

The Messenger

Volume 2007
Issue 1 *The Messenger* 2007

Article 8

2007

Post-It Paranoia

Molly Bechert

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



Part of the [Nonfiction Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bechert, Molly (2007) "Post-It Paranoia," *The Messenger*: Vol. 2007 : Iss. 1 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/messenger/vol2007/iss1/8>

This Non-fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the University Publications at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in *The Messenger* by an authorized editor of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

“Don’t tell me about your mother,” I should have said.

Post-It Paranoia

But back then I didn’t know, hadn’t yet learned that the stories friends told about their crazy mothers could be topped by my own. I would listen, half smiling with anticipation, as Cynthia recounted the Tale of the Offspring Mix-up, in which her mother mistook my friend’s cousin for her own daughter. I would laugh as Christy described the horror of the floral muumuu that her mom wore to the seventh-grade parent-teacher conferences.

When friends told stories about their embarrassing parents, I could taste relief in my laughter. I would think of my own mother, who cared so much about her kids, and feel just a little flash of pride. My mother would never mistake one of my identical twin sisters for the other, let alone confuse one of her four daughters with someone else. And she would always present herself to our teachers as an involved and concerned parent, never appearing at school in anything but a respectable mom outfit. She was My Mom, a figure of familiarity and comfort and guidance. Even her handwriting, similar to mine in a way, would smile up at me from the daily notes that she left on the counter before she went to work.

I was by no means unaware of my mother’s quirks, but that’s all they were to me then—tiny, strange habits that were familiar and endearing. She would misplace things. She would go upstairs mumbling about getting a towel or her sweater or a copy of my birth certificate only to return an hour and a half later having forgotten what it was she had wanted to retrieve. She would talk to herself constantly, narrating her every move in words spoken under light breaths as she worked in the kitchen.

“I’ve got to find that brush,” she’d say. “Got to start thinking about where I put it last. Think about the hair brush and the twins have their meeting tonight, need to make cookies. Oven at 350°, take the pans out first.”

Sometimes my sisters and I would acknowledge her conversations with herself, chiming in to answer her questions or to tease her. And she would always laugh, recognizing the strangeness of the habit. Ten minutes later, though, she’d be at it again, wondering aloud how the damn hair brush got into the dishwasher.

Her involvement in our lives, too, never struck me as particularly excessive. In my first year of high school, my mother was already planning out my college tours, booking hotels for the following year so that we would be able to visit the sixteen schools that she thought I’d like the best, and I accepted that as normal. I took the questions that she fired at us as a reflection of stan-

ard parental concern, even when a simple sleepover at Cynthia's house became the subject of an hour-long gentle interrogation. I barely took notice of the move she'd make from reasonable questions to those that she knew I could not possibly answer.

"So you're going to Cynthia's tonight?"

"Yep."

"Will her parents be there?"

"Yep."

"So what are you going to do at her house?"

"I don't know, just hang out and probably watch a movie."

"Now which college does her sister go to?"

"Mary Washington."

"And what's her major? What about Cynthia's little sister? Any college plans yet? Where did their parents go to school? Didn't Mr. Donaldson grow up in Vermont? Now, remind me, what's their new dog's name?"

Awareness of my mother's insanity came gradually, along with the shoulder-slumped self-consciousness of the first years of high school. When, at my sister's graduation, my mother clapped thirty seconds longer than everyone else after each of the two hundred and ninety seven names was called because she "wanted to show every student that he was equally loved," I felt mildly uncomfortable under strangers' accusing glances. Discomfort increased in my sophomore year when she called both my guidance counselor and my history teacher to set up a meeting to discuss how I "had been hurt" when the teacher yelled at me in front of the other students. Full realization came when she planned out a week of my new boyfriend's summer vacation without consulting either of us, deciding that of course we would love to spend five days and nights in the four-foot-square cabin of our worn-down sailboat with my six family members.

As I noticed more and more of my mother's strange behavior, I began to express my disapproval with snide, typical teenage remarks, which only seemed to encourage her. When my little sister was finally allowed to buy a Chihuahua, my mother warned us about bringing him outside, as she had heard that "large birds of prey" had been known to swoop down from the sky to snatch tiny dogs from the lawns of unsuspecting owners. Never mind that we had never seen a bird larger than a crow near our house, as I reminded her. The day after the initial warning, we woke up to signs posted on all doors that led to the outside: CAUTION: LARGE BIRDS OF PREY. KEEP ZERO LEASHED AND ALWAYS IN YOUR SIGHT. My sisters and I laughed at first at what we thought was a joke, but in fact my mother enthusiastically enforced

this new rule.

We also made the mistake of taking lightly her few initial comments about Avian Influenza. News stories of 2004 told the rest of us that there was a risk, but news stories of 2004 told my mother that we would all inevitably—and soon—contract the virus and die. One day I received a phone call during English class, which in high school demanded that my teacher answer the wall phone and look up worriedly, calling my name so that the whole class turned to stare. I stepped outside the classroom to answer, pulling the cord around the corner and out the door.



Turn Down

“Molly?” My mom—someone must have died. “Just wanted to let you know, I ordered some masks during my lunch break. I’ll be putting them in the basement next to the cat litter. I’m picking up maybe ten gallons of water after work. Won’t last us long, but they’ll at least get us through the initial shock of it. See you tonight!”

That night my mother came home with ten jugs of water, just as she’d promised, and sat us all down to discuss an emergency preparedness plan.

By the end of my senior year, my mother’s quirks were no longer funny—they were infuriating. Her absent-mindedness and her constant anxious chatter in particular became the subject of my own Embarrassing Mother Stories. I could now see a familiar sparkle of pity in my friends’ eyes as I told them each new tale.

It was during the retelling of such a story that frustration with my mother

grew from the occasional mild tickle in my brain to an ever-present pull at the back of my stomach.

I had just finished telling Cynthia about my mother's irrational fear about driving on the highway at night—earlier in the week, I had sat in the passenger seat as she jerked the car from the middle lane to the slow one, groaning slightly as though consumed by the possibility of an accident. "How are they driving so fast? Can these people even *see* in this light? I can't even tell how far away the cars are!" she had hissed, while nervously checking the rearview mirror to make sure that her children were still alive.

"I just hate that *sound* that she makes," I said. "It's so pathetic, like she worries so much that she can't even function like a normal person."

Cynthia laughed, I thought because she had heard my mother make this sound before. When she kept laughing, though, I asked why. She swallowed her laughter and spoke the curse, those words that I can still sometimes hear: "You do that too, Mol."

"Remember when we were driving the other day and you weren't sure if you'd make the light? You made that exact same sound that your mom makes. I thought you were joking when you did it!"

And she was right. I *had* made the Mom Noise, and I still do. Like my mother, I worry when it's raining, when my little sisters stay out late, when I have a deadline looming over my head, and it's not the healthy sort of worry. I envy my friends' smiles, those carefree looks of anticipation as we drive through the wrong part of town searching for the destination that we lost track of ten minutes ago. *How are they not worried yet?* I think. *Do they even have any idea where we are or how to get back home?* And then I feel my stomach churn a bit and I remember yet another reason to worry, the constant one: I am turning into my mother.

I came downstairs one recent morning to be greeted by a small, hot pink Post-It note standing out against the clutter on the white countertop. Thinking it was one of my mother's notes to the girls, which she continues to stick to the counter almost every day, I glanced down and read:

*August 14, 2006—8:23 p.m.
Mysterious phone call from
someone who may be trying to steal
my identity.*

At first I laughed, enjoying the weirdness of my mother's mind. *This woman is insane*, I thought. Then, noticing the way her *ys* swept around to touch the letters next to them, the friendly curl of the *ms* and *ns*, I stopped. No matter how hard I tried, how much I squinted and turned my head, I could see nothing in that Post-It but my own handwriting winking up at me.

—Molly Bechert