

My Sister, Myself

For the first 48 years of my life, I was an only child. In 2015, my father died. As I was going through the box of his most precious possessions, I found her birth certificate. I must have read it over ten times trying to soak in what it meant. I might have a sister!

Linda Gail Ashurst was born on November 22, 1954. The birth certificate listed my father and a woman named Bettie Jo Darneau as her parents. When I asked my mother about it, she said Bettie Jo had been a promiscuous woman and my father never knew for sure if he was Linda's father. Though he never married Bettie Jo, he lived with her for five years and supported Linda and Bettie's other two children.

When Linda was three, my father was inducted into the army and was stationed in San Francisco. While he was there, he reconnected with my mother, whom he'd known from high school. Apparently, he'd decided the relationship with Bettie Jo was over (my mother thinks she was already living with another man), and my father began courting my mother. They fell quickly in love and married when he was released from the army. They moved back to Reno and began their new life together in September 1959. I was born on July 23, 1966.

After finding her birth certificate, I was curious about Linda and wondered if I could find her. Maybe she still lived in the Reno area. My partner, Scott, and I went to the Washoe County records department to inquire. The lady behind the counter asked me my relationship and I said, "She might have been my sister." About twenty minutes later she came back and handed me an envelope. Inside, I found Linda's death certificate. She died of brain damage after falling off a slide at school. She was only five years old. I had to fight the tears back until we got to the car. She was gone. I would never get to meet her.

I was also struck by the odd coincidence that my father had fallen out of a moving car onto his head when he was four. He was in a coma initially and was hospitalized for a month. They were not sure he would survive. As his hair receded, I could see the scar where his head had hit the pavement.

Later, Scott found two newspaper articles describing Linda's death and announcing her funeral. He used an online grave locator and found out she was buried in the cemetery nearest our home, Our Lady of Sorrows. Then I became immersed in settling my father's estate and I set aside the file with Linda's information. I didn't pick it up again until over a year later when I decided to put flowers on her grave for Memorial Day, 2016. I was getting close to my fiftieth Birthday and I wanted to make pilgrimages to all the family graves, cleaning them and putting out flowers. I wanted to include Linda in this ritual.

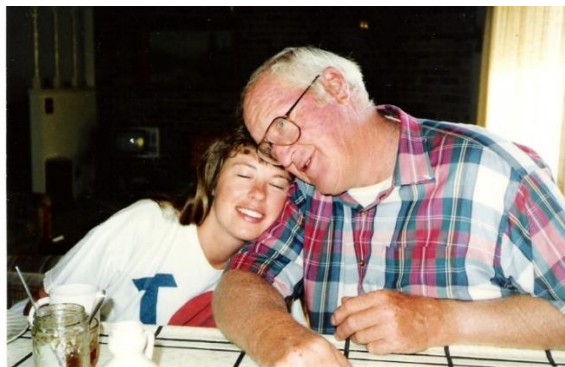
We went to Our Lady of Sorrows and waited while the people in the office located her grave and gave us directions. It is twenty yards out from a big tree near the entrance of the mausoleum. Our house is a mile away. Inside the mausoleum doors is the final resting place of Scott's Nonna, one of the most significant people in his life. I thought, "What are the odds of so many coincidences?"



I remember kneeling in the grass in front of the stone and touching it. I said in my mind, "I wish I could have known you. I'm sorry you didn't get to live your life."

And then I had one of those moments I have sometimes, where I could clearly feel her presence and this message came through: *I am already with you.* I had this knowing that she had quickly reincarnated into another body and was in my life. I began to wonder who she was. The list of my friends born after January 1960 began to roll through my head. I mulled it over for the next week, pondering.

I remember vividly when it hit me. I was talking to my friend Kelly, a close friend born after January 1960. I was considering telling her the story of Linda. Kelly was one of the people I'd thought might have been Linda in her previous life. I was sitting up in our bed, looking at my favorite photo of my father and I which sits on top of my dresser.



As I gazed at it, my face in the picture started to morph, to shift, almost like a wave. It was no longer solid. Then it struck me like a bolt of lightning. Linda's presence was again strong within me and this stream of awareness came through: *I am you. I came back to be with my Daddy. He was the only one who loved me, took care of me, protected me. I didn't understand why he left. I wanted the chance to grow up with him, as his daughter.*

I reeled with this revelation. It took all my concentration to finish my conversation with Kelly. When I hung up the phone, I grabbed the photo and cried—gut-wrenching sobs that went on for a long time. Linda came back to be with her daddy, the only person she knew really loved her and was there for her. He was gone by the time she was three. How awful it must have been for her when he left! I could feel her total devastation and the desperate longing to be with him, her despair at being left. The accident ended her life and she returned as me. In a mysterious way, her longing to be with him as his daughter, both ended Linda's life and began mine.

I found myself lying on the bed, holding the photo and reminiscing about life with my dad. He was an amazing father when I was young—playful, loving, kind. I felt like a princess and I knew he adored me. I adored him back. Later he taught me to be tough and strong, to have courage. Sadly, something snapped in him when I became a teenager. It was a combination of things really: bipolar disorder, alcoholism, a nervous breakdown after a bad drought that dried up his fields, and my becoming a woman. He withdrew from me emotionally. I began flirting with boys. He called me a whore. I rebelled; he pulled away. It was one of the biggest heartbreaks of my life which led to a 32-year rift between us. A rift that was bridged in small moments here and there over the years, just enough to know deep down he always loved me.

We did come to a peaceful parting before he died. He had slipped into the clutches of dementia and was living in a group home. We would take him out for lunch regularly. I recall fastening his seat belt around him and he looked up and said, "I've said some awful things to you. I'm sorry. You didn't deserve that." In that moment, a lump in my heart dissolved and washed away. There was no more pain, resentment, anger, grief.

Thinking about all these memories, I found myself reaching out to his spirit and asking, "Why did you keep leaving me when I needed you? You left when I was so young as Linda, then you did it again when I was a teenager in this life. Why?"

I could feel his presence and this message came through: *I had to pull back, so you could find your own strength. We had a deal. You needed to learn that love is stronger than leaving, cutting off, pulling back; it is stronger than death itself. Our love calls us back to each other over and over. You have sold yourself out lifetime after lifetime trying to keep someone at your side, when you should have let go. Real love is not about desperate clinging.*

I was stunned. This transmission from him reminded me of a shamanic healing I'd had done about fifteen years earlier. The shaman was retrieving lost pieces of my soul and bringing them back to me. When she came out of her trance, she said to me, "I found you in a lifetime several hundred years ago in Mexico. You were a little girl in a village and there was an epidemic. Everyone died except you. Ever since, you have been terrified of being abandoned and have gone to great extremes to avoid it. Even though the people in the neighboring village found you and took you in and you had a good rest of that lifetime, you have never understood that love always finds you and takes care of you. It is your lesson in this lifetime to trust that you are always surrounded by love and to realize love lasts beyond all physical separation."

I suddenly saw a glimpse into how absolutely perfect it all is. Even in the greatest of tragedies and losses, there is love. Perhaps we have to have these tragic experiences to understand how great love is. It is the eternal force that calls us into form over and over again. While out in nature and in some

dreams, I have felt myself a part of a great and mysterious web of energy connecting all of us in an eternal dance. I believe this is God.

I looked again at the photo and watched my face morph and change like a mirage. I recalled the experiments in quantum physics where electrons can act both as particles and waves depending on the act of observation. In that moment, my spirit emerged and I experienced myself as a wave of energy which manifests in different forms at different times.

This experience has changed my sense of myself as a fixed identity called “Rhonda Ashurst”. I understand more fully something one of my yoga teachers said, “You are not in your body; your body is in You. Your Spirit is unique and eternal. It moves from body to body, lifetime to lifetime. Take good care of your body, but don’t be attached to thinking it is you. One day you will leave it like a broken car and take flight again into a new life.”

There is nothing like putting flowers on your own grave to remind you of this!

In the summer of 2016, I mentioned to my cousin, Shane, that I may have had a half-sister. I told him Linda’s story and he said, “This reminds me of a picture of a little girl with your dad that Grandpa kept on his dresser. She was with your dad and I always thought it was you. One day I asked about it and he said she had been born before you and had died in a schoolyard accident when she was little.” So, I guess she even looked like me.

On July 5, 2017 we took flowers to Linda’s grave. As Scott and I sat in the grass in front of her grave, I asked her, “What did you want in that lifetime?”

She answered: *To be loved by a good man who didn’t go away.*

I turned to my beloved Scott and told him what I’d asked and her response. I wrapped my arms around him, tears flowing from my eyes. “Thank you for being that man—for making her and my dream come true in this lifetime. I’m so grateful for you.”

I suddenly had another perspective shift where I could see in my mind’s eye where we were at that moment from above. Scott and I were one mile from our home and half a mile from the University office where we met and worked together twenty-nine years ago. Before my father died, he asked me if I was happy with Scott. I told him yes, I was. He nodded and smiled. He knew I’d found my good man in Scott.

From this vantage point, I could see all the threads which connected us, and still do. I could see the absolute perfection in everything. We are always guided and protected to move towards that which is in our highest good. I also saw that many people in my life are here to help me with this learning and I know that I have known them before. Scott is one of them.

On September 20, 2017, I had my right hip replaced to correct congenital hip dysplasia. As I started to lose consciousness, my dad suddenly appeared in my mind’s eye. He looked like he did when I was a child. He took my hand in his big, old paws and said, “Come on, kid, let’s go hang out under the apple tree.” Suddenly, I was under the old apple tree behind our ranch house with him, lying in the cool grass and watching the clouds go by. When I was young, and we were both tired from doing chores, this was one of our favorite ways to rest on a hot, summer afternoon.

My dad stayed with me during my hospital stay and continued to drift in and out when I returned home. He told me: *I am only a thought away, always.*

It was an exceptionally beautiful experience, and I tear up every time I talk about it. It reminds me life is a mystery greater than we can ever know and love connects us eternally to one another, whether we are in a body or not. This love draws us together over and over again, across space and time.

Rhonda Ashurst lives a quiet, contemplative life with her partner in Reno, Nevada. She writes a blog: <http://rhondaashurst.com>, practices yoga and serves the cat. She believes we are all part of God's magnificent, unfolding story, which we weave together throughout eternity.