

The Messenger

Volume 2011
Issue 1 *The Messenger*, 2011

Article 29

2011

A Good Day Everyday

Dawn Hackett

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/messenger>



Part of the [Fiction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hackett, Dawn (2011) "A Good Day Everyday," *The Messenger*: Vol. 2011: Iss. 1, Article 29.
Available at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/messenger/vol2011/iss1/29>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Messenger by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

A Good Day Everyday

By Dawn Hackett

My Mother said the word shit once. I was eight years old. My ten-year-old brother stopped pushing his chair into its place at the kitchen table. We both stopped breathing and stared at her.

Other times she would just breathe funny. She held her breath a lot when she bought groceries once a month at the naval base commissary. This food store was organized with lines and arrows on the floor - no passing, no tailgating or driving against the grain. It had the only meat freezer that boasted a lined parking lot. If you foiled the directions, your mother would serve two weeks in the brig. Dad would walk the plank.

At the end of every trip the cart was left in the safety zone between the last aisle and the registers, guarded by my brother and me. We waited on the Li'l Debbie thief, ready to pounce. Mom braved the arrows to grab a missed item. People stared and shook their heads, disappointed, lips tight and turned down at the corners. We would not relinquish our Star Crunches and Swiss Rolls.

We ate three balanced meals a day and brushed our teeth after. My Mother was the reason. In school I saw a picture of a food pyramid and wondered how a mom could tip something over with a foundation that wide and full of livestock. We chewed red tablets that stained the plaque hidden on our teeth. Mom bought new toothbrushes every month.



Last night I was attacked by a jar of peanut butter, but it was all natural. I craved then relented. Graham crackers slammed together gave it surround sound while I munched. I told my mom about it. She laughed while she rubbed her thigh.

“The whole jar? Was it raining on your way in?” she asked.

“No, and no. Raining in Charlottesville and headed this way. You look paler than usual.” My brow was tired, but it knotted without me. Her skin changed color like my eyes did, a deep and personal betrayal of what I didn't want others to see. Her second back surgery was a mere seven months behind us,

a small drop along her body's oceanic journey into disability. Tumors had grown inside her backbone, hiding from doctors more concerned with her history of stroke and heart disease, her stints and angioplasties. She had become Frankenmom sans the bolted neck. Fall had recently arrived and brought the cold that permeated her bones. The summer had stewed her arthritis with its thick humidity. But moving had become an expensive proposition and had fallen off the radar.

"Oh, I'm dizzy, but I'm fine," she deflected, "How are you?"

"Good I think. Why did I eat that late? I know not to get started. What is wrong with me?"

"Apparently hunger. Graham crackers, too?" Her mouth hung open with false bluster.

"What a silly question. Of course there were graham crackers involved." I looked down at my middle. She looked at my feet as they happened to be at the end of my legs, her favorite place of concern.

"Your legs are so thin," she worried.

"Your back hurting today?"

"Arthritis."

"Sure it isn't that Circus of the Stars surgery you had? They about sawed you in half to get that last tumor out you know." I smiled, all teeth and goof.

A grimace trailed the edges of her mouth. "Yes, I guess. Can't tell if it's the arthritis or the clamps my backbone is fused to. I'll tell you what, I am so sick of complainin' complainin' complainin'. Tired of hearing myself think."

"If you ever find an off switch, tell me. I need a break, too."



When I was six, my mother was up in the morning long before us and went to sleep hours after us. She worried over bolts of material at Cloth World and sewed our clothes from paper patterns. We promptly outgrew them.

Mom went to her hands and knees to strip and wax the floors twice a month. When she was done and the temporary no-kid-zone lifted, it was my job to drop the pot of macaroni and

cheese or overfill my glass with grape juice. I broke cookie jars and cried. I promised to glue them back together.

When I got my first bike, I spent eight hours a day sitting on a banana seat. I did figure-eight's on Collins Road. Cars took the curves on Collins too fast and people went to the hospital. Mom grounded me for days when she saw me, but the bike was never taken away. In my first grade mind, no bike meant no reason to live. I brought home bloody elbows and purple knees to thank her for my freedom.



When I was 32, my mother had a massive stroke. Her head was shaved on one side from neuro-surgery. The other side still had her normal hair. Someone put it into a Pebbles, top-of-the-head pony tail. It was not allowed to integrate with the stubble. A horseshoe of thick staples tattooed her head behind and above her left ear. The surgeon got it right, the open end was up to hold her good luck. Her head lazed to her right as if the pony tail on that side of her head was a tuning rod, pulling her neck constantly to one side. I stood at the foot of her bed everyday asking the same questions.

“Mom, what day is it?”

“Friday.”

“What day is tomorrow?”

“Friday.”

“Did they brush your teeth?”

“I don't know. I fed myself lime Jell-o for lunch. I did good.”
She smiled. Her eyes closed whenever her mouth opened.

“I love you, Mother.”

“Love you, Daughter.”



When I was four my father was stationed in Memphis for five months. We lived in Navy housing. We lived in the slums of a city full of slums.

There was a hole in the floor where my mother put snap-traps. The traps broke rat backs. Shell No-Pest-Strips hung in the

kitchen and living room, black and yellow. The flies were black, the tacky strips yellow. We burned trash in the backyard in a huge metal barrel. A high mesh grate teepeed the sky against flying embers. My brother found a burned bird on the grate and carried it inside the house. Mom found a box and gave us spoons to dig a hole in the backyard. We all cried, my brother the last to well up, Mom first then me.

She entertained us because we couldn't afford a garden hose. She filled a plastic bottle with a pointed tip full of water and chased us around the backyard in 98 degree heat. She would remove from the freezer an ice tray filled with Kool Aid, covered with cellophane. The cellophane held toothpicks in place until the Kool Aid froze. The three of us ate until our tongues froze and our teeth were stained purple.



My mother was in the bathroom when I got home today. I watched her walk back to her chair. Her left hip is lagging behind the right hip like a piece of plywood slanting against the side of a barn. The right hip tries to lean too far into her walker. On bad days her shoulders dip forward, her left foot points drastically inward and she has no appetite. She reminds me of her mother, crippled from rheumatoid arthritis. Her mother's hands were mountains of knots, one leg turned completely backward - one foot pointed north, the other pointed south. She creaked like ancient timbers when she walked.

My mother wears a path on the carpet from her chair to the bathroom to the chair again. She stays on the cart path and parks within the lines.

"I'd like a lot of olives in my salad tonight," she said.

"Black or green?" I asked.

"Green, please. The black ones are boring. We got any radishes or spring onions?" Her cheeks had the silken finish of polished ivory.

"I bought radishes last week, but I think we're out of spring onions. They didn't look right so I didn't buy them. Your fault, you're the one who taught me not to buy wimpy greens or dented cans. I tell you, Woman, it's been a long day of trying to understand a poet from the 1300's. Why am I in school again?"

“Learning how to write, Woman,” she said. Deadpan timing, toothy grin.

“Right. Now I remember. Maybe this poet I’m studying will expand my mind.” I plopped onto the sofa, laughing.

“May be,” she said, “and you can do this, you’re almost done. Hold on for another, what is it, two months? You always could do whatever you decided, once you set your mind to it.”

I looked at her and smiled, wondering if that was true. “Love you, Mother.”

“Love you, Daughter.”

