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Belief Is Its Own Kind of Truth, Maybe

Lori Jakiela · Wednesday, January 20th, 2016

The following is an excerpt from Lori Jakiela's *Belief Is Its Own Kind of Truth, Maybe.*

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My grandfather was an orphan like me. His mother delivered him to an orphanage one day when he was nine or 10. She packed a small suitcase — clothes, a child's Bible.
She said she couldn't afford to feed him. She said he was difficult.
She didn't say she drank too much. She didn't say she wanted her own life.
My mother said her father wouldn't talk about it. She said he always made sure they had plenty to eat, even ice cream, cartons lined up in the icebox when there wasn't money for anything else.
I never knew my grandfather. I know he made bathtub gin to pay for food. I know a few pictures—a thin man, sad eyes like Andre the Giant's, a tough-guy stance, paperboy cap down low, one pin-striped leg cocked on the fender of a black Ford.
I know he died on his birthday the year I was born.
"He would have loved you," my mother always said.
Maybe I would have loved him back. Two orphans.
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How a mother could take her child by the hand and give him over to strangers, how she could walk away and not look back, I don't know.
I don't know what she told him, what she could possibly have told him, to make him stay and believe, in what?
That she'd come back.? That she wouldn't come back. That his life would be better either way.
Or I do know.
Motherhood is a conflicted state, not clear and simple at all.
Very few mothers are monsters.
Joan Crawford, maybe.
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"You're a good mother," my mother told me the day I was weeping in her driveway.
My son was very young then, a year or so. I'd gone to the grocery. He screamed and thrashed the whole time. I had to hold my hands over his hands in the cart to keep him still. He was a beautiful baby, but he cried so much and so long I started crying, too.
I cried over bills and junk mail and "Mister Rogers Neighborhood." I cried over Oreo commercials, where fathers taught their children how to pull apart a cookie and scrape icing with their teeth.
I cried that day in my mother's driveway when the grocery bag tore open and milk spilled and

flooded the trunk.

No matter how I tried to clean it up, the milk would molder and stink and the car already smelled. It smelled like wet diapers and Butt Paste, a brown muddy-spearmint diaper-rash lotion, the only thing that worked. The car smelled like shit and carsick puke and the lingering grease from the fast food I ate because I was too tired to cook or eat anything else. I smelled like all those things, too — feral, animal, desperate.

“You’re a good mother,” my mother said.

She tried to help me, but I kept on crying like the child I was. My mother sopped up milk and sprayed the car with air freshener and took my son from his car seat and rocked him until he passed out, which is what he did instead of sleep.

My son passed out the way I often did, from exhaustion, anger, all those built-up let-go tears.

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