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My Mom's Ghosts

My mom has schizophrenia. One of her most recurring delusions is that she has an old object of obsessive love who has returned to take her away. Periodically over my Mom's life as she loses battles with the illness, Mom's man makes an appearance. My sisters and I have gotten better about handling mom when episodes repeat. But there is no hope of things getting any better. Mom has to deal with a reality that she believes is real and no one else around her believes is real.

One of my recent "aha"s, is that I have taken on a variant of her psychosis. Since I was little I have sought out another to be my protector of my ego. As a child it was a best friend (sister, next door neighbor, etc). Then as I got older it was a romantic object to complete my insufficient self. In high school I loved the renaissance poetry of unrequited love. It so perfectly expressed my inner reality. I was not whole. I was half a person, in search of his other half. I was flawed and faulty in need of another self to make whole.

As a youth most of my time was spent in fantasy of how me and some object of my desire. Almost no time actually spent engaged in actual talk with those imagined objects. As an adult, I entered two long term relationships with the same preconceived notions of my deficiencies. My partners would heal me. Make me complete. Of course they could not and did not. My passive expectations of their role in my life were as much the reason for the failure of both of these relationships as anything my partners did.

So like my Mom, my delusion haunted my life and all my relationships keeping me imprisoned in a perpetually unhealthy self. Incapable of both mature love and companionship as well as healthy self regard.

So now as I enter the last couple of years of my incarceration, I see my primary objective is to fully embody a healthy mature self. One that takes my needs seriously and takes responsibility for expressing my feelings and needs and does not wait for another to assume my needs for me. I need to interact with others from a place of openness not needing the other to make me feel wanted. I am trying to just be present with my friends and not expecting anything other than their presence with me which is different from the past. I would be looking for something from them: recognition, affirmation, acknowledgement. I needed this constant feedback to feel good about myself.

So to practice just being with someone without expectations is quite a naked vulnerable feeling. It is similar to the feeling I got when I sang in an acapella vocal ensemble in high school and college. There were usually at most three other people on my note and usually they were not next to me. So singing my part against the other parts next to me gave me the same naked, vulnerable feeling. But over time I became confident in singing my part without the support of others singing the same notes. That is my objective now. Make friends and enjoy them for who they are and not what I can get from them.

So I have to treat my thoughts much like Mom and her schizophrenic illusions. I need to accept the fact that my mind constructs a self in my head that is dependent upon others to make me complete. But I don't have to accept that construction as helpful to me. I can choose to ignore it and act on my best interests. I am in a different place in that I can more easily see the ghosts my mind creates as illusions. Mom has a much more difficult time interpreting her illusions as illusions, that is the nature of her illness. The best she can do is not talk about them to others. I can see them as mental constructs. Interpret them as unhelpful. Choose a different thought pattern and behavior that assumes that my self is sufficient as it is.