

i THINK
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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?

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It's 4:40 AM.

I'm riding the elevator down to my vehicle.

Work starts soon.

I make a mistake and look up at the TV screen in the elevator.

STORY 1: A lady died in a car accident in Saskatchewan.

STORY 2: Some kids died in a house fire in Ontario.

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The clock turns to 4:41. I'm sad. I don't know the people who died.

I arrive at work.

We open the door to our workers at 5:30.

Colin approaches the counter.

He's reading a paper.

Four people are standing at the counter.

Colin decides to share what he's reading.

"Did you hear about the three-year-old in (insert country here) that was eaten by a lion?"

I respond.

"What the fuck is wrong with you? What made you think to share that? How is anybody supposed to be happy?"

Colin pouts.

"But it's news."

That evening I go out for a few pops. TM, a somewhat loud lady, is at the bar. She says hello. She then begins to dump every bit of her life misery on me. TM's background is Greek. A friend named Chris approaches.

He's Greek as well.

I introduce them.

They begin talking about Greece.

TM loses her mind and begins blaming every problem in Greece on Syrian refugees.

Chris suggests a corrupt government may be somewhat responsible, Chris checks out the conversation.

TM loses it more; she turns her intensity toward me.

"You're a lousy friend. When I needed you most, you weren't there for me. I was in the hospital. You never visited. You suck as a person. You're a pussy."

I check out of the conversation. I'm confident I'm not a pussy. TM *was in the hospital*, I think. But I also think, *maybe we've shared – well, she shared, her last putrid words with me.* I'm okay if that's the case.

Two weeks later, she phones and asks me for a substantial loan.

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My friend Chuck is a caricature of himself. *He's in his 70s*, I think. His mind is slipping. He's cantankerous. He likes to give me gifts: A jar of change, chocolates, powerful fridge magnets, and random... whatever's.

Occasionally, he gets angry with the staff at the watering hole and disappears for months. Sadly, I think it may be his last, every time he does. Chuck weighs – maybe 100 pounds. His mind is slipping.

I sit beside him. He's happy to see me. He asks me how my son is doing. I don't have a son. His words remind me of my father.

TM comes in. She sits to Chuck's left. A week before this day, I had gone to say hello and goodbye to my mother – she passed away the day before, this day.

I tend to keep things to myself. I do this because, unfortunately, some people, maybe most, don't know how to respond; they don't remember saying nothing is okay. And when life is issuing challenges, sometimes the ones you confide in drop the ball.

"I met my mother for the first time as my mother last week. She died yesterday. I'm a bit off."

"Lots of people come from dysfunctional families."

"You know, that didn't make me feel any better."

I grow silent.

Sometimes my silence is because a three-year-old was eaten by a large cat.

BACK TO TM:

"I must apologize to you. My behaviour a month ago was bad. I was in a bad place, medical problems. I'm sorry."

Apology accepted.

For the next thirty-five minutes, she dropped every ounce of her family frustration on me, mainly about a brother-in-law who doesn't like her. Her words aren't lifting. I'm sure this story isn't, thus far.

Chuck turns to her and barks.

"Don't you have anything fucking nice to say?"

I chuckle, chuckling, how appropriate!

Chuck turns to me.

He's sporting a wry grin.

He reaches into his pocket.

His eyes are gleaming.

"I got a shipment in today. Do you want one of these – I have ten?"

He pulls his hand out of his pockets, and he presents to me – toenail clippers.

Chuck!

TM doesn't like the attention shift.

The moment of relief stops.

She speaks over Chuck.

"Lindsay, I need to ask you a favour. Will you be my medical guardian? I know if I was ever in trouble, you wouldn't allow them to pull the plug."

Funny, we've been talking for forty minutes; she had yet to ask me how I was doing?

"Lots of people come from dysfunctional families."

My youngest sister-flip-aunt – sisaunt Bev, is scheduled for open-heart surgery two weeks later. Her daughter, a niece-flip-cousin, informs me of the news.

She reaches out to me.

She's feeling lost.

I try to offer strength and comfort.

Backtracking several years, my niece-flip-cousin, Allison, my youngest niece-flip... comes out to Vancouver with friends. She reaches out to me. She wants to see me. Shamefully, I push her away – my dysfunction sees to that.

BACK TO 25 APRIL 2016: THE DAY AFTER GOOD FRIDAY

I'm out for a stroll with my friend Jay. Robyn, Allison's older sister, phones. I don't answer. She leaves a voice message. Her voice cracks in the message. I phone her back.

"Allison died in her sleep last night."

Allison was twenty-eight.

I began to cry. I tried to remain strong for Robyn. I think I failed.

I know I failed Allison by pushing her away.

Robyn asks me to speak to her father – my oldest brother-flip-uncle... bruncle. We haven't talked for twelve years. Family darkness and our stubbornness are to blame.

I can't recall the conversation. I know I didn't say much. When the call ended, I cried.

At first, Bev's surgery was a success – in early December, success pivots. Bev's condition begins to deteriorate. Aimee keeps me appeased.

In the meantime, the year is winding down. Many people and the media are painting 2016 as a horrible year. However, I can't help noticing the reasons appear to be because of the deaths of celebrities – and because Trump won the election.

As much as the death of a celebrity saddens me somewhat, as much as Trump winning horrifies me, I find these reasons to be unfathomable benchmarks for whether a year is good or not.

Aimee calls to tell me they met with her mother's doctor on Tuesday. From Aimee's tone, I assume a decision about life support is being made.

I feigned strength as I struggled for air.

At work, a week later, a worker approached me.

"We should all have the day off with pay to mourn the death of Zsa Zsa Gabor."

The comedy of the statement escapes me, and I look directly at him and tell him.

"My sister was taken off life support a few days ago."

Three days later, on December 21—I'm out with friends—trying to stay ahead of my emotions.

Aimee messages me.

Bev had just passed.

My feelings catch me.

Tears began pouring out of my eyes.

A good friend hugs me.

I'm lucky.

Christmas is here. I host a dinner for a collection of sixteen unique characters—an annual tradition—thirty people was the max one year. The night is a success.

My emotions are checked.

I feel the warmth.

I'm lucky.

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As the year winds down, I wonder if I'm okay. I believe I have my emotions in check. It would be easy to be mad at 2016 on countless fronts. Losing lives from your life, regardless of how fractured relationships have become, is taxing, to say the least. I often wish the paths away from each other in families, parts of mine for sure, weren't so lost in the darkness cast upon us by ridiculous societal, and in my family's case, the religious judgement of decades ago.

Mine may be letting reconnection drift away—maybe it's only me—I can't spend too much time worrying about it. Decades are passing by.

And besides, Trump won; I can stop looking.

I'm sad about my family. The year has been challenging on that front—at times devastating. Sharing, through writing, helps, it helps clear my head, it helps me find good in times of intense stress.

I don't regret my life.

I have accepted: I'm a kind man.

Life keeps moving, and each new day shapes me into the man I'm becoming. I'm not

angry at the world. I didn't think forty years ago were better.

I have love in my life.

I have lovely friends.

For the most part, my health is good – I did let some of the stresses get to me, which led to some less than healthy eating choices – an easy fix.

Tragedy gifted me a hyperawareness about how to treat others because you just don't know what is going on in another person's life. Frankly, nobody wants to hear a long story about your cold or parking ticket or why you hate bike lanes...

Spiritually, I strive to be kind; sometimes, my competitive nature fails me, and my opinion needs to be tempered, only occasionally... I don't do boring well; having an idea is good, regurgitating a story about *a hungry cat*... not so much.

Back at the watering hole, I overhear a conversation between a friend and the patron to his left. My friend is trapped in, *way back when things were much better*.

"Thirty-five years ago, I had a toaster that was made in Canada.

It lasted ten years.

We don't (Canada) make anything anymore.

Everything nowadays is garbage.

Blah, blah, blah... We need a war so we can start manufacturing things again."

I refrain from joining the conversation, turn toward a friend, we, maybe just me, call 2G.

"I think the world is a pretty good place. I know it's not for all. Maybe I'm naïve – but for us, it sure is."

He agrees.

The conversation about the past continues. I do my best to block it out.

"2G, I saw on the news today these stories back-to-back:

- *Aleppo being bombed to pieces – commercial break –*
- *Then a story about how traumatized children in North America are because their Hatchimals failed to hatch – to the point of writing letters to the toy manufacturer to demand an explanation, mind-boggling. We have it pretty darn good. We're lucky."*

To which 2G so aptly replied:

"At least they aren't bombing Barclay Street."

RIP: ALLISON

RIP: BERNICE

RIP: BEVERLY

Despite these sad losses for my family, life goes on. And as I mentioned before, the world is mostly good.

I believe most people are good.

We are all trying to get through our days.

We are all trying to bring happiness into our lives.

So, in the spirit of making 2017 a fantastic year:

- Cherish the good from the past.
- Love.
- Do your best to fuel your body healthily.
- Laugh.
- Cry... often if you must.
- Be aware.
- Don't diminish the experiences of others.
- Try to bring light, not darkness.
- A hug can go a long way if you don't know what to say.

That's all for now, it's now two days into 2017, and I wish everyone a great year.

If 2017 deals a hand filled with challenges, try to give more love as you work your way through them.

In the background, I hear the voices wishing for longer-lasting toasters, and I laugh. The next time I hear the pain, I think I will calmly state:

"We can now tap to pay, how fucking great is that!"

LAST NOTE

RIP: CHUCK THOMSON

I'm lucky; I have powerful fridge magnets on my fridge. I smile every time I look at them!

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.
