

----- Origin----- Original Message -----
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From: Hilari Anderson

To: lpr@lidstrompiano.com

Sent: Sunday, December 03, 2006 7:37 PM

Mr. Lidstrom,

My mother informed me that you wanted to contact me. I am curious as to what you might want to say, so I am sending you my email address. I do not know if this is the most efficient way to send a message to you, but as I prefer to negotiate my personal life myself, I did not discuss this email with my mother, and therefore, if you have a more suitable email address, I do not know what it is.

Hilari Anderson

----- Original Message -----

From: Joel Lidstrom

To: Hilari Anderson

Sent: Monday, December 04, 2006 12:06 AM

Dear Hilari,

I appreciate the terseness of your response. My utter absence from, and indifference to, your life could only lead you to greet me with disdain. I understand that, and offer no defense. Nevertheless, when your mother's email broke through the inertia of my life, I realized that I would contact you. It is much too late to establish any meaningful dialog between us, but here I am, writing these words. What can I say after thirty-some years that could possibly have meaning?

Despite an outward appearance of civility and good will, I have lived a life with too great a measure of fear and selfishness. I can defend it by saying that this is the human condition: we are alone in the world, and cannot easily reconcile ourselves to the fact. But I have no excuse, other than to say that fear and selfishness have too often blinded me, and robbed me of compassion and vigilance.

I am certain that an apology to you would be meaningless, but as I say these words I realize that an apology needs to be directed to your mother. It is she whom I wronged, she who endured my indifference, and she who raised you. I will do so, for what little it will be worth to her.

I could say more, but to what end? We are connected biologically, but not beyond that. The same could be said for any life form on the planet, so close are their DNA structures to ours. I am not such a fool to think that because I fathered you that I have any meaning to you, and the evidence is longstanding how little meaning you've had to me.

But I know that you know, Hilari, that life is odd and complex. What seemed to be, often turns out not to be; what seemed not to be, often becomes. What could result from your severe invitation for me to write you? Likely nothing, yet I have taken the chance. The longer I live, the less I can predict what anything means.

For once in my life, Hilari, I wish you well.

Joel

----- Original Message -----

From: [Joel Lidstrom](#)

To: [Hilari Anderson](#)

Sent: Monday, December 04, 2006 11:00 AM

Subject: Re:

Dear Hilari,

I am sorry if my previous email sounded cold; my wife has read it and thinks it to be. I only wanted to honestly "confess" the coldness that I have exhibited toward your life. It thought it would be disingenuous to speak with a measure of warmth in order somehow to re-establish a meaningful interaction with you.

That said, if you were to be interested, I would enjoy hearing about your life, and telling you a bit about mine. The older I get, the more I see that life is often about loss; here is an opportunity for there to be the gain of someone that should never have been so oblique to my life, except that circumstances too large and difficult for me to understand at the time stood in the way.

Please, Hilari, if you are inclined, do respond with a measure of interest. I would enjoy it very much, and use it as an opportunity to better my life, with a hope that it could enhance yours.

Joel

----- Original Message -----

From: [Hilari Anderson](#)

To: [Joel Lidstrom](#)

Sent: Monday, December 04, 2006 7:07 PM

Subject: Re:

Joel,

It seems to me to be a great risk to share my life with you. I don't know that I have determined whether this is a risk that will, in the end, be positive. There is no way to know at this point where this interaction may lead. Such is the unknown of life, I suppose.

I think you misunderstand the tone of my first message. Without knowing your intentions, I had no reason to give you anything beyond a terse message. Why would I offer anything of myself to a person who has been, for me, a distant curiosity, often the object of defiant disdain? I do not say this to you in hopes of making you feel more guilt or shame. I have often tried to imagine how you must have felt about me, all these years, knowing of my existence and doing nothing. Working with people whose ages and maturity levels match those you and my mother possessed years ago has allowed me to feel some empathy for both of you. I wouldn't want any of my little darlings to be my parent, as lovely as they may be.

Please don't read my tone as one of anger. I don't have that either. I am old enough, and mature enough, to have learned that anger is a most brutal disease. I suppose I am wise enough to acknowledge sadness for what has passed, although the vulnerability in admitting that is uncomfortable, and I worry for the grieving I may undergo in the future. I understand what drives a person to make such a connection, and I am trying to be open to that. I accept your apology, although my emotions may need time to match my words. As for whether you owe an apology to my mother, that is for you to decide and for her to address. I do not want to blur the lines here. This is my private life. I have very little information about that time in her life, and I never asked for fear of seeming needy or weak.

That said, I don't know how to share who I am in an email. I don't often know how to do this with those who know me well, let alone someone strange and intangible. I am a high school English and journalism teacher who lives in Seattle and works in the suburbs. I have been married for five years to a man I've known for 15. We have a dog and two cats. I like the dog better than the cats, but I try not to let the cats in on that. I have a close group of friends who love me. I am an extrovert and a picky eater. This is what I know about myself at this moment, after a day of strange reflection.

I hope that I do not sound cold. I have measured my words carefully, but I also have been honest and shared feelings about this situation that I have not expressed to many people. I am open to what may come of this, and I hope that you spend some time sharing something of yourself with me.

Hilari

----- Original Message -----

From: [Joel Lidstrom](#)

To: [Hilari Anderson](#)

Sent: Monday, December 04, 2006 8:56 PM

Dear Hilary,

I respond immediately, with no reflection whatever. That will come. Right now I can only write briefly, and viscerally. I am moved by the fact that you have responded beyond a mere acknowledgement that I approached you. What has moved me, I cannot say. I have just been through a very emotional experience that has underscored how little I understand about myself, and my place in my world. No doubt that has had its affect.

Thank you, Hilari; I'll more closely consider what it is that I want to say, and reply once again. I will say, however, that I would sincerely hope that there be no risk in sharing your life with me, or mine with you, beyond the pain of accommodating something beyond how we had heretofore defined our lives. I lay no claim to any of what you are, and wish to take nothing except what you freely and happily give.

Joel

----- Original Message -----

From: [Hilari Anderson](#)

To: [Joel Lidstrom](#)

Sent: Thursday, December 07, 2006 1:29 AM

Subject: Re:

Understanding that it is late, I have had some wine, and I am anxious about sleeping the hours necessary to make work tolerable tomorrow, I don't know what to make of this latest email. Are you concerned that you are a burden to my life? Interfering with existing relationships? Or, are you concerned that you cannot possibly measure up to an ideal, some dream vision I may have possessed about my "real dad"? I am unsure. Is this a disruption to my life? Certainly. Is it a bad one, I have come to think not, over the past few days.

Yet, I understand if you are afraid about my expectations. I don't know what they are, having never allowed the concept of "father" to be one I cared much for. It was not safe for me to love a father. I have no reason to trust you, and yet I have shared much. Maybe too much. So, you have no need for an additional child, and I have had no need for a father, and yet here we are. What would happen if I did need a father? What would you do? You see, the answer to that question is at the heart of this conversation, is it not? There are things about my life that may be painful for you to know. Are you prepared for that?

I am not naive. I have no illusions of you. At least, I didn't think I had. I also know that the flurry of first communication, like with any relationship, slows in its pace, becomes more comfortable. What I don't want is to become hopeful for what will not or cannot be.

I have only corresponded with you for a few short days, and yet my world has changed. This is true. I don't know what it all means, but my world has changed. A door has been opened that cannot be shut, but it is not open wide, and before I push from the inside, I need to know whether there is a commitment to my presence in your life, whatever that may be, or whether you are satisfied to know that you have a competent, well-adjusted daughter somewhere in the world whom you can think of fondly from time to time. What is it that you want? That will be helpful for me to know.

Hilari

----- Original Message -----

From: [Joel Lidstrom](#)

To: [Hilari Anderson](#)

Sent: Thursday, December 07, 2006 12:10 PM

I am moved by your reply. I'll try to be more brief than the previous email so that my words don't obscure my meaning.

Because this goes to the heart of the matter, I'll respond only to the critical questions you ask. Knowing this, the rest falls into place with relative ease.

"What is it that you want?"

How can I know this, and sufficiently articulate it? I search my heart, my mind, and no easy answer comes. But having gotten to know a little of you has absolutely convinced me that the mere satisfaction or your being an intelligent, fine human being with a good life is not what I want. Your mother had told me this. That could have been the end of the story, but it was not. What then?

"What would happen if I did need a father? What would you do?" My inclination is to say that I would do what a father would do. I would do all I could for you. But I also recognize that one cannot be a father without the child being his child. Deep, loving relationships are formed inexplicably, almost always over long periods of time and with the advantage of physical proximity. Neither you nor I can anticipate how or why our relationship, given no historical context other than utter absence, could grow. And yet, I believe it can. Why? Because what we've said already convinces me that I want to discover what might spring from this. I cannot help but think you feel the same.

Am I prepared for the pain that may accompany such a relationship? My heart says "Yes". My brain says, "How can I be prepared for what I don't know?" But I say that I have recently learned, with great anguish, that the heart can instruct the mind.

Hilari, I will commit to your presence in my life. It is a step of faith; because as you've observed, it is for me to show you that you can trust me.

Can I trust you? Your honest words and intimate concerns convince me that I can.

Joel

----- Original Message -----

From: [Hilari Anderson](#)

To: [Joel Lidstrom](#)

Sent: Thursday, December 07, 2006 8:55 PM

Subject: Re:

I offer you a story. Twice in my life did I experience a depth of feeling I could not predict. Once, when my mother asked for my opinion on her failed first marriage. I was ten. The second time, when she moved to Oregon from Washington. I was 23. Both times, I played the situation off like I didn't care. And then, both times, from some place within I do not visit much, I sobbed, convulsed, ashamed of my sadness. Don't get me wrong. I wasn't sad that she was leaving husband the first. I hated him. I was sad that my life was changing, and I didn't know how to control it. I suppose the same is true for the second time.

This is the third.

Thank you for being honest with me. I will trust that this is how we will speak. With honesty. I do not lie. I tend to hide, but I will not hide now. If a boundary is being crossed, I will tell you, so until I do, you may feel free to expect that this relationship is not burdensome or imposing. I hope you will do the same.

My main concern is that your family will view me as an interloper, someone who has disrupted their comfortable existence. I do not want to impose or create resentment.

So, we move forward. I imagine the seriousness of our conversations will vacillate as we become better acquainted. I have a sense of humor, and I will try to show it. I am also open to your family, should they be interested in learning about me.

I can be trusted, and I am thankful, relieved, and happy to be able to trust you.

Hilari

----- Original Message -----

From: [Joel Lidstrom](#)

To: [Hilari Anderson](#)

Sent: Thursday, December 07, 2006 9:08 PM

I have just finished supper with my family. I thought, given the time difference between here and there, that you would have had time to receive my message, and reply.

Since there are other things to attend to right now, not the least among them is some very good chocolate, I will say but one thing.

When I read "This is the third.", I wept.

Until later, Hilari.

Joel

----- Original Message -----

From: [Joel Lidstrom](#)

To: [Hilari Anderson](#)

Sent: Sunday, December 10, 2006 6:57 PM

I know you know, Hilari, that no unanswered question need oppress out of concern for articulating it.

My mind's eye is recreating my "normal" life as it plays itself out with little or no regard for your pain, while much of the tumult in your life was either directly or indirectly associated with me. Initially I suffered only insofar as a teenage boy suffers numbness at hearing those words "I'm pregnant." But the numbness went away as my life changed. I was drafted into the Army, and sent to Germany where, in many ways, my life was to begin.

It was in Germany that I developed relationships, notably with adults, that propelled me forward, and gave me a sense of adult identity. But by this time, thoughts of your mother, and of you, had receded. I returned to the States with the challenge of working as a professional musician with exceptionally talented adult musicians, and worked hard to catch up. This convinced me to study music seriously, and I spent four years at the U of M almost exclusively in music course-work, and practicing guitar five and six hours a day. Studying music is a good way to repress the rest of what lurks within, because it is so demanding.

Yes, it was during this time that your mother called me with the request for me to sign the adoption paperwork. I received nothing, whether paperwork or further word. How did I feel at the time? I cannot say. It may seem cruel and shallow of me to speculate that I felt little. But I am afraid that it is true. Your mother and you were so far from my milieu, so far from my outlook, my plans, my identity, that I must admit that I didn't think very much at all about you. Contrast this with your game, thinking of me even when you tried not to.

There is pain for me here, Hilari, but the pain is only that I know how fragile you are in this, our endeavor together, despite your obvious strength. I had a life. It was full. Certainly I wrestled with my own demons, but there were no losses, no incongruities, no tumult, no hatred, no pain. The more we talk, the more I know you will revisit these things, and I hope that together we can recoup some of what was lost.

Already, Hilari, I know I have. I have recouped much, having known you only a very short while. It is remarkable. Absolutely remarkable. I just hope that as the days, months, and years pass, that you'll be able to honestly say the same. That together we were able to recoup some of what was lost, and more importantly, to discover new things, good things, unencumbered by our past.

Rob and you are right: we will do this dance. It is a very wondrous thing that, after all these years, this father has the opportunity to dance with his daughter.

Joel

----- Original Message -----

From: [Hilari Anderson](#)

To: [Joel Lidstrom](#)

Sent: Sunday, December 10, 2006 7:20 PM

You write: "I just hope that as the days, months, and years pass, that you'll be able to honestly say the same."

I do, and I have, and I fear for a broken heart.

H.

----- Original Message -----

From: [Joel Lidstrom](#)

To: [Hilari Anderson](#)

Sent: Saturday, December 16, 2006 7:31 PM

If I might marvel, Hilari, I will. I do. Less than two weeks ago we had never spoken. Cool words were exchanged, then careful interest, and some meaningful words, all within the span of a day. Two emails later, we were talking about our worlds being changed by the other, and fears of hope despite its obvious presence. Then, you gave me a story that pierced my heart, and by a remarkable bit of faith you offered to trust me. This after thirty-five years of silence, and only three days of exchanged words.

Before a week had passed, you acknowledged the inevitability of our meeting. But at just more than a week's anniversary, I asked you to dance, and it pierced your heart, with all its elation and despair. This was worrisome to me, and what I had understood by analysis I now felt in my heart: that despite the joy of discovering me, you acutely saw the possibility, if not the likelihood, that what we'd found would not be sufficient to span the gulf of an utter lifetime of absence. I didn't know how to deal with this, although I spent hours writing a heartfelt response that I will one day share with you. But my picture intervened--I could not send it simultaneous to it--and before I saw fit to send it, that very minute I received word of your comfort: "...this joyous puzzle."

Several days of banter ensue, and then we both know this is what we want. We want to share whatever of our lives that we have that the other can have. It's for our discovery, and to share. "I don't want to lose this. It's come to mean a lot to me, and I am afraid to lose it."

And now, the very next day, you confidently invite yourself to visit me, to visit us. You are remarkable. You said it: You're the best.

Yes! Come visit. Tell me what the possible range of dates might be, and the duration. Liz thought that we might prefer to meet and spend a day or two alone together, without the distraction of the rest of my family, followed by a visit with the whole family (assuming that we'd not already have grown intolerant of the other's logic). That would be nice, but I'm open to whatever seems good, and I don't know how long you'll have. You could fly into Minneapolis, we could do whatever we want, and talk. Talk. Find out who we are together, not just who we are in a one-sided conversation. Then we could drive here for whatever amount of time, and then I'd drive you back for your return flight. Or you could just fly into La Crosse.

God, it's a daunting prospect. Incredibly daunting. How much easier is it for fathers to meet daughters--and daughters to meet fathers--in the delivery room? But like the birth of my other children, I wouldn't miss it for the world. Give me some dates, and let's see what we can arrange.

Gotta go fix supper. Cheese will no doubt be a plentiful ingredient.

Your Joel.

----- Original Message -----

From: [Joel Lidstrom](#)

To: [Hilari Anderson](#)

Sent: Sunday, December 17, 2006 7:49 AM

5:00 a.m. No time for me to be awake, but it's become the norm. I usually persist in my bed, trading an hour or more of wakefulness for the chance for half that in shallow slumber, but not this morning. I will now share the "Unsent E-mail" with you. To wait any longer would render it moot, for with each passing discussion, we touch on the edges of its content. Shortly we'll have embraced the heart of it.

I read your email in the most cursory way last night. Zoë was working at the computer, and I preferred to retire with Liz. But I lay awake a bit ago, thinking of this word "love". It is such a powerful word, but so often has such little meaning. It is only by context that we can understand it.

Of course, passionately romantic love is so acutely felt that there is no mistaking it...despite it often ending as one big mistake. What it is, where it leads, what it becomes, why it lives or dies is all mighty mysterious.

A parent's love is so different. By definition, romantic love is exclusive. But not so with the love of our children. I had three. Now I have four. With each increment there is an adjustment, to be sure, but it is accepted easily and generously by good parents. And it grows from there, but it is always bittersweet, and always (except in cases like ours) ends in the severing of nearly two decades of togetherness. Parents must live with the realization that their children are merely kept for a short, arduous but beautiful time, and then must be set free.

A child's love. This is more difficult. It takes its shape inadvertently throughout those early years, and grows commensurate with the maturation of the child's personality. You and I missed this together, but you felt it. You made it a little bit real, as evidenced by your game. The mechanism was there; I was not. And now begins a period of unknowns. We can't yet know what shape we will become together. We will write the next chapters, and I believe we will write them well.

But this is not the end of the story, for now I will offer a father's perspective. It is only as a parent that we can understand the love our parents had for us, and it is only in having children that we begin to understand our love for our parents. A child's love is necessarily selfish. The child is the recipient of all. Every resource the parent has is aimed at fulfilling the child's need. The child knows this implicitly, and cannot, except in the most unusual circumstances, shed this inherent "selfishness" toward the parent, even as an adult. But have a child, and immediately things are turned on their head, and with the years of work, and love, and the ultimate adulthood of children, we reflect on who we are, and finally with some clarity see our position between children and parents...and we see that we are they.

This is terribly agonizing to be thinking about these things to articulate them decently. Why? Because I have a 93-year-old father who sits in a chair all day, and an 88-year-old mother who, without anyone so much as asking, has lost her ability to communicate with those she loves the most. I have a wife who means the world to me who has shared a life of joy and pain with me, and who lost both her parents too soon. And I have three young, beautiful children for whom I do all I can, and who will one day, beginning very soon, depart to start their own lives, leaving us proud but not just a little bereft. And now I have you.

"I don't know my capacity for love, but I think I will find out."

The child needn't wonder about her capacity for love. It is unnecessary for her to know. She only needs to know that she is loved. It is the way that things have always been.

My message of days ago, which I could not send but that has lain patiently knowing that it would yet be of good use, follows:

Your words from school were so sad, Hilari. I knew that what I say touches you, but I better understand that the more meaningful it is, the more it causes pain. I wish it weren't that way, but for now, it is what we seem to have when we speak of inner things.

My pain is not like yours; it is not that I lost thirty-five years. It is that you have come so palpably near, and yet a gulf remains that you--and to a lesser extent I--fear might not be spanned. I suppose that gulf is those same years, having passed differently for me, robbing me of an ability to easily approach you.

It is odd. Most father/child relationships begin with such obligatory closeness. Ultimately, after the bond has been fully formed, the child leaves, and the bond is loosened. Ideally it remains easy, and with a free exchange of love and acceptance. For us the bond comes very late, and removed by half a continent. It happens severely, almost passionately. It is never easy, and the exchange is illuminating but tormenting. And the loosening? Normally this is when the child approaches adulthood. But you and I meet when you're long since an adult. Everything is upside down.

Can we adapt? Let's begin to adapt, of our own volition. Let's assume some things. Let's talk more of common things more, and our anxieties less. We won't repress our anxieties--when they appear we will talk about them--but let's base our conversation on an implicit thing. Let's pretend. Or let's assume. Or let's make a statement of faith. "To think that I should like you, or more than that?" Yes, Hilari, more than that. Let's assume what fathers and daughters must: that we love.

It is unspeakable, but it is what troubles us so. We meet, and so unexpectedly we discover that we knew each other all along because of who we are, in and of ourselves. But how can we love? Love is predicated on all those things that we never shared. And then, when we see how remarkably we fit the other's need, it seems that a great tragedy must occur: love that would have been easy, and deep, and illuminating, and easily sustained, can never be. The mechanism is gone. Everything is right for it to occur, except for the passage of thirty-five years.

But we are stronger than the passage of time, if only we decide to be. Can we throw aside the pain of unknowing, and accept the joy of discovering love? Parents love their children from day they are born. They need no prior history. You were born to me with these words:

"I have only corresponded with you for a few short days, and yet my world has changed. A door has been opened that cannot be shut, but it is not open wide, and before I push from the inside, I need to know whether there is a commitment to my presence in your life."

A father loves his daughter when she is born. And the daughter knows only to accept him.

Let's quit fearing for what we are. That only confuses us. Instead, let's talk of pedestrian things. Of school. Of times in our lives. Let's find some common ground. Let's not dwell on the loss of thirty-five years, but enjoy our gain. Let's keep it simple if we can. The pain of unknowing can be let go. Fathers and daughters find comfort in their love. I know it's there for us. Let's just patiently let it unfold.

Good night, Hilari.

And now a good morning.

----- Original Message -----

From: [Hilari Anderson](#)

To: [Joel Lidstrom](#)

Sent: Sunday, December 17, 2006 8:51 AM

Good morning, Joel. My morning experience was similar to yours, I think. I woke at 3:30, unable to get back to sleep. At 5, I figured I would get up and start looking up flight information. I, too, am a believer in staying in bed. Even if I don't sleep, I figure I am receiving some benefit by resting, as restless as I am. Ninety minutes of restful restlessness was all I could take. I only wish I could make some coffee now.

I don't know that I will ever have children, yet I am painfully aware that with each passing day, the possibility becomes less. I have never wanted them, owing, I suppose, to a feeling that I was a parent my whole life to a mother who loved me fiercely but whose needs were paramount to mine. I grew up and didn't want to take care of anybody. And yet, I became a teacher, which is, by definition (I hope), a nurturing job. I give of myself freely and love them well. Like children, they are with me a short time and then leave.

At Renton, I had an advisory for four years -- a group of students with whom I spent 30 minutes of every day. The advisory, by its nature, was not academic. Our school was so troubled that we sought ways for kids to connect with adults that weren't about grading scales and test dates. With each passing day, we became closer. I watched them grow from children to adults. The day they left me, I felt such a hollowness, knowing that this important time with them was over. I had an influential writing teacher in college who told me once that students entered his life, he grew to love them, and when they left, he was more than devastated. We, the students, he said, could never know the depth of his loss. I thought about those words every day during that final month with my advisory. They were excited for graduation, talking of their "final summer" plans, looking toward college or work or whatever. I cried. They became used to it, loving me for it but feeling just a little sorry for me at the same time. It is with great emotion that I think about these people now. We send emails two or three times a year, or at least, some of us do. If I saw them on the street, I could freely express my love to them, and they would accept and expect it, but smile, in their little ways, because that time in their lives was a passing flicker, but for me, it was my life's decision.

So, I don't know what it is to be a parent, but I do know what it is to love like one, if only a little. This is what you write:

"The child needn't wonder about her capacity for love. It is unnecessary for her to know. She only needs to know that she is loved. It is the way that things have always been."

You are right, of course, except that I am not a child anymore, and this is not how things have always been for me. I say this to you with some pain, yes, but none that you need protect me from nor prevent me from experiencing. I will accept what you offer to me, but not in the way of the child who has become complacent after years of receiving, with a pure and deserved selfishness, the love of a parent. I will accept it with the appreciation of someone who has wanted to be loved by a parent, no, by a father, who has loved as a sort-of parent, and who must now experience a thawing, a release of pride, of fear, of worry.

Anything that I do in this I do with an open heart and a clear eye. I don't fear an insurmountable chasm as much as you may assume I do. If I did, I wouldn't be talking to you this way. I wouldn't be willing to sit here weeping as I do.

When I told you I feared for a broken heart, it's because I fear that I could love you, that perhaps I already do, and that seems so *illogical* after two short weeks. Who am I to ask for love from you? You were right when you said initially that our only bond is that of DNA, and what is that worth? Seemingly nothing, and yet perhaps everything. I am not looking to reclaim what has passed, but I do acknowledge it with a heavy heart and much regret. When I express a fear about this, it's because I want your heart to be open and freely given, not offered out of a sense of duty to a stranger who lives half a continent away. I never wanted that from you, which is why I never sought you out. I don't want to be anybody's responsibility.

And yet, I don't sense that at all. And yet, I ask. I may ask for a while. Don't become impatient, please. I am not one to easily trust. And yet, I've thrown caution to the wind.

And yet, I'm still coming in February.

Hilari

----- Original Message -----

From: Joel Lidstrom

To: Hilari Anderson

Sent: Sunday, December 24, 2006 5:49 PM

It is an odd thing, this you and me thing. Liz read what I wrote earlier, and thought that I omitted a crucial observation: that until you are parent, you cannot possibly understand how much your parents love you.

This is something I couldn't tell you, because it is so sad, with respect to you and me. I even nearly changed my line to read "you cannot possibly understand how much parents love their children", because it stares me so hard in the face.

I've always been a latecomer, and often am sorry for it. But as I look at what might have been, I cannot come up with a different story than what has already been told. And given the story as I understand it to this point, I can't come up with a better plot twist than for us to discover each other how and when we did.

It is too soon for the denouement--there still is much plot development waiting to unfold--but I am hoping and expecting that it will make sense of us, and give readers of our lives no small sense of delight; for it is not just any author that can successfully turn such pain and emptiness into something so remarkably rich and rewarding. I continue to bet that you and I can, and will.

"Denouement". Now *that* is another story.

Good night my shine-faced, curl-haired, long-lost daughter.

Your Joel

----- Original Message -----

From: Hilari Anderson

To: Joel Lidstrom

Sent: Sunday, December 24, 2006 7:27 PM

Subject: Stories

I have a moment of privacy before I begin making dinner -- sautéed shrimp in a garlic sherry sauce. It sounds impressive but takes about five minutes to prepare. The trade off is the \$100 I spent on the food. Oh well.

I wanted to more properly respond to this: "I've always been a latecomer, and often am sorry for it. But as I look at what might have been, I cannot come up with a different story than what has already been told. And given the story as I understand it to this point, I can't come up with a better plot twist than for us to discover each other how and when we did."

It's true that at another time in my life, I may have responded differently, perhaps out of defensiveness or anger. For whatever reason, at this age, this stage, I was ready for you. But you need to know that, even though I see the logic and/or magic in all of this as it is now, I wish I had you earlier. All of you.

"But I am hoping and expecting that it will make sense of us, and give readers of our lives no small sense of delight; for it is not just any author that can successfully turn such pain and emptiness into something so remarkably rich and rewarding. I continue to bet that you and I can, and will."

Already we have, and we will.

With love,

H.

And one final exchange

Joel, my father,

I left you to go to bed not 45 minutes ago. I've spent this time writing cards on pretty pink paper. These cards accompany small gifts, tokens of my affection for members of my new family. These gifts, these cards, were purchased days before my flight, carefully packed in suitcases and transported to Minnesota, where they will be left for others to appreciate. There is no such card, no token, for you. Instead, I write this letter, which I will hand to you as I say goodbye and board a plane that will, eventually, transport me half a continent away from you and this amazing week we have shared.

We mentioned tonight that we have not wept much this past seven days. I have reflected on this several times over the last few days. I determined that there was little room for weeping when I felt such tremendous joy. But do not be fooled. I weep now. I weep.

Saying goodbye to you, or contemplating it, is devastating. I have just found you, have recently held you, and now I must let you go. I will miss you in a way I can't articulate in this letter, but I don't need to. You know. You know already.

I want to write so many things, to tell you that I love you, to tell you that I fully accept and embrace you as my father, my friend. I want to tell you that the past week has held more meaning in my life than any memory I can pull from my consciousness. I want to say all of these things in such a way as to convey their import, to show you how deeply I feel, to prove my devotion to you as daughter and friend. But I can't. I don't know how. I can only construct some sentences, use some language, and hope my meaning is clear.

It is late. Two a.m. I should sleep now so I may wake and see you in the morning. I dread this morning, the morning of our goodbye. I will count the minutes until our next hello.

Is it time? Is it now? When? Because my heart needs and loves you.

Hilari

Hilari, my daughter,

I read your letter in the parking lot, weeping gently at first, but sobbing uncontrollably before I was half way. I composed myself, and resolved to find a place where I could see your plane, fully read your letter, and watch you leave. I knew you were right--and practical--admonishing me not to remain, but I also knew that I would stay, implacable except that I hear the jet's roar, and see it rise and disappear.

I watched from the road at the end of the runway, window open to hear the plane engines' idle, while snow fell and melted silently on my arm. I re-read your letter, vacillating between joy having received a written expression of your love, and bereavement at having relinquished your voice, your hands, your arms, your breath.

At one point the snow grew in intensity so that I could no longer see the plane, and periodically I would drive to find a better vantage point, and a place where I could again read your letter to better assimilate it, and make it part of me. You are right in knowing that, though all what you said was beautiful and what I longed to hear, it was not necessary: I knew it all before you wrote it. I knew it all before you even thought it, so palpable is our love for each other.

When the plane finally taxied toward the runway, I returned to my original vantage point. Visibility had returned. Your plane, though, hesitated on the tarmac before turning to face its destination. Suddenly, after such agonizing deliberation, the engines revved, the plane paused momentarily, leapt forward, rose, and was gone.

I slowly drove to the grocery store, quiet and gently fatigued, and feeling a little as if I'd been swimming all day. So tired was I that on the drive home the only thing that kept me from the ditch was an occasional perusal of your letter. More than once I had awakened from a brief dream, and realized that my best chance of survival was to distract my mind from the drive.

Where do we go from here? I don't know, Hilari, but I am bursting with joy and love and thankfulness. I have finally found you, my beautiful daughter, and no words I can assemble can convey how you have moved me except that I simply say

I love you.

Joel