A question was recently posed, “what do you see when looking in the mirror?” The inquiry concerned itself with whether or not a person was accepting of how they looked. Simple enough. Or, so one would think. For me, the query was one I nearly choked on…. the images which I see staring back at me penetrate much deeper than surface appearances.

When the day is moving along at its typical frantic pace, I see nothing but a glimpse of myself in a hurry to reach the next destination, to meet the next obligation on my itinerary. To achieve the next …. However, all of this zigzagging notwithstanding, there exists moments of calm. Those flashes when all is relatively quiet and still. It is likewise at these intersections where I find peace and am able to catch my breath. But, it is also at this time when the reflections observed in the mirror are most alarmingly profound: I see a mixture of my mother and father staring back at me.

Most notably, it is their eyes. Not only am I able to infer my mother's sadness, but see it, as well. Without doubt, my actions hurt her. Deeply. Yet, conversely, I recognize that she embraces the person who I have matured to become. Dare I say it, she is proud of me. We have shared so much with one another. Lamenting, it is wished that I could have started out as a better son. Instead, I stained her with my scarlet letter.

In a similar fashion, I observe the eyes of my father in the reflection. Penetrating my thoughts. Evoking emotions. Causing me to ponder what could have been. Seeing his face looking back through mine, I cannot discern whether he is angered or confused. Aside from the obvious (me taking his life), the thoughts which raced through his mind at the last moment must have seemed to be in slow motion. The realization that his troubled son just…. Did he hate me at that moment? Did he love me? Did he realize at that time in my life I was damaged goods? Did he possess the compassion of hope that I would someday find a ladder which would lift me out of my despair, or did he wish me to rot in hell? Did my father remember all the good times, or were his last memories of all the ugly moments that I caused? Was he saddened because of how distraught I was (am) over taking his life? Although peppered with the umbrage I caused him throughout my youth, my memories of the good times are most prevalent. The duality of both opposites keeps me grounded.

These moments of recognition are a mixed blessing. I see (physically, in the prison visiting room) my mother on a regular basis and do not distinguish her bodily or facial changes. However, when I see her in the mirror (in me), it becomes clear that we are both aging. Quickly. We have missed out on so much with each other; this really stings. Initially, when taking note of these images attention is jerked back to the awful tragedy which I subjected my parents and community to a lifetime ago. But, like anything else in life, there are two sides: the encounters in the mirror also provide an opportunity to not forget from whom I came.

These fleeting experiences only occur occasionally, but the impact lasts well into the day. The intensity is humbling. Potentially depressing. Yet, the good memories are cherished. Their facial characteristics have become infused and the end result is, well, me.

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