



Shirley Ann Blair Moyer

January 22, 1937 - February 10, 2020



My mother, like my father, died at home at 14689 Poncho Conde Circle, Rancho Murieta, California, where they lived since 1989.

The email from my brother arrived on Saturday, December 24th, stating that my mother was in the hospital. She woke the night before unable to breathe. After performing a biopsy, a mass on her lungs was found. On Sunday she was moved to Gramercy Court, an assisted living facility in Sacramento, without a definitive diagnosis but a suspicion of cancer. My brother was also told her liver function was not good. What was most disturbing, according to my brother, was the escalation of her dementia. When I thought she wasn't listening, was it dementia?

Another email from my brother. Jan 4, 2020. Gramercy Court has released her to return home and into DeeDee's care. (DeeDee was a friend of my parents. She moved in with my mother in 2014, two years after my father's death.) Allen said still no definitive diagnosis of the type of cancer.

Not long after my mother's birthday on January 22nd, the doctor informed DeeDee and my mother that she probably had less than two months to live.

On Saturday, Feb. 8th, my brother emailed saying DeeDee was told by the hospice nurse that she may not last another week. On Sunday, Allen and his family visited and I called. My mother was still able to go to the bathroom by herself, although, according to my brother, it took a long time. We spoke briefly. She knew who I was and was aware of Allen, his wife, Debbie and her grandson, Cody. She was having a difficult time breathing and was quite tired.

On Monday, Feb. 10th around 8:30 a.m. my brother emailed letting me know Mom had gone into a coma and was very cold. The hospice nurse and DeeDee were with her at the house. At 2:30 p.m. I received another email letting me know “Mom was gone.” On February 24th she was interred next to my father’s ashes at the Sacramento Valley National Cemetery near Dixon, Ca.



My mother was the child of alcoholic parents. She told me she often took refuge with her Grandma Smith and a couple from their church, Edith and Earl Stirling. Until I read articles and memoirs by

alcoholics and children of alcoholics I had no awareness of how living in an unstable, chaotic and violent household affects children.

According to my mother, her mother was highly critical and volatile. I must admit I never really liked her mother, my grandmother. As a child I could not have named it but as an adult I realized it was



Florence Smith Blair

the pervasiveness of alcohol in her life and the lives of my maternal relatives and their friends. I have often wondered if that is why the smell of alcohol upsets my sense of safety and causes anxiety, why I am uncomfortable in bars and with people who drink too much.

At the age of 19 in 1956, Shirley Ann Blair married Ray Arthur Moyer, he was 25 and two years free from his service in the Navy during the Korean War. She was a year out of high school and working



Ray, 1950

at a drug store making milkshakes and hot fudge sundaes. They met skating. My mother had only dated one other person. She told me my father

was a good dancer (as was my mother) but more importantly, I think, my father came from a stable home with loving parents who did not drink, who did not yell and scream, who did not criticize. My father came from a home of generosity and kindness and goodness, people who survived the Great Depression and knew the value of hard work and saving money.



Mae & Earl Moyer

My mother was the younger sister, the not-as-pretty sister, the sister who did not drink and “run around.” My mother and her sister were not close. I don’t think they even liked one another. My mother’s mother was pregnant with my mother’s sister when she married, a sister who was raped as an adolescent, who married four times, and who also became an alcoholic and whose son became an alcoholic and killed himself when he was in his mid-40s.

None of these incidents is unique. They seem to be played out again and again, generation after generation. My mother’s parents divorced after 25 years of marriage. I was six years old and we were

readying to move to California from Omaha, Nebraska. My father was a lineman for AT&T and while serving in the war fell in love with California so he applied for a transfer.

I was born when my mother was 21; my brother arrived two years and three months later when she was 23. In between there had been a miscarriage. I once asked my father what about my mother made him want to marry. I was 21 at the time and we were having dinner together at our favorite Mexican restaurant. My mother was in the hospital for a biopsy—a suspicion of cancer. His answer was not what I had expected. He said, “I didn’t want to be alone and I wanted a family.” Nothing about love. Nothing about shared dreams. I didn’t know how to interpret this information. And I didn’t ask the next obvious question: Were you in love? Instead I asked if he’d ever had an affair. He said he didn’t have the time and he’d rather spend it on a golf course. And then he told me tales of a friend of his who continually had affairs even though my



dad would always warn him that it would not end well. I figured it must have been his friend who was on wife number five.

Did my mother enjoy being a wife and mother?



Honestly, I don't know. But she was good at it. My brother and I never wanted for anything. We always lived in a clean house, wore clean clothes. Once a week she stripped the beds and washed the sheets. She dusted and vacuumed and scrubbed toilets. Dinner was always on the table at 5 p.m. She made the best fried chicken and pot roast. And the best pies. She said her secret to making a perfect pie crust is a splash of 7-Up. When my brother and I were in grammar school, she enjoyed the times she was scheduled to be a room mother. She'd make cupcakes for our class snack and liked helping our teachers. She



felt appreciated. She volunteered as a leader for the Bluebirds and Camp Fire girls and worked as a district organizer. Though she learned to drive, she never passed her driver's test. I think because of this my

father taught me to drive when I turned fifteen.

My mother started smoking cigarettes when she was 13. By the time she quit, at the age of 80, she lit a cigarette every 10 minutes. Like many people who smoke she was oppressed by her addiction. In her 30's she was diagnosed with pyorrhea and had all her teeth removed. Because she had difficulty keeping her teeth in she was prescribed Valium. She also suffered from horrible menstrual cramps and was often laid low. Women like my mother were often referred to as "high strung." Maybe it was more about being stuck at home cleaning and cooking and ironing and washing and dealing with two energetic kids all day. Maybe it was the constant drone of the television and the soap operas that attended her isolation. The only books I saw my mother read were by Barbara Cartland. Betty Friedan's "The Feminine Mystique" never made it to my her bedside table.

Because my mother was often unwell, my father helped with the housework and the cooking,



especially on weekends. He was master of the grill and made the best bacon and eggs with a side of fried potatoes and onions. He also played with us. Softball, basketball, soccer, badminton, tennis, pool, ping-pong. He even installed a portable 32-foot long swimming pool in the backyard that became a gathering place for friends and neighbors. I never once heard my parents complain about all the kids who ran in and out of our backyard. One day after my brother and I graduated from high school the pool was dismantled and returned to grass.



In 1964 my parents purchased a 4 bedroom, 2 bath home with a garage in Fremont, California for \$16,000. In 1982 they sold their home for \$99,999.00 (on Zillow it is currently valued at \$929,000) and moved to a 3 bedroom, 2 bath home with a garage in Tracy. In 1989, when my mother was 52, they moved to Murieta Village in Rancho Murieta, 25 miles east of downtown Sacramento. Murieta Village is a beautifully landscaped



community of manufactured homes designed in the 1970's for people 55 and older. It sits across Highway 16 from the gated community of Rancho Murieta and its two golf courses, which is why my father decided to move there.



He was determined to spend his retirement years golfing. He even got my mom to take up the sport, although I don't think she ever liked it.

When did I notice that the dialogue of my mother's life became constant complaining? Did it happen after she had all her teeth pulled and she started taking Valium? Was it always there when I was a child and I didn't notice? I think my first realization of her endless complaining occurred after I left home. Nothing was ever right. Not the restaurants I selected. Not the Thanksgiving dinner I prepared. Not my edict that she was not allowed to smoke in my apartment. Not her home nor Rancho Murieta nor the "rich" people who snubbed her at the golf course and in the club house. After a while I stopped listening, curtailed my visits and phone

calls and lived my life, eventually moving to Haines, Alaska in 2001. I tried being as kind as I could but it didn't seem to matter. Is kindness kindness if there is a line at which a person decides to no longer be kind?

Because of my mother's smoking she suffered from a variety of ailments, including diabetes. After one phone call from my father relating yet another of my mother's visits to the doctor, I asked if the doctor told her to quit smoking and change her diet. Yes, but your mother does not believe cigarettes cause her health problems. I guess my father's angioplasty at the age of 55 in 1987 was a more violent warning. He quit cigarettes cold turkey the day the doctor showed him the plaque clogging his arteries. Unfortunately, he did not change his diet. He died of liver cancer in 2012 at the age of 79.

It was while caring for my father during the end stages of his liver cancer that I learned of my mother's drug addiction, a fact I was grateful to be told because it helped explain her erratic and volatile behavior. During a visit from one of the

hospice nurses my mother commented that my father had been prescribed the same drug she takes: Lorazepam. During the conversation she revealed that she had been taking the drug four times a day for ten years. I wasn't really paying attention because I was there to care for my father and my knowledge of pharmaceuticals was limited to aspirin and Advil. After the nurse attended to my father she asked to speak to me outside.

She asked me if I knew anything about Lorazepam. No. It's an anti-anxiety medication. Okay. And then she told me, Your mother is a drug addict and that if she ever stops taking the drug, I would witness an anxiety attack like I couldn't imagine.



I wish I could say I was stunned, taken aback, but what I said was: Oh my god, it all makes sense. Her erratic behavior. Her over-reactions to the simplest of things, like not noticing she put her glasses next to the phone or her anger at me for not immediately cleaning a pan I used to make lunch. I thanked her profusely for telling me. It

put my mother's meanness and paranoia, forgetfulness and inability to concentrate into perspective. Unfortunately, it did not protect me from the hurt of the meanness and paranoia that she directed toward me—and others. One day I finally broke and told her that I didn't want to hear all the mean things she had to say about her neighbors, my brother, his wife, her grand-children, my father, my father's friends, and on and on and on. It was hard enough to learn about all the mean things she'd said about me to her neighbors. Her next-door neighbors even told me that they were surprised that I was a such a nice person.

I have often wondered who my mother might have been had she never been prescribed Valium and all the other medications that followed. Who she might have been had she stopped smoking when my dad did in 1987. Currently, more than 40 million people in the United States are on benzodiazepines. In 2020, a report stated that it's a \$3.8 billion business. The report also stated that mental health experts are finally speaking out that benzodiazepine addiction is an epidemic as frightening and serious as the opioid crisis.

When I researched the side effects of benzodiazepines it was like seeing my mother: Drowsiness, confusion, dizziness, trembling, impaired coordination, forgetfulness, insomnia, constipation, paranoia, feelings of depression, dementia. Could I have intervened? Could I have had a different relationship with my mother? Drug addiction makes victims of everyone it touches.

When I was 4 or 5 years old my parents helped teach ballroom dancing at the studio where I also

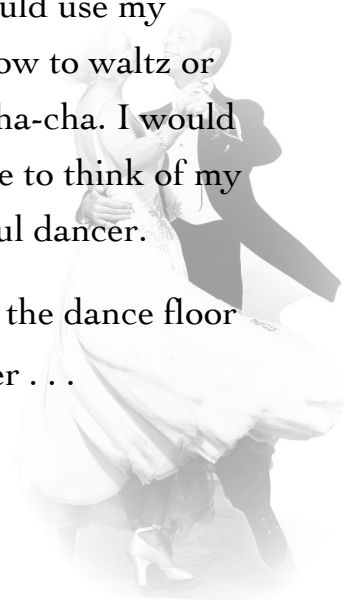


studied dance. The studio was in the basement of the home of Emil and Kitty Dahlberg in Omaha, Nebraska. My father worked with Emil and Kitty was my mother's friend. Kitty would use my parents to demonstrate how to waltz or samba, jitterbug or cha-cha-cha. I would

sit on the staircase and watch. I like to think of my mother dancing. She was a beautiful dancer.

When Ray and Shirley would take the dance floor and transform into Fred and Ginger . . .

They were beautiful to watch.





In 1993, while I was working in the Creative Services department at Apple Computer we had a “Parents’ Night.” John Sculley was the CEO. A photo of him was made into a life-size cutout. Employees and parents were invited to take a Polaroid photo.