

A Man and his Mom

DC Benny, June 2001

DC Benny meditates on what his Mother hates and why he loves her.

My mother says she hates Mothers Day. In order to give her a Mothers Day gift, I have to hear about what a "shiesse" holiday it is and how "every day should be Mothers Day". She hates gifts, except for frog statuettes or anything to do with frogs. Mom identifies with frogs since they are stereotyped as ugly, but according to her "they are really secretly beautiful" and under appreciated.

My mother hates power lawn mowers and leaf blowers with a passion that can only be described as Teutonic (even though she is from Austria, which I like to think of as "Germany-lite"). She has waged verbal wars with the neighbors about how their leaf blowers/ mowers scare the squirrels and birds. Mom has written hand-scrawled, Martin-Luther-treatise-length-tirades, against technology which are then sent to the local newspaper, The Northwest Current. Since there is not much news to report, The Current will sometimes print these letters. My mother will then receive "fan calls" from some other "eccentrics" with similar agendas. These "fan calls" lead to my mother and the "eccentric" bonding on the porch of my parents house over a jug of cheap-ass Almaden mountain burgundy, until her new accomplice staggers off into the night.

My mom hates television except for Sanford and Son, which is "funny".

Anytime I try to introduce her to a new show, she will last about 5 minutes and after several dramatic sighs proclaims it, "not funny". My mother hates the fat lady at the post office who made a comment about her smelling raw garlic. Mom eats raw garlic daily and it seeps through her pores like some sort of organic tear gas. My mother hates people who cut spaghetti with a knife, expressing the sentiment that people like that should be shot with a blunderbuss. My mother likes the word "blunderbuss", which is apparently some kind of wide barreled, archaic musket that sprays shot in a big arc (I think my mother just likes the fact that no-one knows what the word means.) My mom loves thrift shops. Even more than thrift shops, my Mom loves what she calls "trashing". My Mother will grab one of her wide-brimmed straw hats festooned with ivy, get on her bike, and pedal away (my Mother hates cars and rides her bike everywhere). She will then ride around the neighborhood and dig through piles of trash like a prospector during the 1890's Sierra Madre. Sometimes Mom will rescue plants that have been thrown away, which she then replants in our back yard. Other times she appears with a chunk of lumber tied to her bike basket, or with a piece of furniture, gardening tool, birdhouse, busted lamp, and anything in wrought iron. The list is endless. Occasionally she hits it big and arrives bellowing, "Look what I found, an 18th century oxen yoke...in the trash!" Or "look, a hand carved wooden angel made in Italy!" My father and I give each other a look because we know the real deal. Maybe Mom did look in the trash, but items of this stature probably came from one of her antique store haunts. She won't admit to actually having spent money.



Make new friends, but keep the old. Some are silver and the others, you find in the trash.

Besides collecting junk, my Mom loves to "collect characters". My mom has been known to come bursting through the front door with different disheveled strangers. "This is Phil!", she will announce. "He lives in the park!". I catch my father rolling his eyes and saying something passive-aggressive like, "I see Phil doesn't enjoy wearing shoes". My mother will ignore this and say, "Phil writes stories on cardboard scraps with a stick dipped in mud! Isn't that wonderful!" Then she will read Phil her own poetry (usually about societal injustice to frogs), and they will both get smashed on cheap-ass jug wine, while my Father and I will go out for a walk. Fleeing the scene, because we are both afraid to admit that we don't understand my Mom's poetry at all. The less durable collected characters' luster will usually dissipate after a week and my father will make a sarcastic comment such as, "So where is the 'writer' fellow... working on a novel?", knowing full well that Phil probably took a shit in one of Mom's flower pots and was summarily banished. Most of these characters (the durable ones that is) remain in my mothers life; the trash men who she cooks breakfast for, the veterinarian who castrated the cats in our basement, the flute player from the projects, the gay opera singer who makes fresh pesto garnished with pot, my brother's drag queen friends, Ms. Hoochvalt who calls for her dog Wolfie every night at 7:00pm even though he died years ago, and the 300 pound vegan lady. Again, the list is endless. With all of these characters that come and go, my mother is loyal to those whom she loves, no matter what their faults. One of my high school friends helped her get one of our cats out of a tree in the backyard. A couple of years later, when he was locked up for a very serious crime, my Mother campaigned relentlessly to have his sentence reduced. She refused to believe that someone who had once rescued her cat could be capable of wrongdoing.



Things my Mother loves (and a few more she hates).

My mom loves to take pictures of every event that ever happens. I have no idea how to categorize the subject matter of her pictures. I do have some favorites: one I call, "Osteo-man", which is a shot of this old man with osteoporosis so bad that his chin is basically touching his chest. My mom caught him at dusk, from behind. The effect is that "Osteo-man" is walking around with no head. "Come look at the headless horseman" she will say before she whips it out. My mom loves to laugh. I inherit my dark sense of humor from her. One of my earliest memories is of Mom reading me a German Fairy tale called, Der Shtrupelpeter. It was a series of stories about bad kids and the fates that befell them for being bad. One kid made fun of another kid for being black and then fell into a bucket of tar, which I like to think was ahead of its time. The name of the book came from a kid who wouldn't stop sucking his thumbs (even after being warned repeatedly). Consequently, a giant tailor appears holding some huge scissors. He uses the scissors to cut the kids thumbs off. Ironically, I was never scared by the story but rather, excited by the fact that I was allowed access to an adult level of graphic violence...packaged for kids.

My mom loves her garden, laden with trophies from "trashing" and hates when anyone calls it a yard. My mom also loves my old sweaters, which she wears like big coats around the house and uses the pockets to hide cigarettes in.

My mom hates religion which is a whole "nother" story.

My mother hates Block parties and had my father build a tall fence to keep the noise out. She also doesn't like to see the neighbors who she also hates and who hate her back, but pretend not to. The neighbors like the fence, since it is another barrier to shut out the drunken family brawls that take place whenever the bills can't be paid. As far as the brawls go, my Mother has always felt that "if it's gotta come out, its gotta come out". She doesn't like people who "keep it all in".

Nature vs. Nurture.

When people tell me I look like my Dad, I think, "Yeah, BUT I AM MY MOM"; a symphony of paradox trapped in a conundrum. I have her nose with the bulbous tip. I have the big vein that pops out in my forehead when I lose my temper. I have a shopping habit, a love of good food, red wine, black comedy, and weird people. So Mom, here's to you and everyone else out there who doesn't give a fuck what people think. Now lay off the garlic, your breath is killing me...