Carrie Bird

Writer/ Director

Dear Lucy

Edinburgh Fringe 2018

John

Edinburgh, August 2018

Dear Carrie,

**Dear Lucy**

**Missing years, hidden stories**

Firstly, many thanks for compiling this personal story of your grandmother and the consequences of the tragedies of war, its effects, altering the course of family lives. Deeply moving; triggering so many emotions, so many questions.

For me personally many questions that I would have liked to answer my parents. But are the answers private, personal and intimate, whose answers I would not fully understand or appreciate and so best left unanswered. Or would they have longed for me to ask, so that they, each separately and jointly, could share emotions from the past and in so doing rekindle the joys of the past. I will never know: whilst my parents were alive I never thought to ask.

(It is so wonderful for me to think that your family has all this correspondence bringing to life important moments in your family’s lives.)

I started drafting this at Festival time, but stopped, caught between the conflict of should I have asked my parents, or did they want to keep things private. And what about me? How much do I want my children to know – yes, there are many things that I would like them to know. But are they too busy building their own lives now?

You asked for personal thoughts and stories and I felt moved when listening to the preview of your show on the Royal Mile to let you know something of my story, very different in many ways, a different war, but nevertheless triggered thoughts on what would have happened in my life if that war had not taken place.

*(Incidentally, I live in Edinburgh, greatly enjoy the Festival, and have found over the years that I chose the shows to see in the Fringe from what I see in the Royal Mile. So, thank you and your cast for being vulnerable on the Royal Mile.)*

* My parents have both died, both born in 1913, my father dying over 20 years ago, my mother only a few years ago.
* Since their deaths, particularly that of my mother, and particularly since I reached retirement age a few years ago, I have been asking questions, knowing that those who could give the answers are no longer with me. Wishing that I had asked the questions of my parents when I had the chance.
* My thoughts turned to speculations. But my thoughts also wondered if it might be for the best that hidden thoughts, hidden years are sometimes best left hidden.
* I consider that I had good relations with both my parents, could talk with them, ask them, discuss with them. And still have great respect and love for each of them, of gratitude for all they did for me.
* But now I would like to really know more about them. But when I was with them I never thought to ask them the questions I now wish that I had. Making my own way in the world, my own career, my own family, took all my attention; I can’t remember even asking myself the questions I now want to know about them.
* And what about my own thoughts, the reasonings that I came to as I made decisions, should I write them down so that in perhaps forty years my son might find answers to questions he will only consider raising then, when he reaches a plateau in his life.  
  Or should deeply personal thoughts remain hidden?

Briefly, my story. (No box of letters to provide insights)

* My parents were both born in England and met whilst studying at university in the 1930s. What attracted each to the other? All I know is that they met whilst studying.
* Then my father became a priest (in the Anglican church, in London – why there?), my mother moving on to teaching.
* Did they continue to communicate? I assume that they did.
* In the late 1930s my father accepted a call to go to South Africa for, I think, three years. What motivated him to take that step? Why and what went through his mind?   
  What about the relationship between them?

* World War II intervened and it was only after the war ended that my father was able to get back to the UK and up to meet the lady he had met before the war.
* He then asked her to go out to South Africa where they would marry.
* That she did, travelling out to South Africa, I think on her own, in late 1947 and getting married in 1948.

(I know have photos of my parents with friends after the wedding, the names of the people written on the back of one of the photos. Except for one man who was my godfather the names are just names: Mr …; Mrs …; very formal in those days.)

* What went through her mind receiving this proposal, a lot having changed since they last saw each other in the 1930s. What thoughts went through her mind as she contemplated going out on the ship to South Africa, going out to start a new life on her own with a man she had not known for several years?
* Or had they kept up a correspondence by letter? It would not have been by phone, very expensive in those days.
* Were there other possible loves in their lives, in each of their lives?
* I know that my mother had to suspend for the duration of the war a friendship with a German family (I still correspond with the lady’s daughter and son-in-law).
* What led my father to seek her? What correspondence had they had during those years. My father was a very good correspondent, so I assume there would have been letters.

My mind is left with ‘Why’s’. What prompted them, each in their own way? Did they have misgivings.

A lot of me wants to know why, to understand. I should emphasize here, as a passing thought earlier might suggest, that for myself I am pleased that they persevered with their relationship, that they married and that I was born as their son. I have a lot to be grateful for. But that does not stop the questions, the why’s, what went through their minds

Questions. But should the hidden lives, the missing years, remain unknown, remain private? Would I personally benefit from knowing?

Dear Carrie,

Although the Edinburgh Fringe where you directed the ‘Dear Lucy’ show is now many months away, I still am pleased that you opened up questions about my past through your work.

My story is very different: a different war; different circumstances; neither of my parents in military service. But I grew up with the belief that war (WW II) separated them for several years.

I drafted most of the attached soon after seeing your show. Then thought this is not relevant. And my mind has been ‘havering’ about sending these thoughts to you. But now feel I should, you will now if they are relevant, and can ignore them if irrelevant (and that does not upset me).

So attached are some notes

Best wishes

John

PS: And yes, I remain pleased and grateful for having seen your presentation of your family story. Of it having helped me clarify questions