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Mr. MacDougal
Period 6

Thursday's with Mom

Procrastination at its finest. Thursday night, 9:30 I walked into my house after my trumpet lesson, and my mother, was relaxing on the couch, cuddled with our two cats. Knowing it was about bed time for my mother, I reluctantly asked if we could conduct the interview I had mentioned earlier in the week. It was due on Friday, the next day of course. We sat down at the dining room table. With a mess of wires all somehow finding their way to microphones in front of us, me at the head of the table and my mother beside me, our conversation began. Awkward at first, due to the unnatural setting of forced conversation, I attempted to ease in by simply starting off from her childhood.

Interestingly enough, my whole life had been filled with occasional stories from my father, Doug Walters. Sitting on my porch at my old house, long car rides, or at the dinner table, my father would entertain us with endless stories of life growing up in a rural small town in upstate New York. Images of my father young and free, riding his bike down dirt roads and through forests, playing pickup baseball games with the neighborhood kids, and eating ice cream at Jimmy Coon's gas station would flow through my imagination. By the end of the interview I learned that somehow my father knew he needed to tell us these stories before it was too late. Lisa Joy Walters, my mother, grew up only 15 minutes away from my old house yet I knew very little of her childhood. Though the knowledge of my father's childhood was vast and intricate. This was an intriguing place to start.

My mother, had always described her childhood as 'boring.' Which seemed like an understatement. Does anybody actually have a boring childhood? I quickly learned that it was not as boring as earlier perceived. Right next door to her lived her best friend Joy. That

reminded me much of my childhood, also living on Long Island, my brother and I lived next door to our best friend as well. This was an interesting and sort of random connection, but one that I knew would help me grasp life as my mother, because Joy had quite an influence on her life and so did my neighbor. Joy was a Born Again Baptist and my mother a reform Jew, which in essence is an interesting combo during the 1970's. Although, my grandmother was never too strict on religion, so Joy peaked my mother's curiosity as she went and explored other religions. While maintaining her Jewish heritage, my mother actually spent time participating in Joy's backyard Christian Youth Group and envied her Sunday church routines.

"Every Sunday she would go to church, and after every church she would go out to lunch. I always wanted to do that"

"Go out to lunch after church?" I interjected, quizzically giggling.

"Yeah, and I haven't done that yet!" she laughed along with me. But hers was more of a nervous laughter. One that showed her frustration of never completing this simple task 50 years into her life, but still laughing along at the miniscule nature of the 'tragic' scenario.

I had always held onto this minor detail. In these later years my mother loves both church and brunch! This past year she has attended church almost every Sunday, and has even invited my brother and I out to brunch on several occasions. But what is it that's stopping her from doing both even once in her life? More or less make it her weekly routine like she'd always hoped. Does she even know what's stopping her? Or is this some big coincidence that she just never has the time in her busy schedule for both?

While being engulfed in my mother's interest in all religions at such a young age, I also was dying to know what life was like growing up in the late 1970's. No matter how many Netflix series I watch set in the 1900's, I just feel like they're always missing something. It just feels too forced. Almost as if the director had been too focused on the wardrobe and props from the 70's

rather than the actual lifestyle. And movies filmed in the 1970's? Well, there's always a lack of appreciation for the time period and too much focus on the storyline. I can forgive that though, films nowadays do the same. What a shame no director takes time to insert quips of dialogue and actions that perfectly replicate the current time period. But, I digress.

"There was one time where my mom asked me to call for her. I don't know if you had known this story.

I didn't.

But she said, "Why don't you go call for Joy?" So I sat on the lawn and yelled "Joy! Joy!"

Is that really how it worked? Well, she then explained to me that 'calling for somebody' simply met going over to their home and knocking on the door. But, I am also led to believe that to some extent, my mother's silly story was not so silly. Is this a common scenario? Sitting on the lawn and 'calling' for you friend? It seems so indicative of the time, and simply a scenario I have never experienced, even while living next door to my childhood best friend. Maybe my mother should be a film director.

Eventually we just found each other in a vortex of endless stories, forgetting the microphones were even sitting in front of us. More stories from Joy's house, that involved tortillas for dinner and big bowls Ice cream for dessert. When not at Joy's, she was eating homemade grilled cheese at my grandmother's. Still the best grilled cheese she has had, I can vouch for that. I was a bit hungry after our conversation.

Her 'boring' childhood got even more engaging when I learned that almost every weekend her whole family would drive into the city from Smithtown Long Island, to visit her grandparents. So about an hour drive, give or take. I had known none of this. The family tree has always been a blur to me, and it was clear through our conversation.

7:24, insert my extensive audio of confusion with family tree

My mother had both sets grandparents living in the city. Which makes sense, because my grandparents (her parents) also grew up in the city. On most occasions, every weekend they'd visit her Grandmother Eve, whom my brother Evan was named after. Here she had quite a vivid memory of the exact layout of her apartment. It was actually uncanny how clear this memory was. Almost as if she had visited it last weekend.

She then began reminiscing of these weekends. I can tell in her voice that these memories held a special place on her bookshelf of memories. A genuine smirk crafted its way upon her face. Her focused eye contact slowly shifted around the room and eventually up towards the meeting between the wall and the ceiling. As if a memory bubble was being streamed out of her mind, and she was watching the clip on rerun, like a bored student in an old cartoon would to pass the time in class.

"My favorite thing to do when we went to the Bronx, because she lived on an apartment building on the sixth floor, is that I would sit with all of the older ladies, in the front of the building...and we used to, every evening they would bring down the folding chairs, and we used to sit in front of the building, and all of the old ladies would chat, and I would sit with all of them, and then we would walk down to a carvel and get an ice cream cone. And my grandmother's favorite ice cream, and she actually had it the night she passed was a lollapalooza"

"Do they still sell that?" I asked

My mother's face dropped. "No, but I wish they still did. It was a long ice cream on a stick, and then sprinkles all around it, and all you did was taste all of the sprinkles!"

Wow. The night her grandmother passed she was eating her favorite ice cream? To me that seems like a beautiful way to pass, to my mother a haunting memory. She actually experienced the passing of her grandmother at a very young age. At the time, her grandmother had moved in with them from the Bronx to their home in Smithtown, in their dining room actually.

She was sick for many months and her family took care of her. The night of her passing, my mother was awake and actually heard the sounds of her grandmother passing. She was the only one to hear this. In our conversation she seemed to only touch over this horrid image. Understandable. So I decided to not go any further. But why was she the only one awake to hear this? Did it just so happen to wake her up? Her room though is nowhere near the dining room where her grandmother was, but is near the rest of the bedrooms. Why did it not wake anybody else up? Was she up before her passing? Fun fact: my mother is a medium. Oh wait, did I forget to mention that? What if this was where she got her start? Did she have a feeling that night was **the night**? After all, I get this sense that my mother was the closest one in the family to her Grandmother Eve, and with this bond so strong it only makes sense that these innate medium abilities kicked in at the perfect time. After that night, her family goes on to almost never mention her Grandmother Eve. I could tell this disturbed my mother, and this was something she knew she had to change when the time came.

music transition

It was in a special needs preschool run by a Rabbi where my mother not only earned her first teaching job, but also met my father. Love at first sight. Well maybe not, but it was when she first saw my dad, a psychologist for the school, working with a young autistic boy, when my mother fell in love with him. She described how gentle and kind he was with the boy, while having a pure expression of joy written all over every inch of his face. My mother to this day is devoted to helping children on the autism spectrum and has made a career out of this passion, so it comes as no surprise that this was the defining moment in their relationship.

Their relationship was quite unconventional for the time period. My mother Jewish, my father, unknown the sect of Christianity, but Christianity nonetheless. Ten years of age separated them, my mother had never really been through a serious relationship before and my

father only a few. One in which he was cheated on and deterred from relationships until after his experience of serving in the Navy. On top of all of that, my mother 'asked out' my father on their first date: walking along the boardwalk. She always described their relationship as never having a 'dating phase'. There was no blind date, they both never skipped around to other people, there was no friends in common, it just sort of happened. Even prior to the beach date, I asked if there was ever any real flirtatious phase, and she simply responded with "No." They got to know each other through endless drawn out meetings every week. Small talk was just about present.

"One day he said to me, how was your weekend? And I said 'very religious'... *laughter from both of us* because it was Rosh Hashanah! He probably just giggled. Like he did everything with me"

Music transition

During the last weeks of my father here on earth, in a hospice bedroom while laying on his deathbed he told a story that my mother had never known their entire 25 years of marriage. During the first meeting that they both attended together, my father looked at my mother for the very first time and just immediately thought "Wow." He was a man of very few words, so this story testifies. Maybe it really was love at first sight. *Unconventional* love at first sight. This was no cheesy 90's love story of gazing into each other's eyes. This was unspoken stories of glances passed at each other in which they both just *knew*. No flirtatious remarks, no complicated dating history, or connections through friends, just pure *knowing*.

This motif seems to repeat itself. On paper, they both actually seem so different. My father grew up in rural upstate New York in a Christian family with an extensive history of divorce and remarriage amongst his parents. My mother on the other hand, lived in suburban Long Island to two Jewish parents that had known each other their entire lives, and still married to this day. Their taste in music, movies, television, and sports? Different. So how did they just

know? Why did this relationship last 25 full years? As a high schooler I have seen many relationships around me come and go. Couples that are almost seemingly inseparable and share common interests in every which way, but dissolve after a year. So what made their bond so much stronger, that the only force capable of pulling them apart was death?

*Insert extensive quote about **values** connecting them*

Values. She repeats that often word often. At first, I was confused as to what this actually meant. It just seemed so broad. Values? That can mean anything. How is that the ultimate bond between what she describes as a *soulmate* level relationship? According to Merriam-Webster **values** can be defined as: *a person's principles or standards of behavior; one's judgment of what is important in life*. Just one simple word can be the deciding factor of a healthy and happy 25 year marriage? Where did these synchronized values originate?

Through this confusion, I mentioned religion as a possible explanation. A difference of religion is a deal breaker for many. Religion is so vast, with an innumerable amount of beliefs and stories. How can a Christian and Jew come together to provide a healthy lifestyle for two young boys with very little to no conflict? Wars are fought over religion for centuries. Many lives lost due to a simple difference in beliefs, yet a quite beautiful love story blossomed from this difference. This must be a paradox, right?

“One of the questions I asked on our second date...Actually, it wasn't a question, it was a statement: I am raising my children Jewish”

“And he said?”

“Okay.”

Again, a man of very few words.

8 years ago my mother met what has now become her 'Dear Best Friend' or “DBF” by the name of Christine. Christine, a Doctor of Metaphysic, introduced my mother to intensive

spiritual therapy. Through these therapy sessions my mother began to find who she really was. She learned much about her current life, personal history, higher self, and past lives. My mother truly believes that this work is what has shaped her into the woman she is today. Without Christine and the work she had done on herself, she believes the passing of my father could have been disastrous. When beginning this work with Christine, despite the financial costs, my father was more than supportive. He was always non judgemental by any means, and even quoted towards the end of his journey, while conversing with my mother “You are not the woman you were the day I met you.” Sometimes a line such as that can be conceived or even implied in a negative way. My father though, stated it in the most loving way possible. He recognized these beautiful traits she had picked up along the way since beginning work with Christine, and was just truly astonished by the strength that had began to illuminate her. So much so, that during the months of being diagnosed with Cancer, sick on a hospital bed, he himself began spiritual therapy with Christine. Though only a few sessions, he too was peaked with curiosity about the Christian religion and Jesus Christ. These were his roots that he had never actually explored in great detail.

Months later, through much complications, it was eventually his time. God had decided his work on earth had come to a conclusion, and in September of 2015 he checked into a hospice facility.

“When we got into Good Shepherd Hospice, and the cross was up and they said ‘well you’re Jewish (to my father), should we take the cross down? He said no. ‘Well how is your wife going to feel? ‘She’s going to feel fine”

It was moments like these that I realized, that differences simply do not matter. That’s the bottom line. Lisa and Doug Walters were different people by all means, except for their values, and in the end that is all that mattered. A value they shared was raising a family under a

stable religion. An established faith they believed was a key to raising grounded individuals. Beyond that, religion to them was a broad concept with room for loose interpretations that embodied positive values no matter the religion. Faith: another word my mother always has on repeat. Eventually though, their lives came full circle. My father was baptised, and passed away with a cross above his head. In between that? He explored his options and converted to Judaism to marry his *soulmate* while never changing his values. My mother? Born Jewish while participating in her bestfriend's Christian Youth Group. Bat-Mitzvahed and raised both of her children Jewish. Currently, she attends church every Sunday with no intention of stopping. I don't think either of them actually 'knew what religion they were' nor did they even care. They knew they believed in being supportive of each other and to their family, responsible, respectful, inclusive, mature, and most importantly: loving.

“Right before he passed, he said there is only one word that we have for each other now,...and it's love”