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Search for Meaning
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In today's service, we're exploring how thinking of ourselves as manifestations of an ultimate mystery might affect our ways of understanding our own lived experience. I've been thinking about families as one form of that ultimate mystery.

My family, The Coffman's, conducted our relational business based on unspoken, conditioned stories. The stories provided guidance, rules, expectations, stability, personalities and perhaps even future outcomes; much the same way an operating system dictates the functions of a computer. One such definitive story involved the relationship between my parents and I. If the story could be seen as a kind of giant talking bubble, floating ceaselessly above the Coffman family, and you could read it, it would say something like this:

"Kris, made in the image of her mother, will be identified as such. Her primary relationship will forever be with her mother, who will define her personhood by taking up permanent residence in her soul. Kris will unquestionably understand her place as knower and satisfier of all things mamma Coffman. To that end, Kris's father will be off limits to her, and will instead be given relationship rights to the next born child, a younger sister. Kris will not know her father, and her father will not venture curiosity about her. He will not engage in any activity that could inadvertently lead to knowing her, such as cultivating her interests, developments, dreams, or her possibilities. He will offer her no emotional protection, and no knowledge of his own inner landscape."

And so the story went, agreed upon as the status quo for many years.

But what if the unfolding of our lives could be more than our conditioned stories? What if, despite the evidence that supports our daily delusions of "How things must be", we are given the gift of something different, something more?

As I prepared to give birth to my second child, a son, my father gave me something that suggested, perhaps, I was also made in his image. He wrote me a note entitled quite simply, "Some Thoughts"

I would like to share some of that note with you.

"To the grandson: In the game show hosts' words – COME ON DOWN! A splendid life awaits. Secure, safe, full of love and promise and indulgence. Don't get too

comfortable, you will find that a great deal is expected of you. Plan to excel in many aspects of life. You will be firmly directed by dad, mom and sister. Competition on many levels. The trick is to enjoy all aspects of existence and look for new, fun challenges. Don't be intimidated by the strong characters around you, rather find the enjoyment in mastering new areas and endeavors. Cherish the family bonds – they will support and sustain as you mature and grow. Remember – you are in charge of your world, it's there for you to enjoy.

To the mom: Forget all the resentment, discomfort, irritation and sharp pain – He's here! A priceless gift to cherish and nurture. Also, an 18 to 20 year pain in the _____ with a contrary nature, smart mouth and multiple annoying male habits and characteristics. Be firm, be fair, be loving, and be a little bit protective. Bond, but don't exclude his father and sister. They both need you too. Most of all, enjoy the fleeting experience of his dependence and growing. It's over so soon!

To the dad and sister: Watch out! Momma lion is roaming around with her male cub. This is a dangerous time – you can be hurt unless you're careful. If you watch and plan, you can also have a lot of fun sharing in future experiences. Sister, you have a four year head start. Train him well and you'll have him intimidated until he's 14 and you're off to university."

My son is now 16, thriving in life as his sister does the same, "off to university."

My father bridged years of absence with this simple note. In an act of opening himself and defying our family story, my father offered loving, humorous parental guidance to each member of my growing family. I thank my dad for this gift of allowing me to see myself in his image. Such a gift reminds me that the more we open up to the possibility of mystery, rather than our conditioned stories, the more there is for us to find.