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When Mother's Day Means Only Betrayal and Rage

Sun, 2018-05-13 16:03 — Robin Olson

*I'm not the only person who had a challenging relationship with their mother. I get that, but a few weeks ago something happened that changed how I think of my mother. It left me with so many unanswered questions, mixed with a frenzied desire to know the truth. It gutted me, shocked me, uprooted the foundation of my entire life. Now I find myself going back and thinking about so many moments, having to re-write them, now flavored with different meaning. I am so angry, hurt and confused. **I'm not sure how I go on from here knowing that my life has been a lie .***

April 7, 2018

My birthday is April 3rd. It fell on a Tuesday this year. The weather was dreadful but Sam and I planned an afternoon away from home. We'd walk around New Haven (*ended up being in the rain*), visiting a museum, a cheese shop and get cupcakes. It was fine, nothing special, kinda damp day.

Saturday the 7th was set to be "family fun night" with my nephew, Ryan and my ex-sister-in-law, who I consider to be my sister (*but who is very private so I'm not even going to say her name*). These are the two, most cherished members of what's left of my family.



©2002 Robin AF Olson. It would take all afternoon to make these pies but it was always worth the effort.

My mother died in 2010 and my dad in 1999. I have a brother, sort of, but we had a falling out after my mother died. I haven't seen or spoken to him in 10 years. It's not a big surprise, but we never got on that well as kids, either. For my part I tried to get along and tried to love him. It hurt me that I never could find a way to feel close to him except when we were joking around. We both have a great sense of humor, but other than that we are very opposite. After thinking about it a lot, he scares me. I find myself trying to please him, be a good older sister. **He lived with me for a time, after he got divorced. He was supposed to look after my cats so I could go away for a few days. I came home and a cat was MISSING. He hadn't paid attention and let her out when he was busy with his young son. He never told me she got away and got mad at ME when I yelled at him for being so irresponsible.**

The cat had one eye and was very old and didn't know the area where she was since I'd only recently taken her into my home after my mother refused to provide vet care for her. Sure, she'd feed a friendly stray but when the cat showed up one day with one of her eyes bulging out of her head, she withdrew, dug her heels in and demanded that the cat was FREE. FREE to do what she wanted, go where she wanted to go. That what happened to it now was mother nature. I don't know why my mother said this about the strays she fed, but she said it more than once. I think she felt trapped in her life and was somehow living vicariously through the strays. It made me sick.

It left me feeling furious to the point where I could no longer have contact with her.

My mother had plenty of time and money to take the cat to the vet. Instead, the burden was on me to provide for the tiny gray cat I named Sasha.

When I confronted my brother about Sasha, he shrugged his shoulders, uncaring. I told him he was my brother and I loved him. I couldn't understand why he'd do this to me. He just stared blankly at me as if I was speaking another language. After that point I began to realize

I was stupid for trying to be kind to him. I think his heart is made of dollar bills because that's all he ever cares about...that and being an all-about-me-drama-queen.

I eventually found Sasha and got her back home.

There are so many things that go on behind closed doors that never are spoken about. There are so many tiny events that only add up to something much later. I never understood why my mother made me feel bad because I wasn't as cheerful as my brother. I suffer from clinical depression but she labeled me as being "crabby" and make a joke of it.

She always urged my brother and I to get along, yet she played favorites. Only until the last years of her life did she realize my value. It was Dan she favored and that was a bitter pill for me to swallow.

I just wanted my mother to love me.

She never said as much, ever. She was often cold, distant. **She manipulated me by telling me a shocking story about her first (then ex) husband Donald, who murdered her new sweetheart in a jealous rage in the lobby of the apartment building she lived in. He was a guy nicknamed, Kaz.** Yes, she told me this, crying. Unburdening herself of decades of keeping this guilty secret, then denied it days later after I'd lost my temper and demanded we contact someone and find out if this was true, maybe even the police.

After she changed her tune, saying she did it to get a rise out of me, I stopped answering her calls and wrote her a farewell letter. I didn't want to have such a toxic person in my life. I was separated from my husband and I needed support, not more drama and lies.

I didn't speak with her for nearly a year and I was never able to find out about her Ex or Kaz.

This is the same person who I would defend when my father would say nasty things about her when she wasn't around. **He got so mad he tried to kill me when I protected her.** He said something really bad about "Jews" and I couldn't stop myself from pushing his buttons, saying; "*You married one.*" He flew into a rage unlike any I had ever seen. I ran upstairs and locked myself in my bedroom and somehow shoved a wall unit across the door before he could reach me.

He got his rifle. Yelling at me to come out of my room. He hit my door with the butt of his rifle, cracking the door in the middle. He eventually realized he couldn't get in and left me alone, stomping off enraged.

Meanwhile, my mother wasn't home. She was the Crew Chief at the EMS in town and wouldn't be home until after 6AM because she volunteered during the night shift.

I snuck out of my room around 5AM and hid on the neighbors back deck. I was taking care of their house while they were on vacation but forgot to bring the key. I shivered in the early May cold, waiting for my dad to go to work and my mom to come home. I knew she would comfort me and be proud of me for having her back, but I was wrong.

Instead she shouted at me "Why did you do that? I don't need you to protect me."

I was floored, betrayed. I was 16. I wanted to run away, but I had nowhere to go. I went back to my room and tried to move the wall unit to its original location. I couldn't. It was too heavy.

I never knew how she was going to react, I just knew it would not be what I'd expect from a mother. She even told me, more than once, to never have kids, to never marry. Instead, regarding men she said; "love 'em, lay 'em, and leave 'em." I thought it was a joke, but looking back I fear it wasn't.

She was brilliant, a genius with photographic memory, but born too soon because she lived in a world where women couldn't achieve what they can now. I've written about her talents before, but I've never said much about the dark side of her icy behavior and her secrets. Most of the time I felt inadequate around her or that I didn't please her. I wanted to feel the comfort of a hug, but she didn't want to be touched, especially after my father took his own life.

Years after she died, I found a diary entry saying she could have stopped him, but didn't. She'd seen him do it and after that shock, she didn't want anyone near her ever again. She never told us.

She alluded to having a lot more secrets, but by then I didn't want to know.

Yet, I still tried to make her happy and give her something to laugh about after my dad died. We had our moments where there was a true, clear connection, but it wasn't very often. I was so stressed out about wanting to make her happy, I would end up failing or her reaction would just gut me. She hated getting gifts, but she liked to push me away when I tried to offer her something. It was about as far from what I would dream of as a relationship with a mom than I could imagine and it still hurts me to this day.

But who really was my mother?

April 7, 2018 2PM

My family fun night was going to start early, at 2PM, so we could bake Easter Pies. It was a family tradition from the Italian side of my family (*my dad's side*), though it was ironic that my Jewish mother took over the care and sharing of the recipe. She wrote directions a few times so I'd be sure to continue on after she was gone. **Making those pies was one of the few happy memories I have. We'd cut up the meats and slice the hard cooked eggs. We'd catch each other up on what we were doing and make lots of jokes. We'd drink tea and soak up each other's company.**



©2006 Robin AF Olson. *The making of the last Easter Pies. My mother died a few months after this photo was taken.*

After the pies baked we'd have the annual discussion on whether they tasted better cold or hot (*mother liked cold, daddy liked it heated*). This year I had anxiety about making the crust. The last time I tried it didn't work out. My mother always made the dough the night before so it was the missing piece of how to make the pie great. I'd try again. I found a recipe online that was very close to what I remembered. I made so much extra that I knew I'd have plenty for the top and bottom crust, but wasn't sure it would hold together once I rolled it out. **Even if it failed, it would be fun having my family there. We'd have a little celebration for my birthday and some cake and that would be good enough for me.**

But then the doorbell rang.

I opened the door, wondering why Ryan didn't just walk in. He's family. He can come right into my home. It wasn't Ryan. It was my brother and his second wife. I just stood there wondering what to do, what to say. Was he going to pull a gun on me or have a happy reunion? I squeaked out "Hello." They said hello back. I started to cry. The pain of a decade-long separation got to me, even though I knew I shouldn't care any more. Seeing my brother suddenly 10 years older was a punch to the gut. I didn't care what he was going to do. I reached out for him. He gave me a hug. I continued to cry. I wondered if they knew about his son and ex coming over. Maybe they were going to join us and make pies? I should have known better they weren't there to celebrate.

He said he had something important to tell me and thought it would be ok to stop by since he knew I was having company. I thought he was going to tell me he was sick with cancer and was going to die. I was literally shaking as I invited them into the house.

I offered them tea. He said *no*, his wife said, *yes if decaffe*. Then she didn't believe me it was decaffeinated so I showed her the container. My brother stood in the kitchen looking ashen. He began to tell me about how his wife had taken a DNA test. We all knew she was adopted. She'd met her bio-family, but wanted to know about her health markers and what issues she'd have to be concerned about (*so she listed all her worries over and over again "macular degeneration" "parkinson's"...she's all about ME ME ME*). My brother decided to take the test, too.

I didn't know what he was going to say next. I'd done a DNA test years ago and it was pretty much what I expected: lots of eastern European and some southern European DNA, no American Indian as I'd heard rumors about as a kid. My brother took out his phone and brought up the app. He showed it to me. Something was missing.

No Italian DNA.

I'd just read that siblings don't necessarily match in their DNA and I told him as much. I was about 25% Italian, but maybe it

was fine that he wasn't? Then he dropped the bomb. 23&Me showed him family matches of other people who take the test. He didn't see my results since I hadn't taken that particular DNA test, but it did show him something shocking.

My brother has a half-brother none of us knew about.

My brother also has a FATHER that is NOT the same father as I have.

My brother is only my HALF-SIBLING. (I have no other siblings)

I almost collapsed, shocked to the core. I couldn't believe it. My brother said he'd pay for me to take the 23&Me test and of course I agreed right away. This had to be a mistake, right? Because if it wasn't it meant some terrible things.

It meant that my mother had cheated on my father barely 3 years into their marriage. Some guy, who still lives and is in Florida, is my brother's dad. This guy has a SON who is my brother's age so that means...THIS GUY fathered his son and my brother AT THE SAME TIME.



©1957 Feminella Family. My parents wedding day.

So much emotion settled into my heart that I felt like I couldn't catch my breath. It was too much to consider being possible. So many questions began forming in my head...**WHY? Who was this GUY? Was she in touch with him over the years? Did he know? Did my father KNOW? Why did my mother LIE TO US? She had 6 years after my father died to tell us the truth without him knowing. WHY DID SHE LIE? I could not stop thinking about it.**

My brother asked me point blank-Did I know?

Without missing a beat, I looked him straight in the eye and told him I would never keep something like that from him, even if he hated my guts and vice versa. **I had no idea, but then I realized that was why he came over, to see my reaction.**

And meanwhile all this is going on in front of my nephew and my "sis"...who had no idea, either. What a way to drop a bomb, with no concern for how anyone would take the news. It could have been done in private, out of respect for me, for his son, for his ex, but no, it had to be a big drama-filled event.

I asked if he contacted his bio-dad. He hasn't yet. He reached out to his half-brother, but there hasn't been any reply. I told Dan I'd go through my mother's papers and search for clues. She left some journals and letters behind. Maybe I'd find an answer there. **There is no one living, other than my brother's father, who knows what happened.**

After that they hugged me and left. They didn't want to make pies or eat them. They were going out of town for the next week. If I had any info I'd text him, but other than that he didn't have more to say to me.



My family.

My precious sis handed me a bottle of vodka. She grabbed a can of cranberry seltzer and asked me if I wanted a drink. She doesn't put up with anyone's shit, especially my brother's...err half-brother's. She was furious at his behavior and said as much. She was kind and understanding and said she was very happy my nephew didn't get his DNA test back first. It would have made it appear that my sis had cheated on my brother and that Ryan wasn't his son. She laughed because it's crazy to even consider, but I was glad that wasn't even an issue. **I don't usually ever drink but went to my cupboard and selected a small glass silkscreened with pink elephants. It's a cocktail glass from the 1950s. I figured if I was going to get drunk, I was going to do it right. I handed my sis the glass, then said "Fill 'er up" as tears slid down my cheeks.**

The next few days I was in a trance, obsessed with going through my mothers old letters. There was a journal started from the day my brother was born. She wrote about me and how much she loved me, that she didn't think she could love anyone more and felt badly about that. I don't remember ever feeling love from her so this was a surprise.

She noted that my brother had a "weak chin." Those words shocked me. Why say that about your newborn child?

She also wrote about me staying with her friends on their farm while she was in the hospital. How I was so happy being surrounded by cats. That I was in my element. I was only 2 ½ years old.

Later she penned a rather plain description about moving away from Fulton, NY to Westchester County, NY, about how she was happy to put the last 18-months behind her. **She hinted there were dark days, but I have no idea why. I have many letters from my father written to my mother during those days. He was devoted as ever and his tone was loving and affectionate.**

What happened?

I don't know.

Though I still have more letters and some journal entries to read. I don't think I'm going to find the answer I'm looking for. The small pile of papers has sat untouched for a few weeks. I think I need to move on, even though I don't know how.

I keep looking over my life and feeling like it was a lie. I don't have to feel badly any more that my brother and I don't get along and that we will never be close in a way I dreamed of. I doubt the doorbell will ring again and he will be standing there, with a sad awkward smile on his face. We never got along because we're not completely related. He has another family whose blood runs in his veins.

I am the only child of my mother and father.

And I think of my poor father, how he was cuckolded, how he was proud of "his son," who is not his son. How devastated he'd be. I don't think he knew. He would have brought it up as a weapon to hurt my mother at some point, but he never did.

My father loved his family and was completely devoted to us, even though he and I had a very few, very bad days. Most of the time I was "daddy's girl" and felt protected and cherished and now I realize that I really was his one and only child.

With every memory of my past, it's now colored differently. This is the first Mother's Day since I learned the terrible news. I find myself wanting to say "F--- you" to my Mother on this day of mothers and get rid of those mementos of hers I used to cherish, but more than that I want to free myself from trying to be a good daughter to someone who clearly did not deserve my devotion.

And my brother? I checked on him via a text when he got back from his trip, asked how he was doing. "Good" was his reply. Any news? "No." I told him I'd always be his sister and if he wanted to go out for coffee, just us, to talk, I would be happy to do that. I wanted to be there for him. He did not reply, but maybe that was his reply. He got what he wanted from me and was going back to his fancy life where I am the poor relative, now half-sister who is not worthy of being in his life. I had already mourned losing my brother so many years ago, before he showed up at my door, and now he was probably gone from my life forever.



©1969 Judith Feminella. Big sis and little bro.

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Comments

Wed, 2018-05-16 13:29 — jmuwj (not verified)

RE: EVERYTHING IS RELATIVE... ^[3]

Those DNA tests can be like Pandora's box, on so many levels.

Robin, I have similar skeletons in my own family closet and I've gone through all of the letters and papers and talked with my only surviving relative of my father's generation on his side of the family. I'm completely estranged from all of my mom's relatives because of personal matters.

One thing I've discovered is that parents are people. They're not gods. They're not perfect -- even the best ones. They make mistakes -- sometimes pretty bad ones. They fail. They are found wanting. Just like us.

Just like us.

It may take a lifetime to reconcile all of that, but personally, I have found it within myself to love my parents for the good they did for me and others, which in their cases was a lot -- and to overlook the less-than-perfect or not-what-I-wanted or needed, as they certainly did, so many times, with me.

As for the family mysteries, sometimes I think it might be better to leave them at that, because, as you have found, sometimes the answers are not at all what we want/are prepared to accept. But it is what it is.

I hope you are able, in time, to remember the good and overlook the bad. And I do hope you and your brother get back in touch, if that's what you both want. I have no hope of ever hearing from mine, or even knowing where/IF he is. And the "brother" part? Well, maybe. Maybe not.

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