

InPresence 0083: My Mom, the Yoga Teacher with Jeffrey Mishlove

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(00:25) Hello I'm Jeffry Mishlove and today is Mother's Day. Although, I know you won't be watching this video for probably ten days or so, I still feel like it's an appropriate time for me to share with you some reflections about my mother. I know some of you have asked me to talk more about my childhood and my early life experiences. So well, my mom Rose Mishlove was born in Bayonne, New Jersey. Well, that's actually not true. She was born in Prince George County, Maryland, but grew up basically in Bayonne, New Jersey, which is right across the Hudson River from Manhattan. You can take the bus from Bayonne and be in Times Square in about 20 minutes. So, in a sense, she was a New Yorker. But, I don't think people from Bayonne exactly thought of themselves as New Yorkers.

(01:27) Now, I can tell you this, my mom had the sweetest disposition. I never doubted for one second that I was loved by her and what a wonderful gift that is for any mother to give to their children. It's probably the most important thing of all. But, she had a character. For example, she married my dad, who was at the time an army officer. They got married, as I recall in 1942, in December of 1942, right in the middle of the war. My father had been stationed in Bayonne but very soon he was transferred to Hawaii. So, they were separated for years while he was in the service, until the end of the war, after which I was born. I was born in December of 1946. My dad returned from the war and it didn't take long for my mom to get pregnant with me.

(02:36) She grew up in a very intellectual family and I think I've described some of the other relatives in that family. I'm showing you now a picture of my mother's family and there she is holding me as an infant. I'm probably about one years old in this picture. The interesting thing about my mom, actually, is that she had a real talent for acting. I suspect if she didn't get married and she moved to Wisconsin, practically as soon as my dad got out of the military or very shortly thereafter - I was, I think 4 years old when we settled into Wisconsin permanently - she gave up her aspirations for an acting career at that time. I think, and I'm probably prejudiced, she could have had a career in Broadway.

(03:39) But, what happened is: when she got settled in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, where I grew up, she became very actively involved in the local community theater productions and starred in many plays, not only with the local community theater, but with some Summer Stock theater companies in the neighborhood, which she actually got paid for. It was something to see my mom on stage, you know, with lead roles in various plays. Probably her greatest role was playing Blanche Dubois in *Streetcar*

Named Desire. What I watched at that time was a sense of the character that she played possessing her. She literally became possessed by Blanche Dubois: "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers." She played that role to perfection and it affected her character. I mean, Blanche didn't go away when the play ended. As a matter of fact, I think a bit of Blanche Dubois always stayed with my mom after that.

(04:55) I remember this, when I was a graduate student in Berkeley, California, there was a period in my life where I was a kind of angry, discontent, rebellious, alienated young man, before I had really found myself. To be honest, I was lost. Maybe it's good to be lost. I don't want to put that down at all. I think it's essential sometimes for people to be lost, to sort of blow off the crust of all the certainties that we cling to. I went through a phase like that and I remember that I went to see a Jungian therapist at one point and I was complaining and I said, "You know, why couldn't I have been born into a family of Yogis? Why did I have to grow up the son of middle-class parents in a city like Fond du Lac, Wisconsin? I could have done so much better." How stupid of me, truly.

(06:00) The irony is that my mom became a yoga teacher shortly thereafter. She taught yoga for 30 years and she was the sweetest yoga teacher. She used to bake cookies for her yoga students. There was a time when my parents lived in a small apartment in Milwaukee with a tiny little living room and she'd have her "Yoga with Rose Studio" in the living room, my dad would have to go upstairs in the bedroom while the yoga students were all there. She cleared all the furniture out so there was room for people to practice yoga. Then afterwards she would serve what she called yoga yummys. Cookies that she baked for her yoga students. She had a sense of humility. Well to be honest, I have to say, I think she was a very saintly person. You know, I didn't always appreciate her, I think, when I was younger. I didn't realize what a gift I had in having this woman as my mother.

(07:08) You know, as I became an adult and moved out to California and began living my own life, I went for many, many years, you know the only contact that I had with my parents was an occasional visit, maybe once a year and then weekly phone calls. That was it, until about 2006, when my mom was at that time 80, in her 80s and living in Milwaukee. She came, for reasons that I won't go into right now, to live with us in Las Vegas, where we were living. Well, I actually bought her a condo so she can live independently on her own.

(07:57) But, the sad truth is that she was developing Alzheimer's. Within about a year she was put into assisted living. I say "was put into," I did it and it was so hard. My mother pleaded with me, "Please, don't do this to me." Now, she, at the age of well into her eighties, at the age of over 85 at that point, 86, 87, suffering from Alzheimer's, managed to develop a new romantic relationship and she was very concerned that her boyfriend wouldn't want to visit her if she had to live in assisted living. Well, she had to because by that time she had blown up four microwaves and nearly blown up the entire condo by leaving the gas on for hours. So, we really had to do this and it was one of the most difficult things I have ever done. But, I am happy to say she made a great adjustment and even in the middle of her Alzheimer's, having a romantic affair with the instructor of the acting classes she was taking at this

local senior center, she was still performing. She could memorize small bits and perform them and she loved to perform. At the drop of a hat, she would perform.

(09:23) But sometimes she did some unexpected things. On one occasion, I remember she was part of a performance that the acting group was putting on at the senior center, and her job was to sing a song called, "All of You." Instead, she got up and sang "All of Me", an old song that she knew perfectly well, but it wasn't the one that was on the agenda. I can say this, we love to sing. It's the one thing that no matter how serious her Alzheimer's was, we could get together and sing old Broadway show tunes. She remembered all the words really well and loved to sing and we had a great time singing together.

(10:13) Now, my mom died in 2011. So, it's been almost seven years now and I miss her greatly. But, you know, the funny thing is I don't feel that I'm that disconnected. I've lost my mom and my dad and some other close friends, but I never feel that they're very far away from me. When people come up to me and say I'm so sad for your loss, I sometimes think to myself, "Why? There's nothing to be sad about."

(10:55) Well, what does this mean for you? There was a time in my life where I had a very profound realization of what it meant to be a mother, what it meant to give birth, and what it meant for me as a mammal - yes, we are all mammals - to have come from my mother's body and she, to have come from her mother's body, who arrived on this planet right through the body of your mother. What a profound thing it is, and actually I suspect, rather hard for most males to grasp, especially males such as myself who have never had children of their own. In any case, for you, I think the lesson here is to give some thought to the strengths and weaknesses of your mother. How were you affected by your mother? Were there times when you felt you weren't loved? Can you forgive your mother for whatever misdeeds and mistakes she made in raising you? Because, I suspect, if your mother understood how those mistakes may have affected you, she would have asked you for your forgiveness. And I'll leave you with that thought. Thank you for being with me. (12:24)

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