

Secrets

10-20-25

I don't think that I kept much from my mother. I have always been chatty, a sharer, but had no siblings to confide in. My mother was a good listener, non judgmental, and available. So she knew most of what I was up to. The only thing that seemed out of bounds as a topic to me was my father. Somehow, as a child, I felt that there was pain associated with those questions, so I avoided them. I wanted to protect her. But I was also curious and sometimes a snoop.

The only interesting thing I ever found by this snooping was a packet of letters from my father to my mother, written after she had kicked him out when he admitted to her that he had another wife. I didn't know that at the time I discovered the letters. I was understandably curious about him and what had happened.

Some of the letters were mailed from NYC which I understood as he was in the Coast Guard and stationed there when they met. She was working in the city at the time, having been trained as a draftsman there after the war started. Other letters were mailed from Buffalo which surprised me as I didn't know he had been stationed there. Yet other letters were from the Chicago area. The letters were loving and he was begging to come to visit us in Syracuse. I never told her that I read them, and when I went to find them again several years later they were no longer there. I wished then that I had secretly squirreled some of them away.

The only other time I read something that was not specifically meant for me was before she married my step-father. She had to get out papers to show she was no longer married and left the papers out on

the buffet. It was then that I found out that the marriage had been annulled because he had another wife. That was a huge revelation and explained much.

In my late 20's, through a strange series of coincidences, I was able to contact my father, but I was still reluctant to tell my mother.

Fortunately, my mother-in-law, Barbara Steinau, convinced me to share that with her. I was so glad that I did. It turned out that she had wondered if Pete and I had moved to Chicago for just this purpose. She had assumed that I knew that my father was from Chicago. That was far from the truth. If she had told me at some point, I must have been too young to take in that information. As a little kid, who knew where Chicago was anyway? I only found it out from a birth certificate I needed to obtain to be licensed as a PT when I moved to Wisconsin. As it turned out, my mother was glad that I had made contact with my father and shared several interesting details of what had happened.

When I met my half-sister Maureen, we put my mother's information together with her memories from early childhood. She is close to me in age and, together, we created a much fuller picture including his job offer in South America, his wife's refusal to go, and his phone call to my mother asking her to come with him, all of which led to his wife finding out the truth.

One bit of information from those old letters did cause us to wonder.

Maureen recalled overhearing her parents arguing (read fighting) and was left with the idea that there was a brother in Buffalo. Even as a small child, it is hard to believe that she could confuse that with a sister in Syracuse - not a mistake even a small child would make. So we wonder – is there actually an unknown brother somewhere.

Maybe one day I'll get an inquiry through Ancestry from an unknown man..... "Who are you?"