



family

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My family is unique in that my parents choose to express themselves to a larger audience. Glimpsed from the outside, big personalities appear to coexist amicably. Within our home, however, there is conflict and chaos that only we see, a pattern of stress that continues and intersects as we all contribute.

The most easily noted family member is my father. Confidently eccentric, he fills up all of the empty space in a room. Whether he's laughing, yelling, or playing music, there is always noise to be heard around him. You would never guess by his flamboyant persona that he spends all day sitting behind a computer screen making music. His projects are complex and his creations can become even more experimental than his outfits. Sometimes the amount of software running is too much and a glitch erases weeks of work. In these situations my father demonstrates extreme patience and rebuilds.

My younger sister seems to aspire to take up just as much space as my father. Her emotions are a tornado that all of us are swept up in. Dance allows Agnes some focus and structure as well as a chance for her to be in the spotlight, but she doesn't need a stage for that. Agnes' presence has the same effect on her peers as a pinata breaking at a birthday. Her personality is magnetic, and being friends with her guarantees that she will become your favourite person. She naturally leads any group, taking them through the Candyland that springs up around her.

In our group, I am seen as the opposite of that. My family associates me with all the stereotypical traits of a teenager: moody, reclusive and antisocial. They talk about how I'm always holed up in my dark cave of a bedroom and they reminisce about a time when I was younger and around them more. A time when my mother would sit me down every morning and help me braid my hair. I see myself in some ways as a reflection of my mother. We deal with our emotions in a very similar way and seeing that allows me to reflect upon myself.

My mother, Elizabeth, is easygoing and kind. She is the one who taught Agnes her sensitivity. My mother carries the weight of providing for all of us. We rely on her self expression, so we rely on her sensitivity. She is emotional in a different way from Agnes. My mother tries to shield us all from seeing that side of her. Her stress builds in layers of walls between her and us until she has no choice but to open up. These moments are rare but the tension that she carries is visible; she's the stability in our household, so it rests on us all.

At times it seems like our family has too many contradicting ideas and individual problems to function properly as a unit. Instead we feed into each other's issues, creating a cycle of turbulence. We are jarringly different and almost ill-fitting. Our clashing personalities push against each other, changing shape like waves against cliffs. But we are able to coexist and survive by working together. Each of us is learning each other's strengths and weaknesses, figuring out ways to make up for past distance. Somehow, in this pandemic we have found a way to grow more than ever. We are unlearning bad habits, changing old patterns and trying to rewire our instinctual treatment of one another. Slowly, the explosions are less and less, and we deal with these occasional bumps through our changed perspectives.