

in the bush
collective: issue 2

in the bush presents:

MOMS



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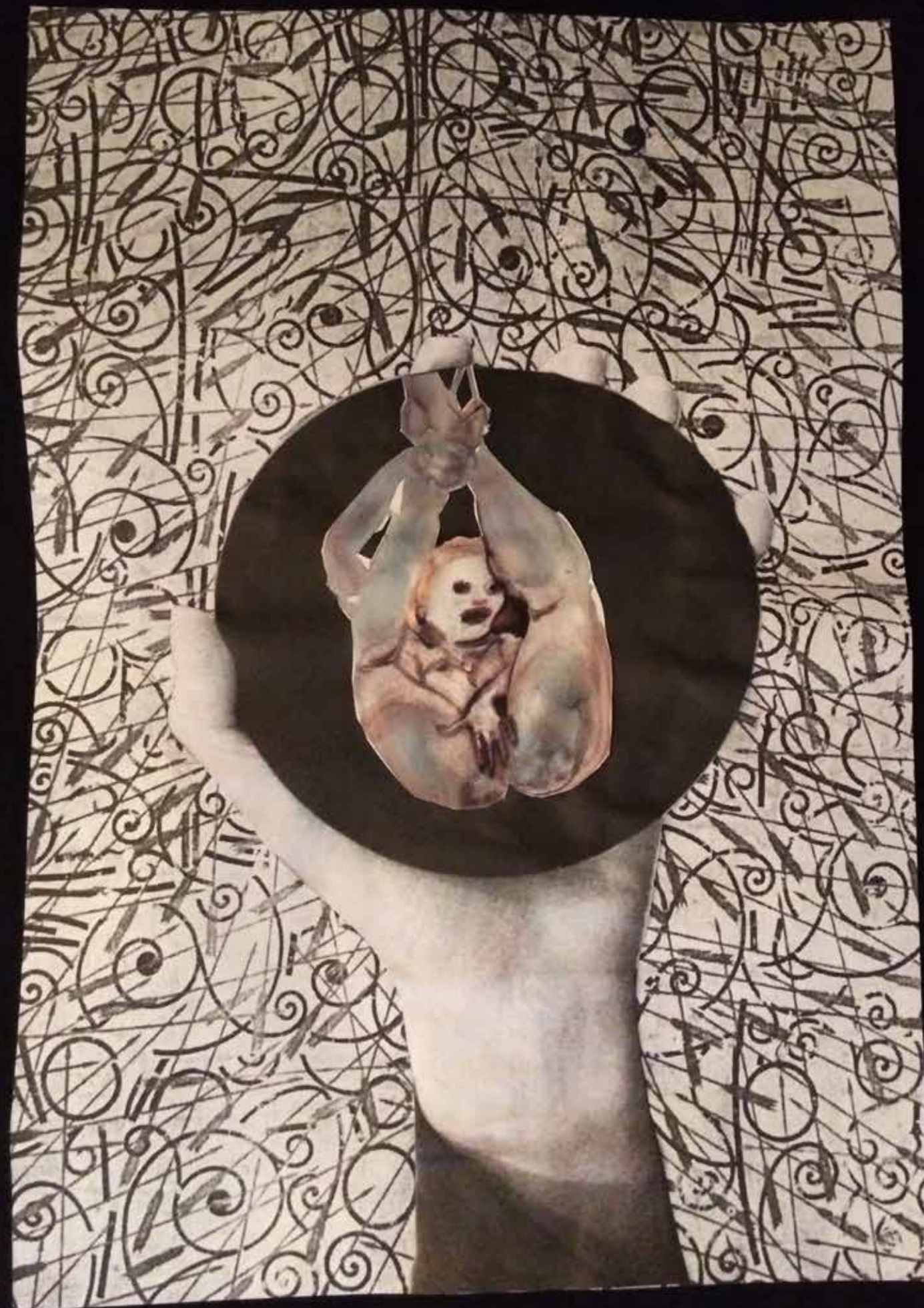
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In the Bush is a creative feminist collective that embodies the spirit of the bush --- free, untamed, flowing, a little gross, and up for interpretation. Our aim is to destabilize socially sanctioned categories relating to gender and sexuality.

In the Bush facilitates bi-weekly discussions in Vancouver, BC to which all are welcome. Get involved, give feedback, or check out In The Bush Zine Issue 1: The Sex Files at: www.in-thebushzine.tumblr.com.

This 'zine was put together over a series of discussion nights, collage hangouts, and online conversations between 'Bush-whackers' and our mothers. Unless otherwise stated, the images in this 'zine are collaged and we don't own them. We were encouraged toward this topic by GUTS magazine.

We were interested in how our mothers relate themselves to feminism, the digital and physical archives of our relationships with our mothers (Facebook chats, paintings), and the things we can only say about our mothers anonymously.



MUMS AND MOTHERHOOD :

Perspectives From a Mentally Ill Cis-Woman

Like many others, I always had a complicated relationship with my mother. I needed her and her support, but didn't like the way it was given. I felt lonely as a child, smothered as a teen, and now as an adult, distant. From conversations with friends and portrayals of families in media, I know that this isn't out of the ordinary. From the outside, everything in my family seems pretty good. We're privileged, white, middle/working class, my parents are still together, and my sister and I both have University degrees. We get together and play card games, drink, laugh, and socialize. For my mum and for many families, this is the dream -- a picture perfect, happy and successful family.

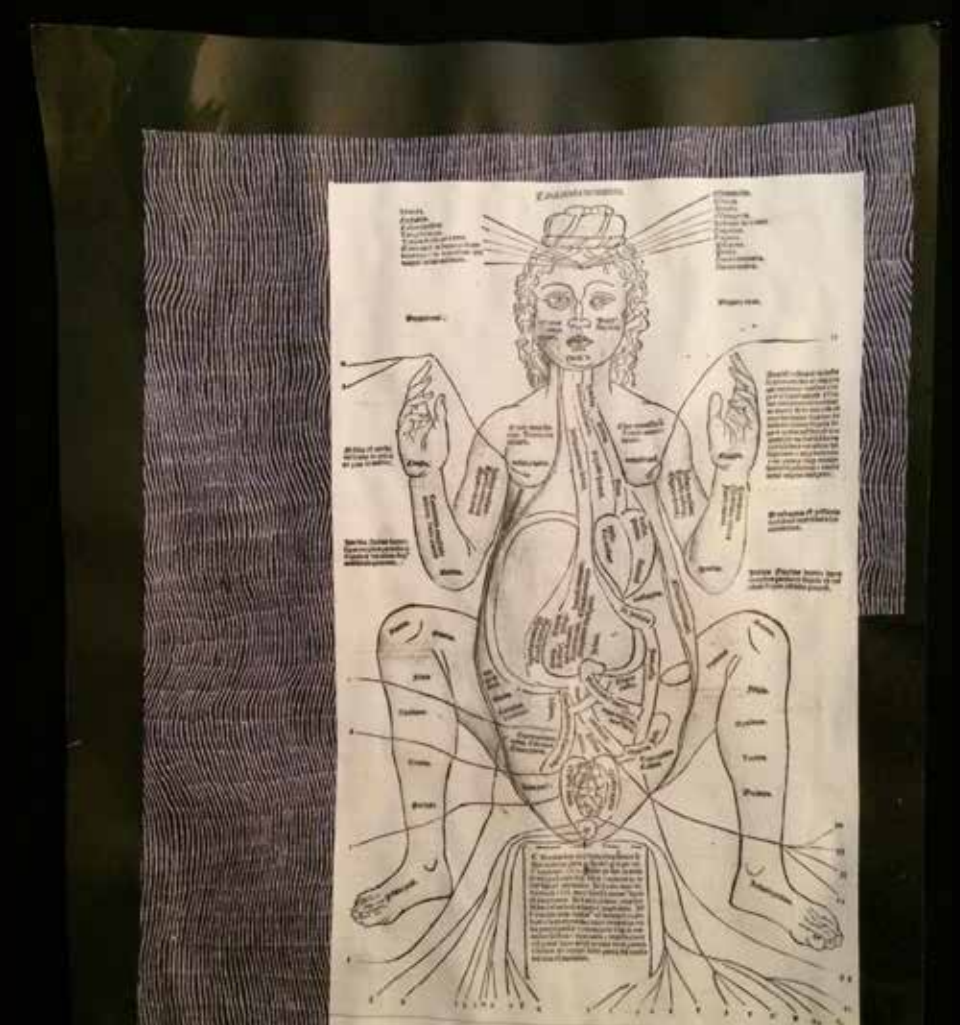
Beneath this, I am living with three mental disorders mainly due to emotional neglect and prolonged abuse. My illnesses have interfered with my familial relationships immensely, affecting especially how I view my mother and decisions I make toward my own motherhood in the future. As a child I was taught to tell an adult when something happened that made me feel bad or unsafe. Throughout my childhood I was being abused mentally, physically and on occasion sexually by another family member. I would tell my mum that I felt bad, that I was hurt and that I didn't feel safe. My mother, my designated safe space, told me that I was overreacting. Over time I taught myself bad habits -- to keep those feelings inside of me and to think that appearing okay is better than working through it.

For a long time I knew and understood that I was unwell, but it wasn't definite until I was in the middle of high school. I was called to the counsellors office at my school and was greeted with a letter I had written a few days prior in which I had talked about abuse and hallucinations. My mum was called in from work to come get me, to talk, and to take me to a Psychosis Intervention program. She was very upset that I was unwell and put blame on herself for not realizing what had been unfolding for so long. In the name of a perfect

family, my mother had denied my trauma. She denied my sadness until the letter was revealed, and has been denying my illness for as long as I've been out of the initial Intervention program. I don't feel like I can talk about a very large part of my life when I'm with my family. I don't quite know how to be myself.

I've heard many people utter the words "I'm becoming my mother," which seems to always be an upsetting realization. We make vows to ourselves as potential future parents to not do certain things that ours did : I will be more progressive, I will be more accepting, I will love more, I will be better. The thought of having a child worries me and fills me with questions. What if I ignore their emotions? What if they are unsafe and don't feel like they can tell me?

What if they develop mental health issues as well? How could I handle the stress of a child on top of my own? How could I care for a growing child when I cannot always care for myself? I have started to catch small glimpses of myself when I am around her. The way our fingers curl, biting our tongues in conflict, laying awake at night as we filter through paranoid thoughts. I am terrified of turning into my mother. I am terrified of having a child.





KATHRYN ALMA NIHTE

Portraits of her children (unfinished)

Why did you paint them?

As an artist i had the ability to represent the people most important in my life, The three sisters. Lucille was 8, Isabel was 10, and Emma was 16.

Why didn't you finish them?

I went to university and got a degree in arts and education. I'm coming back to painting them now that my girls are in their twenties. I have more time.

How did you know they would be so accurate 15 years later?

What I noticed in all the girls I painted. Their strength of character in all three girls that I could see as a mother. You pretty much know your kids right?

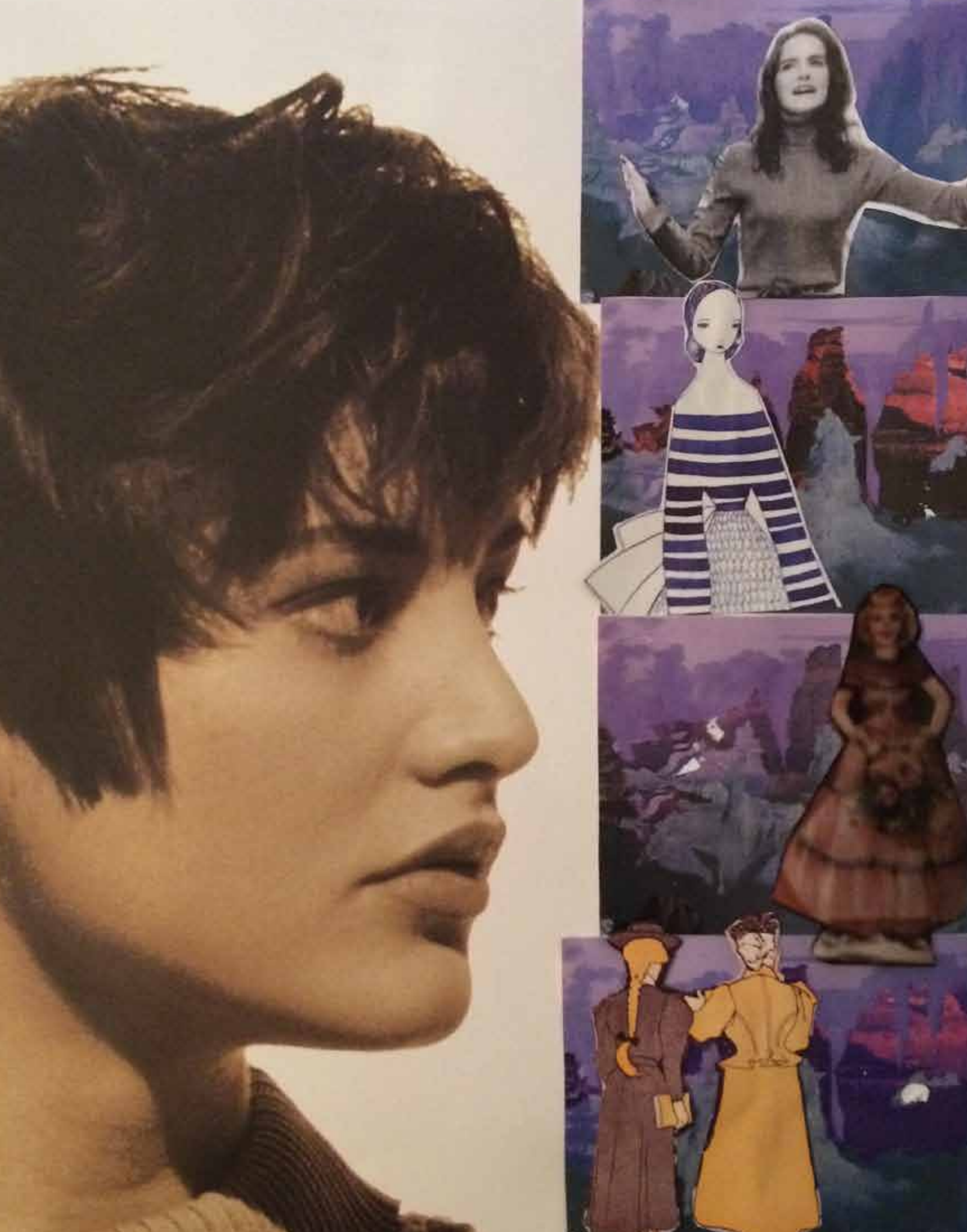
Would you change anything?

I would like to rework them to what happened in the years inbetween. So yeah, they are a work in progress.



“I never really thought about the portraits growing up. My mum is always painting and it seemed natural that she's want to paint her daughters. We are all very different and I find it amazing that she was able to accurately paint us and our essence. I think Isabel's is the most accurate. She's a tree baby and loves everything to do with nature, she's now a agriculture student.”

- Lucille Zarifah, portrayed above



INTERVIEWING MY MOTHER

Describe your relationship with your mom & your relationship with other motherly figures in your life.

I find it almost troublesome to put write the words regarding this topic. To say my relationship with my mother is disharmonious would be an understatement. She was a 17 year old that never grew up while displaying untreated mental illness and narcissistic personality disorder enabled by her own mother and three husbands. Still to this day, she is personally engrossed in her own issues, unable to step away and genuinely show interest in other people's lives and give of herself without strings. As a result, I grew to view her more as an unstable, disruptive older sibling than a mother figure, one that could be counted on to not be able to count on. From as far back as I can remember, I was more the mother, always trying to solve her problems in life and make things better for her in order to achieve some sense of harmony.

As a matter of survival I suppressed my feeling by using what I called the coffee can approach, put all the hard times in a can and tightly secure the lid. While some have a thimble size can, mine grew to enormous proportions. My sheer determination to be the opposite of my mother has driven me to this day to be a better, giving person. It was imperative that I not hold and dwell onto the past: I had seen too many others wallow in their own self-pity based on their early childhood experiences.

Primarily being raised by my grandmother until age 10, the closeness and bond that had had been forged at an early age continued until her death. She was always there for me and I was for her. During my mother's unsuccessful attempts at assuming the motherly role, 10 years too late and unable to cope as a parent, I had the good fortune to be influenced by my lifelong girlfriends' mothers. These women were very comfortable in their femininity as working women, mothers, and wives. They provided a comforting, stable shoulder to lean on while providing sound advice and lifelong principles that I still live by today. However, the one individual who has had the most profound influence in my life is Auntie Em. Since the age of 4 to the present day, her unwavering belief in me and my abilities, when I couldn't see them myself, has shaped me.

What does motherhood mean to you. You could go into difficulties with the IUD and feeling that motherhood might not a reality, endometriosis etc. In what ways did motherhood change in your life.

In my 20's I experienced many pelvic problems as a result of a Copper 7 IUD implanting itself in my uterus and later what they believed to be endometriosis. After 3 surgical procedures, the gynaecologist recommended that I have a hysterectomy at age 27, as a solution to the extreme pelvic pain that I had been experiencing. Knowing other older women who had the procedure and the problems they experienced, I wasn't convinced that I wouldn't be trading this problem for other complications. Therefore, I made the choice not to have the radical surgery.

At age 33, a new gynaecologist performed another surgery to explore and clean up scar tissue etc. We were told it was unlikely I would conceive but rather let nature takes its course, you never know. By this time we had come to terms with the fact that parenthood was not in our future, we were not alone as many friends were childless. A year later a routine visit to the doctor's office proved to be life changing. What seemed to be an unusually intense bladder infection that came on suddenly was actually a very rare symptom of pregnancy. Fortunately our doctor was astute enough to enquire if I thought there was a chance I could be pregnant, to which I laughed and replied "we aren't exactly the most fertile couple". Since the necessary prescription could cause birth defects, a pregnancy test was done and to our joyful amazement it was confirmed I was about 2 weeks pregnant. I stopped smoking that very day.

Motherhood changed my life in ways I couldn't believe. Naïvely so, prior to the delivery I thought that life really wouldn't change that much due to the assistance of a nanny. Looking back now, I can't believe I honestly thought I would be back to work within 2 months, go out on date night on Fridays and life would go back to normal before child birth but with an extra dimension of fulfillment. Boy did I get that wrong. From the moment you were put in my arms, the love I felt was more than I could ever have imagined or experienced ever before. There is nothing like it.

While bringing you home from the hospital, I didn't even make it across the bridge before stating "If I didn't own my own company I would give my notice to quit today and become a full time mom," I had shocked myself. Something profound happened during the birthing process. My focus shifted from self-in-

terest to selflessness wanting to care and be there for you and every milestone. From your birth and through the years until I retired I would continue to be conflicted between motherhood and career. This was the first time ever that I realized you truly cannot have it all and be good at everything, you are only human. Priorities would need to be changed, compromises made and the ability to be flexible always present, but with great rewards.

I firmly believe that I was able to balance motherhood and career because of my life partner. For without the right person who supports you. it's difficult to do it all on your own, something will give. We entered parenthood together as a team with the duties of life assigned without gender interfering. I am lucky enough to have your dad, an amazing husband, who was able to comfort you, our colicky daughter, better than I.

However the majority of child care and medical issues, daycare problems and daytime school activities fell on myself, partially because I had a bit

more flexibility owning my own business, but mostly because it was not socially accepted in the workplace for men to take the time off to handle childcare issues. These responsibilities added immensely to the daily pressures of my life.

In the early 90's the recently introduced 10 weeks of parental leave for men was definitely frowned upon in the business community and in our case would have been detrimental to the career or result in a loss of job.

While there is no ideal balance between career/ home I still regret my time that I had to devote to our business and away you. But I feel we made it work as best as we could.



DRESS CODE for most of the junior secondaries in Coquitlam is fairly well enforced. Most female students are not allowed to wear jeans, as girl pictured on the left. Many student councils have decided independently that girls should wear dresses only, as the girl on the right. Unhassled dog, pictured above, is a vision in black wool.

your mom gives the most thoughtful responses to the least thoughtful statuses haha
My mom just said "predrinking doesn't usually work out properly anyways"
ahhah moms are so irrational sometimes
Thanks for keeping me healthy and always in my heart
Love you
Love you too
my mom told me my grandpa was "near the end" for the last 7 years of his life
your mom is quickly turning into my fav fb user
my mom said "She isn't doing well"
My sweetie pie
You were so precious it brings tears to eyes
my mom and dad are finalizing divorce papers so there were lots of jokes
Okay! I told my mom I would marry a European and she asked if I was trying to piss her off.
but my mom's a trooper
mom's spaghetti
i don't know my mom
my mom will make me
hung out with your mom and let her vent for a while about work, I think she's feeling better. Gotta sleep b talk to ya then. I love you
: amazing! Hope your mom is holding up. I remember helping with my gran's house and stuff before she died but doing it was like part of realizing that she was letting go and would be gone soon. Everything
Yeah you're right. Mom's are only ghosts in your mindssssss. im a zombie goin insane for your brain ahhhhh! thriller imma killa and a cannibal wanna be eatin?! baby baby baby back ribs cage smoking on ya
hey mom
hey sweetie all
neeevvvverrrrr
a nice day with my mom
oh my god my mom...
MOM I JUST, my mom is on to you. she is mad
does your mom like to party?
: has been hard for my mom, she feels very old she keeps saying. it's a hard for her obviously, in that her aunt is on her last days and her sister is gone. leaving her as the last in her immediate family
i need to tell his mom
to be there for your mom and comfort her and all. I bet Texas is beautiful. I hope you are sleeping OK from the sounds of your statuses y
it but your relatives should be making sure
p
my mom has been really mean
is your mom okay?
maybe a kinky mom
TAG MY ASS TAT. My mom still doesn't know and she is my facebook friend. Also I've never had a nude photo of me on the internet. Real life is one thing, but internets are forever. Would you mind
started balling My mom's like Why are you crying?!? And I said cause that's the nicest thing anyone's ever done for me! So thank you SO much! and FYI I had the soup for dinner and half of the
but u noe and my mom had her fourth chemo today but she's not as "dead" as we thought she would be.
make ur mom make it
My mom is a huge feminist she helped represent the group that made public breastfeeding and female toplessness legal in Ontario
nobody answered me. My mom's not gonna let me go otherwise and I already told her the plan so lying won't work.
found a lump on my mom's breast and it's like noticeable..it's like bumping out and i hope it's just a harmless tumour...); im skipping school to go with her for her checkup for like ultrasound guided
funny thing was my mom also loved budha somewhere in the house when i moved out my mom gave me a budha statue housewarming gift \
not good at fb-ing mom
my mom was istard, n' you" joke he may be one rocks i
wanna read it too! my mom says it's somewhere in the house
: love you! miss you! mom
know i suck! it's r
were going to do dinner everything is ok love mom and dad rehearsal...but step-douche romeo decided that was not cool so booked the dinner later im sorrrrrrrry
her mom just died as well, I think about 5 weeks ago.
me and mom are spending some good time
and like it was my mom's birthday weekend... and i made a pumpkin and bought candy and no one came hhaah
i guess mostly
a FEVER and now my mom won't let me come over this weekend :(:(Hopefully I'll be there next weekend though. Maybe if im better tomorrow my mom will let me come over.
ate dinner with my mom and I got sad and weirdly jealous of my mom haha. What have you been doing? What's the hot goss? How's hil, how was the
pleasant, and your mom will be doting OK?
thats something a mom would say, like how my mom thinks matthew mcconaughey's name is
like midnight, so my mom stayed up and watched TV with me, and then in the morning i thought i was all done but when started driving to drop me off at school at like 8:20, i just couldn't stop crying



*Hey, for my collective's 'zine we are asking our moms if they identify as feminists, how, why, when they started/stopped. Can you tell me a bit about that?
Looking forward to seeing you later in the week*

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let's see...

i guess my identification as a feminist started in my early 20s when i started grad school and got involved in the equal rights amendment and women's consciousness-raising groups, around 1975-76. back then women were making 59 cents to men's dollar. and now it's more like 79 cents and still not right. i just sent you the article showing that it gets worse as you go up the pay scale. pretty interesting.

it never made sense to me that my mother, who got a full scholarship to college, could not get a decent job, and was considered "used up" as a divorcee. she was so mortified that she rarely visited friends. she only regained her pride when she married my step-father. only then could she look back at her life and appreciate what she achieved. so i think that experience also affected me greatly, well before the days of the ERA. anyway, i've been a feminist ever since hope that helps.

xo, mom

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thanks for this :)

*you may not want to talk about this by email, but some aspects of your life that I think tie into feminism would be your abortion, miscarriage, close calls with sexual assault, and high-powered career. Do any links to feminism come to mind in relation to any of those?
I'm going to try and be home sunday night to monday night btw*

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We just had a great dinner. In your text below I'll try to respond briefly to your questions. They are not threatening to me at this point because the big picture issues in my life are the ones I've pondered the most. Your take on my perspective would also be of great interest to me given my great admiration for what I know of your intentions & intelligence. Please just don't think that my written

word is my last word on a subject. It's all an evolving perspective, as I'm sure you know.

Sent from my iPhone

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sorry! i got that far then the message sent itself from my iPhone!
and then dinner arrived, etc. here's what i wanted to comment on:...
my abortion happened my second year in grad school. i had visited my boyfriend who was going to start grad school and was kind of a hyper guy. so i did not tell him about it until much later. did not want to freak him out (i did not have a phone and would have had to write him a letter then wait for a reply, etc. so just got it done. it was pretty early, 10 weeks.) i don't think i even told any of my friends, so it's not like i had a lot of support. but few years later, i drove a friend up to houston to get a saline abortion (i.e., inducing labor and delivery by killing the fetus); she was pretty far along and it really killed her & her boyfriend. she stayed at my house, in my room for a week afterward. never thanked me and never kept in touch; just dropped me like a stone. i could see why thought, she wanted to forget the whole thing. her boyfriend, whom she adored, also dropped her like a stone. i found the whole thing pretty depressing.

at one point i even started seeing a great counselor (for free!) who helped me a lot by letting me tell her everything. i think that experience made me realize how lucky i was to get an abortion and counseling for free, no questions asked. there was a girl in my group who had to be 13 if she was a day; always wondered how she got pregnant. she was so sad! i think her mom or grandma was with her. anyway an experience like that just makes you value what you have and know that abortions and contraception should be freely available for all women.

my miscarriage was right as i was planning to marry your father. and the big issue there was that he was not sure he wanted to have kids. i realized that i really wanted to have a kid, so i decided then and there that if he could not handle having kids, our relationship was probably not going to survive, so i'd just go back home and raise the kid myself. so i guess my feminist take on things helped me in making that decision.

the near miss sexual assaults were when i was a freshman, and then a junior. i was just walking home both times. i did not think either person was really serious about assaulting me; they were just dumb boys really. i was not really even mad

at them, though the second one i hit and lit into screaming a ton of foul language as my first response to his approach. (what an idiot he was, holding his pants open with a streetlight behind him so i couldn't see anything anyway!) he just took off. so maybe, in that case, it was feminist to feel aggressive as opposed to afraid. i don't know.

and my career, well, it was really the accumulation of a string of opportunities that laid themselves before me as i moved through the stages of education. i sometimes think that my lack of confidence in succeeding is why it took me much longer than it should have to succeed. or maybe because i'm just lazy too. i would say over the years i've had an increasing interest in history and what's going on in the world, and that more than anything else has strengthened my sense of women's suffering in the world.

i think seeing my mother suffer, in part because of the world she was brought up in, made me aware of these injustices at an early age. and weirdly, from a young age, she broke with her family, and now, as an older person (and for different precipitating reasons) i've broken with mine. even after my father left her, and she was broke and sent my sister to live with her mother and sister, she did not want to go back where her parents lived. she wanted to stay out west and be independent.

i think that was lonely for her, and sad, but also showed how strong she was. she really set a great example, and in many ways represents the core where my feminism came from. so weird that my father was just the opposite of all that!

OK let me know if you're coming home tonight; your dad is at meeting and done at 9 and i'm going to pick him up. could pick you up too, or we could see you on monday. just let me know.

xo, mom

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*It's crazy how much you've been through. Or maybe it's crazy how these kind of things are so rarely discussed. I consider myself lucky that you've shown me since my teens that these are all common issues that women have to deal with, and how to talk openly about them. Also you are *not* lazy. Anyway thanks again love u x*

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" I believe that men and women are equal and should be treated as such.

I believe that girls and women are entitled to the same education as boys and men.

Does that make me a feminist? "

- A mom



Daughter: "Do you want to participate?"

Mom: "No"

D: "Yes."

M: "No."

D: "Yes! You can speak in Polish."

M: "For me it means that women wanted to fight for equal rights with men, and they only won themselves more work. Because now they not only have to be women, they simultaneously have to be men. [Men's bodies] are built differently. They have a different skeleton, they have different muscle strengths, and women who try to prove that they will work more than men kind of defeat the purpose. It's the same as with any human being. One person is good for one kind of work, and another isn't. And then there are ass-holes that rule the world sometimes that are really stupid."

D: "Ok. Do you think of yourself as a feminist?"

M: "Of course. But feminism is unnecessarily mixed up with lesbianism."

D: "Why, what do you mean?"

M: "In the eyes of many people its the same thing. Which is wrong."

D: "Agreed. That's stupid."

M: "Olivia (granddaughter) can even be a feminist in kindergarten if she doesn't want to be treated differently than the boys."

D: "Yeah. And besides that she is a feminist. When she was watching Batman, she's like 'Why do they keep calling Wonder Woman Princess? Her name is Wonder Woman.' And she's three."

M: "Almost four. Even Olivia's getting older."

D: "Are there any defining moments in your life when you were a feminist?"

M: murmurs something to the effect of "not really."

D: "Ok. Thank you."

"The move from home to hospital also brought about a sudden change in the narrative surrounding birth, and this affects women socially. Birth was redefined as a malady, treated as an illness, and broadcasted as unsafe for both mother and child.

The most frequently used obstetric textbook of the era, written in 1920 by Dr. Joseph DeLee, described the "evils" of labour, argued that "few escape childbirth without damage," and advised that specialist obstetricians sedate all women as soon as labour begins (Feldhusen, 2001).

This negative narrative made birthing without a trained physician seem dangerous and reckless. The public came to fear midwifery as it was depicted to be archaic and unsafe (DeVries, 2001). The fact that midwives lacked formal training (because of sex-based discrimination and no fault of their own), contributed greatly to this. Laboring mothers came to rely solely on physicians.

The rebranding of birth as a dangerous affliction, and the subsequent reliance on physicians had a large social impact on women. Suddenly, women's bodies, that throughout the history of humanity had managed to give birth and perpetuate the species, were now portrayed as weak, incapable, and in need of a physician to rescue them from their own biological function."

- Katie Miles

And babies?



"My mother is a Christian. She does not use the Lord's name in vain nor does she swear. Ever. But she won't hit a bible on your head and cares more about love than sin. For her, feminism is expressed in the household and the church. She has come through a system where women are viewed as categorically distinct from men: predestined as followers of a masculine leader of the church and home. Although she once endorsed this belief, when she was finally married she couldn't accept it as true. Now she tries to encourage my Kentucky bred pastor of a brother away from this patriarchal ideology."