

I kept speaking with Mrs Patterson and Mostyn once a week, then once a fortnight, then once a month and then one day I left the school and I never saw them again.

I don't want to make it sound like my Mother was a monster or that my childhood was miserable because it wasn't.

We had a piano in our kitchen. It wasn't a big kitchen but it was the warmest room in the house and we'd gather around it and sing soul songs. There's a Ray Charles song, 'Drown In My Own Tears' that she sang a lot. There's a moment halfway through that sends shivers down my spine.

*This moment of the song plays – the drums building and Ray Charles singing 'why can't YOU...' The song continues, quieter.*

The way he sings the word 'you' gets me every time. It's like it's coming out of someone else. We all used to howl it like wolves.

313. Having a piano in the kitchen.

314. The way Ray Charles sings the word 'You'.

*The music swells and continues to play for a few moments longer. The NARRATOR listens. It fades.*

I forgot about the list until her second attempt, just over ten years later.

Dad showed up halfway through Chemistry. The same trapdoor feeling. Fight or flight. The same wordless drive to the hospital.

As a teenager I dealt with it less well. I wore my heart on my sleeve.

The night she came home, she sat at the kitchen table and said that if it wasn't for the ham and pineapple pizza lining her stomach from the night before she'd be dead. And I said:

*'You took three weeks' worth of anti-depressants, a packet of Aspirin and half a tub of antihistamines. You're probably healthier than I am. If you're going to kill yourself go jump off a bridge.'*

Rather than storm off I sat there and started to shovel food into my mouth. I'd spent ages on this meal and I was furious that she was sitting there, wishing she was dead and letting it go cold.

There was a moment of absolute, deafening silence. And then she started to laugh. It was such a genuine laugh that after a while I found myself joining in. Eventually, Dad got up and left the table, going into his study to listen to records.

I couldn't sleep that night. I started to clear out my room, packing up the things I wanted to keep and throwing away the things I didn't.

I started shaking. Have you ever had that? Where you notice that your hands are shaking and your breathing is deeper and you're surrounded by bin bags full of your things and you realise that, you know, *I'm really upset*. I must be really upset.

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And then, inside a box under my bed, underneath some sticker albums, sea shells and action figures, I found the list. I sat on the floor and I read it through.

1. Ice cream.

The younger me had dealt with this so much better. He wasn't self-righteous. The younger me was hopeful. Naïve, of course. But, hopeful.

So once I got to the end of the list I picked up a pen and continued where that little boy had left off.

315. The smell of old books.
316. Andre Agassi.
317. The even numbered Star Trek films.
318. Burning things.
319. Laughing so hard you shoot milk out of your nose.
320. Making up after an argument.

The next morning I sat at the end of Mum's bed and I read the list