

My family, a circle of five

Part 1 : My Parents

Let me introduce my family to you, My dad Hugo De Clercq, my mom Anny De Clercq, my two year younger brother Jeroen, my three year younger sister Leen (Kathleen) and myself Mieke.

I am thankful to be born into a family where the old authoritarian patterns of power, control and manipulation were not being played out. Where parents play the dominant rulers and the kids have to obey without objection or communication. That wasn't us. We were definitely given healthy boundaries and supportive guidance but also lots of freedom. My dad was gentle and sensitive and knew how to listen. He didn't talk much, but when he did he used his words wisely. I felt safe and comfortable with my parents. It sometimes shocked me when visiting other peoples homes where the dynamics and communications were harsh, loud and disrespectful.

I am grateful for the distinctive ways that my parents raised me and provided unique experiences and great lessons.



When my dad was growing up and even after he was married, he was not free to do what he wanted to do in his life. My parents promised each other that they wouldn't control their children that way. Even when I, the oldest, came up with ideas that were initially not what my parents wished for, they supported my dreams. Wishing to attend boarding school at age 13, living in Gent in student homes while studying and marrying a much older American with 3 children and moving to the other side of the world at age 29 are major examples. I could feel that at first they didn't want these things to happen, but they allowed me to do what I desired without telling me I couldn't do it or intimidating me with their opinions. They gave me the freedom to experience life and grow from the choices I made. A gift that I am deeply grateful for. Because it was given to me, I am able to pass this gift of consideration and allowing on to my children.

My mom and dad have the same last name, they are cousins. My two grandfathers were brothers. I asked my mom a lot of questions about my parents past and their relationship; how they got involved; how much criticism they received from their families and community . It's a powerful and unique story. It demonstrates their strong unwavering character and their quest for sovereignty and freedom. I admire their bravery to go against the cultural norm. As freedom seeking human beings it is almost impossible to do what we want to do and not care what other people say or think. Social and peer pressure can often stop us from living the life we desire and deserve. I admire my parents for who they are and the life they lived together!

The blindness in the family brought me so many valuable lessons. What does it mean when you can't see? How do you do things in daily life? How is your self esteem affected? How are your relationships? How do you integrate socially? What other senses do you rely on? What does being married to and taking care of a visually impaired person involve? I think my mom could write a whole book about just that! I observed my parents and watched how they orchestrated their daily lives, how they cared for each other, how they created solutions and overcame their challenges.

The male and female roles were reversed in our family. My mom was the breadwinner, she was running the book store, she was doing all the driving and all the gardening. She was very focused on taking care of the business, taking care of the needs of my dad and the other disabled family members. My dad was the nurturer. He was a very gentle soul. He was a great listener and very patient. When I had challenges, I went to my dad. He knew how to support me. Mostly by listening and not responding immediately. He listened and by doing so I found my own answers and my inner balance back. He also supported my mom this way. He was her support system on a spiritual level. His awareness and spiritual essence (not religious) was a key element and support system in our circle of 5.

My dad loved teaching us, especially languages. He graduated in 1960, a member of the first class in Belgium mastering 5 languages fluently. He spoke fluent Dutch, French, English, German and Spanish and studied also Latin, Greek (ancient Greek and modern Greek), Italian, Russian, Polish, Hungarian and Romanian. A total of 13 languages. And on top of that also reading and writing in Braille. He loved stimulating our mental capabilities by playing games. I got my enthusiastic interest for languages from my dad!

My dad was always present with us and very loving. A quality I immediately recognized in Paul in July 1998 (exactly 20 years ago!). I met Paul and his three children in an alternative healing and awareness retreat in Breitenbush Hot Springs in Oregon. Paul was walking with Andrew, Angela and Christopher on the trail from the main lodge towards the cabins. Christopher was having an upset. Paul was holding their hands, walking around in nature, being very patient and loving and kind and being totally present with them. I told Eliane, my Belgian friend who was with me there in Breitenbush; "Do you see Paul there with his kids, how he is treating his children, so lovingly and nurturing and patient? THAT is the quality I want in a partner and that is the quality I want my future partner to have for my children". I didn't have any idea in that moment that my life would be

divinely guided to come together with Paul and the children. I was just pointing at that nurturing quality Paul was displaying. A quality I recognized from my dad, that was truly powerful and supportive for me as a child and I wished my future children to experience as well.

As a kid I sometimes wondered why I had parents who's roles weren't the same as in many other families, where dad does the traditional masculine tasks and mom the traditional feminine activities. Not in our home. I pondered about that many times. Now I see how many gifts this reversed scenario has given me. I learned to question the true essence of masculinity and femininity. A great topic to write about in another episode!



I am grateful for my parents, for the life they lived and the lessons I learned from them. Actually I am still learning every day from my mom, my brother and my sister. I am also very thankful to have my mom right here with me by email and phone answering the many questions I am firing off to her every day as I am writing my episodes. The more she shares about her past, the more appreciation I have for her life well lived! Our family, a circle of five, with my dad now supporting us from the other side, is still a dynamic circle. I am now connecting with them all on a deeper level than ever before. I am grateful for my family and the lessons learned!