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Francis Bearse Takes a Shower or I Miss My Ma

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Francis Bearse Takes a Shower or I Miss My Ma

When I came here in July of 2004, I didn't think much about my mother. As it approaches the end of my stay with the beginning of September, I am thinking about her increasingly. I just had a good cry for myself knowing that I will never be able to talk to her again. I will never be able to hear her voice or to embrace her or laugh with her.

She would have hated Sannicandro. Not being able to understand what was being said around her would have driven her up a wall and if she were here she would have some great jokes and stories about what happened to her in Sannicandro and when we were alone, she and I would have been in stitches laughing ourselves silly.

Instead, every time I buy something new to make this little "casa" my own, I begin to cry. Just placing a cobalt blue bowl on a coffee table this morning started me crying. As much as she would have hated Sannicandro, she would have loved going to the stores and looking for items to place in the new home. She would have reminded me of what I needed or what I should have. As we tried to negotiate in stores for what we wanted she would have been exasperated, but once we were out the door she would have had me laughing hysterically by pointing out something funny I had missed and she had seen in the store. She would have had secret little names for everyone she met, pinpointing either their qualities or their faults. She was absolutely awful that way. It never was done with malice, however, and always with some semblance of respect and never, never to hurt anyone. Such names would be a little joke between us.

But her being here was not to be.

I think the reason we were so close is that for the first years of my life we were always alone. My father was a seaman and was always on trips earning money. My

sister didn't arrive for two years, and it wasn't until she was about four that she became a real person to me. It was just Mama and me. I can remember that when she washed the floors, to prevent me from running around and dirtying them again, she would hang me on a doorknob by the straps of my overalls. One day her father came to visit and berated her for doing this to me. Gramps took me down and hugged me. I cried, not because I was released, but because I wanted to be back on the doorknob. I loved swinging back and forth laughing with my Ma as she washed the floors and sang to the radio.

Sometimes my father's checks didn't arrive on a regular basis and my mother would be very low on cash. They didn't have much money then. I remember sitting on the front stairs crying when my grandfather again came across me. He asked what was wrong. I said "My Dottie is crying because she can't pay the gas man." Of course Gramps would give her money until the checks all arrived, but I shared the insecurities of the young mother holding it all together while her husband was at sea.

I think because she didn't have my father with her during those early years she talked to me for comfort and for company. She talked to me as an adult. I don't ever remember her talking "baby talk" to me and every subject was open for discussion. She never held back and neither did I. This tradition lasted all of our lives. We told each other everything, and I mean everything.

Sure, most people would tell me that this is not a "normal" relationship between mother and son, the friendship, the profound relationship that my mother and I had. Of course, they would be right. It is not normal. It is different. It is odd. I wouldn't have it any other way.

So, I sit here in this little town in Southern Italy, happy at making connections to my father's family and a culture I want to understand fully; however, each time I hang a picture, paint a piece of furniture, or even clean a window, I miss my Ma and not being able to tell her.

When my mother died, I asked my cousin, Francis what it would be like. He had lost his mother a couple of years before. He told me that his mother's death didn't really hit him at first and it wasn't until a year later that one day he was taking a shower and he realized he would never be able to stop at his mother's house and have a cup of coffee and talk with my Auntie ever again. He said he broke down in tears and cried like he had never cried before.

As I placed the cobalt blue bowl on my coffee table this morning I finally understood how Francis felt in the shower that day. Like Francis, I broke down and cried like I have never cried before.

I miss my Ma so much, and I will never be able to end that nagging, powerful pain no matter how long I live. It will be with me no matter where I go or with whom.

She was my only profound relationship in life.

michael vocino
Sannicandro Gco.
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