

Unanswered Questions by Jobi Jones

It is the same thing every year. I find myself guilted into another mother-daughter banquet by my grandmother. As soon as I enter the room she senses my presence and immediately starts parading me around. She drags me from table to table trying to show me off as if I am some door prize she has just won. The dialogue is more or less the same. "Y'all, I would like you meet my granddaughter Julie." Under my breath I correct her, "My name isn't Julie," while still keeping that fake smile on my face that I mastered years ago. She politely restates her introduction: "This is my granddaughter Jobi, Julie's daughter, my middle child. Julie passed away a few years ago."

It is at this moment that all noise drowns out and the only words I hear are those spoken through body language and facial expressions: "Oh you poor thing, how tragic." It is also at this moment I feel like running towards the glow of the nearest EXIT sign to escape all the looks of sympathy that make me feel as though my mother died right before I arrived rather than fourteen years ago. I cannot even pretend to know the bond and relationship that these women are celebrating and feel I need to excuse myself for intruding on their special moment. I do appreciate the concern, but the apologies just aren't necessary.

I was so young when she passed away that I really don't remember her. This made it hard to relate to my Dad and my brother who were in fact deeply affected by this awful event, and when they talk about her it makes me feel extremely odd. They talk about their memories and the way she was and I have absolutely nothing to contribute to the conversation. It is weird; I have utterly nothing to say about my own mother. All I have are questions.

The answers to the majority of these questions will never come, but must be imagined. Like the way she walked. Maybe she had one of those super-model walks that made everyone stop and look at her when she entered the room, as if they could feel her presence. Or maybe she just sort of strolled along. And the way she laughed. Did she have one of those laughs that was absolutely contagious and spread like brush fire through a room until everyone was in tears? Or did she just kind of giggle? How about the way she smelled? Maybe she smelled of those expensive perfumes that lured people to her and lingered in the air for hours after she left. Or maybe she just smelled of ivory soap.

These are the types of memories my family has of her and I resent them for it. It is not fair that one phrase or event can send memories flooding through their brains like tidal waves, while all I can do is regurgitate facts I have been told. They get the good stuff, the stuff that really makes a person and shapes their soul, and I am completely jealous. It is as if they were this whole other family that I was not a part of and I am not invited on their strolls through memory lane. I am just a little bitter that the woman who gave me life didn't stay around long enough for me to get to know her. From what I have been told, she was going through extremely rough times and felt her only solution was to not continue with this life.

When I was younger, I thought that once you died you stayed that same age all through eternity in Heaven. I had therefore hoped that the rest of my family and I would die soon so that we could still be the same family again up in Heaven. That was my biggest concern in my childhood,

being older than my mother when I died. I know it may sound weird, but how were we going to be the same, whole, family again one day when we were all old and my mother was still young? It bothered me for a long time.

After I grew up a little and let go of that burden of old death, I started to question her reasons for committing such a selfish act. I would sacrifice anything in the world to know what was going through her head at the precise moment it all happened. I mean, was it honestly that bad? These questions have made me doubt my beliefs in a God and also have trampled my validity and feelings of self worth—mainly because rather than getting sad, I get angry. It is as if we were not enough for her to live for and she felt she couldn't come to us, her own family, for help. Instead she took the easy way out and hurt us all. She may have eased her pain but she inflicted it on everyone else. For this I resent her.

For the longest time it never occurred to me that I actually did have a mother. The facts I had just weren't enough; I needed more evidence. And one day I got this evidence and was not prepared at all. I was watching some old home movies for a family tree project I was doing. The video was of my brother's sixth birthday party at my grandmother's pool. Suddenly the camera was focused on me tugging on the bathing suit of someone that wasn't in the camera's view. I could hear myself: "Mama..." (still tugging) "hey Mama..." (tugging some more) "Mama..." Finally a response, "What honey?" It was then that the camera zoomed back and I saw my younger self actually talking to my mother. I wanted her to watch me swim. I sat there for a minute while the tape continued to play, in shock from the reality check I had just had. I cannot put into words how odd it was to watch me interact with my own mother, a person I don't even know. It is a fact that that moment actually took place, but it is still so unreal to me because I just can't remember. I can't remember anything. And I resent myself for that.

They say everyone has a destiny and that your life is planned before it even starts, but I would like to know what it was about me that made me destined for this. I do find peace in the belief that everything happens for a reason and God won't give you more than you can handle at one time. I also take comfort in the belief of a "Heaven" where one day I may get answers to all of my questions and then some. Until that day I will just have to continue day dreaming and dealing with my emotions because no matter how angry I get or how loud I scream, I know that there is no one to answer me. At least not now, anyway.