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Del and Me

Maeve Saunders

My father left a lot of things to my mother. It was never, “go ask your father”, it was always “oh, the door is closed to the office again, I guess I’ll have to go ask mom”. I didn’t think about my father much when I was young. His absence never bothered me and after a while it became expected. I don’t want this to sound like some sad story about how my father was never around when I was young and that I would stay up all night crying because I missed him. I didn’t miss him. He was here, I know. It didn’t matter that I couldn’t see him. I don’t know if my life would have been better if he had been around more. I don’t know if I would have been happier or felt more loved. It doesn’t really matter what could have been. It’s not very important to me, especially now, when my past is my past and I would like it to stay that way, and something tells me so would my dad. It mattered, of course, when my father was around. When he would give me attention it mattered more, but it wasn’t soul crushing when he wasn’t and I think if I cared any more about my father being gone, I would never be able to write about it.

Music was the only way I could ever strike up conversation. It was the bridge between our two worlds that were exceptionally different and probably never meant to cross paths. It also helped that everything I would ask for my father to look at were only the things he would ever want to hear about. I molded myself into a person that my father would pay attention to, and it didn’t bother me. Maybe this is a bit sociopathic of me, but I would be able to flip a switch around my father. I was able to blow out the candles and become someone else, or maybe just become another version of myself, who’s to say.

My father was emotionally and physically absent most of the time. Actually, he was probably more emotionally absent than physically. It was never his intention I believe. He’s a worrier and a workaholic, and he can’t help it. He couldn’t help it that he needed to spend all his time in the office, working, rather than with us. It didn’t make me upset either because I knew what he was thinking. He was thinking, “I have all these kids, and all these cars, and all these expenses, and no money. Fuckin’ell”. To be fair my father did

have money, much more than he would let on. But spending it would mean he didn't have it anymore and what were we to do with no money, especially money well spent? I don't resent my father for acting the way he did, towards his money and his kids. He has a way of life. A set of rules to follow, taught to him by his father, and by his father, and his father, and so on and so forth until everyone is living the exact same life as before. I understand it, I do. It's hard to break the habit and start a new tradition of paying attention to your kids. To let them know that they are loved. To build that emotional connection with at a young age, so they don't grow up wondering "Mom, does dad love me?"

My father is not a villain, let's get that straight. He is not an evil man or a bad man in any sense. I might have thought he was evil when I was young. I remember it being weird for me to never see him around and then to suddenly have him show up to some important event of mine, like any good father would, and give me a hug and a kiss and tell me he loved me. That was weird for me as a child. It was weird because it was rare and, in my mind, uncalled for. I grew up never asking for his attention around the house, mostly because he was always working, and I would be damned if I ever tried to bother him while he was working. I never asked him for that kind of attention, so to receive it now, in a public place, with my mother and brothers and grandparents and everyone else who they could think of to bring and make me more embarrassed, was uncomfortable. We would go home those nights together and not talking because there wasn't much of anything to talk about. I was tired and alone and my father was tired and alone. We were both tired and alone and how do two lonely people bring themselves to find one another? They don't.

Our relationship is lovely now. With all his kids either in college or settled across the country with his new family, my father has finally taken the time to slow down. We talk a lot more now and let each other know that we love them. I'll call my dad every now and then to tell him how I'm doing or what I've been up to. He doesn't really tell me much about what he's doing or how he's feeling, but I never expected he would. It takes a lot for my father to open up. To be vulnerable, especially with his children. He puts up a front I've come to notice. Even after all these years, he still likes to act like the perfect role model for us, even when we know and may have even told him that that's not what we asked for. He's slowing

down, yes, but he's still in fight or flight mode. On "showing weakness isn't good when you are raising kids, even when your kids are good and raised, never show weakness" mode. It makes me sad honestly. Not that I feel sad for my father and what his life has turned out to be.

No, my father has had a good life and I have had a good life. He did good with himself and with us, despite what anyone reading this may think, he did good. He tried his best and I saw. He worked extra hours; endless hours and I saw. He fixed up the house and I saw. He paid for all our momentary choices of sport or hobbies, even when they were absolutely ridiculous, and I saw. I saw him and I still see him. I see how he's tired and I see how he's loved and comfortable, with his life and with us. He knows he's done his best and worked his hardest. He deserves his peace and quiet. His little house on the water and a sailboat to go out on every weekend. And dog just like Patches, his childhood pal and my mother standing beside him letting him know it's been a hell of a time. My father deserves this and so does my mother. My father deserves his rest. How do I tell my father that it's time to rest?