

Mother's college letters provide bridge between mother and daughter



I've always thought of myself as different from the rest of my family. I'm the skinny one, the quiet one, the nerdy one. The one who likes books better than other people. I'm not the socialite or the athlete. When the opportunity to attend a sporting event or social function arises, I'd rather stay home. And I've had several political discussions over the dinner table that were uncomfortable to say the least. I pride myself on being different. I don't believe something simply because my parents do and I am more than a matching face in a family portrait.

Yet recently, I've come to the difficult conclusion that I'm surprisingly similar to one specific member of my family. I didn't have one of those oft mentioned epiphanies ending with "Oh, no! I'm turning into my mother!" you see all the time on television. Instead, I realized that perhaps my mother was once just like me. I didn't change, and neither did she, at least not all at once. She evolved, matured over the years.

When my mom was leaving college and entering adult life, she wrote letters to her siblings regularly. My aunt saved these letters and recently brought them back out. Reading these letters was illuminating. I watched through the lens of twenty years as my mom lived out scenarios that I'd previously only known as stories. But it was the prose of the letters that surprised me.

I felt as though I was reading something that I had written, not because her experiences mirror mine, but because our thought processes were shockingly similar.

I felt as though I was reading something that I had written, not because her experiences mirror mine, but because our thought processes were shockingly similar. I've always known that I inherited my mom's stubbornness, but I was unaware we had much else in common.

Somehow, although our opinions and outlooks are different, they are fueled by similar motivations and reside in heads that share more than just physical features. I can't explain the extent of the sameness I felt as I read my mother's letters other than to say that I recognized something in her words. I know that my sisters didn't feel the same because their response to the letters fell along the lines of "That sounds like Mom," not "That sounds like me."

If a person is who they are because of their experiences, like a jumbled collage

of every triumph and heartbreak, then my similarity to my mother makes no logical sense. Our lives have been different in almost every way — in time period, family dynamic, location, and economic opportunity. Following this rule, we often have differing opinions. Yet, underneath a thought is the thought process, and my mother and I have similar characteristics and tendencies. So, I must believe that the essence of a person is rooted in something deeper, linking generations.

Next year, I'll move away from home. As cheesy as it sounds, I'll be starting the rest of my life. I wonder how I'll evolve — whether I'll even recognize the idealistic youth that I am today. Though she might have the work ethic of a Puritan and the stubbornness of a mule, I know that I would be lucky to end up like my mom.

Olivia is the entertainment editor at The Roar. Want to discuss familial relationships with her? Email her at the.roar.ogarrett@gmail.com.