

**i THINK**  
**I THINK**

if **i** lose my mind. will **i** lose me?



BY **LINDSAY** WINCHERAUK

# ABOUT A BOY



*A boy is born in a secret place. A dark place. A sad place.  
His Mother is his Sister. Making her his Sister + his Mother.  
His Father is his Grandfather.*

*His Grandmother is just his Grandmother.*

*His Brothers used to be just Brothers. But then it is discovered they might be Uncles as well.*

*That turned them into Brunkles.*

*His Sisters used to be just Sisters. But then it is discovered they might be Aunts as well.*

*That turned them into Sisaunts.*

*The boy is never meant to know the truth because his birth brings with it, shame.*

*How could any of them be, okay?*

*Especially, the boy and his Grandmother?*

# HAUNTED FROM THE GRAVE

*A story about an inheritance.*

## HAUNTED FROM THE GRAVE

**I**t has begun to pour down rain. Pelting me. Drenching my twelve-year-old frame. I'm standing on the corner of Stephen Avenue Mall and Centre Street. A haggard-looking man is staring at me from across the street.

What am I doing here?

I'm a fucking mess. I'm twelve — so, I guess I shouldn't be using profanities.

Did I say I'm alone?

Did I tell you I'm twelve?

I glance across the street; the dilapidated man is stumbling toward me. His eyes look strained, veiny roadmaps retreat into his skull. My heart begins to pound. I don't know where to go. An hour ago, I sat on the couch of my older sisters' apartment. Alone with my oldest sister Bernice. We rarely spent time together. Quality time, never. Bernice was railing on our father. She kept saying he wasn't a good man; he was hard.

I didn't want to hear it.

I needed to escape.

Calgary is a big city.

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If I could make it to the elevator, I could disappear from the noise. I could return to my childhood.

I froze on the corner, unable to move, rain washing away my tears. The man picked up his pace. He stopped in the middle of the intersection and vomited on the street. Not to be deterred, he kept traipsing toward me. Puke dripped down the front of his tattered clothing. His eyebrows were bushy, nose warted, his grill gapped with missing teeth.

I needed to move, to escape once more. I turned up First Street, paused and looked back; I saw a filthy, broken, callused hand dart out and grab the corner of the building. It pulled the vagrant around the corner. I ducked into the Hudson's Bay Store, riding the escalators up to the third floor. I rushed to the corner where the washrooms were located and retreated to the last of three stalls. I locked the door, climbed up on the toilet, and began shaking in fear. Each time the door of the washroom creaked open; my anxiety intensified. I covered my mouth, trying desperately to hold my breath. Hours passed, then the door creaked open again. I peered out from under the stall. The gaunt man stood just outside. The shoe on his left foot was torn with a hole exposing his big, blackened toe. On his right foot, he wore a bag. Tears started dripping from my eyes. He knocked on the stall door. He begged and then barked at me to come out. I held my breath; the man slammed his fist into the door. I heard the washroom door creak open again. In walked two people. They were talking about work. I burst out of the stall.

*Excuse me. Can you help me? I'm lost.* I cried out, my leg shaking in desperation.

*Let us help you. Where are your parents? Can we call your parents?*

I didn't know how to reach my parents. I told them where I was staying: *They live on 4th Street and 4th Avenue on the 22nd floor with my sisters.*

*Son, you shouldn't be out alone. I'll walk you home.*

Forty-four years later. I'm back in Calgary. I'm at my mother's deathbed inside the Peter Lougheed Center this time. I'm alone. I'm saying hello to Bernice for the first time as my mother + goodbye because her time is running out. I say hello. She begins to cry. Suddenly, the tears stop, and she starts railing about her father.

She says he wasn't a good man.

He was a hard man.

I don't want to hear it.

I want to escape.

When the time to go arrives, I gently kiss her cheek and give her my love.

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I walk away.

I glance back.

Her eyes are bursting with tears.

Her voice quakes.

*I'm never going to see you again, am I?*

The answer is yes.

My heart explodes.

I had arrived on this day by accident. While renewing my passport, I discovered I was a secret baby, born in a secret place. A reality I was never supposed to know. I watched my parents die – they weren't my real parents – Bernice became the uncovered secret, of my mother. My father, an unknown story, came to me, and figuratively, left my life a second time. My family lived a lie their entire lives, so, for them, nothing changed. But, for me, everything changed.

My family likely never understood how difficult it would be to ever come together again,

simply because my mother might be there. So how could I possibly find the fucking strength?

Take a moment and let the last two lines sink in for a moment.

Could you imagine?

*"Could you come to my wedding, Christmas, memorial service?"*

*"Will I be meeting my sister as my mother for the first time?"*

The truth is my curse. As much as I needed to escape from Bernice's despair, I was not allowed. The truth haunts me; it always will. My family is gone; I'm no longer part of them. It saddens me. But, as they say, *it's just what it is*. I'm older now.

Should it even matter?

I don't know how a re-connection would be possible or a point?

I'm not mad. Sad is the only honest emotion. I feel for others who've been products of lifelong lies. I understand the pain of finding out the truth + the emptiness of being a secret cloaked in perceived shame.

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In 2003, I discovered my truth. At first, it was debilitating. Then, as the years slipped by, it became manageable—bearable is a better word. So, I met my father—he wasn't—my mother had lied on my birth record.

I wrote to my sisters (aunt + mother), asking them to help me with my father's identity. If only for medical reasons. I stressed; I didn't want them to relive a turbulent past.

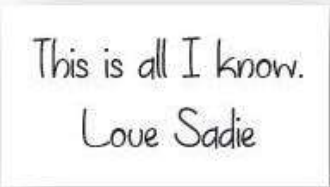
My letter fell on deaf ears.

I asked my mother again alongside her deathbed. Her reply was, *"at least, it wasn't that asshole."* The man she listed on my birth record.

She died a week after my visit.

A year slipped by, and my pain began to wane.

I checked my mailbox on the way to work. An envelope had arrived from an insurance company—I cracked it open—there was a note attached.



This is all I know.  
Love Sadie

That's the first time Sadie ever used the word love toward me!

I kept reading. I'm the beneficiary of an insurance policy for my mother. I began to cry, overwhelmed with grief, the tears rolled down my face.

*I wasn't, nothing.*

*She acknowledged my existence.*

*She's making amends from the grave.*

My mind raced. More tears exploded in my eyes. *An insurance policy. I don't care about money, but wouldn't it be nice if it was to the tune of \$50K or even \$100K?*

When I got home that day, I further inspected the policy. My name wasn't listed on it. Instead, it stated if my mother had a child, this policy would be payable to the child. I'm the child. Included in the envelope was my mother's Will, scratched on several pieces of paper. Barely legible. In the Will, my name was once again absent.

*A knife turned in my stomach.*

The Will stated everything she had was being left to her sister Sadie. At least I was being (remembered) by insurance.

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I called the insurance company to inquire about what I needed to collect—I asked how much the policy was?

\$2,500, the agent dutifully expressed.

\$2,500. I have a change jar with more in it. Fifty-six years of neglect and all it's worth to repair the damage—

*I'm not fucking selfish.*

The pain returned. My name wasn't listed on the policy or in the Will. I felt sick.

Another year slips by. I'm still trapped inside this story. Albeit the pain is lessening. My life cards have been challenging; I'm up to the challenge.

- I write a book.
- My sister/mother dies.
- My niece/cousin dies.
- My youngest sister/aunt dies.
- I suffer a catastrophic stroke.
- I remain strong.

I press on, my past keeps grabbing at my shirtsleeves, pulling me toward darkness. I trip,

fall, get up, move on. I don't look back; I can't keep looking back. My mind begins to reset. I'm loaded up on toxic medications. I share a story about a stroke on Social Media. A family member notices and tells me that's not the place to share such things. I haven't heard from that family member since.

My life became littered with prescriptions and doctor visits.

## TIME OUT

I'm generally a positive, upbeat, deliciously funny individual.

*Who says deliciously funny?*

I'm loaded with compassion and empathy. I know not to judge people except for how they behave in my presence. I'm kind. I'm giving. The reason for this **Time Out** is to shout out this is not a story of 'woe is me.' It's a story about my reality. It is a story coddling those who've faced similar heartaches, screaming out: It's okay, you can survive.

## AUGUST 2019

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8 It's been almost three-years since my mother died for a second time. It's been one-and-a-half years since the insurance. I visited a Specialist. A regular visit. He wanted to show off a new machine. A machine that scans your insides to ensure all is well. He encouraged me to get examined.

*I'll call you if the results are troubling. I don't expect they will be.*

The next day the phone rang; the results were troubling. I'm referred to another Specialist.

## SEPTEMBER 2019

The Specialist tells me I have nothing to worry about. The results, although troubling, were likely in error. He sends me for more tests to confirm his beliefs. I visit a Phlebotomist. The professional vamping my blood tells me it's her first time, + she'll be taking fifteen-vials. I express my hatred of needles. I tell her she'll likely hear those original words often in her career. My blood is extracted.

*"That wasn't so bad now, was it?"*

I calm. I look directly at the Phlebotomist and, in a soothing timber, say, *"Do you know where I can get some heroin?"*

She glances back at me, sporting a confused look.

I visit another lab where they do an ultrasound of my insides.

## NOVEMBER 2019

I return to the Specialist. He tells me my liver is fine. It's nothing to worry about, but —

*"You have a genetic deficiency that has been passed down from your parents. Your body isn't producing enough of an important protein. So, I'll need to run more tests to decide our course of action."*

*"Is there anything I should do in the meantime?"*

*"I don't want you to worry. Eat healthily. I'll see you again in January."*

I left his office with a requisition to give more blood. On the requisition, it is stated clearly what my condition is. It also tells my serum levels.

## I FOOLISHLY GOOGLE

I've been crying on my drives to work every day since. Google did not contain alternative outcomes for what the Specialist is trying to confirm. One heading on a Googled page destroyed me: **Life Expectancy**.

I searched for a second, third, fourth, fifth opinion. They're all the same.

The number listed is one year higher than my current age.

I'm fucking terrified.

I don't know who to tell.

I will eat nutritiously.

Just as the family's pain is becoming manageable, from the grave, my mother tugs on my shirtsleeves, haunting me, reminding me my name never appeared in her Will.

All I ever did, was, be born.

## WHO IS LINDSAY WINCHERAUK?

Lindsay Wincherauk is a fearless writer. He has published two books and has had more than eighteen OPEDs appear in major commuter newspapers. Lindsay wasn't born with a silver spoon in his mouth. His father (who wasn't his father) worked as a mechanic. His mother (who wasn't his mother) worked as an excellent chef in a diner. In fact, his birth was in a secret place where |society deemed| unfit mothers were sent to give birth in isolation – shading families from shame. If the babies survived being born, usually, they were sold to wealthy Americans or adopted out to farm families.

*Lindsay's life began with a lie.*

Despite Lindsay's perilous beginnings, starting with deception, Lindsay knew no better and went through life excelling at things, usually in two-year stints. Be that athletics (hall of fame, record holding, one-eyed quarterback), scholastically, career-wise (generating more than \$70 million in revenue for one company), socially, + without question: creatively!

Lindsay's challenging beginning instilled in Lindsay heaping doses of compassion and empathy. Lindsay's life starting out as a lie gave him a keen sense to spot BS from miles away. It also provided him with a dry sense of humour and an understanding those born with silver spoons in their mouths will never be self-aware enough to understand (or admit) their good fortune.

During Lindsay's work career, he was well-liked by all coworkers. Lindsay was also well respected by his diverse collection of clients, developing several fantastic friendships, primarily because Lindsay is known for his unflinching integrity and ability to hold conversations on most topics.

Lindsay's life mantra is:

*The most valuable part of life is the fabulous people we meet during our journeys. If you treat people with respect (leaving judgment at the door), and more importantly, by opening doors for those less fortunate or who can't speak up for themselves, you are living a good, compassionate life. Making money at all costs is not the only thing mattering. Life can be difficult + devastatingly unfair.*

*Lindsay believes sharing vulnerability is what makes us human. Lindsay will never shy away from being honest about his pain.*

*Lindsay also believes we must stand up for ourselves, + more importantly, for those who are too burdened by the injustices of life, they can't find the strength to stand up for themselves.*

## SOME THINGS LINDSAY IS MOST PROUD OF ARE WHEN:

- A sixty-year-old employee of his, who had entered a point of life where life had become more struggle than joy (it happens to all of us as we age), said to Lindsay, *"I must thank you. I've listened to how you treat people, + by listening, I've learned so much about compassion and patience. Thank you. I consider you a great friend."*
- Another employee who was struggling with addiction thanked Lindsay for his kindness, presenting Lindsay with a Christmas card from him and his girlfriend. Tucked inside the card: lottery tickets.

*LINDSAY WINCHERAUK, compassionate, empathetic, well-read, kind, blessed with unflinching integrity, humour in balance, loved by coworkers + friends alike.*

Lindsay will always stick up for the underdog. Lindsay understands there are countless older people suffering job loss because COVID gave some companies an opportunity to – Lindsay thinks it is essential to draw attention to this life-threatening issue by being the voice for those too broken to speak up for themselves.

Lindsay is currently pitching four manuscripts to publishers and literary agencies. One of the manuscripts (he can't talk about) will blow the roof off the predatory practices of – Lindsay is writing relentlessly and is also pitching OPEDs and short stories, fiction, + non to literary magazines around the globe.

Lindsay has appeared on Breakfast Television, radio programs in Montreal, + several others in the Vancouver area. Lindsay has also been a featured guest on CKNW + CBC, both on several occasions. And Lindsay was a vital witness of a Hate Crime. This led to the first Hate Crime conviction in Canadian legal history, resulting in him being a speaker at an Enough is Enough Rally (anti-violence rally) with dignitaries, politicians, law enforcement, and community leaders in front of a crowd of approximately five thousand.

Lindsay was the **#1 MIXED-TAPE DJ** at the **UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN** for most of the nineteen-eighties, a fact bringing him joy.

Lindsay resides in Vancouver.

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