

The demons that drive writers

By Holly Lisle

There are folks who want to write books.

Then there are those of us who write because drinking kills your liver (and killed most of our relatives) and therapy is too fucking expensive.

You think I jest (and to a certain extent, I do). But there is something that drives people to turn themselves inside out, to rip every event they've lived through to shreds to try to make sense of it, to turn all of that pain and horror into plots and characters and conflicts and twists, and pushes us out the other side of unrelenting brutal self-dissection with books in hand.

And since over the weekend (while I was doing some cleaning) I found one of the *little shards of horror that made ME who I am* poised like a scorpion in the center of a bunch of stuff I was throwing away, I thought I'd share.

We start with the date here, which is Dec. 3, 2001.



The Envelope of Maternal Manipulation

I've redacted both addresses, not because either of them is current (I know mine isn't and have no clue about hers) – but because having strangers show up at places because the addresses are THERE would be uncool.

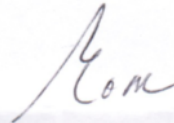
My mother's handwriting is distinctive and unmistakable, so I want to have it here.

Next, the lovely missive that came inside this envelope.

December 02, 2001

Dear Holly,

I hesitate to write to you after the last phone call to you, when you said you never wanted to hear from us again. Being thick headed and figuring you maybe didn't mean it when you called your dad a bastard, son of a bitch. I figured you probably were having a bad day. Any way not to bother you. You probably **actually** don't care but your dad had a severe stroke and we sold our mountain chalet and business and moved to [REDACTED]. On the off chance that you might call Murphy we didn't want you to call and us not be there. The people who bought the house kept our same phone number and would tell you. But I'd rather write and incur your wrath for writing than to incur it for not letting you know. We hope things are going well for you. Should you or your family need to get in touch with us our cell phone number is [REDACTED]. Our six month address is [REDACTED].



Letter from my mother

Done on what looks to me like an ink jet printer.

The words here are fun, so if you're visually impaired and relying on a reader to read this post, I'm going to copy them for you.

December 02, 2001

Dear Holly,

*I hesitate to write to you after the last phone call to you, when you said you never wanted to hear from us again. Being thick headed and figuring you maybe didn't mean it when you called your dad a bastard, son of a bitch. I figured you probably were having a bad day. Any way not to bother you. You probably **actually** don't care but your dad had a severe stroke and we sold our mountain chalet and business and moved to REDACTED. On the off chance that you might call Murphy we didn't want you to call and us not be there. The people who*

bought the house kept our same phone number and would tell you. But I'd rather write and incur your wrath for writing than to incur it for not letting you know. We hope things are going well for you. Should you or your family need to get in touch with us our cell phone number is REDACTED. Our six month address is REDACTED.

Mom

SO.

I'm not from a normal family, but I've seen them on TV.

On TV, when something awful happens, what does the family member who KNOWS it happened do?

She picks up the fucking telephone and calls everyone, and says, "Your dad had a stroke, and is in the hospital, and we don't know if he's going to make it."

In which case, the person who receives the call packs fresh underwear, jumps on the next plane out of town, and shows up at the hospital, because even if your dad IS a philandering, lying cuntbucket sack of shit, he's still your dad, and you remember when you were little and he took you hunting and fishing and taught you how to clean game and load shotgun shells and shoot both a rifle and a shotgun and was the coolest man on the planet...

You remember when you loved him.

And you go. Because there's still a chance what's wrong can be made right.

But like I said... I'm not from a normal family.

In my family, apparently the way you let someone know someone important to them has had a stroke is to...

Wait for him to die, so you can hold it over the head of the

one who wasn't at the funeral.

Then when he DOESN'T die...

- Wait until he's out of the hospital
- Wait until you've sold the house
- Wait until you've sold the business
- Wait until you've moved your whole fucking parade all the way to the other side of the state, and...
- THEN write the letter above.

The purpose of this letter was not to give me a chance to make things right with my father.

It was to fill me with guilt.

It didn't.

See, I have learned from long and brutal experience that this is the way my mother operates.

When my grandmother died, I got a letter from my mother telling me that everyone was surprised that I didn't come to the funeral, because everyone else was there.

My mother's letter was *how I found out my grandmother died.*

When my sister died a couple years ago, I found out when my mother phoned my first ex-mother-in-law (the child molester's mother) who told my older son, who called Matt, who took the call, got grim-faced, told me no, things weren't okay but to go ahead and finish eating, and when we left the restaurant, took me out to the car, and then told me so I wasn't sitting in front of a bunch of strangers when I fell apart.

That ugly game of telephone tag was how I first even discovered that the sister who was four years younger than me was *even sick*, that she had been unwell for a long time, and had apparently slipped into a coma and stayed that way for a while. Possibly a long while. There apparently would have been

tons of time for me to go see her while she was alive... maybe even conscious. But no.

This was how I found out my sister – who I always figured would come live with me when my parents died – (she had cerebral palsy and was severely retarded, but she was a good kid and I loved her) **was dead. I wrote the linked poem following my learning of her death.**

In my mother's version of family, this is the way you do things.

And I should have realized it a lot earlier.

When I was twenty-seven (in 1986) and considering getting a divorce from that fuck Barry (the child molester), she told me that with his drinking and his diabetes and his running around, he wouldn't live long, and I should just stay married to him and wait for him to die.

By every proof of her existence, my mother likes to wait for things to die.

Meanwhile, however, Barry died in 2005. Instead of having my third husband, Matt, since 1995 – instead of having love and a partner in life – I could have had that evil spawn of scum and cuntery for another twenty years.

Divorce...?

Is AWESOME.

My best guess is, if either of my parents is still alive, my mother is still married to the husband *she hoped* would die, so she could send me another of those delightful "Guess whose funeral you missed this time?" letters. Hey, if either of them is still alive, they deserve each other.

But enough of them. Back to why I'm a writer.

When this is where you come from, when this shit show of manipulation and lies is what you have to call home and family, from an early age you turn inward, you start pulling yourself apart, you question EVERYTHING, and anything that does not hold together, you discard.

And then, because all the rage and fury and disbelief and despair inside you has to go somewhere, and because you have to find a way to make it mean something, to make it matter, to make it not a poison that eats you alive...

You write. Novels, short stories, nonfiction, blog posts, words, and words, and more words.

Because even though writing is a gruelling, painful, difficult way to make a living...

- Drinking kills your liver
- Therapy is too fucking expensive

And when you're done turning your life upside-down and inside-out and stripping it to the bare-bone essentials and then rebuilding on those, and **then turning that process into stories**, maybe you will have created something that someone ELSE who crawled out of a hellhole and survived can use to make his or her own life better.

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