

## MOTHER'S DAY

The school bus had just come to a stop in front of my house. I was a fourth grader and finally home for the day. I remember the bus route used to make no sense because although I lived within five minutes walking distance to school, I had to ride the bus which went to the farthest stops first. I was — and still am — a very impatient person in life. I'm working on it but fear it may never change. What the hell? I'm not perfect. As I was just about to get up from my seat on the bus, I looked up at our house. My mother was opening the window of the upstairs bedroom shared by me and my brother. I don't just mean the blinds. She opened the window *and* the screen. I thought to myself "What is she doing?" Then I got a warm sort of stinging feeling that I often did when I knew something wasn't right. I said to myself "I can't believe she's actually going to do it," then prepped myself for the impending embarrassment.

From that upstairs window, she flung four yellow bins filled with toys into the front yard. GI Joe went air borne, He-man and his sidekicks were hurled and whatever else was in those four bins was now part of the landscape in the front yard. All of those action figures got just that -- action! I didn't even bother to look at any of the other students as I made my way down that seemingly never-ending aisle to exit the bus. What was I supposed to say? "Want to come in for milk and cookies?" Before I even got the front door open -- and I'm not even kidding -- you could already hear her screaming at me and my brother. It, of course, included the familiar phrase in our household "wait until your father gets home."

SIDE NOTE: And parents wonder why their kids grow up the way they do!

In the week or so leading up to this apparent monumental moment in my life, my mother had been nagging my brother and I to clean our room and organize the bins. Yes, you read that correctly -- organize the bins. It wasn't enough that the toys would just be picked up off the floor and placed into the four yellow bins that fit nicely under our bunk beds. The bins had to be organized by toy type. I mean, really?

Multiply this situation by 400,000 and you pretty much get a painted mental picture of what it was like for me growing up. But as a former reporter, it would be very unfair to only give you one side of the story.

My mother always made sure that my brother, sister and I had everything we wanted for Christmas. Our birthdays were the same way. My mother made sure we were taken care of. But, she was the epitome — and then some — of strict when we were growing up. There, of course, was the middle child factor that also kicked in. That being my older sister of 5 1/2 years got the attention that comes with doing all the firsts as a child -- the prom, the driver's license, etc. My brother, Tony, is only 11 months younger than I. To put that another way, when he turned 14 years old we were both 14 years old for two weeks until I turned 15. This situation, when two siblings aren't even a year apart, is known as Irish twins. He was the football player, fisherman and troublemaker. In fact, I'm convinced that he was the sole creator of trouble. My parents' attention was focused on him a lot. There I was in the middle — Ignored. I will talk more at length later about being the middle child and how despite the cons that come with that territory, the giant plus side that exists and that I've come to discover in my spiritual journey.

Fast forward from the fourth grade to the year 2000. No sooner did the ball drop ringing in the new millennium, I was packed up and moving from my very first TV reporting job to my second. From Binghamton to Albany, NY. It was also quite the market jump too. The pay -- not so much. But, it was still better than

making \$17,000 a year and deciding between noodles and noodles for dinner nightly! Another plus -- my cousins Chris & Angie and their kids Danielle and Paul lived in Albany. Paul was away at school. Danielle and I are the same age and both huge music lovers. She's a beautiful singer and piano player. Chris is my Godfather. And, Cousin Angie made one hell of a traditional Italian Sunday dinner. Her pasta was perfect. In my time in Albany, I think I only had to turn down one Sunday dinner invitation. Live without a home cooked meal long enough and you jump at the chance when one is offered.

On a Sunday afternoon, just one month after starting my new job at Fox 23 News in Albany, I was about a half hour from finishing my weekend reporting shift. The phone at my desk rang. It was my cousin Chris asking if I wanted to come over for dinner. I said absolutely but told him I just wanted to go home first and change my clothes and freshen up. When I arrived home, I could hear the phone ringing in my apartment. I quickly scrambled to get the door unlocked and picked it up. It was my cousin Chris on the other end. I told him I'd just gotten home and was going to change and head over to the house. "No," he said - "Angie and I are going to come over." This seemed a little strange — why would they come to my place after inviting me to dinner at theirs? Perplexed, I said ok and hung up the phone. That's when I got that warm stinging feeling in my stomach again. It was one of the stronger stings. Something wasn't right. Something was up. I immediately called home. My Aunt El answered the home phone at my parent's house. "What's going on?," I said. This caught her off guard — she wasn't expecting my call. She didn't know at the time — nor did I —

that I have a very strong intuition. your cousin gets to your place." happened. Trust me, you just know.

She replied "Wait until I already knew what "Don't fuck with me,Aunt El -- what's going on?" I will never forget this phone call or what came out of her mouth for as long as I live. "Your mom

died,” she said. “Don’t tell him that over the phone El,” my father said in the background. To be completely honest, I don’t really remember what happened next. I hung up the phone and went into shock. When my cousin Chris and Angie arrived at my door, I opened it with just a sickened look on my face. I was devastated. “I already know,” I said. Then I burst into tears and started packing for what would be the longest, most depressing trek I’d make in a lifetime. For the next three hours I was in my cousin’s car heading home to Rochester, NY.

You would think as a reporter I would’ve asked a few very important questions such as “what happened?” or how she died. But, just the mere thought of a dead parent is enough to stop anyone in his or her tracks. I was 24 years old — a few weeks away from turning 25. My mother and I are so much alike -- precisely the reason she and I would fight off and on as I was growing up. Living on my own is when I really started to enjoy talking with her. I was looking forward to the many more milestones in life I could share with my parents now that I was old enough to appreciate their company. I was also at an age where advice from parents didn’t come with such confrontation. I appreciated it.

A little ways into the trip home, my cousin turn to me and asking something along the line of why there was a gun in the house. I turned to him and said, “What? What do you mean?” He said, “They didn’t tell you?” “No, tell me what?,” I said. My cousin got this look on face, hesitant to say anything. “Oh my God, I said, “She killed herself?”

The vision of my mother putting a gun to her head and pulling the trigger is very troubling. My mother certainly had her moments of depression. She was very neurotic. She was a lunatic of sorts when she got in one of her moods. But was she suicidal? I never once entertained the idea that she could or would go down that road. Looking back on it, it makes total sense. When you play Monday morning quarterback in a situation like this -- a lot

becomes much clearer. And, when you're a lot like your mother, you become scared and concerned for your own life.

My mother's funeral was jam packed with people. Neighbors who had since moved that we hadn't seen in 10 or more years, old coworkers of hers -- the list goes on. Despite her moments, my mother had that magic touch with people. She was very well-liked. Much like me, she spoke her mind -- but she was respectful and respected.

For the next 10 years I tried to wrap my head around her death. Anger played a big role. In conversation, people would always ask whether she left a note. She didn't. Believe me, I checked. I learned that just prior to blowing her brains out (sorry -- it's just a thing that helps me cope) she was out in the garage cleaning the inside of her car. My mother would get pissed if a crumb only an ant could see were on the floor. It was aggravating. So; leave it to her to make sure we had a clean car to ride in on the way to her funeral. Without a note, there was much to the imagination about why. The answer, at least my answer, came while at a bar in Las Vegas one evening and knowingly on my spiritual journey.

My friend Mike and I were sitting on our usual side of the horseshoe shaped bar chatting. He had recently lost his father. I was there to induct him into the "Dead Parent Club." It's not a legitimate club, just one I created to laugh about this sort of situation. It's incredible how many of my friends -- all around my age -- are members of the club. It is rare that I meet a person these days that still have both parents. **(It's a Sign, Stupid!)** I believe that God puts them in my path for a reason. There is something therapeutic about

sharing stories and making some sense out of this tragic situation. As kids, we think our parents are invincible and will be around forever. As adults, we sometimes don't realize the short amount of time we have to enjoy their company.

Despite being at the bar to console Mike, somehow the conversation led back to my mother. I remember telling him that when I was a teenager in high school she told me that she had always wanted to be a News Reporter. Then, I remember saying something about how angry it made me that she could take her life and not think about all the other people that would affect. “I would never do that to someone else knowing how this feels,” I said. What came out of my mouth next brought a look of shock to my own face followed by a flood of tears. It even stunned my friend Mike. It was a revelation that took 10 years to surface. One that could only come about while on a spiritual journey. “Maybe my mother had to die to save my life,” I said to Mike. Let me explain.

The truth is, for as much as I am an over-achiever in life, I also used to give up really easily when the going got tough. I didn’t believe in myself for a very long time. My mother’s death was, in part, was the impetus to get my head thinking otherwise. I was also a very angry person in life — often pissed off at the world. Her death helped me change my mantra. I’ve had many achievements in my life that I had no idea were going to be in store for me. Many of them came through news reporting and many others after that career. I can say with certainty that if my mother hadn’t committed suicide, I would probably not have pushed myself as hard as I have to get to where I am in life. I became the news reporter she aspired to be. Because of her choice regarding death, I can’t and won’t give up. Her choice with death is what gives me the daily drive to continue to try to be the best I can in life. Isn’t that what all mother’s want for their children — the best? I can honestly say my mother’s dying saved my life. It really did. Period!

My discovery and understanding of why her death had to happen is not something that’s going to sit well or make sense to some people, but hear me out. In life, God puts certain people in our path. People come, people go. Those people are in our lives for

one reason or another and for whatever amount of time necessary. We are also in peoples' lives for a reason. Sometimes we are in someone's life for a very particular purpose. Think of the trickle-down effect. If my mother were alive, I may still be a news reporter. If I were still a news reporter, I might still be that angry person. Think of this scenario. A young boy starts to run out into the road. A stranger who sees the impending danger runs out to protect him and ends up getting hit and killed by the car. The boy grows up to be a doctor who ends up saving hundreds of lives through his practice. Had the boy not lived to fulfill his destiny, so many other lives would have been at stake.

Death doesn't always have to be the case -- it's just an example. Consider this scenario. I had a friend Nick for a short time in Las Vegas. He auditioned for the band I had formed. For the next couple months we became pretty tight. It was one of those rare friendships in life. We connected on so many levels. Our bond in music was just the icing on the cake. Nick, however, was not the happiest of people. And, he was addicted to pain pills. He ended up moving back home to Texas for treatment and a change of scenery. I was upset. Sure, I wanted him to go home, deal with his demons and get clean. But, it was still tough to watch him leave after we'd become such good friends. We kept in touch for a little while. Then, phone numbers changed and that was the end of our communication. About a year and a half later I received a text message at work. The number was unfamiliar. It was Nick. A few minutes later we were chatting on the phone. He was moving back to Las Vegas. I was ecstatic. Even better, he was clean. On the phone he said he always remembered what I told him before he moved back to Texas. I told him something I had learned from someone else. Imagine you have only one piece of dog food each day. When you wake up in the morning you have the choice to feed either feed the white dog or the black dog. Which dog are you going to feed? This scenario, which speaks about the importance of staying positive, was something I'd learned from Chris Howard - A Regional Vice President at a company called

Primerica. I couldn't believe Nick remembered that. I was so thankful that little scenario was part of his successful recovery. Someone had passed it along to me. I in turn passed it along to him.

Nick moved back to Las Vegas a month after our phone call. We spoke via phone once. We never spoke again. How could this happen between two people who had become such good friends? My theory: Nick was in my life at just the right time and for the amount of time for which he needed. Maybe God and the Universe intervened and stopped us from reconnecting again. Maybe Nick is now helping someone else who needs a friend and some healing. I look at it this way. I'm thankful for the time I did get to spend with Nick. I'm even more thankful that he has recovered. Who knows, maybe Nick might not be around at all if it weren't for me. I've stopped questioning why people come and go.

Parting ways with someone or experiencing the death of a loved one can be detrimental or a situation from which to learn and grow. For me, focusing on the positive within the realm of the "reason" has been healing and a source of closure. My take on mother's death may be very different from what brother, sister & father all believe. That's absolutely okay. Whatever sense they make or have made of it is just as valid. The bond a mother has with each of her children is different and unique. That's the beauty of a mother.

### **My Mother's Famous Quotes:**

*"Do I look like I just fell off a Christmas tree?"*



*“I’m tired of cleaning up this house and watching you kids mess it up again. Do I look like an octopus on roller skates?” (Octopus would sometimes be swapped with Wonder Woman)*

*“We’ll see what your father thinks when he gets home. Then you’ll really be in for it.”*

*“Make me come in there” (except she was already halfway down the hallway and actually coming into the bedroom to yell at me and my brother)*

*“Talk to me like that again and I’ll slap you into next Tuesday”*

***“I love you”***

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