

Mother Writings

A collection

As We Grow Into Mothers and Fathers Ourselves

December 2003

In August 2003 my Mother was diagnosed with Breast Cancer. This diagnosis was very scary and unexpected. Strangely, my Mother loves doctors and going to the hospital. In my lifetime, she has always spent a lot of time there, even when I'm not sure there was anything physically wrong. Some of the family accuses my mother of being a hypochondriac, but she does SEEM to have the physical ailments that she complains of having. Therefore, when my Mother was diagnosed with Breast Cancer it took our family some time to wake up. With our worry, we began to take life and my mother's illness seriously. Communication really increased. My brother and I talked more than ever and my Mom and I started spending more time together and arguing much less. I love being with her.

I found it interesting that as my Mom lost her hair from chemotherapy, she began to wear colorful, patterned scarves to hide and protect her head. She wore long earrings, and carefully applied make-up. This image looked so familiar and I was delighted to see my Mother "decorated." It demonstrated to me her strength and that she would fight the cancer. This new visual picture of my Mother was both interesting and somehow familiar. Wait. My childhood memories of my Mother are of this woman. This lovely woman who looked artfully composed was reappearing. Where had she gone?

In a formal portrait painting that was done in the late 1970's by an artist family friend Bobbi Mastrangelo, this visual symbol of my Mother was captured. I dug out the painting and began to look at it very closely – how the artist painted skin, pattern, and energy. What would happen if I revisited this image with my own woman artist hand? I decided to find out.

The process of painting this picture brought me intense joy. My hand swiftly applied the paint to the canvas, intuitively but carefully selecting color. How could painting a painting bring intense joy? I did not know until this image. It was almost as though I closed an open wound by painting this combination of past and present.

I juxtaposed a painting of Bobbi's painting to my Mother's present image state, and used my own writing in the image to play with textural qualities and to connect my reflections about growing older. I had a great time painting the little painting of the little girl and the horse in the left hand corner. I think the girl is me, but where is my horse??

My mother's past and present meet in this painting. How did her past lead her to her present self? Will her life's story tell my own? My following statement continues to haunt me, "As we grow into mothers and fathers ourselves, we began to look more at the past for guidance of what we are to become."

Fiercely Independent

January 2004

What did my Mother teach me? I couldn't answer that question literally. My Mother lectured me at times about the choices I had made. Occasionally a scolding voice would emerge, and she would remind me that I was fortunate to have everything in my possession to make a good decision. Unlike her own childhood, my mother did not have the support, facilities, and love from family and friends to help her make good decisions. However, my Mother has MODELED for me how to get through emotionally and physically by her own daily living. I observe that she is fiercely independent and strong.

Have you ever made a quick decision that would change the course of your life forever? My mother made a lot of these. But with every decision she made, and with every repercussion, she came out stronger and wiser. I admire her willingness to "start over" in life, and to take risks. The biggest risk I witnessed my Mother take was when she left my Dad. My Dad is a priest and we were living in the church rectory. One night she gave me and my brother each a big black garbage bag, told us to stuff whatever items were of value to us, called a cab, and departed this life with us. From

living in a shelter for a month in a Maine city, we found a comfortable home, furniture, clothes, food, stability and my Mother regained independence. She started college, got a job, and smiled.

My Mother taught me that the weight of the world can be heavy but you have to hold up your piece. So I do.

Contemplation

March 2004

What our Mothers teach us can be very integrated into our everyday. It can be a challenge to define how they specifically influenced who we are and what we do today. This is partly due to our unconscious borrowing of their mannerisms, language, behavior, and personality. How interesting it is to recognize in a child a particular facial expression shared in the family. Or to witness the struggle to communicate among family members because of the same “dysfunctionalities” or the unspeakable competition that occurs around a family game of cards that you do not share. What our mothers teach us can be so engrained in us as adult children, and in this subconscious ,they manage to guide us in the choices we make in life, how we fold our laundry, and how we laugh.

What an amazing opportunity *to be* and *to have* a mother. And they’ll remind us of this too.

What Mother Am I To Become?

May 2004

What an amazing honor to witness a close friend in her pregnancy of her first child. I share in her excitement, fear, curiosity and anticipation. I can't help but wonder whether she is revisiting her childhood psychologically. Can you "hit play" in your mind of your past with your parents? What do we take from our mothers (and fathers) and what do we leave behind? Will I consciously be able to leave behind the negative patterns my parent(s) created and consciously take with me the patterns that were encouraging and warm?

What mother am I to become?

My Mother Taught Me Silence

July 2004

Consciously and unconsciously we select the behaviors that make the “best fit” in our lives. Our mothers modeled behavior is not always good for us, particularly if that behavior includes an inability and fear to express oneself. We might select this behavior and realize later that years of expression oppressed into a body takes a physical toll. How does your body respond to expression? Does it hurt? How do you get back into balance? How has your body served as a map to your emotional wear and tear?

When we are silent for many years, our body starts to send a message. When do you finally read it?

Living Out the Unlived Lives of Our Mothers

February 2005

As daughters do we have the obligation and desire to live the unlived lives of our mothers? This pressure on the daughter can be both suffocating and motivating. How do we as daughters deal with this obligation? Do we travel the world in search of this missing piece, and in the process discover this new sense of self? Or was this “authentic” self right where we started? We keep living and checking whether we have come up to par. Are we attractive enough? Are we intellectual enough? Do we have a successful career? Do we have children and do we want to? But some of us daughters use this underlying pressure as a great motivation to go beyond expectations. I suppose that every woman lives an unlived life of another woman, whether we travel the world as a bohemian or return to the same home every evening. What prevents women from taking risks and living the life they had only dreamed of? WHAT IS THE RISK?

This work was directly influenced by Gloria Steinem when she wrote, “Many of us are living out the unlived lives of our mothers, because they were not able to become the unique people they were born to be.” Did your mother live as she was intended to? How do you live in response to her life choices?

Gently Down The Stream

March 2005

If we are fortunate, at the core of our relationships with our mothers is unconditional love. They bring us along on their life journey while we wait, observe, rebel, follow in their footsteps, and sometimes run far away. And while we struggle with this relationship, it always falls back to this connection we have...or the connection we wish we had.

It's complicated. As we grow into adults ourselves, our relationship with our parents shifts. As our age increases, there seems to be a direct correlation with responsibility to our parents. They sometimes have unrealistic expectations, wanting us to jump at their phone calls, to pursue visitations with family members we no longer share common ground with. Maybe we become less of the child and more of a playmate or best friend.

There may be a tough struggle when the child does not want to play the role as adult, and the role of adult child is confused - forced into situations that are draining and sometimes, fun.

Our parents, our roots of our being ARE very important in our lives. But when should our mothers draw the line? Or should we?

Nick and the Stork

March 2005

My own Mother 's health is declining and I am very worried. I am trying to brace myself of the idea that she might die. In an attempt to look at this terrible situation in a positive light, I have been imagining that my Mother will be reincarnated. After a long visit with my Mother in the hospital, my stepfather Nick and I head to our favorite Mexican restaurant for dinner. I decide to pose the question at him. "Well Nick.... if *your* Mother was reincarnated, what do you think she would be?" He replied rightfully so, in his Americanized British accent, "A stork."

I am comforted at the idea that my Mother will never leave me in my mind and in my heart. How can we use our minds to make our connections with our mothers stronger?

April 2005

Stan and I are in France. Mom and Nick encouraged me to go even though I have been so concerned for my Mother's health. We drive out of Paris heading North with an unknown destination. We settle for the evening in the hometown of Claude Monet. We ride our bikes from the bed and breakfast through the village. While crossing the bridge, I look up at the sky and see storks flying above.

LIFT HERE

