

Tina Kribbs

English 122

Miss French

March 23, 2011

The Puppet

Forgiveness can set you free.... Freedom. Who wouldn't want freedom? Free from what? What is freedom? Push the enter button. Seventeen definitions! Scanning the choices on dictionary.com, a sharp poke in the pit of my stomach as I read number seven, "the absence of or release from ties, obligations, etc." That's it: the absence of, the release from ties. But why would anyone who suffered the loss of a loved one want to release anything that the loved one was attached to? I love my mother and I remember the times we shared; the good times, the bad times, and the ugly times. The ugly times seem to be so.....Vivid. I have to remember the ugly times.

I am not new to this concept of loss; I have lost many people close to me. As hard as it is to admit: death is really just a fact of life. Period.

In one year, our family was faced with the death of 8 people. We were a very tight-knit family. My mother's and father's aunts and uncles (my great aunts and uncles) never missed a summertime barbeque or the biweekly poker game. Although they were my "great" aunts and uncles, I never called them anything besides Uncle Jimmy, Uncle Alfred, Aunt Niva, Aunt Annie, Aunt Bonnie, Uncle Harold, and of course not to be left out in that year, "soft" Grandma, and "hard" Grandma. That year was the toughest year of my life. Up till that point anyway....

The knee-jerk type response many people have when faced with the death of a loved one is to forget all the bad things that happened. Somehow "let-go" of the bad and fill your mind with only good things about that person. If you have ever been to a funeral usually nothing but

loving memories are surrounding the event. This is understandable, since the day is, after all, to pay respects. It seems, most people (myself included) hold onto the memories of the funeral and never get back to the “real relationship” they shared with that loved one.

Mom died.

To comfort myself, I thought of all the people she must be hanging out with in “heaven.” I could just picture them having summertime barbeques, playing innocent pranks on each other, having water fights, and in the evening sitting around the kitchen table playing a good game of poker. Somehow I thought that in order to keep from going crazy, it was ok to trick my brain into thinking that after death, we are re-united with our loved ones in another dimension that looks just like the one we just left. At one point, I felt like I needed to try to understand why I had been forced to wade through this swamp of sadness and loss. That’s it. It must be. God had been trying to *exercise my heart* by taking so many of my aunts and uncles in attempt to prepare or condition me. But why would God do that?..... Nothing could ever prepare me for the monumental amount of loss I felt when Mom died.....Oh—how I miss her; still....

Hot summer night feeling numb to the world; the only thing I can feel is my husband’s warm body lying next to me in the bed and the cool breeze from the window gently stroking our feet. We knew the end was near. *My tired heart was about to explode!* I was nervous for him and deeply saddened for myself, but I knew it was not about me right now.... Tears filled my eyes and although I was trying to hold back the sorrow; the dam broke and I could feel the streaming heat, from the rivers flowing down each side of my face... Without warning, I couldn’t help but bellow, “I wish it were me!”...Cry....cry, cry....cry... “I want to take your place.” (Did I just say that, out loud? How cliché... How could I. It is not possible to trade places. Who cares what I

want anyway! Here I am feeling sorry for *myself*?)

In a tone that was comforting and understanding, he sorrowfully, gently, whispered,

“Oh, Tina...”

After a long pause he further shared his thoughts, “It’s O.K... I am not afraid. I do wonder when *it* comes how *it* will feel; but I am not afraid to die.”

Now, I felt like the lines of communication were open. I felt like I could say anything.... And I did. “Will you tell Mom and Dad and all my Aunts and Uncles and Grandmas that I love them?” I wished I had the sense to open my mouth and insert my foot at that time... But no, not going to happen. “You are kind of lucky, in a way: At least you are going to get to play poker with the family again.”

Gently wiping the tears from my face and tucking my hair behind my ears, so he could look into my eyes he softly proclaimed, “I think of death as a re-birth -- to the energy that is.” I was confused. I *really* wanted to understand. He must have seen my eyes practically roll behind my head as I was trying to formulate a picture of what he just said..... He enlightened me by expanding the picture, “Imagine a ball of *light*; now picture that we are all “tiny particles” of *that light*. When someone dies they become one with *that light* again.” Long pause...it sounded like he was choking back tears of fear. He took a long, slow, deep breath and affirmed, “I will be *one* with all those who have gone before me, and they ***do already know*** how you feel; we will have all the memories, of everything, so we will not need to play poker. We can *just* be: *that ball of light, that ball of energy, and it is all around, everywhere, and always.*” [.....] And there it was.

God doesn’t really have to exist!

I had struggled with this my whole life. I never understood my relationship with “God.” First of all, I don’t really get the point of giving this higher power a unisex name and then we refer to the higher power as HIM. IT is *a higher power*, not a man or a woman.... Why is it that in order to be “strong” or “powerful,” we have to call *It* a him. That bugs me... I wanted to love *It*. When times were tough, “I gave my troubles to *It*.” Somehow, that always seemed to work; I liked that part of our relationship. Nevertheless, *It* didn’t always treat me so nice. The thing about *It* is, to be quite frank, a lot of the time I thought of *It* as a selfish bastard. I do not claim to be an aficionado on the subject of Christianity or “God” for that matter; however, I do have an opinion on the subject at hand. As I understand religious beliefs, God made his son die for all our sins; he sacrificed his loved one. I get how hard that is.

I get it.

Over, and Over, and Over.... I directly watched Mother (56), Father (67) and Husband (40) suffer endlessly until the day they died. They were all relatively young, and so was I. I was 24 the year my mother died. One of the hospice priests told me that the suffering they were going through was their *cross to bear*, like Jesus. Well... if that is the case, why was my heart so *burdened*....why did I have to see their suffering with my eyes and heart, unable to help in any way? What does my *cross* look like? What other horrendous thing is in store for me? I can hardly wait...Spare me! Literally. Please.

Back to forgiveness. It is harder to forgive a wrong that was committed on a loved one than if that same wrong was committed on oneself, or so says R.T. Kendall in his book *Total Forgiveness*. I would buy that...but...If “God” doesn’t exist, who am I mad at? I don’t feel anger or resentment around my Father’s death. Was it my husband’s death?... No, I am deeply

saddened but do not blame anybody, or any “being,” for either of their deaths, except the cancer....Maybe I need to work on forgiving cancer?...How do you forgive something that is not tangible? What about Mom? Mom died of cancer, too, but something feels different about her death. That’s it! The oncologist. The man that denied my mother and our family proper notice of her death.

Holding a grudge is hazardous to your health, according to the heading of the book, *Forgive for Good: A PROVEN Prescription for Health and Happiness*, by Dr. Fred Luskin. Maybe another doctor can help. He leads his program, working to understand how the individual created the need to have to forgive, at all. 1.) Renting too much space to disappointment; *Maybe*. 2.) Taking things too personally; *Of course not*. 3.) The blame game; *He is to blame, period*. 4.) The Grievance Story.....The Grievance Story....That sounds familiar. There it was: the question; gawking at me from the bottom of the page. Are you telling a grievance story?

My mother’s sister, Aunt Sue, was a nurse and she followed my mother’s condition from the start. Aunt Sue could talk frankly to me as a third party and not upset or confuse Mom. We knew (my aunt and I) when Mom only had 6 more months to live. Aunt Sue knew everything about my mother’s condition, and she had consulted a few oncologist friends at the hospital where she worked..... I confronted my mother’s oncologist, Dr. T---- to see if he agreed that it was time to let my mother make the choice between more treatment and hospice. He refused to be honest with my mother..... For six months, I was stuck. Watching my mother deteriorate before my eyes; all the while, my mother wanted to hear that she was ok, and that the cancer was not “back.” (We knew better, but it wasn’t our place to tell her or the family, it was her doctor’s place to be honest with her.) Against the wall.....12 days before she died, I went to her family practitioner and told him that the oncologist would not allow my mom the choice to go into hospice and I was worried about her final wishes. I begged him to write her a prescription for hospice and let her and our family get her final affairs in order. She had been in and out of the hospital for 7 weeks straight, never coming home more than 2 days at a time, before returning. He agreed to call the oncologist....

Ring, Ri.. “Hello,” I answered the phone before the second ring could finish. I recognized the number, my face heated up and I could hear my heart knocking on my eardrums.....It was the oncologist. I was sure he was calling to apologize. But what he

actually said was quite different. "I am sorry you are going through this Tina.... But.....How can I cure cancer if I am sending all my patients to hospice?"

"WHAT?" I hollered, as if he were on the other side of the world.

(I was struck by his words, paralyzed at the thought. This man has such little compassion for individual human life. How could he think it is up to HIM to decide how painful my mothers' death should be...Who does he think he is? GOD?) I hastily replied, "It's not your place to decide."

To calm me down, he agreed to meet my family at the hospital in my mother's room, at 3:00 pm the next day..... All the family got off work early and everyone was there to receive the important news. Needless to say he still didn't do the right thing. I had to talk to the hospital administrator and get the doctor on call to write her a prescription for hospice. My mother died 11 days later.....

And there it was, perfectly packaged and accurate making sure not to leave out one important detail. There it is before me. Oh my, this proves it! I have a problem to deal with. Writing the grievance story was intriguing; I could recall every disgusting detail of every moment that surrounded my mom's death... With this experience, I learned two things, I do have a grievance story, and:

the oncologist is not to blame.

Pain. Sorrow. How could I?..... I lied to my mother and our family for six months. Selfishly, I did not want to be the one to tell them the unbearable truth. I was busy feeling sorry for myself at everyone else's expense; especially at my expense. Ten years later, I am still holding this grudge. For what? For who?

Inside I burn. Inside I ache. Inside I hurt. From under my skin I could feel my grievance story clawing at the back of my brain; trying to creep back into the forefront of my mind.

Working hard to jerk me away from facing the raw, painful truth I had just discovered. “Take off the gloves, Tina.” I deserve to be punched. “Maybe you do have something here, but Dr. T---- was/is an ASSHOLE!”

So am I...I am even a bigger asshole... I lied to my own mother during the most important time in her life...her death. “You are not the only one to blame here!” So confused. I need help...Can “*It*” help me?

Let’s suppose that “God” does exist in the way Kendall would like to believe “He” does. Kendall supports his argument about having a more difficult time forgiving someone who has wronged a loved one, by explaining the relationship between God and Jesus. Jesus had to ask God to forgive us as humans because we were *ignorant* to what we were doing to him. (Dr T---- was not *ignorant*; inept, maybe. Dr T---- he knew exactly what he was doing to my mom. Not the same, different lesson to learn...) Back to forgiveness. God granted forgiveness to us for doing something terrible to his loved one, his son. Kendall affirms that the only way to have total forgiveness is to ask God to forgive the person as well.....This theory would work, every time, whether we were forgiving an act on ourselves or a loved one. Ahhh, could this be it? If it is harder to forgive someone for committing a wrong on a loved one, and we truly, deeply, love God; then every wrong act committed would indirectly be committed on God, and therefore to totally forgive the wrong doing, one would have to forgive the person for committing the act on God. In other words, ask God to forgive that person as well, and truly mean it. Ok, so how is this done?

Step 1: Being aware of what someone has done and still forgiving them.

This makes no sense. I haven't begun to forgive, I don't know how to forgive, or maybe I don't want to forgive, but either way this is a book that is trying to teach forgiveness, and it is starting by expecting the person to know how to forgive in step one....OK?

Step 2: Choosing to keep no records of wrong.

Like a paper-cut that keeps getting brushed all day... A nagging pain, that increases with every touch. This rule, too, is a little disturbing. As I stated earlier, if we keep no records of the wrongs, then we will not be able to *remember the real relationship*. (I don't want to have or keep a *relationship* with the oncologist who hurt us so badly. So, if I choose to not keep a record of his wrong, then will it have never happened? Are there no consequences?) – Exhausted... I am not truly invested in Kendall's concept of God. Therefore, I cannot fully understand what is required for total forgiveness; I think I'll settle for regular forgiveness. It seems that R.T. Kendall would require me to understand regular forgiveness before moving on to total forgiveness anyway. Feeling frustrated, frustrated feeling. Spinning in circles. If only I could see the way out of here!

The Tao of forgiveness; maybe that is what I am looking for.... William Martin, author of *The Tao of Forgiveness: The Healing Power of Forgiving Others and Yourself*, explains in very basic terms that the Tao means "the way." It certainly sounds good. Martin suggests that working to understand "the way" of forgiveness will lead us to being able to forgive. He explains that to understand forgiveness is impossible; however, to understand the way to forgive is something we can work with.

Chapter 4.) Anger; There is no one to blame.

This sounds like a good chapter. Could it be? It would certainly let me off the hook... There it was on the top of page 28. "I would like to live longer. I probably won't, but that is always the case for

everyone, isn't it? Everyone wants to live longer. Everyone has to die. There is no one to blame. I am happy." The words of a teenage woman suffering with AIDS in Africa.

Martin attempts to explain this foreign notion. "Perhaps it's not really answers that she found, but a perception— a spacious perception in which she and her life were viewed as they were, not as the way someone thought they should be." She had anger and she worked through it. She was blaming and being frustrated at everyone and everything including but not limited to: the government, the doctors, and her husband for giving her AIDS. Her ability to "let go" of her anger and frustration allowed her to use her energy to be "happy" instead of wasting it on something that could not be changed.

If there is no one to blame, then there is no need to forgive. Dr. T----, me, we are both let off the hook..... It doesn't mean that the terrible thing did not happen. It did happen, just the way I remember it.... So why can't I "let go".... Is there something else?

My grievance story, I can't let go of it.....The reason I like the grievance story so much is because good or bad, it reminds me of a time when my mother was still alive. It takes me there literally—I can be there physically. (Face red, heart knocking on my eardrums, electrocuted by the words, "How can I cure cancer if I am sending all my patients to hospice?") I can really FEEL what it is like to have a mother again.

The times surrounding my mother's death were frustrating, and full of unfairness; even beyond the unfairness that I was going to lose my mother at the age of 24....How ugly. How sad.

By holding on to this anger and resentment I paint my mother in this ugly picture.

Could my friend Diane be right? Diane has done a lot of work trying to figure out forgiveness for a book she is writing. We have talked about forgiveness in the abstract for hours on end. We have

never walked away with the answer; in fact, we always leave the conversation wondering if we have a better understanding, or if we are more confused. I found it appropriate to invite her to watch the DVD *The Power of Forgiveness* with me. Alexandra Asseily informs us that, “We can be tolerant for a while, until something really pushes our buttons and we get triggered back into a deeper memory” (Wiesel). Wow, this is true! She further explains, “Forgiveness allows us to “let go” of the *pain* in the memory—and if we “let go” of the *pain*; we can have the memory, but it doesn’t control us.” I was working hard to figure out how this related to my situation.... I started to feel like since I couldn’t understand the second half of her message that maybe I am some sort of masochist.

Stop. Play. Stop. Play.... I needed to hear the message over and over again. Diane stopped me from playing it a fourth time. She almost jumped out of her seat, reaching for the remote, “If I could choose what to remember, then forgiveness wouldn’t be such a problem.” She went on to explain that anger and resentment are very colorful—emotionally; and, on the other hand, as unfortunate as it is to admit, death, in the mind’s memory is dull and gray. If this is the case, it makes sense that I would want to paint a “colorful” picture with my mother in it. **I can’t allow** my mother’s memory to go the “dull, gray, colorless place people seem to go when they die” And yet.....

My anger has perpetually trapped my mother in the colorful hell of her own suffering.

Rev. Lyndon Harris also shares his thoughts in *The Power of Forgiveness*. He is working to build a garden of forgiveness at the site of 9-11. A forgiveness garden. The goal: to give people a place to meditate and reflect on the possibility of forgiveness. This garden would not in any way excuse or

condone the act of violence that was committed. “We want to invite people to intentionally ‘opt out’ of the cycle of violence and revenge.” Harris states this option so clearly. That *is* it.

Forgiveness *is* an option... It was there in so many words. Ahh, like going to a funeral and choosing to remember the good things about the person...it’s not knee-jerk reaction.... It’s a choice.

Asseily also enlightened us with this golden nugget of truth, “ [...] when memories control us; we are then puppets of the past.” I am being jerked around by this terrible memory of the past. I am not in control of the memories of my mother. Back and forth. Back and forth...My memory is *triggered* at the will of this “invisible— ANGRY puppet master.”

I *can feel* what it is like to be a loving wife, when I think of the beautiful times I shared with my husband. I now reclaim the right to be a loving daughter again, no longer a puppet. I cut the strings. I love you, Mom.

Works Cited

"Freedom." *Dictionary.com*. Dictionary.com LLC. Web. 17 Mar. 2011.

<<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/freedom>>.

Dodge, Diane. Personal Discussion. 19 Mar. 2011.

Forgiveness: Stories of Our Time. United States: Alive Mind, 2008. Video.

Kendall, R T. *Total Forgiveness: True Inner Peace Awaits You!* Lake Mary, Fla: Charisma House, 2002.

Print.

Luskin, Fred. *Forgive for Good: A Proven Prescription for Health and Happiness*. San Francisco:

HarperSanFrancisco, 2002. Print.

Martin, William. *The Tao of Forgiveness: The Healing Power of Forgiving Others and Yourself*. New

York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2010. Print.

Wiesel, Elie, Hạnh Nhất, Thomas Moore, Marianne Williamson, and Martin Doblmeier. *The*

Power of Forgiveness. Alexandria, Va.: Journey Films, Inc, 2007. Video.