

“Listening to each other’s stories is better anthropological practice than reading text books on kinship”

Opening Prayer

Oh God, who is jealous enough to punish the children for the sins of their great-grandfathers,
and loving enough to show mercy to a thousand generations beyond,
be kind to us today as we gather.
We cannot enter our mothers’ wombs again,
yet you promise us rebirth
into the holy and mysterious family that is each other, and you.

Bryson

Welcome. And congratulations. I am delighted that you could make it. Getting here wasn't easy, I know. In fact, I suspect it was a little tougher than you realize. To begin with, for you to be here now trillions of drifting atoms had somehow to assemble in an intricate and intriguingly obliging manner to create you. It's an arrangement so specialized and particular that it has never been tried before and will only exist this once. Being you is not a gratifying experience at the atomic level. For all their devoted attention, your atoms don't actually care about you indeed, don't even know that you are there. It is a slightly arresting notion that if you were to pick yourself apart with tweezers, one atom at a time, you would produce a mound of fine atomic dust, none of which had ever been alive but all of which had once been you. The bad news is that atoms are fickle and their time of devotion is fleeting-*fleeting* indeed. Even a long human life adds up to only about 650,000 hours. And when that modest milestone flashes past, for reasons unknown your atoms will shut you down, silently disassemble, and go off to be other things. And that's it for you.

However, you have been extremely - make that miraculously - fortunate in your personal ancestry. Consider the fact that for 3.8 billion years, a period of time older than the Earth's mountains and rivers and oceans, every one of your forebears on both sides has been attractive enough to find a mate, healthy enough to reproduce, and sufficiently blessed by fate and circumstances to live long enough to do so. Not one of your pertinent ancestors was squashed, devoured, drowned, starved, stranded, stuck fast, untimely wounded, or otherwise deflected from its life's quest of delivering a tiny charge of genetic material to the right partner at the right moment in order to perpetuate the only possible sequence of hereditary combinations that could result-eventually, astoundingly, and all too briefly - in you.

A Moment to Reflect

Prayer

God, my genes and atoms may have been made selfish and indifferent,
But I am more than this.
When my time is done, they will dissolve away, without care,
But we are more than this.
Invisible and weightless,
Your mystery is inside of me. Our genes may be selfish; may our spirits be generous.

A Short History of My Patriarchs: Hard Work, Divine Sadness and The Spark

Tin-watch Trevor | Alexander: The Golden Voice | Ronald the Patriot | Frank the Tiger | Hidden Iris

It may be wrong of me, and certainly an over-simplification, but in families one tends to deal in opaque perceptions. The glasses have always been rather dark for us. And the stories from my dad's side have had a darkness to them too. This is the protestant work ethic, and the dour, never-quite appreciated men have passed their feelings on.

[Go through each one]

These are all men who have worked very hard. They are men of unquestionable commitment, men who have gone beyond the call of duty in their work, and received little in reward in this world for it.

Ffantastic Ffrank | Sidney's Games | Reg the Activist

The perceptions on my mother's side were always different. It was lighter. By the sea. With some class, and some fun, mostly. Ffrank was Dulwich boy, a south London wide boy from Albyn Park. He ducked and dived, and ended up a working class hero. He developed Jaywick – where everyone could have the holiday home of their dreams. There's still the stiff church side – no pubs allowed. He built KCK – King Cole's Kitchen – a sprawling

Essex house where children and grandchildren played. Reg took over the business. He didn't like church much, and was more into CND – he had a huge logo painted on the roof of the house. But when he became ill none of his activist friends came to visit. Only people from the church. He turned at the last, perhaps.

He'd met Dorothy in the street – they'd played together in the streets of Dulwich. She was the daughter of Sidney, who worked for Parker Brothers games. Myth has it that he brought Monopoly over to the UK. Whatever the truth, there was a lightness to their life and faith.

Don | Sandra

So this is dad: a distillation of all these men. A hard worker. Serious to the core about faith and duty. A sharp blade of disappointment running through. He won't ever get the full credit for what he's done. Never be a bishop. Never be published and acclaimed for his ideas. Perhaps he is thawing: the Cross of St. Augustine. Retirement not being so bad.

And mum: a liberal activist, throwing people off motorbikes, campaigning for Greenpeace since I can remember, the first environmentalist I knew. And a filthy sense of humour.

Me

So here I am... a blended whiskey of all these people. You can probably see it all: the need to work hard, the need for appreciation... but hopefully tempered by some activism too.

I don't think about it so much for me, but for what I am going to pass on. What will Elias receive from these men? What can I try to withhold? Should I? How will the Bateson mix react with all of this?

Confession | Waiting to be reborn

Romans 8:22,3: "We know that the whole of creation, right from the beginning has been groaning as if in labour, just as we who resonate with the Spirit groan inwardly too as we wait for our rebirth in God."

Eucharist

We break bread to remember our genetic families; the sacrifices and commitments they have made that allowed us to be here.

We drink wine in celebration of the family you have grafted us into, thankful for your sacrifices and commitments that allow us to be here.

Amen.