

The Toy Soldier

By Russell Perry

It's difficult to say exactly when I started to remember my other family. However, I do recall that I was four years old when I told my mother about them for the first time.

As adults, we remember snippets of our life as small children, significant events which come to the surface from time to time over the years. One of these events which remains vividly in my memory, is the day I told my mother that I missed my "other mother" and wanted to see her.

It was my fourth birthday and one of the gifts I received was a toy soldier, one that you could wind with a key and it would march in a straight line until it had to be rewound.

I told her that I used to have a similar toy, one that my other mummy had given to me for Christmas. Her reaction was to stare at me for a long while before talking, and when she eventually spoke it was with obvious concern. She stooped down and held me by the shoulders, looking directly into my eyes. "What do you mean Aaron, what other mummy? Have you been talking to strangers? Has someone told you that they are your mother?"

I told her I had memories of another mother and father, and that there was an older sister and a baby brother, and we lived in another house in another town.

She seemed even more confused and upset at my explanation. She told me later, it was because she was always afraid of someone trying to take her children, that there were many reported cases of children being kidnapped and she feared that someone may have been trying to entice me to go with them.

However, I insisted that the mother from my memories wasn't a stranger, and that I used to live with her, and that I wanted to see her again. I remember pleading with her, "No Mummy, I really do have another mummy. She lives in Bretton, where I used to live with her and my other Daddy. I haven't seen them for a long time, they will wonder where I am. Can we go to see them please?"

She continued looking at me with concern and tried to talk me out of the notion that I had another mother. She told me lovingly that I must have been dreaming and that she was the only Mother I had, and would ever have. However, I insisted that I really did have another family in Bretton, which made her a little angry, so I had dropped the subject and went away to sulk.

My memories of this other family were quite strong. Their name had been Grice and my name had been Toby. I could see their faces in my mind's eye. I also recalled that my sister walked with a limp, the result of a horse-riding accident, and I remembered that my father fixed cars for a living. We had lived in a house which backed on to open land where my sister rode her pony, and my little brother had only just been born when I last saw them.

These facts I imparted to my parents over the ensuing weeks and months, as I implored them to take me back to Bretton, often bringing my mother to tears. Each time I mentioned my other family I was told that I had been dreaming and to forget about them. I became increasingly confused and prone to bouts of melancholy when I thought about them. However, the memories remained strong, and I didn't give up on them for long. I was soon pestering my parents again about taking me to Bretton to see them, but always with the same result. I would pester until they became angry and then I would drop it for a few days, but the memories wouldn't go away and I would again entreat my parents to take me to see my other family.

The small town of Bretton was only about an hour's drive from our farm at Redhills. It must have been quite troubling for my parents at the time. They may have started to believe there was something in my recollections, or perhaps they had grown weary of my persistence. Whatever the reason, they eventually agreed to take me over there, "To put this business to rest, once and for all," as my father said quite sternly.

I have a clear recollection of the day we drove over to Bretton. As we drove into the town, my mother let out a gasp as she pointed to a service station on the main road. Emblazoned on a billboard on top of the roof were the words, "Grice's Auto Repairs". I remember telling them excitedly that the service station was where my father worked.

As we approached the town centre, I suddenly became quite animated and pointed to a side street insisting that my father make a turn. "Daddy, Daddy, down there. This is our street."

He had to break hard to take the turn, then drove slowly along the street until I saw the house and again became very excited. "This is it Daddy. This is my house. The one with the big tree."

He pulled over in front of the house with the tree and parked the car. I remember that everyone got out of the car slowly, expectantly, except for me. I threw the door open and ran up the path to the front door, with my mother shouting from behind me. "Aaron. Come back here, don't run. Aaron!"

But I wasn't listening, all I wanted to do was see my other Mummy. I raced up to the door and tried to open it, but it was shut. I bashed on it and shouted for my mother to let me in.

She opened the door and I hugged her legs, then confused I turned to my current mother, wanting to say "See?". I looked from one to the other, bewildered. I loved them both as mothers, and I remember having difficulty in separating my feelings for them.

My current mother came to the rescue as my other mother looked at us in confusion.

"I'm sorry, this is Aaron, our son. For some reason, he seems to think that he used to live here and that you used to be his mother. Are you Mrs. Grice?"

She still looked bewildered and answered hesitantly. "Yes, I ... I am, but I don't understand."

In those first awkward moments as Mrs. Grice tried to make sense of what my mother was saying, a young girl came to her side, a girl I recognised immediately as Sally, my sister. I reach out and took her by the hand pulling her from the doorway and coaxing her toward the side of the house. Imploring her enthusiastically to come with me. "Come on Sal, let's go and see Pebbles. Pleeese." I spoke to her as if I had seen her only yesterday and fully expected her to know who I was.

Pebbles was her horse, which, my memory told me, lived in the paddock at the back of the house. Sally looked at her mother with uncertainty, and her mother nodded for her to go with me and then turned back to my parents.

As Sally followed me around the house, exhibiting a slight limp as she walked, my parents were left to explain the strange events we had brought to the Grice's door step.

I remember telling Sally that I was her brother and didn't quite understand her confusion and why she didn't know me. She was friendly toward me, but I sensed her uncertainty. We patted Pebbles and talked about my new family, until she suggested we go inside and talk to the adults.

As we entered the kitchen from the back door, I recognised the layout of the house. I let go of Sally's hand and ran down the hall to the room that used to be mine. It hadn't change a bit, everything was as I remembered, I ran over to the closet and pulled out a large toy box and opened it. I scrambled through the toys and came out with my toy soldier, and by the time they caught up with me and entered the room, I was sitting on the floor watching the soldier march toward the wall, having wound it to the maximum. I turned to my current mother as she entered. "See Mummy, I told you, I do have another one."

To my great delight both Mummy's came and hugged me. While I had been with Sally outside, they had been discussing my situation and strange facts were to emerge.

As it turned out, the Grices had lost their son Toby about five years before to a car accident. They still grieved his loss and had kept his room exactly the way it had been on that fateful day. No one was really certain, but given that I, or any of my family for that matter, had not previously known of the Grice family, or spent any significant time in Bretton, the obscure conclusion settled on by the mothers, was that I had lived a previous life for a short time as Toby Grice, and upon death my soul had returned as Aaron Patterson. However unlikely it seemed, it could be the only explanation for my knowledge of Toby's life. The immediate recognition of my mother and sister and the obvious connection I felt for them. Also, my familiarity with Sally's injury and her subsequent limp, along with the memory of the toy soldier and where Toby kept it. These were all compelling pointers to this reincarnation. So, the theory became the prevailing explanation for these extraordinary events which connected the families.

It was agreed that we would not make our story public knowledge and, although a few privileged others would be told the story over the years, we kept it mainly to ourselves.

It was agreed that the Grices would keep the soldier and the rest of the toys there, and I could play with them when I came to visit, but it was a strange fact that, after all my fuss and urgency to return to my previous family, and after having gone back a few times, the need to visit grew less important as time moved on. My parents took me back when I asked as a child, or when the Grices contacted us, but the old memories faded and my new ones took over, and now I'm in my twenties and I think of the Grice family as one might think of as, cousins maybe. I have my new family now.

The End

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