Disclaimer

Many of the people mentioned here have long since passed on to wherever they have ended up, but some are still with us. If you are one of those who are still present and are not entirely pleased with how you appear, I can only say that perhaps you should have behaved better.

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I have some pleasant memories of my early childhood from when I was very young -- I've even been accused of having memories from the womb. It's probably because those early times were the best part of my childhood.

I've always had a short attention span which manifested itself very early. I remember that my sister Linda and I had a little, yellow wading pool with two rings around the edge that had to be inflated before filling it. My daddy, Fred would blow them up while we waited impatiently. Linda standing close by and silently watching, while I tried to contain my excitement by running around the yard in my green swim suit that had ruffles in the seat. (To this day, I can't understand why some women wear those tennis skirts with ruffles in the back. I stopped wearing butt ruffles when I was four years old.)

Fred would then place the pool near the spigot in the concrete area between the house and garage and fill the little pool from the spigot, carefully lifting the edges to smooth out the wrinkles in the bottom — he was just that detail oriented. When it was full, (to six complete inches!) he would announce, "When the water’s all gone you’ll have to get out," before we would eagerly hop in.
Fred would be working just around the corner in the garage, making it possible to keep an eye -- or at least an ear -- on us while Mom would be working in the house. (He didn’t actually do much parenting, but just said, “Go tell your Ma” whenever bleeding was involved.)

You can only play for so long in six inches of water, even on a hot Saturday afternoon and I soon asked Linda if we could stop and go do something else. The wading pool only came out on the weekends when Fred could set it up for us so she wasn’t in a hurry to abandon it yet. (Mom just didn’t do things like that, she left many things to Fred. Except me, of course, but more on that later.)

My solution was to simply step down on the inflated edge to let the water out, but Linda yelled enough that Fred came around the corner and asked, “What are you doing, (My Name)?” That phrase was repeated later and Mom even wrote it down in a baby book.

Ironically, I rarely saw real concern about what I was doing as I grew up.

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My sister Linda and I thought nothing of the way the family doctor would hug mom and talk in low tones in the exam room before we were sent to the waiting room to, well, wait. Children think that whatever goes on in their lives is normal because they don’t have much to compare it to. It would not be until over fifty years later that I found out the truth — for sure anyway.

I always wondered because Mom made references to things in her often repeated little stories. Things that sounded so preposterous that they couldn’t be true. For example, she would say, “When I had you I had a room mate in the hospital — we didn’t have private rooms then —
and she asked me who the blond man was who had been there to visit me and I told her that was my husband. Then my room mate said that she thought the dark haired man who was there before him was my husband!” That story was always followed by titters of laughter at the ‘ridiculous’ idea, because the dark haired man was her doctor. That was only one of her stories. It seemed like she just had to tell someone, without really telling.

And it certainly seemed ridiculous. After all, my daddy Fred came home from work every day at 5:20 p.m. You could set a clock on the routine of my early life. Daddy was always there. In the background. He didn’t say much, but I sure wish he had. Mostly because he wasn’t there for long. I was ten years old when he went to the dentist one day and got up from the chair, then immediately collapsed with a massive stroke.

That was in 1965 and they weren’t aware then that pushing a person’s head that far back in dentist’s chairs that didn’t recline could dislodge plaques and blood clots to break loose from the carotid arteries and lead to a stroke. Daddy died months later after languishing in the veteran’s hospital where they simply couldn’t do much for him. Medicine has come a long way since 1965.

I felt like I had a good life until he made that trip to the dentist. I was often busy in my own imagination and felt fine with being somewhat overlooked. Poor Fred was probably a ticking time bomb and a heart attack or stroke was bound to happen, and it was lucky that it didn’t happen when he was driving and we were all in the car.

Everyone told me that it was a red flag that I had a parent die of a stroke at the relatively young age of 46, and that I needed to be careful to monitor my health, or did I?
As a kid, you think your parents know more than you and that whatever they do is the best choice. As a child in the 1960s, I grew up in the typical environment of the characters in *Leave it to Beaver* or *Father Knows Best*, which were television programs where typical problems were something so benign as kids leaving the water running when their parents were gone, or something equally simple.

But there were things beneath the surface of that typical environment. My sister Linda would often generously tell me when she was given a bicycle, sled or wagon, “It’s ours together,” so I considered that as normal, too, reasoning that since she was two years older, she therefore got more stuff.

And then there was the time when we were at the doctor’s office and I asked Mom if I could go ahead of her and Linda to the taxicab stand a couple of blocks around the corner. Mom didn’t drive and taxis were our transportation. Although I couldn’t have been more than nine years old, she said yes. While they were settling the bill after the doctor had seen Linda for a small ailment of some kind, I scurried on over to the taxi stand but decided that I didn’t want to wait in that small building where there were men I didn’t know, so I went across the street to the Woolworth’s for a couple of minutes, reasoning that Mom and Linda would be waiting for me there when I went back. But they weren’t, so I went browsing in another store, thinking that they would show up soon.

The taxi dispatcher eventually saw me looking for them outside when the stores were closing and hurried out to meet me. He put me in a cab to be taken home, explaining that they’d
left long ago. Mom was there when I got home, calmly cooking supper at the stove, apparently unconcerned.

As an adult and mother, I can’t get my head around the idea of doing such a thing as leaving a child behind, and being totally unconcerned when they didn’t turn up until over an hour later. But Mom had been right at Linda’s side and brought her home. That was only one of many occasions where I wondered why no one was concerned about me.

That feeling persisted, becoming stronger after Fred died. Perhaps it was because Linda was blonde and blue-eyed like Fred, and I had black curls and dark eyes that Fred’s family and Mom gravitated toward Linda, especially when Linda was sad or anxious, which was often. I suppose her anxieties had something to do with her poor judgement when she was only fourteen and followed a boyfriend to Texas. Back then there were no cell phones so she didn’t find him and ending up destitute on the streets. Thank goodness the police picked her up and called Mom to come and get her. So, Mom got on a Greyhound bus and went. Never mind that I was only eleven, she just left without even arranging for an adult to check in on me. I took care of myself that week, getting to school on time and hiding the fact that I’d been left alone at home as a sixth grader. I had my own anxieties and sadness like Linda did while dealing with the death of a parent, but I was on my own.

As I grew up, in many ways I felt ‘less than,’ which I now understand was a reflection of how I had been treated my whole life. I didn’t stand up for myself because no one else had, so I felt in some strange way deserving of the abusive boyfriend that I had in high school. The only ‘help’ I got from Mom was when she wrote a note so that I could get an excused absence from
school when I was too embarrassed to go because of my blackened eyes. It was only when a visitor to our house stepped up to defend me when that boyfriend started smacking me around that I began to realize that I didn’t deserve to be treated that way. It was the first of many turning points for me and I dumped that boyfriend.

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It took a long time for me to stop feeling ‘less than’ and to build my own self-confidence, but it wasn’t easy. I’ve dealt with a few bumps along life’s road, the worst was when police officers came to my door and told me that my husband had been in an airplane that crashed and that he did not survive. The hardest job I ever had to do was to tell my little girls why their daddy was not going to come home. I reasoned that if could do that, I could do almost anything, but what an awful way to gain that kind of strength.

Much of how and why I am the person that I am was explained with a DNA test I received one Christmas from my sister-in-law. As I’d long suspected, Fred is not my dad, but the doctor is! And I have a ‘new’ half sister! Her mother was also a patient of the doctor’s. It was a joy to meet her and we both agree that we had found a facet of our lives that we have always missed. Both of us had felt like an outsider in our families as we grew up; feeling different without being able to determine a reason why. Our other half siblings -- the doctor’s legitimate children -- are not interested in meeting us, but perhaps, in time, we will meet. I am keeping that door open.

It is Fred who I feel the saddest for. His life really didn’t turn out how I’m sure he would have hoped it would. Whether my mother was deceived by her doctor, or by poor choice on her
part, one of Fred’s children wasn’t really his and he must have known or at least suspected. He had very blond hair and blue eyes, and although I resemble Mom, her brown hair hardly explained my black curls and dark complexion, which really stood out from the day I was born. Another story Mom told was that Fred asked her at my birth, “Is she mine? She’s awfully dark!” Mom replied, “Of course she’s mine!” In response Fred said, “I know she’s your’s, but is she mine?” This story, too, was followed by Mom’s titters of laughter at another ‘ridiculous’ idea.

In those days there was no DNA testing so there could be no proof, but one thing that is clear is that poor Fred got shortchanged in life in several ways. He had been hurt so badly in the war that he walked with a considerable limp and the bones in his right forearm had been shattered by gunshot wounds, and it’s likely he suffered from the stresses of PTSD. But I suspect that he’d had a fun loving nature when he was younger. I remember as a child seeing him water skiing in spite of his leg injuries, and that he had a wide, bright smile but I rarely saw it. He died younger than he should have and I think he got cheated out of so much.

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It’s been a long road to get to be the person I am now, and I’m still on the journey that I hope to be on for a long time yet. One thing that I have learned is to choose kindness. Hate seems to be popular and readily accepted in today’s culture, but even to be filled with righteous anger is not a good thing. I instead choose to be forgiving and kind, and to reach out to others.

I could have responded to the things in my life differently; I could have continued to believe that my family treated me as they did because I somehow deserved it. I could have believed the things the abusive boyfriend told me -- that he acted the way he did because of what
I had done, or how I’d acted, or how I looked, or any other stupid excuse he came up with. But I chose not to believe him or anyone else who acted like I was in any way ‘less than.’

It’s ironic that when I found out the truth of my parentage that I had already gotten past those feelings I’d had growing up. Instead of being shocked and angry, I was happy to find a new half sister and simply thought, “This explains SO much!” when I saw the report on my DNA page.

I’d already decided that if I couldn’t treat myself the way I would treat my best friend, how could I expect others to? In spite of all that has happened, I know that I’m awesome, and I’m choosing to have an awesome time in this life.

So far, so good!