

MAKING THE MOST OF A GHOST...

How do you commune with the dead?

I know this sounds morbid as hell, but the question comes back on me every so often, like a bad aftertaste.

Why bother, and why care? I don't believe in any afterlife or reincarnation, so why is the need for mental continuity so compelling?

I think for me, especially where my mother Angela is concerned, it's because she represents the most significant unfinished conversation in my life.

As a kid, I can't remember more than a dozen words Angela ever really spoke to me. In any memories I have, she didn't make my lunch, she didn't play with me, she rarely spoke with me one-to-one, and I cannot remember one clear "I love you". I believe that she must have loved me, for I can see it in her face in a few photos from my babyhood, but she wasn't "there" in my life very much. She just wasn't a presence, parental or otherwise in any meaningful way.

I think this present-yet-absent theme explains the attachment issues I have with women, and why I tend to treasure the women who mother me in their own ways. I've had a few woman friends who've baked cakes or sweetbreads for my birthday, and it has always touched me very deeply. There's something about the time and effort taken by a caring person to create a treat that triggers my sweet tooth (not to mention dopamine), and that I may enjoy over multiple sittings. It's taken me a long time to see these little acts of kindness and friendship in a balanced way, and not let them get blown out of proportion.

All the same, the sweet taste of a treat made just for me helps to eclipse the bitterness left inside my gut. It came from a little boy who didn't understand that some women are not wired to be nurturing mothers or to be demonstrative or affectionate in general. Such may be the nature of introversion or depression, or a product of how my mother was raised.

So as I've gotten older and less subjective, I've tried to see my mother Angela in a whole-person kind of view and accept and understand her nature, and not internalize it as any form of personal rejection. It's a simmering-down of the neediness that peaked in those one or two occasions where I can remember that we had some one-to-one time. Inside me, that little eight-year-old boy needed attention from his mother and needed to know that she saw him and loved him.

Over the years, it hasn't been easy to depersonalize and detach from someone who sat in such a symbolically significant position, but that's what happened gradually, as our family broke up and we lived apart and disconnected from each other. It has happened to all of us to some degree, but it was especially so with my Mother. Gradually, from my age of nine to twenty nine, Mum went from being my familiar mother, to being a curiosity and a worry inside our home, to being a lost person whom you no longer knew (and whom you feared no longer knew who you were), and ultimately a stranger you never saw anymore.

If that arc doesn't describe the downfall of a relationship for all of us (me, my sister, and especially for my Dad), then I don't know what could.

Although I accept how and who she was, I'll never know if she ever truly wanted to be a mother, or if it was family pressure that ultimately cast her in that role. I don't really think she ever became her own person. I think her mind became a kind of depressive hell which she ultimately gave in to. It's possible that, if her life or choices had been different, she might have found fulfilment in a different relationship or via a deeper connection with her creative artistic and musical impulses.

So I sit here and wonder what I would say to her if we could speak for a moment. I suppose the simplest and most direct thing is "I love you" . The voice is mine, and unfortunately so is her answer.