



DAY 19

I Wish I Would Forget...But Do I?

Isaiah 43:19 (NRSV) – "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

Memory is a mixed bag. The further back I dig, the less happiness I find after the age of 6. The

story of my upbringing is a story of destruction, increasing mental illness, psychological violence and eventually disaster.

When I was 6, my mom was a popular French singer across western Europe and the Middle East. She even had a little tour in Japan. When I turned 20, we had lost everything: money, their friends, our home — twice. Our family was ruled by my father's unchecked paranoia and I had had enough of it. I was starting my own life away from my parents, so I did not see them very often. But one day, my father told me over the phone to never come back. I was 24 and I never did. When asked about my parents, I often said that they had passed away in a car accident.

I was loyal to my parents, to their madness, to their denial of reality, to their attempt to fight the entire world all at once. I used to feel that we must be special if the world was so hard bent on destroying us. But one day I started to ask questions, and this automatically turned me into a traitor — an enemy of my people. I could see my father digging our own grave with so much fury. He didn't want my help, not even my thoughts. Just my loyalty.

My father ended up serving time in prison. When released, he survived two more miserable years with cancer, cared for by his older sister he had spent decades hating and belittling. He passed away in 2008. The hospital contacted me to ask if I wanted to come and say goodbye. I told them I already said goodbye, many years ago. I was told that he died happy learning that I was divorcing my then wife he couldn't stand.

I wish I could forget and luckily I did forget some of it. But most of all I forgave. When my father was no longer here, other layers of memories began to come to the surface. He loved me. He was extremely fun and insightful. He was smart and insanely gifted. His sense of humor was to another level, even if there always was some cruelty.

Becoming a father myself makes me think about him. He is my frame of reference. I owe him the person I have become, for better or worse. This is bone memory, soul memory. These memories never go away.

Lord help us to carry the burden of our memories. These are building blocks of who we are as people, they inform our lives and yet they do not define us. Help us to remember and feel, but not to be disabled by these memories. Liberate us and show us the path forward as we continue our journey.

Frederic Vigne