



Motherless Daughters
of Orange County



Sisters at Heart ©

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MDOC GEARS UP FOR THE HOLIDAYS

HOLIDAY BRUNCH

Our annual holiday brunch will be held this year on December 5, 2009 at the home of Mary Felix from 11:30 until 2 pm. Mary lives at 9053 Suva Street in Downey and is a past president of MDOC. She is inviting us into her home during the holiday season so we, as motherless daughters, can share memories of our past Christmases and Hanukahs with each other, and just be together during this often stressful time of year. Please come, bring a dish to share with others, and bring your holiday spirit. Invitations will go out later by mail and/or by e-mail, but this is an invitation as well. If you plan to attend, let me know at juanita@finewoodnthings.com or by phone at 714-588-6359.



Thoughts for the holidays....

*Please don't mourn for me
I'm still here, though you don't see.
I'm right by your side each night and day
And within your heart I long to stay.*

*My body is gone but I'm always near
I'm everything you feel, see and hear.
My spirit is free but I'll never depart
As long as you keep me alive in your heart.*

*I'll never wander out of your sight.
I'm the brightest star on a warm summer night.
I'll never go beyond your reach
I'm the warm, moist sand when you walk on the beach.*

*I'm the colorful leaves when winter comes 'round
And the pure white snow that blankets the ground.
I'm the beautiful flowers of which you're so fond.
The clear cool water in a quiet pond.*

*I'm the first bright blossom you see in the spring.
The first shiny raindrop that storm clouds bring.
I'm the first ray of light when the sun starts to shine
And you see that the face in the moon is mine.*

*When you start thinking there's no one to love you
Talk to me and I will listen.
I'll whisper my answer through the leaves on the trees.
And you'll feel my presence in the soft summer breeze.*

*I'm the hot salty tears that flow when you weep
And the beautiful dreams that come while you sleep
I'm the smile you see on a stranger's face
Just look for me.....
I'm every place!*

Message From Our President ~ Juanita Driskell

Hello Sisters at Heart,

I hope this holiday season finds you and yours well and happy! Right now, MDOC is gearing up for our annual Holiday Brunch, to be held this year at the home of Mary Felix. If you are reading this newsletter online, just click on [upcoming events](#) and you'll find the invitation. You can RSVP either to Mary or to me. We hope you'll come and share some of your memories, thoughts and feelings about the holidays in a room full of other women just like you. If you are not reading this online, the Brunch is on December 5 from 11:30 until 2:30. Mary's address is 9053 Suva St., Downey, 90240. If you come, please bring a dish that would serve 4 to 6 people, plus a serving utensil. RSVP to me at 714-588-6359, or online at [jua-nita@finewoodnthings.com](mailto:juanita@finewoodnthings.com), or to Mary at 562-862-6653.



It may seem a long way away until the May luncheon, but the time is now for me to ask for help with the planning. Specifically, help is needed in these areas: decorations—this means flowers and/or centerpieces for each table; publicity—contacting newspapers about the event and making up fliers to be passed out in places we frequent; donations—soliciting a few donations from businesses to use as door prizes; registration—making up name tags and signing people in the day of the luncheon; photos—taking digital pictures at the luncheon to be used in the newsletter; invitations—Mary has already signed up to do these again this year, but will need help in addressing and mailing them out; speaker search—finding a speaker for the luncheon. If anyone wants to help with any of these tasks, I would appreciate it tremendously. It does take work to make a luncheon a success and the more people who share that work, the easier it is. Please contact me by e-mail and let me know.

Recently, several other members of MDOC and I went to a book signing for Hope Edelman's new book, [The Possibility of Everything](#). This is a different kind of book for Hope because it isn't about mother loss, although as with everything we do, it's always there, if only below the surface. This time the book is about her oldest daughter who developed an imaginary friend when she was three. In time, it seems the imaginary friend became a subject of concern for Hope and her husband, and they wind up traveling to Belize to see if the native Mayan healers can "cure" their daughter of his presence. If you'd like to read more about the book, or even buy a copy, follow the links below. (I bought her book the evening of the book signing and am looking forward to reading it.) www.thepossibilityofeverything.com

http://www.amazon.com/Possibility-Everything-Hope-Edelman/dp/0345506502/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1257954613&sr=1-1

I am going to renew my solicitation for membership renewal now because my request in the last issue was met with a deafening silence. Only one person responded with a check for the \$20 renewal. (Remember, if you renewed at the May luncheon, you don't have to renew again until next May.) Let me repeat that your \$20 goes toward things like the May luncheon, the web service for this newsletter, and administrative costs like mailing out invitations, plus any charitable donations that we make as an organization. So, please, send your renewal as soon as you can. You'll find the form on the last page of this issue. And if you are new to us and would like to join us, use the last page as well.

I hope to see a lot of you at the Holiday Brunch in December, so until then, I hope you had a great Thanksgiving holiday with your loved ones.

Juanita Driskell

MDOC President

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Sisters at Heart Newsletter

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This newsletter can also be viewed on our website:

CLINICAL CORNER

By Nancy Rappaport

Holidays are a time when many children who have lost their mothers may feel forlorn. I was only four years old when I lost my mother to suicide and we rarely talked about her through the years. Growing up in a large, blended family, with the anticipation of the perfect Christmas, the rituals of caroling, stringing blue lights and tinsel on the tree, did little to transform the melancholy I felt at having lost my mother. Even now, celebrating the holidays with my own family, I still yearn for the mother I lost too soon.

It was only when I started to locate her friends when I was a young mother, and discovered a novel that my mother was writing at the time of her death, that I saw how she embraced the festivities of a family tradition. One of her friends told me how my mother prepared a feast of roasted pork and wrapped piles of presents. My mother wrote in her semiautobiographical novel how, for the two weeks surrounding Christmas, she became “the eternal mother, a mother happy in her fulfillment, content.” I learned that she made each of her six children homemade knitted stockings. I loved mine because there was a snowman holding a miniature broom with real straw. If only she had not succumbed to her depression.

Holidays are a time meant for spending with family and friends, but the seasons also possess a dark undercurrent for those who have experienced a tragic loss. For some, holidays highlight the absence of a family member even more. For me, the holidays spur bittersweet reflection, as I contemplate my mother’s life with my family.

While writing my book, my sister Martha sent me some home movies recorded during the early period of my parents’ marriage; in them I discern my mother, father, my grandmothers Edith and Cora, and the old patriarch Arthur with his piercing blue eyes. There is no sound, only grainy images, unfocused. Sometimes you can only see a kaleidoscope of movement. The movies are like any family film, with fleeting views of one birthday party after another. We crowd around the dining room table, children parading paper hats and blowing streamers, smiling into the camera. My mother carries in the birthday cake piled with flower decorations. A pony trudges around with a sled of kids in front of our house; then, more cake and candles. My father in blue shorts and brown loafers deposits hundreds of Easter eggs on the lawn. The camera lingers on him. My sisters are splashing each other in the pool. Dad holds my brother Jim tightly in the water as he kicks hard to learn to stay afloat on his own.

I recognize myself. I’m being passed around from one lap to another. My older sister proudly feeds me a bottle of milk. Now my other sister gives me a kiss. My mother in a purple bathrobe leans close with a gently exhausted smile. I am in the high chair, and the sun is breaking .

through the curtains. More Christmas trees with presents, blue lights and silver tinsel

My father and mother produced a family grown from an intoxicating promise of love. Each of us carries the patterns of our family, malleable in some ways. But there is also a constellation of forces, of unwritten rules and rituals, that makes it distinct. A scaffolding that may create unbearable pain or offer a retreat to comfort. A family is not only what you say it is. This family is caught for a moment in the ordinary magic of ephemeral living.

My son Cory asked me as a practical five-year-old whether only my mother’s bones were buried or if her head was buried as well. My daughter Lila, a first-grader then, wanted to know whether my mother was still wearing clothes. I told them somewhat irreverently that she was dirt in a box. I was uncomfortable saying that my mother had gone to heaven and mumbled something about love lasting longer than death. I was not sure how to explain her death to myself, let alone to them.

When Lila was 13, she asked me, clearly scared of what my answer might be: “Would you ever kill yourself?” I assured her that I would never commit suicide and besides, I told her, giving her a hug, I wanted to stick around to see who she would become. I didn’t want her to hesitate to rely on me whenever she needed to. I didn’t want her to fear that I would leave her. Yet her intuitive worry was not unfounded; the child of a parent who has committed suicide is five times more likely to kill herself than a child who is not exposed to this loss.

Psychiatrists have studied what can seem like the Russian roulette of familial suicide, an ominous pattern of suicide occurring from one generation to the next called “intergenerational transmission.” So far, researchers have demonstrated that children who have lost a parent to suicide are at greater risk of killing themselves if they have a mood disorder, engage in substance abuse, are “impulsively aggressive,” or are exposed to sexual abuse in the family. Still unclear is the mechanism by which a parent’s suicide increases the risk for these children. But losing a parent this way is also not a prophetic death sentence; it takes a lot of damage to lose the will to live.

When I met people as I was growing up, all the way to medical school interviews, if I told them that my mother died when I was four, they were curious about how she died—the question was irresistible. Most people seemed relieved when I said barbiturates, as if death and sleep are siblings. -

People wanted to know why and what was the cause. Such questions are usually edged with the fear that premature death, especially a self-inflicted death, might somehow be contagious. *Why would she kill herself?* becomes *What does this mean about you?* Somehow, confessing that my mother committed suicide felt incriminating: proof that my mother's life was out of control. I worried that they would mistakenly assume I somehow played a part in that.

Rather than burdening my children with my bereavement, I want to let them see how I deal with the painful longing for lost family without depriving them of my presence. I don't want to be overly nostalgic about my mother. I don't want the upheaval from my loss to undermine how I connect with my children; rather, I want to find strength in understanding.

My children have watched me as I have tried to understand who my mother was, knowing that I write "letters to Mama" that are my way of telling my mother who I am and who my children are becoming. I try to penetrate the incomprehensible mystery of her death and to somehow show them our enduring connection to those we love. Cory, ever the concrete thinker, once asked me where I was sending the letters. Lila said that maybe in my dreams my mother would write back.

Sometimes, I peer into an apparent void, a one-way dialogue with too much room for projection. My family history gives me a fragmented and sanitized view of my mother. I often feel as if I am figuratively tugging on her apron strings pleading for something more, starved for a tasty morsel that will satiate my desire to know her in a way that is intimate and familiar.

In our bedroom, we have a picture of my husband Colin as a child, about 4½, staring at the photographer and brimming with affection. He is an adorable boy with a puckish, mischievous, contagious smile, a turned-up nose, and eyebrows with a distinctive thick, wavy quality expressing permanent astonishment. He is at ease and cooperating with the pose because the picture was taken by his mother. About a year after the photo was taken, she died unexpectedly—a brain hemorrhage cutting off her life at age 32. She left behind Colin, his older brother, and their father.

The disquieting truth is that we both have the same absence in our lives, the experience of growing up without our mothers. We were both encouraged to pick up and move on, and so we did. When we met each other and learned what we shared, we recognized our mutual sadness, even if we have chosen to deal with it in different ways. Once Cory looked at me and astutely observed, "Mama, just because you talk about losing your mother doesn't mean that Papa doesn't miss his."

When the nights grow darker and longer in the weeks before Christmas, Colin can become moody. This is the time of year when his mother died. His irritability is epitomized by the yearly struggle to fit the Christmas tree into that always-too-small Christmas tree stand. We have resolved this now by bringing the stand with us when we go looking for the perfect tree. If only we could remember that the inevitable sense of loss each of us feels around the holidays has its source in memories we cannot reconcile and cannot fix. Yet the mind has an interesting way of migrating back, a shadow that is not so easy to define but is unsettling.

Now as a child psychiatrist, I see as the holidays approach that families can have a foreboding sense that things aren't right and they are unsure how to forge ahead. This anxiety can come after a divorce or loss of a parent but is amplified with the child's sense of abandonment and being left after a parent's suicide. Some kids may feel anxious or angry about the holidays and want to retreat, privately mourning. And they may complain that it feels "fake" to celebrate a time that was special in the past but now leaves them crying in a rage of tears. Families may find comfort in continuing rituals, hanging favorite Christmas ornaments, lighting candles in remembrance of those who have died, or preparing a special meal.

There is no sound preparation for children who lose a parent to suicide. Yet the holidays can remind us that out of the darkness there is light. In the midst of sorrow there is affirmation of invincible enduring hope: missing who we want to be there, but realizing within the small remembrances that love lasts longer than death.

Excerpted with permission from *In Her Wake: A Child Psychiatrist Explores the Mystery of Her Mother's Suicide* (Basic Books, 2009).

Nancy Rappaport is an assistant professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and director of school-based programs in child psychiatry at the Cambridge Health Alliance in Cambridge, Mass. (www.inherwake.com).

Courage is not freedom from fear, but being afraid and going on. — J.C. Shapley

In love and remembrance:

Members' Corner

We acknowledge each Sister at Heart as she remembers the anniversary month she lost her mom and their age at the time.

October

Mary Felix

Karen Stoller

Mother

Edith

Anne

November

Erica Amejka

Cami Black

Amalia Wasserman

Cecelia

December

Casey Enda

Pat Farrell

Kira Mulrooney

Minnie Margaret

Catherine

Birthday Wishes

October

16 Mary Felix

November

9 Casey Enda

26 Pat Farrell

December

28 Kimberly Martin

Motherless Daughters of Orange County Membership Form

Please print and complete all items

Today's Date: _____

- \$20.00 Annual Membership (See member benefits below)
- \$15.00 Student Rate: Eighteen (18) years of age and younger
- Other:\$_____ MDOC appreciates any other tax-deductible donation you care to make and will provide you with a letter for tax purposes.

- I have enclosed my company's matching gift form.
- Please contact me regarding volunteer opportunities.

Membership donations pay for the printing of *Sisters at Heart* Newsletter for those professional therapists on our courtesy lists, mailings, local organizer support, and administrative costs. This information is strictly for the purpose of maintaining our database. Motherless Daughters of Orange County does not sell or exchange its member information with any person or organization.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: (_____) _____ E-Mail: _____

Occupation: _____ Your Date of Birth: _____ / _____ / _____

Mother's Name: _____ Mother's age at time of loss: _____

Do you have children? Yes No Month/Day you lost your mom: _____

If so, how many? Boys: _____ Girls: _____ Your age at time of loss: _____

How did you hear about Motherless Daughters of Orange County (MDOC)? _____

Please make your check or money order payable to: Motherless Daughters of Orange County or MDOC

Mail to: Juanita Driskell, 1302 W. Colonial Avenue, Anaheim, CA 92802

MEMBER BENEFITS

Your annual membership to Motherless Daughters of Orange County will provide you with the following benefits for one year:

- Invitations to special events and social events for motherless women.
- Notices about local workshops and seminars that relate to early mother loss and/or grieving.
- Remembrances on your birthday and the anniversary of your mother's death
- Discounts to members for all MDOC-sponsored events that include the public.

Motherless Daughters of Orange County, Inc.

Mission Statement

Motherless Daughters of Orange County was formed to provide support, community and resources to women and girls who have experienced early mother loss (birth to 21 years of age). We are committed to bringing together motherless daughters, otherwise isolated, to encourage healing among them and to promote awareness about the long-lasting effects of such a loss.