. Glory be to Them!"

HYMNS FROM THE RIG VEDA

Translated by Jean Le Mée

HYMN OF ORIGIN

The law of Heaven and Truth were born
Of conscious fervor set on fire.
From this came stillness of the night,
From this the ocean with its waves.

From the ocean and its waves
Then the year was generated-
Appointer of the days and nights,
Ruler of all mortal beings.

The Creator regulated
Sun and moon in due succession,
The vault of Heaven and the Earth,
Aerial space and blessed light.

FROM 'HYMN OF CREATION'

Neither non-being nor being was as yet,
Neither was airy space nor heavens beyond;
What was enveloped? And where? Sheltered by whom?
And was there water? Bottomless, unfathomed?

Neither was there death nor immortality,
Nor was there any sign then of night or day;
Totally windless, by itself, the One breathed;
Beyond that, indeed, nothing whatever was.

In the Principle darkness concealed darkness;
Undifferentiated surge was this whole world.
The pregnant point covered by the form matrix,
From conscious fervor, mightily, brought forth the One.

HYMN OF THE WORD OF KNOWLEDGE

When, O Lord of the Word, the Wise established
Name-giving, the first principle of language,
That which was excellent in them, that which was pure,
Hidden deep within, through love was brought to light.

When the Wise created language with the mind,
As winnowing ground barley with a sieve,
Friends acknowledged the quality of friendship;
Upon their speech was impressed the mark of grace.

With devotion they followed the path of the word
Which they discovered dwelling within the seers.
They drew it out, ordering it in every way,
The Word over which the seven singers rejoice.

Many a man who sees does not see the Word
And many a man who hears does not hear it.
Yet for another it reveals itself like
A radiant bride yielding to her husband.

Another man is said to be uncaring;
He is never moved to act courageously,
All caught up in his futile imaginings;
The Word he hears remains without flower or fruit.

He who forsakes a companion in knowledge,
Has no way left open of sharing the Word.
Indeed, whatever he hears, he hears in vain;
He knows nothing of the path of right action.

All companions are given both eyes and ears.
But each man differs in his quickness of mind.
There are some who are like deep refreshing lakes,
And yet others like shallow pools of water.

HYMN OF THE ONE WORK

You take possession, Divine Fire,
Of all that the devoted bring-
On the altar you are kindled.
Bring us the priceless treasure.

Come together! Speak together!
Let your minds be in harmony,
As the gods of old together
Sat in harmony to worship.

The speech is one, united are the voices;
The mind in union with the thoughts of the Wise,
In union with the words that I speak to you,
To you the sacrifice I make is one.

Let your aim be one and single;
Let our hearts be joined in one-
The mind at rest in unison-
At peace with all, so may you be.

CHARTRES CATHEDRAL

Jean's principal work and research since retirement from Cooper Union was centered on an investigation of the architecture of the French Cathedral of Chartres.

On the back cover of this booklet is a photo of *la Belle Verrière* (the Beautiful Stained Glass Window), a very significant relic remaining still today on the site of Chartres Cathedral after the all-consuming fire of 1194. It was a "Eureka!" moment for Jean when he discovered that this window provided a perfect template for the construction of the new cathedral still standing there today. This is how he viewed his work on the Cathedral.

MAY 02, 2008

Peeling the Chartrian onion

Integument par Integument

To discover the kernel

My reddened eyes cry

Of long hours spent over lines

Overtime

My reddened eyes cry

Of joy

At the sight of lines

Thrown across the site

Revealing another sight!

—Jean Le Mée

THE HIDDEN CATHEDRAL

Before his passing Jean completed more than two hundred pages of text and accompanying drawings, done by hand with compass, straight edge and colored pencils. I served as his in-house secretary.

In recent months the task of putting all this into a reasonable format seemed daunting, to say the very least! To the rescue came our friend John Adago who very kindly gave of his time to read the manuscript. He and I came to the mutual conclusion that it would be very difficult for the two of us to put together the existing text and the most relevant of the dozens of drawings and figures in a way that would effectively highlight Jean's work.

Finally it was John who introduced me to Clifford Henderson, III, himself a poet, builder and geometer who "speaks the language" and can make the connections we were at a loss to provide. And so it is with great joy that I can now announce that there is definitely another "knower of the field" familiar with sacred geometry and the architecture of the Christian Middle Ages who is willing and eager to finish work on the book.

Further information will appear on our website www.lemeestudies.com. which will, hopefully, be updated soon. Please "stay tuned!"

WITH DEEP APPRECIATION

This weekend marks one year since the passing of Jean, my devoted husband and friend for more than fifty years. Shortly before our marriage, back in the days when people were still writing letters to each other, I received one from him showing a beautiful print of a stained glass window and bearing the printed words, "I appoint unto you a Kingdom!" Little did I know at the time that the Kingdom of mind and spirit that he would show to me would be so astonishingly rich!

This booklet, my gift to you from Jean, would never have been possible without the help of Clifford Henderson, who, while beginning research needed for "The Hidden Cathedral" enthusiastically took on another big job—designing its format and putting it all together so beautifully.

Mark Trautman, a.k.a. St. Paul's gifted organist and choir director, also revealed his love of and attention to details by helping us with every part of the preparation and printing of this booklet, and, also the leaflet for today's service—choice of paper, printing, and, in general, getting organized!

My gracious and talented daily helper, Beverly Morgan, very attentively typed all the various excerpts cited and offered valuable suggestions regarding presentation of the manuscript.

Jean had a special friend with a big heart and a long name, Shantala Sriramaiah. Shantala, an Indian woman by birth but currently living in Brussels, is trained in Engineering but is a gifted teacher and chanter of the Vedas. Jean and I had the good fortune of being able to meet with her a couple of years ago in New York and we became fast friends. During the last month or more of Jean's final illness, Shantala would call us on WhatsApp from Brussels every single day at 2 pm, 8 pm Brussels time and would chant from the Vedas for Jean while he eagerly held the cell phone. Our daily meeting always brought a big smile to Jean's face, and mine as well!

Fr. Jim Warnke, whom I have known for many years through St. Paul's Church, is always there in my life, as inspiration, love, and support! When I found myself alone for the first time in my life, just the sound of his voice was reassuring and I felt more centered and at peace. I am grateful for his listening, his practical council and for his sharing a lot of laughs with me!

Thanks to my longtime friend Karalenne Gayle who is in touch with me daily by text and by phone. Karalenne has not only shared her friendship with me in conversations we never had time for before but she has also introduced me in that way to her large and talented family, where something noteworthy is always going on! Karalenne and I have shared a lot of the kind of information about daily living that I would otherwise find missing in my life now due to Jean's absence. I have been greatly helped by her loving spirit and upbeat mood.

Solveig Eskedahl, Sister Donald Corcoran and Jay and Meryle Borden have supported me in prayer and in frequent "check-up" calls to find out how I'm doing and to offer help if needed. And then there is my attentive and stalwart daughter and advocate, Hannah, who is always looking out for me and figuring out best solutions for any dilemma I might encounter.

I have just learned that Connor Norris will be our specialist to help me to move out of the dark ages and into the light of video recording and live streaming the service today. This will make it possible for Jean's family and our other friends abroad to be with us by internet for the funeral service.

P.S. In Jean's study at the present time are nine large boxes of Sanskrit books all categorized according to the Library of Congress. I am looking for a university or other institution who could accept them all together as a donation. In the same place are also around three thousand four-hundred (that's right!) other books on all sorts of amazing topics. These also need a good home and an appreciative owner or owners! Thank you for any help you may be able to offer!

—Katharine

