

D is for Disentangle

Disentangle (v): to free from entanglement; untangle.

My mother, a home economics teacher, knew how to make things stick - and not just cake batter, but many things.

Take time, for example. Temporally challenged, my timelines always seem to be orbiting about. *Time flies?* Well yes, for me it *actually* does. Like the fruit of the same name, dates hang and oscillate in my mind as well, shifting imperceptibly like the hands of time: tick-tock, tick-tock.

Case in point: I *think* I was nine (but I might have been twelve) when I finally grasped that my mother was born in February. It would take many more years and some serious tending on my mother's part for me to confidently recall her birthday. For years, I was never quite sure: was it February 21st or February 22nd?

I moved away from home shortly after graduating from high school – the Class of '89. I was seventeen. Early adopters, my roommate and I had a colossal cordless phone with call display. All brawn and no brains, it featured phone numbers - nothing else. Google or Facebook hadn't been conceived yet. Birthday notifications? I wish.

My father's daughter, I gambled and called my mom on February 21st that year.

"Happy birthdayyyy," I shrilled.

"Sheryl," my mom chuckled, perhaps masking a tinge of disappointment, "my birthday was yesterday."

February 20th? The 20th wasn't even on my list. Crushed and embarrassed, I made a note to remember it. Literally. My luck, the notebook I used to record her birthday didn't survive the next move (I moved a lot in university). It was nowhere in sight the following year.

As tempted as I was to guess her birthday again, I didn't.

A careless move is one thing, a stupid move is quite another.

Tail between my legs, I called my mom early the following February and sheepishly admitted that I couldn't remember whether her birthday was the 20th, 21st or 22nd.

At first she giggled. Then, with her teacher's cap firmly placed on her head, she deftly asked me what eight (my birthday) and twelve (my sister's birthday) equaled. Twenty, I said slowly...slowly piecing it together...February 20th (enter eureka moment here)! When she realized I got it, I could hear her beaming on the other end of the phone. I was all-smiles too; her trick had clicked. To this day, I have never forgotten her birthday.

Not everything in life always adds up so easily though: Alzheimer's, dementia, frontotemporal damage - what's the difference? More importantly, why did it have to happen to her? To be honest, I wish I could subtract those years. But I can't.

What I can do, however, is make use of this time to help disentangle things and make them stick: things that matter, things that count. Things like words--you know, *things*.