

Hey David,

You know, the hardest thing for me to do is write 200 to 400 words about anything. 2,000 words is far, far easier ;)

So let me apologize for the length of this thing, and suggest you grab a cup of coffee before you start reading.

Take care,
Chris

What If... Just Maybe... You Can Go Home Again

It's hard to know where things began to go wrong all those years ago, and to this day I still wonder just how it all happened. The single most important person in the world to me had become a stranger. For most of my life she'd always been there. I'd always loved her more than anything or anyone else. Now she's a thousand miles away and we are worlds apart from each other. How did we ever get to this awful place?

That was where things stood two years ago and I'd pondered that question a million times. I just couldn't find the answer. It seemed to me that she just didn't care any more. Somehow, my mom had just simply stopped caring about me. Our "relationship" had been reduced to a once-a-month phone call (at best) that lasted about ten minutes and consisted of an exchange of trivial updates about the weather or other people, nothing important, nothing personal, and nothing hinting at love or even sincere interest. In these conversations, we are like two strangers trapped together in an elevator, compelled against our will to find something to talk about even though we know nothing about each other. Unable to conjure up anything more to say we finally hang up. I feel the cold steel blade of a knife sink deep into my heart as I press the "end" button on my cell phone. We haven't said "I love you" in years.

She'd lived her whole life in a small town in Texas, and I'd spent almost 40 years of my life there. In 2010 I was living in NC and hadn't seen her in at least 7 years. I'd enrolled in an internship program that required me to be just 20 miles from her for a two week period that summer. I agonized over whether to even go see her or not. Luckily, I made the right decision and showed up on her doorstep unexpected and uninvited. I didn't know if I'd be there for ten minutes or for the entire two weeks, but I knew I had to see her to find out in person whether or not she still gave a damn about me or not.

I took a deep breath and opened the door and walked in without knocking. I'd never knocked on that door ever before, the house I grew up in, so it just felt too unnatural to knock this time. She happened to be in the living room. She looked at me and I said "hey". She didn't seem surprised and didn't even stop what she was doing, she just said "hi". I walked over to her and we hugged. Next she asked me, "what's up?", and I told her about the internship and that I'd wanted to see her. She tried to hide her emotions but I could tell, because I knew her so well, that she was pleased by that. This was the first of many pivotal moments for us, that would take place over the next two months I was there with her.

Yes, I stayed two months. Though I'd only moved away from that small town, and her, seven years before, we'd started drifting apart long before that. I didn't realize it then, but it had all begun to unravel on January 24, 1994, the day my dad passed away.

They'd been together 44 years and his death devastated her. In her mind, life would never be the same again. I'll never forget the first words she said to me as she wrapped her arms around me and desperately clung to me when I got to the emergency room that day... **"What are we gonna do now?"** The anguish and despair in those words still haunts me even now.

Mom and I are both problem-solvers. I'm sure I learned that from her and from my dad. I couldn't "fix" this because I couldn't bring my dad back to life, but I could fix all the rest, at least, in my way of thinking. Dad wasn't Mr. Fix It when it came to doing things around the house. He was an auto mechanic, not a carpenter or painter, etc.. He kept the yard, but that was about it. So in my mind, mom would be able to draw his Social Security now, which would take care of her money-wise, and I'd keep up the yardwork - problem solved. Plus, I'd even do the necessary repairs around the house that he'd been neglecting.

I was proud of myself because I knew I could handle this just fine and I knew mom would be okay; I'd make sure of that. For weeks she was a total basket case. She couldn't get it through her head that the sky was not going to cave in on her, or that I really could take care of things. Being a daughter, I guess in her mind I wasn't capable of the same things dad could do.

In time, frustration got the best of me and I gave up trying to convince her it wasn't a big deal and I just hired a caretaker for the property - a man. This seemed to remedy that situation and she felt much more at ease about the house and the yardwork (and whatever other calamitous event was just around the corner in her mind). She now had "a man" to take care of things for her. She still grieved though, for about two years. It was difficult to watch but I tried to stay close to her. But she kept pushing me away. In time I felt like she didn't need or want me around any more. I didn't understand it at all, we'd always been very close.

In late 1999 I moved 3 hours away because I felt like my life was going nowhere and I was no longer happy living in that small town. I went back to visit once or twice a month and things seemed okay, not great, but okay. Over time I saw her less and less. Then our visits became phone calls every couple of weeks. Then in late 2004 I moved to North Carolina and our lives seemed to go in opposite directions from each other. We drifted even further apart, though I could never put my finger on why.

Finally, in July of 2010 the answer came. In one of our conversations while I was staying with her she told me she had thought I just didn't care about her any more. **I was stunned.** I asked her what she was talking about and she said "**well, you just moved away after daddy died**". I was speechless. I literally sat there with my mouth open for what seemed like several minutes wondering how she could possibly think such a thing. **I did not move away after he died.** I moved **several years** after he died, long after she'd seemed to be doing okay on her own.

Now, there's a lesson to be learned here. People don't always know or remember the facts. People remember how they perceive things to be, the facts don't matter. What I later came to realize was that in her state of grief there were many facts that my mom had distorted, and that distortion carried on for years after.

I was lucky. I'd made the decision to see her even though I thought she didn't want to see me and it turned out to be the turning point in our relationship. This conversation led to an avalanche of sharing and discovery between us and over the course of those two months that I stayed with her we came to realize that **we were both wrong**. She thought I didn't care about her, and I thought she didn't care about me. Nothing could have been farther from the truth. It was simply a misunderstanding that had gone unchecked for years.

It's pretty scary to me to think that I might have gone the rest of my life believing my mom didn't care about me any more. Even scarier to think I might have missed out on the last few years of her life because of this ridiculous misunderstanding. Instead, I'm now in the process of moving back to Texas to spend whatever time she has left on this earth right there with her. I want us to be closer than we've ever been. I want to get to know her again and I want to do everything in my power to make the rest of her life the absolute best it can be.

If there is someone in your life that you love, but your relationship is strained for one reason or another, I beg you to find a way to open up a line of honest communication with them. Resolve to

get to the bottom of things, to try to understand **from their perspective** what went wrong and why. People are what really matter in life, especially those we love. It doesn't matter who's right or wrong, or what happened or didn't happen. All that matters is the love you have for each other. Give it a shot. You may just get lucky, as I did with mom. I hope so.