

Rowan's Tribute

Jan 21, 2018

When you hear this tribute, Ren and I will also be holding a ceremony for Mum. We will be with you in spirit. As I write this, I am overlooking the bay of Yelapa in Mexico. Yelapa means the meeting of two rivers. I was born of the meeting of two other rivers—the intersecting lives of my birth mother, Val Hooke, and my Irish birth father, Bill.

In 1985, a dream moved me to find Val, who soon became Mum. When we first met, in a B&B in Cheltenham, George opened the door to me with welcoming smiles, and then Mum was right there in front of me. I had no idea how profoundly this meeting would change me, nor cause to wish that it would. When I set eyes on the woman who had birthed and breast fed me for 6 weeks, it was as if all the atoms of my being knew her and instantly found their right relationship to each other. Without ever having realized anything was awry, this was a sense of belonging in this world that I'd not known before.

Mum and I shared a meandering journey, marked by easy laughter, vigorous discussions about all manner of topics and sometimes profound disputes about differing beliefs and values that tore at both our hearts. Yet, Mum was caring about me and my marriage with Ren, my life partner.

The years we had were punctuated by long phone calls across continents, and visits. On rare occasions we had trips, just the two of us, one to the west coast of Vancouver Island, another to Ireland. It was no mean feat to get Val to leave George for a while, though I do recall that on one of our trips he had a pretty interesting solo adventure on a motorcycle, heading up a coastal BC highway into the mountains.

Mum and I loved hearing about each other's life experiences and sharing small moments. I can hear her saying now, "Oh, I didn't know that", as if she thought she should know all my stories. Here are just a few cherished memories—Mum and I sitting on a park bench in Dublin, discovering we both loved Kit-Kat bars. Mum's stories about being an air traffic controller during the war. Mum and I on the back roads of Ireland, completely lost, confounded by signs in Gaelic that bore no relationship to our map, and breaking into side-splitting laughter. Mum keeping me behind while she dressed for her 90th birthday celebration because she wanted me to help her decide which necklace to wear.

Mum's love for me was deeply healing. Sometimes her words shook me to my foundations. I had to find and trust my own truth. This was one of the greatest gifts she gave me. The greatest gift though was her courage in facing the harsh consequences of being pregnant with me in 1947, to ensure I had the family and cherishing I would need, to become a whole human being. Thank you my dearest Mum Val for giving me this life and for being you.