

Almost There

by Jerry Ratch

On the phone I asked my mother how she was doing.

"I'm getting old," she said. "Going slow. But getting there. I'm ninety-four!"

My mother was always 94, when she was really 93. I remember she was 93 right after she turned 92. And 92 when she was only 91.

She seemed determined to be what she was about to become.

Looking ahead, like children to their next birthday. Eager to be there.

But then the inevitable.

"So ... when are you coming to visit?"

"Soon, mom," I took to telling her, instead of my usual, "Oh, not for awhile." The awful stone-cold truth. "Pretty soon," I'd say now. That made her happy.

She would forget until the next time I called. I don't know why it took me so long to understand, and say I was coming *Pretty soon*. Like you tell children in cars.

"We're almost there." That quiets them down for another little stretch of the road ahead.

They ask: "Are we there yet?" We learned to say, "Yeah. Almost there."

Originally, I could not tell a lie.

Now, I'm almost there.

