

THE MENDED MIRROR

BY

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THE MENDED MIRROR

FRAMING THE MIRROR

Page 1

THE MIRROR SHATTERS

Page 17

REFLECTING ON IMPACT

Page 61

PIECING TOGETHER THE FRAGMENTS

Page 341

PERCEIVING THE BEAUTY OF A MENDED MIRROR

Page 405

Conversations for Book Circles

Page 421

Appendix & Resources

Page 437

Gratitude & Stories of Companions on the Journey

Page 440

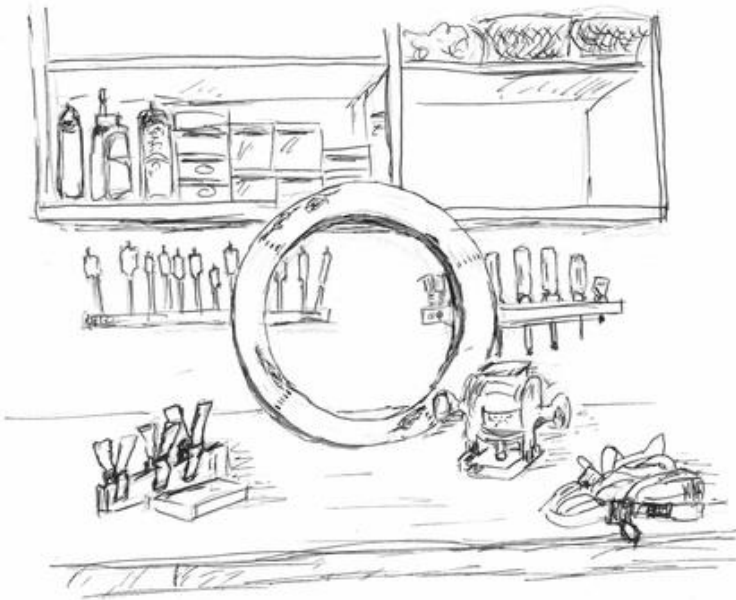
Praise for The Mended Mirror Full Text

Page 451

About the Author

Page 454

FRAMING THE MIRROR





WISDOM CIRCLE begins in thirteen minutes. I need at least seven minutes to finish preparing. Waiting impatiently at a red light, I rehearse my strategy to welcome people while completing the set-up.

I pull into the church parking lot. There's an empty spot. My anxiousness begins to subside. I gather my supplies. With arms full, I reach past the bundles to open the door. My phone rings, stopping me from exiting the car. I groan. I consider not answering. But I know I will; I always do. I know who it is because there is only one person who calls me on this phone. As hard as it is to constantly respond, I love my Mom, and I appreciate and respect her incredible capacity to really be there for others. I try to reflect that level of being present and caring back to her.

I fumble in my purse for my phone and answer the call.

"Hi Mom. What's up?"

The sound of screeching pierces my ear. The shock of it takes my breath away. It is a voice I haven't heard in years. She sounds like a raging banshee. At the top of her lungs she is screaming over and over and over again that she hates her daddy. Mid-scream she hangs up.

The silence throbs with an aching echo.

Stunned, I sit and stare at the phone.

The phone rings again. It is Mom's number. I answer.

The voice is radically different. It is a smooth voice, trying to be charming. She declares that she loves her daddy.

Then a different voice, monotone and resigned, tells me she needs to talk to me. I remind her that Wisdom Circle is about to begin. She says to come up to see her when I finish leading the Circle.

As I walk into the church, I think of the permission Mom gave me two years ago to record her so that she can see an episode of herself being odd or suicidal. She has no memories of ever being suicidal and is intrigued by my stories of this disruptive reality in our lives. This

seems like a good night to provide her with a glimpse of the odd behaviours that have swarmed through our lives. But I don't have any recording devices with me and the equipment at home is packed away with batteries that need recharging.

I arrive at Mom's at 9:15 p.m. I use my key to let myself into the condo complex. I step into the elevator to travel toward a well-known destination, not knowing what I will encounter when I get there. I knock on her door feeling an edge of anxiousness simmering through my body. It is a feeling I always have in the seconds before I engage with Mom. Tonight it is heightened.

She calls out and tells me to come in.

She's in her white chair in the living room. There is a blanket over her lap. She is sitting very still, watching me with an unusual depth of engagement.

Though she doesn't speak, I respond to the firm nod of her head that directs me to sit in the green chair across from her. The large square coffee table is between us.

I look at her and try to find some normalcy in a moment that feels off-kilter. "Mom, why did you need me to come up tonight?"

She doesn't answer.

She stares at me.

It feels like she is assessing me.

We sit in silence, our eyes holding contact.

I wait while she decides whatever it is she needs to decide.

As she continues to hold eye contact, she begins to move, slowly shifting until she is sitting sideways. She curls up in a loose fetal position.

Only then does she break eye contact with me.

She looks down into her lap. She picks up a corner of the blanket. She rubs the edge of the blanket between her fingers.

She speaks in a tiny voice. "Why do people hurt me?"

My heart breaks.

I don't know why I know to ask her, but I do. "How old are you?"

“Three.”

“Why are you so sad?”

“Momma is leaving and she won’t take me.”

I watch her. “Who will take care of you?”

A tiny shrug lifts her shoulder as she sinks further into herself.

“Daddy is walking away ... My brothers tell me I can go with them.”

“Where are they going?”

“To the back kitchen.”

“Is it fun there?”

I ask her this because when I was a child the back kitchen at the house where Mom grew up caused goosebumps of fear to rise on my neck and arms. Going anywhere near it caused my stomach to erupt with a churning sick feeling soured with anxiousness.

She answers so quietly I strain to hear her.

“Sometimes.”

A deep fragile silence booms through the room.

Then, in her tiny voice filled with a sigh of acceptance of what life is, she asks, “Why do people want to hurt me?”

A tear rolls down my face.

Her body shifts, moving so fast I am startled. She sits at the edge of the chair with her back straight, her legs spread apart, her hands clutching the arms of the chair, looking like she is ready to lunge at me. There before me is the one I describe as the raging banshee. I’ve never seen her in her full-blown state before; I’ve only heard her over the phone. But I recognize the raging voice. I notice that the stiffness in her stance is familiar.

She looks like a young scrapper ready for a fight. Her clothes look different. They have the look of jeans and a t-shirt, rather than the look of a moment before of a smart outfit for a woman in her eighties.

She screams while staring at me, “I hate my daddy ... I hate him I hate him I hate him I hate him.”

While the sound of her screeching lingers in the room, she morphs again.

She leans back into the corner of the chair, stretching her legs out in front of her and draping one arm up over the back of the chair so that her body is open and fully seen.

She speaks in an oozing, overly sweet voice of calm, almost like a Southern drawl. “I love my daddy. I just love my daddy.”

I am stunned. I recognize her. She makes my skin crawl. She looks and sounds like a performer in a nightclub. I am amazed at how the same outfit can look so different simply from the shift in her attitude and her way of engaging life. Her basic green sweater and pants give a totally different impression than a moment ago. They have lost the first impression of being a practical comfortable outfit. They now look like they are intended to highlight her physical assets. Her clothes have a different look to them, she holds herself differently, she sounds different, her focus is different, the energy emanating from her is different.

How have I not recognized this before? They are all so distinct, with clear personalities and perspectives on life.

The feeling is confirmed as she morphs again.

She stops lounging in the chair and turns back toward me.

She slumps. She speaks in a voice filled with whininess. I know the attitude, tone and topic well.

“I just want to die. You would be okay with that, right? There’s nothing that I can do for anyone. I don’t want to be here anymore.”

She slumps more fully into herself.

And then ... nothing.

The pose has shifted subtly and the slumped, discouraged-looking body is gone. I feel like I am looking at a blank screen in comparison to the details I have just seen.

She speaks in a bland, non-descript voice. “Thank you for coming over. I need to sleep now.”

She curls up and closes her eyes.

I sit and stare at her. I am stunned at what I have seen all my life but never understood.

She falls asleep. I go to her and pick up the blanket that was knocked to the floor. I cover her and tuck her in so she can sleep in her comfy chair. She spends many of her nights here.

I let myself out, closing the door quietly behind me.

I am aware of walking down the hallway in a daze of shock. Thoughts and impressions come like fragmented pieces into my mind. My head is racing with details, yet calm with awareness.

I look at my watch. It is 9:28. Thirteen minutes have passed since my arrival in Mom's parking lot, thirteen minutes that divide my life into two contrasting perspectives: a lifetime of not understanding and an eruption of knowing. A wall that obscured awareness has crumbled, providing a glimpse into a startling reality that radically changes my perception.

A metaphor comes to my mind. It's like hearing a language we don't understand. We are not able to interpret it, no matter how loudly or slowly someone speaks. We have no frame of reference to be able to understand. It appears that has been the case with Mom. I have lacked understanding until now. Now it makes sense.

For a reason that I do not understand, tonight Mom has chosen to intentionally show me how to see and understand a lifetime of reality.

Mom has many personalities. Disconcerting though it is, it makes sense of a lifetime of experiences that haven't made sense.

During the moments of Mom morphing from one personality to the next, I had no trouble recognizing the distinct characteristics, focus and physical stance of each one of the personalities. They are deeply familiar as ones who have come and gone through the landscape of my life. Tonight they have shaken me awake. My eyes have been opened to the awareness that life has not been filled with shifting moods and states of Mom like we have always thought; it has been something more. I'm stunned we didn't realize it until now.

As I walk down the hallway, a memory drifts into my mind of my brother Mark saying that when he was a child it felt to him like we had four moms and we'd never know which one would show up.



WHOLENESS IN BROKENNESS; I have become aware through the writing of this book that my relationship with my Mom is a primary source of the learning that is at the core of my life's work, which focuses on the power of connecting to wholeness and authenticity. Mom is also a significant contributor to my life being filled with profound hopefulness. As I look back over my life, I realize these may sound like surprising insights because, from my perspective, my relationship with my mother is impacted by the disruption of a series of disconnected personalities, a reality I do not recognize until a year before her death.

My understanding is that Mom's many personalities form as coping mechanisms when crises and trauma are too much for her to bear. One of the blessings of the alter personalities is that they are the ones who cope with trauma while Mom's core personality remains strong and dynamic. It is through her core personality that Mom impacts the community around her with a passionate vision of inclusivity and her adamant perspective that our world can and must shift toward ways of being that enhance all of life on Earth.

My mother's challenges with mental health impact who I am today, providing me with a perspective on life which includes striving for resilience and seeing possibilities of authentic goodness even when chaos is rampant.

Seeing goodness in the midst of chaos gives hope in a world where good news stories are seldom told by the media. Being able to see goodness and possibilities, even when it appears that the walls that divide us are too high to climb, gives hope in a world where fear, consumerism and blame imprison and immobilize us. Being able to see goodness and possibilities, even when life feels like it is falling apart, is a gift that allows hope to grow and creativity to awaken. I am grateful for the way Mom could see goodness even when others could not. I am

grateful to Mom for helping me to develop the ability to see goodness even in the most difficult moments of life.

After Mom's death in 2011, I begin to tell snippets of my story of providing support to my mother for more than 20,000 hours over a period of forty years as she lived with the impact of an unnamed reality. From 2011 until now, the previously untold glimpses of this part of my life were shared only with close confidantes.

To me, sharing stories such as this deepens our awareness of the goodness in us, despite the harsh voices of judgment that erupt in our heads or the brokenness in us with which we struggle. When we risk being open, vulnerable and honest about our struggles and our joys, the fullness of who we are emerges and connects us to one another at a profound, authentic level.

Sharing our stories helps us to risk coming out from behind masks that separate us from one another and from ourselves. Experience has taught me that the pattern of hiding behind masks and disconnecting from authentically engaging in life is at the root of some of our greatest struggles in the times in which we live. We are experiencing an epidemic of loneliness rooted in the destructive powers of judgment, shame, blame and guilt. We are experiencing a culture that is numb to some of the deepest travesties of human history as we sooth ourselves with over-consumption of things, addictive substances and repeated mindless patterns. Too often, we are cut off from the roots of meaning at the core of our being. We strive to survive by fulfilling shallow expectations, rather than allowing ourselves to be nourished by the rich compost of wisdom and the vision of collaboration that is deep within us. Sharing our stories connects us at that deep level of our profound longing for community, creativity, compassion and acceptance.

The story of Mom's many personalities increases in complexity five years after Mom's death, when we discover that as siblings in one family we do not all have the same biological father. When we learn this shocking news, I hear myself make a declaration that startles me but feels true in the place of deep knowing within me: I believe that because

of Mom's many personalities she was not aware of the extra biological father in our family. No matter how much others scoff at my interpretation I continue to believe this to be true.

The shock of hearing about the first DNA test result and people's response to it creates a sense of urgency in me for the story of Mom's many personalities to be more fully explored and shared. I immediately find myself scurrying down the "rabbit hole" to seek out the fragmented pieces of our lives, hoping to piece them together to provide clarity and possible explanations for the undercurrents in our lives. Because the results of the DNA information prompt speculation that causes confusion about a story that is more than people know, I feel compelled to ensure that the news of the extra biological father not result in judgment of my mother but rather be received with a deep understanding of the complexity of the story.

Over the years, our family does not talk openly about the difficulties with Mom. When we are children, if we do talk about the disruptive realities of life with Mom, it is rarely more than whispered confusion and pain. The three older kids in the family, Mark, Janis and I, speak with each other about our experiences periodically, but we almost never talk about them with Dad, and we rarely, if ever, discuss them with our younger sister Betsy.

During the worst years, Mark, Janis and I are in our teens. Betsy is young, in the early years of school. Based on my relatively new understanding of Mom, my interpretation of the difficult years in the early 1970s is that the medication Mom is on before and after major surgery sends her into a discordant spiral of revolving personalities, each one filled with more despair and fear. During these difficult times, the older kids in the family take care of our younger sister Betsy to protect her from what we don't understand. Betsy reminds us that her experience of Mom is different than that of her three siblings.

What is clear, based on the conversations and wonderings we have shared, is that we each have our own story, our own perspective and our own experience of how we have been impacted.

Others would tell this story differently. This is my story, my perspective.

From my perspective, telling the fullness of this story is important. I do not feel that Mom's mental health challenges, which are the result of trauma, need to be hidden in the shadows of our lives. This is a story of struggle that reflects themes of a multitude of stories which weave into the fabric of our life in community. It is also a story filled with resilience and Mom's amazing capacity for goodness even in the midst of struggle. While there is despair, there is also hope.

In the year of my sixtieth birthday, when the news of the shocking DNA data barrels into our lives, the writing of this book propels me into a deepening awareness of who I am and the depth of the influence of Mom on my life's work about how to create life-giving, creative and meaningful community.

Writing this story has been a time of identifying learnings and insights which inform my perspective about life as a direct result of my relationship with Mom. Engaging with Mom awakened a longing in me to discover how to be in relationship with myself and others where we are authentic, where we can risk showing up as the person we are deep within us. This longing develops, in part, by watching Mom show up in a multitude of ways I do not understand.

My central learning that impacts my life is that: when we connect to our true essence, to our authentic self, we connect to a reservoir of power deep within us that is filled with love and creativity; when we risk connecting to one another in a deeply authentic way, we see life differently—no longer are we bound by small-ego thinking that is rooted in limitations, entitlement, blame, judgment and the compulsion to protect our territory, rather we see creative possibilities, abundance and incredible goodness; and when we connect at an authentic level as a community by creating a commons where everyone is respected and belongs, the wisdom within us and amongst us has the opportunity to emerge to enable us to recognize future possibilities that enhance life when we work together.

The brokenness and the richness in my relationship with my Mom has helped me to identify principles and practices about how to create healthy, life-giving authentic community so that we can address the brokenness in our world by choosing to live together in ways that reflect our deep longing for the well-being of all.

I learn again and again that though life can be demanding and appear to be fractured or even crushed, somewhere in the midst of the rubble, there is goodness and a longing to be whole that yearns to emerge amongst us. This is a story that explores how to connect to that power of wholeness, the power of love, in the midst of the brokenness in our world today.

While this is the story of my ongoing journey home to who I am, rerouted by unexpected detours, it is also a glimpse into our shared story as humans as we seek to be in healthy relationship with ourselves, each other and the Earth; as we seek to create space for love to emerge, acceptance to expand, possibilities of an alternative vision to be considered, and creativity to be our response when pathways to wholeness and the common good become obscured.

Before you follow me down the “rabbit hole” described in *Alice in Wonderland*, as a place filled with unexpected turns and bizarre realities, I think it would be good for you to hear two stories to help you know aspects of who I am that impact how this story unfolds.

The first story reflects a central theme and perspective which dances and weaves through my life. It arises from a mystical moment that happens the summer I am three.

I am in a glorious meadow where warm sunshine fills the air. Butterflies are flitting everywhere. I hear the song of a multitude of birds and the splashing dance of the creek. I hear the voices of others in the meadow. I can see them out of the corner of my eye as I run and twirl with delight amongst the flowers that blow in the gentle breeze. The breeze carries the warmth of the sun and kisses my face. When I come to the centre of the meadow, I stop. Everywhere I look I see light: light pouring out of the people; light flowing like a wave around the

butterflies and blossoms; light emanating from me. I see light all around me, coming from within me and from within every living thing.

I don't exactly see the light with my eyes, but I see the light with an inner vision that feels more real than what my eyes see. This guiding vision makes the world a magical, mystical place filled with possibilities, potential beyond our imaginings, and peace that is deep and profound. For me, the light is the energy of the Divine. I know deep within me that the light all around us and within us is the power of Love.

In the early years of my life this is how I think everyone sees the world.

Throughout my life, this memory informs how I see people and how I engage life. It is a reflection of my profound sense of knowing that the Divine is intimately present and can be found deep within all of us. It is an energy that connects us to life rooted in love. I return to the feeling of this experience in moments when I am challenged to see the light and goodness that are within all of us. This memory roots me in an awareness that even in the midst of the struggles of life we have the amazing capacity to let love shine and creativity flow through our lives. The result is that I am often puzzled by behaviours, masks and walls that cover over the depth of goodness that is everywhere. I am often outraged by injustice, and filled with a longing for what is possible. In the midst of my frustrations, I am sustained by the awareness that the energy of love is all around us, and that no matter how broken life can seem there is still wholeness present.

The second story provides insights into my detailed memory that goes back to when I am very young, a reality that you need to know in order to make sense of the stories I tell. I know my earliest memories go back a long way because of a picture in the family box of photos.

When I am eight or nine years old, my family spends an evening around the dining room table digging into the box of family photos to find treasures. I ask if anyone has seen the pictures from the time we went to Algonquin Park. Mom and Dad both respond. Without looking up, they both say that we've never been there. I am surprised. I

have such clear memories of going to Algonquin Park. I remember stopping on the side of the highway to feed a fawn sugar cookies. I distinctly remember trying to scramble out of the car with my tiny body seeking to keep up with my sister and brother. I remember being on the beach and seeing a teenager asleep on an air mattress that is drifting far out into the lake. I alert my brother, tugging at him until he looks to where I am pointing, so he will see the danger she might be in. I remember that we are there for Janis's and Mark's birthdays and that Janis receives a painted cardboard in the shape of a doll designed to thread wool through to complete the picture. I remember Janis won't let me play with her cardboard doll. She turns her back to me as we sit on the top of a picnic table, hiding her gift in front of her, ignoring my demand to be included.

We continue to sort through the photos showing each other pictures filled with memories. And then someone finds a booklet of pictures where the first picture is of Janis and Mark feeding a fawn while Mom stands in the background holding the cookie tin. Apparently, my little legs did not scramble fast enough to get to the fawn in time to be in the picture. The next picture in the booklet shows the gate into Algonquin Park. My parents are shocked because they have forgotten we stayed there and shocked because I remembered.

The date on the pictures is August 1957. I am eighteen months old.

This book has been described as both intimate and intricate. While it feels risky to share it, it also feels like a call, a nudge, or more accurately a push I cannot ignore. I could keep silent, leaving people with the interpretation that Mom and the extra biological father in our family simply had an affair, but the story is filled with so many more layers of complexity and insights into life. The push to write this story is strong. It will not leave me alone, awakening me each day with new edits, guiding me to write with only the skeleton outline that divides the book into five sections. The story flows out of me, continuously surprising me with the memories and reflections that emerge. Pieces of

the story click into place, often startling me with how the puzzle fits together to create a picture filled with textures, contours, depth and colours permeated with nuances that illuminate the beauty at the core of life.

I have pondered how Mom might feel about this story being told. I am aware that telling it provides details that we often don't share in our society. For me, telling this story provides potential for greater appreciation of the incredible resilience in my Mom. She truly was an amazing woman.

After prayerful consideration, my deep intuitive sense is that Mom would be more than okay with me telling this story. Mom always wanted to write a book about her life to be a source of learning, support and insight for other people. Comments have been made that this story has the potential to help other families dealing with mental health challenges, as well as people who work in the mental health field. Mom would appreciate knowing that her story has the potential to help others. Already, my sister Janis has shared that reading this book has given her greater understanding of Mom and the challenges she lived with. As a result, her heart has softened toward Mom. This story is also filled with Mom's significant impact on the development of my life's work of the importance of creating Authentic Connection Culture, learned through both her struggles and her strengths. She would love for it to be known that she has been one of my greatest teachers.

A rich tapestry of life emerges as the strands of the story are woven together. Some strands are light and flowing, others are colourful and zany, some are golden and filled with sparkles, others are thick and heavy and hard to handle. The beauty and strength of the tapestry emerge from the deepening insights and learnings, creating a reflection of life that shows the potential we have within us for life to be filled with both love and wholeness.

One of my hopes for our world is that we awaken more fully to the transformational power of love, a power that longs to engage our passions, teaches us to celebrate diversity, and compels us to risk imagining a way of being together that leads to wholeness. Awakening

to this power within equips us to co-create a world committed to the well-being of all. For me this story of connecting to wholeness even in the midst of brokenness, of experiencing resilience even when life shows up with difficulties, deepens our hope as we work together to mend the world.

The moment that creates the impetus for me to tell this story erupts on the morning of April 18, 2016.

THE MIRROR SHATTERS





EARLY MORNING MONDAY, APRIL 18, 2016, the sound of a whistle cracks the silence. A text message has arrived. I groan. My body, mind and spirit are exhausted, drained from the demands of a busy life and the months of directing *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. This is my first day to sleep-in after the show closes.

I lie in bed, sinking more deeply into the mattress and pillows. My slightly awakened mind conjures images of the impact of the musical on the small town of six thousand people north of where I live. Over one thousand people were in the audience over a four-night run. The cast and crew of one hundred people all invested a magnitude of hours to lift the production to a professional standard. A tiny smile wants to crack my face. I'm too tired to smile.

Instead, I let visuals flash through my mind of how we deepened the meaning of the story. Throughout the show, most of the cast wore scarves made of camouflage material. In the final song, Joseph and the narrator help the rest of the cast to discover that on the inside of their camouflage scarves there is a lining made of the same material as Joseph's coat. The side of the scarves that has been hidden throughout the show is a replica of the scarf Joseph and the narrator have been wearing. The whole cast turns their scarf over to the bright colours. They realize the beauty has been on the inside from the beginning.

On a metaphorical level, the beauty within, represented by the colourful side of the scarf, has been camouflaged by the small-self attitudes of jealousy and a sense of entitlement that most of the characters express for much of the story. The material of the beautiful lining that they have unknowingly been wearing identifies the whole cast as beloved in the same way that the coat, made of the same bright material, identifies Joseph as Jacob's beloved son. It is intended to remind the people on stage and the people in the audience that we are

all beloved; that we can choose to share love in the world rather than cover over the love within us with hatred and greed. My mind wanders to the bookmarks we gave everyone in the audience as a keepsake. Each bookmark has some of the material of the coat attached to it along with the words “Colour the World with Love.” A tiny smile finally curves my mouth.

I drift back toward sleep in a glow of satisfaction.

I stop myself from drifting too far because I know I need to do something about the text message. I consider ignoring it, but it will awaken me every fifteen minutes with a persistent intrusion.

I groan, thinking, “I really need to figure out how to change the settings on text message notifications so they stop after one alert.”

I reach out blindly and grab the phone. I anticipate that once I open the message to stop the notification whistle, I will fall back to sleep. The text is from my sister Janis. I am instantly awake. Our busy lives don’t allow us to talk often. I don’t want to miss a chance to connect.

I read the message.

“Good morning, Karen. I have a question. Do you remember the last name of ‘uncle’ Scott, a family friend when we were little?”

I respond without needing to give it any thought. “Pretty sure it is McDonald.” I look at what I have written and think, “That’s spelled wrong. It should be Macdonald with an ‘a.’ But what difference could the spelling possibly make?”

I press the send button, then write, “What prompted you to think of him?”

Immediate response: “I need to talk to you.”

The phone rings. Without telling me why, Janis asks me about my memories of our family friend we called ‘uncle’ Scott.

Though puzzled by the question I rhyme off a list of my memories:

I remember going to his cottage as kids. We loved it there, and it seems to me that we went often. I remember ‘uncle’ Scott and his wife coming to all the adult parties at Mom and Dad’s. I also

remember Mom flirting with him sometimes, and other times she treated him like her buddy.

When we were still quite young, there was a huge fight at the cottage on the weekend that Grandma came up with us. I don't remember going back to the cottage after that or seeing 'uncle' Scott at the parties at our home. I do remember hearing updates about his kids when Dad came home after golfing with him.

There were two other times when we saw 'uncle' Scott again. The first time was when I was eight. He gave each of us a necklace watch. The second time was when we were teenagers. He took each of us out for a full day visit that included dining at a very exclusive restaurant.

Scott's name came up during the really bad years when I sat up with Mom night after night while she was distraught to the point of being suicidal. Mom begged me one night to call him at midnight. She pleaded with me, declaring, "He is the only one who understands me."

I pause.

Janis fills the pause with a sentence that stuns me. "I'm pretty sure 'uncle' Scott is my biological father."

