

Mark
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It's a sick world

The fun of hypochondria is wildly contagious

If there's one bad thing about life, it's the fact that sooner or later we're all going to be dead. It's a grim ending to an otherwise gleeful experience, generally speaking. After

all, there are those of us who view death as a long overdue coffee break at the end of the arduous work shift known as "being."

But as the human race learns more about the

various things that cause our respective demises, a strange affliction has evolved in society, one which continues to grow in prevalence. It's hypochondria.

I once went to the doctor because of a massive white spot at the back of my throat. It was partially on my pallet and partially on my uvula. I realize that you may say to yourself, "But isn't an uvula, like, a woman thing?" I know I did. But it's not. It's actually a slang term for what is technically known as the hangy-down-thing-in-the-back-of-your-mouth.

Naturally I thought I had lymphoma. Who wouldn't? But the doctor informed me that I was wrong and that the spot was merely a canker sore.

This was the beginning of my own hypochondria inclinations. The



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doctor told me that these sores, which I've had all my life, are essentially tiny ulcers. They're harmless. Maybe they are, but if I'm constantly getting these small ulcers in my mouth, then what in God's name does my stomach look like?

At least my hypochondria problem isn't very intense. I only tend to fret when sharp pains pierce my side. All things considered, maybe I should worry. Maybe those pains are telling me something like, "go see a doctor." Well anyway, other people have worse problems than I do.

There's a guy I know who had a whole array of different diseases from which he suffered now and then, sometimes several at the same time, but always adjoined so that he never experienced a moment of health. His room was adorned with flowers and incense, and every night

he went to sleep in what he morosely referred to as his death bed. As irony would have it, he was killed in an accident while he was driving his... well, I guess you'd call it a "death Pinto."

I believe the single biggest factor contributing to the hypochondriac mentality is the inevitability of death. Disease and sleep eternal are like two peas in a pod. They're joined at the hip. They go to bars together, drink Mad Dog, and make goofy faces in the mirror behind the bar until the bar tender has had enough and calls them a cab. They split the cab fare on the ride to their mutual flat and give each other a good-night kiss just before they crawl into the same bed and make spoons until morning.

I have a solution to this problem that, if implemented, should clear up this hypochondria problem within a couple of generations. Here it is: Society in general should downplay

the severity of death.

Why tell children that yes, grandma is gone forever, wafted off to that immaculate seniors country club in the sky, when we could instead tell them that grandma is getting a new apartment underground in a coffin?

While it may still make us sad that we will never see granny again, at least in terms of our own mortality, we'll have no clue that one day we'll all become nothing more than food for grubs. That, after all, is the bottom line: Death equals worm meal. No matter how spiritual you are, your body is still screwed.

Then, at long last, disease symptoms will no longer be cause for concern. They will become fun party games in which participants guess each other's ailments. "Who gives a shit about Pictionary? I've got herpes simplex 2!" Imagine the implications. Instead of barreling down the interstate on long family vacations playing license-plate bingo, passing the time could be filled with sentences like:

"Fevory, kind of nauseous."

"Rashes in weird places, I don't want to talk about it."

And "Guess what? My appendix just burst!"

Fun for the whole family.

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A mother's goodness

Daughter's understanding comes with age

She doesn't say it as often anymore.

That may be because my visits are no longer lazy afternoons of laundry and play. Instead, my stops are

winsome whirlwinds of whos, whats, whens and an occasional why. Or it may be because we have grown older. And with that growth, my needs and her

motives have changed. Time is quickly carving a chasm between my mother and I; not a chasm of separation, but of deeper understanding. Our relationship is metamorphosing into a friendship of two adult women. We have bypassed the traditional mother/daughter roles.

"Be Good."

Those two simple words follow me everywhere.

My mother's warning is almost ritualistic in nature. I approach the door, mother comes into the hallway. I turn the knob and ease the door open, she and I rattle on with last minute thoughts. I step through the threshold, she moves to hold the door behind me. I say "good-bye." She says "be good."

I would agree, it is a phrase of seeming simplicity. The casual observer might assume my mother's directive is uttered only to fulfil her maternal responsibilities. But he who would say that is deceived because he is unable to see what those words are for us: a translucent code. The obvious interpretation is simple, and the observer is partly right. She does want me to stay out of trouble and to

“*Time is quickly carving a chasm between my mother and I; not a chasm of separation, but of deeper understanding.*”

display my best behavior. The true meaning is historic.

"Be Good."

I spent my formative years in a state of singleness; one parent, only child. My mother was my everything. She played all roles for me: mother, teacher, confidant, friend. With time came a stepfather, a brother and a sister; each loved fully by both of us. Yet none of them could change the bond my mother and I had forged through the years.

Competition is a component of our bond that my mother has tried to ignore, play down and overlook. But I had no one to compete with other than her. My brother and sister are almost a generation behind me, and my friends' aspirations were different from mine. My mother's were not. So, at a very young age, I created a goal of great magnitude, one that would shape who I was to become; I had to be good as, or better than, my mother.

"Be Good."

Until just recently, I equated those words to mean excellence. I used them to justify my desire to succeed. I drove myself to do as well as my mother did at my age. When she was in high school, she was everything I wanted to be: talented, and as a result, popular.

In high school, I was good at what I did. I was editor of the school

paper, competed in nationals for speech and stretched myself between a plethora of other activities. But I was not my mother. I was overwhelmed and frustrated because my obsession had lured me into spreading myself too thin.

"Be Good."

My mother is not a supermom. She doesn't wear pearls or heels, or work in a high-rise 9-to-5. She doesn't have to rush home to her family; to cook, to clean. She doesn't read self-help books before quickly pecking my father on the cheek and slipping softly to sleep.

No, mom can be better: be described as an aging hippie. She has graying hair, which until recently hung straight to her waist. She used to cut it herself, composting the fallen wisps in her organic garden. She works out of the home, running a hodgepodge business of editing, writing and teaching. She is extremely well-read, is even more well-spoken and has a passion for her family, God and plants. For her fellow humans, she feels great compassion. The emptiness my mother feels for those less fortunate is not kept carefully behind emotional bars. Rather, the empathy is put to work. She donates, she volunteers and she recycles.

A year ago, I wanted to be the first woman I described. The person my mother is not. Becoming my mother, in her true essence, was unacceptable at that time.

Now, I don't think I would mind it too much. In fact, I would be a little honored.

That's because today is different.

Today, my eyes are open wide and ears are dry.

"Be Good."

Competition with my mother's past is unfulfilling. I have realized and accepted that our lives are on different paths. Her choices are hers; in a different time and under very different circumstances. For the most part, they are not going to work for me. My choices are finally mine, and I am finally learning how to be me.

Translucent objects shimmer; different angles and lights alter their appearances. College was a new angle and a new light for me.

The code needed modification, a twist.

"Be Good."

When my mother tells me to "be good," she still means for me to behave. That will never change. And she wants me to be good at what I do. But, in order to understand what she meant, I had to know who I really am and who my mother really is.

The twist is that "be good" means to have compassion for those around you, to share your material and emotional wealth, to love humanity and to love plants.

In essence, "Do Good."

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