

## HIDDEN DISCOVERY

My mother is dead. The words echo over and over and over in my brain like I'm hearing it for the first time. She was only 59 when cervical cancer stole her away from us seven months ago. I still reach for the phone to seek her advice or invite her for lunch.

Who will I talk to when my husband, my kids, my job push me beyond the brink? Who will go with me to see Mick Jagger in concert? Hysterical laughter bubbles up and escapes.

I sit on the edge of my bed and caress my mother's diary. I found it a few months ago while forced to go through her things alone. Alone, because neither my brother nor sister would help. Big babies, I never can count on them when things get tough. It's taken me this long to muster the courage to open it.

I flip open the cover then slam it shut. I take a deep breath, open it again, and read:

*~ December 25, 1970*

*Dear Diary,*

*Isn't that how you start these things. Sound idiotic. But since it's in ink I can't scratch it out and start over.*

*I received this journal for Christmas from my father's mother, Nana. I'm not her favorite. Last year I received a blue-haired troll doll, a fad from the 60's. New motto: Make lemonade out of a turnip.*

*I've decided to record meaningful events in my life. When I'm grey and wrinkled, I will reflect on whether my life held significance.*

*First Entry—Got engaged Christmas Eve. At eighteen, is anyone ready for marriage?*

I thumb through the pages and look for significant events.

~ January 2, 1971

*Eloped! Never thought I'd go through with it but, he's a good man. One of the few who didn't get drafted and sent to Vietnam.*

~ July 16, 1971

*Returned home from the hospital today with a pink, tow-headed daughter—Claire.*

**SCARY!**

Way to go mom, knocked up before you got married. I smile at my mother's admitted fear. Her forthright and resilience persona always amazed me. I never saw her vulnerability, not when she had to terminate a stillborn pregnancy, not when her mother passed, not even when she faced her own death. My mother could humble a saint.

I flip through her diary until I find something of interest.

~ June 5, 1972

*I hope all our protesting puts a halt to this stupid war. Another girl has come into our lives. This one cries and fusses—a lot. Have to wonder if they mixed up the baskets at the hospital? I think we'll call her Sissy.*

~ January 22, 1973

*Roe vs. Wade. This is a great moment for woman. Not sure if I can survive another pregnancy.*

~ August 9, 1974

*Nixon impeached. Will we ever trust again? We have a boy. Martin. God help me!*

~ August 15, 1974

*The war is over! Yeah, I don't think I can endure another rally. It's been hard enough to drag around two kids, let alone three.*

Demonstrations were more than a cause with my mother. They were her life. I'd forgotten about being hauled throughout Portland crusading for this cause or that movement. I remember one event, I hadn't started grade school. Someone handed me a sign to carry. They positioned two of my fingers in the shape of a V. Then we all yelled and marched around in a circle. The local newspaper had taken my picture and Mother pinned the article on the refrigerator for all to see.

There was save the whales, save the seals, save the planet. My mother was quite the salvage queen. We had countless people that traipsed through our front door. But the rallies of the 70's waned, replaced by the fervor of the PTA mom of the 80's. The New fashion became bake sales, school supply fundraisers, and troop leader. She did, however find time for a protest here and there.

I skim the next few pages of the diary until I hit the word affair. There it is bold as a neon sign. I slam the book shut. I feel the palpitations of my heart and the sweat on my palms. My mother had an affair. No way. It can't be true. Unthinkable.

*~ February 24, 1983*

*We met again. I never imaged myself in an affair. I know this will destroy my marriage but I don't care. He makes me laugh.*

I can't deny my shock but somehow, I understand. Dad was never around much. I can't cite a time when my father attended my piano recitals, soccer matches or softball games.

*~ April 1, 1984*

*My divorce is final today. I am happy it's finally over but at the same time a little sad. The affair is kaput too. Funny, not upset about that. April Fools!*

*~ March 6, 1984*

*Claire's been accepted at the University of Oregon. My baby is going to leave me this summer. What will I do without her?*

Oh Mom, you could be so maudlin. The year I went off to college, you'd have thought I left the country instead of a two-hour drive. You phoned me every day for weeks. My roommates teased me relentlessly—jealous bitches.

*~ September 20, 1987*

*Someone wonderful has come into my life.*

Bob was a tall lanky guy, lumber by trade. The married and remained together until her death.

*~ January 1, 2000*

*Celebrated the coming of a new millennium. Wasn't the world supposed to stop turning? New Year's resolution—Stop listening to foolishness!*

*~ May 8, 2000*

*The number of abused animals in the country is disgusting. People should be tested before they are allowed to adopt a pet!*

That year my mother took up animal rights. She'd found someone else to save. I think she missed her calling to minister.

I continue to flip through pages regarding her animal rescue efforts and grandchildren's births, then I stop.

*~ September 17, 2010*

*I've lost 7 pounds... Outstanding! But I'm so tired. I may need to put on some weight to regain my strength.*

*~ November 22, 2010*

*I'm so excited the family is getting together for Thanksgiving. The weight is still coming off and now I have leg pains.*

*~ December 20, 2010*

*Spotting is getting worse. Resolution—make an appointment with my OB/GYN.*

I put the book down to catch my breath. I know what's next. I wipe the moisture from my lashes and continue.

*~ February 14, 2011*

*Got my results...not good. They want to perform a hysterectomy, chemotherapy, and radiotherapy but at the same time they say it doesn't look good. Happy Valentine's Day!*

*~ February 28, 2011*

*It's official, I've got stage four cervical cancer. They say four, maybe six months. I've nixed any treatment, won't do any good anyway. God, I hate all the weeping that's going on in the house.*

I spent every waking moment at my mother's house. Most nights I ended up on their couch. Her husband Bob was too distraught to manage on his own. My wonderful husband supported me and took on the role of mother and father of our twelve and nine year olds.

*~ March 13, 2011*

*Made an important decision today. I've opted for assisted death. Euthanasia, it's kind of a melodic word. I don't want my family to have to endure wiping my ass or listen to prolonged gasping breaths.*

*Claire is my only hope. The others have all forsaken my choice. I need to do this while I can still function. I am grateful to Dr. Kevorkian and the state of Oregon for giving me the option.*

*~ March 31, 2011*

*I've decided on April 19. The day I came into this world, is the day I will depart.*

*~ April 19, 2011*

*I am at peace with my decision. I hope in time everyone will come to understand that this was my choice, my right, my life. God be with them all.*

Mother's departure day, as she called it, was surreal. Neither her husband, nor my siblings attended. Her physician and I were the only two present. She pushed the syringe filled with prescribed medication into the tube attached to her arm, wished us all happy lives, closed her eyes, and went to sleep.

The pit of my stomach churns and I ache to hear my mother's voice and wrap my arms around her once more. Instead, I hug her diary and rock back and forth.

A sudden voice rings in my ears. "Ready, Mom?"

Propped against the doorway with one leg crossed over the other, my daughter's caramel brown eyes cast a quizzical look. At thirteen, she has all the poise and promise a mother could hope. I gaze into her eyes and see a glint of my mother looking back at me. I smile and slide the diary under my pillow.

"What are we rescuing today dogs or cats?"

She replies, "Both."