

My mother's father is a man of many names; some call him Malcolm; others know him as Callum or Rodrick. His ex-wife refers to him as Cal-Ro in a grainy voice over our old, blue phone, an abbreviation of the two. With all these names he was very difficult to trace. Perhaps we should have taken this as a caution from the universe. I have spent much of my life without male role-models. I have no grandfathers, my uncles are distant, I have no brothers and my parents separated when I was five. Before they did my dad was certainly not an ideal role-model. When he wasn't at the pub or working away; I wished he was. It has always been my mum, my sister and I. Raised by women.

My mum was born in 1964 to an unprepared teenage couple in Glasgow and was adopted three months later. Her shiny, new parents were older, middle class and extremely religious. They loved her, but not unconditionally. Despite her love for them, she always hungered to know where she came from, a thirst for knowledge that I have inherited. Although my dad comes from a large Catholic family, on his side I have three aunts, three uncles and eleven cousins. I don't look a smidgen like any of them, nor does my sister. I also don't associate my dad, or his family with my identity much, because he hasn't had a lot of involvement in forming it. As accustomed as I am to less than perfect relatives, nothing could prepare us for meeting Callum.

I'd been eagerly anticipating the moment for several months as we hunted through archives, web-pages and old address books. We found him. We agreed to meet. Arriving at Buchanan Bus Station in an early evening in 2015, we waited with bated breath to see who climbed off the sparkling sapphire coach, to finally put a name to a face: Callum, Father, Grandfather. Now was our 'Long Lost Family' moment. I readied myself for vast displays affection; tear-stained apologies and Davina McCall hopping about in the sidelines. Instead, I was met with faint horror, then a sudden intense shame at my snobbery like sharp needles in my stomach. I'm not sure how I imagined him to look, but it wasn't as he appeared. He was very overweight, bald, and he had one of those scarlet faces that I had come to learn was due to alcohol abuse: an 'old Jakey's nose,' as my mum had scornfully called it, in lighter circumstances.

As he got closer I also quickly learned his hygiene left something to be desired and he had few teeth, but what horrified me the most were the small resemblances. To see my sister's sad green eyes and my plump lips on this dirty old drunkard filled me with conflicting emotions. There was no doubt that he was our blood. It was tragic to see a man of barely sixty, who had been previously described as "Elvis Presley," so decrepit.

He came with a Stornoway stowaway, Mhairi, a wobbly drunk, yet endearing woman in her late forties and one of his few friends on the Isle of Lewis where he lived. I can remember vividly being so frustrated at her presence, I judged the imposter immediately. Assuming it was an opportunity for free alcohol. However, I was wrong to condemn her so quickly. It is Mhairi who we have kept in touch with as opposed to Callum and I now know I know she came to chaperone him and keep him on his best behaviour. Even if she did cost us several bottles of spirits. There were awkward, forced hugs and "How do you do's." When I came to hug him, to welcome the man who had cast my little family aside, and made no effort to get in touch, or respond to our letters and phone calls into an embrace, forgiving him for decades of neglect. He gruffly said, "Och, yer too old fir that nonsense." Despite this I was hopeful, he was pleasant enough, perhaps even polite, but there was only small talk. Back home, once he had consumed a few stiff drinks, there were more tender moments. He had brought his camera and was determined to get as many photos of us all as possible; commemorating the reunion of his estranged family. I study one from the tucked away collection; my mum holding his haggard face with her warm hands beholding him with misty, wistful

eyes and immediately I hear his broken voice, "Ah love ye mah dahrlin, ah love ye..." But the alcoholism was astonishing as he drank and drank with little change, drinking anything he could get his hands on. We even came across a bargain bottle of raspberry liqueur in my room, where he had been sleeping, when he left. It was at the nicer moments though, that I desperately searched for a vague connection, but I felt nothing, pallid warmth. He felt like a stranger.

I thanked the heavens for that pull-out bed in my sister's room, my only solitude, the only time my sister and I could speak candidly with one another about what we thought. Despite her kindness Mhairi was irksome and I was relieved to find out she had to return home on the second night, perhaps then we could speak in more detail with Callum. However, my hopes were thwarted. We wanted to know more about the adoption, about my mother as a baby before she was so insecure as her adoption report had described and even about Ruth (the biological mother) and him. We schemed and started small; my sister asked if mum was cute as a baby, however, all our questions were crossly avoided as he firmly stated "It's in the past;" a decision I don't feel was his to make.

Callum was also a bigot and a pervert, making many repugnant comments on how many black people there were in Glasgow now, too many apparently, and the length of the school girl's skirts nowadays. My fuse had shortened mid-week and my polite smile was replaced with curt retorts about embracing diversity and other cultures. We also learned that he had a litter of illegitimate children across Scotland, half of whom he knows about, none of which he is in correspondence with, my unknown aunts and uncles that, like me, had a piece missing. It felt like he had robbed them from me. This again should have been a clear warning but, incredibly desperate for a male role-model, I still wanted a positive relationship with him; he still showed embers of decency and I told myself people make mistakes. The knowledge of his overly sewn and too-wild oats has left me with constant uncertainty and curiosity whenever I see someone who bears a resemblance to me, especially since there are a select few people with my patchwork appearance. Heck, I could be the cousin or nephew of you, the reader. If so, I apologise for our shared relation and if you haven't met him, you're not missing out.

Leaving day was strange, almost bittersweet. He left his jumper for us to hold onto, an old Scottish custom, which we boil washed with great affection. It still lies safely bundled in the airing cupboard because he wasn't all bad and he did appear to be fond of us at least. We ceased contact with him after a lot of effort and whitewashing. Like all his kin, I am now estranged. Although warned by everyone along the way I, like my Mum, had to find out for myself and make my own judgements. He has inadvertently helped with my sense of identity as I now have two biological grandparents whose likeness to me is outstanding. Most of all, I have learned that a conventional family isn't really a necessity, and the only people I really need in the world are my dear mum and sister; and my Dad on weekends, our relationship although tarnished has vastly improved. I also don't think for one minute that we'd be as close as we are if we had a host of loving family members.

Having seen the small amount of light within him I will bizarrely miss him, but it is not something that I shall lose sleep over. I look forward to not being called a 'swot' again and I cannot wait to make a success of myself in spite of him. This experience has left me with a great longing for my mum's clean, teetotal parents who I never had the opportunity to meet, and on a less related note my granny on my Dad's side who died not long ago and was never disappointing with her endless supply of soup and Penguin biscuits. When I consider Callum's life, I come to realise that he is like this for a reason. With an abusive father and an absent 'socialite' mother, his childhood was difficult and having little experience of love he either can't achieve it, or he struggles to communicate it. His string of sexual partners was likely an attempt to seek approval and love, even if

just for one night. In short, as I often say when a difficult child shrieks at the restaurant I work in, throwing food over the floor and creating general chaos...

“I blame the parents.”