

Human Echoing

Why this tool exists — in one story.

My sister Tammy was a lot of things. She learned to play the saxophone quite well. She was funny and she was always kind. But the greatest thing she ever did was just listen.

I used to go to her place in my teens, and whenever I was upset, she would just hear me. Whatever it was, she was a place to speak and not be judged.

The other thing that she would do almost every time is say, ‘I’ll make cookies.’ Part of me was like, noooooo... my sister was a lousy baker. She had all my grandmother’s recipes. She had all my mother’s recipes. They were both wonderful bakers. But my sister? Somehow couldn’t bake to save her life. The cookies were either going to come out salty or burnt or undercooked. And somehow, they were the best worst cookies I ever had.

So sure enough I would watch her get the things out to start baking... the flour, the sugar, the vanilla, the chocolate chips. Mostly I know now she was putting in love. So, I would ask for a large glass of milk. We would sit and often eat every one of them. It wasn’t about the cookies. It was her gift of listening. It was the only place I could ever go in my life and truly feel seen and heard.

Tammy is passed now. But her gift of listening is not. I carry it. As a friend, as a partner, as a dad, as a peer in a room with another guy who has lost too much. My goal and daily effort? If someone crosses my path and needs that level of being heard I cue up. What I learned from my Sis. That is Tammy still happening in the world. Her echo. Through me. I do not have to be Tammy. I just have to keep her best quality alive by working on my own ability to listen. That is what gives me peace. That is what makes the loss something I can carry instead of something that flattens me.

Some days I wear a small cookie pendant with a bite taken out of it. It is a private thing, just for me, a reminder on the days I need a little extra prompt to listen instead of talk. Other days I bake myself a dozen cookies and sit and think of my sister. Thank God for Google. I make good cookies.

I miss you, Sis.

That is the whole tool in one story. You find the best quality of someone you have lost. You carry that quality forward by being more of it in your own life. That is how the love finds somewhere to go. That is how the dead stay alive in the world. Not as ghosts, as echoes — their qualities, moving through whoever picks them up.

The tool that follows shows you exactly how. Four small steps. Read it slow.

If you want help walking through this, reach out: hello@themensdateproject.org

THE TOOL — FOUR SMALL STEPS

You read the story. Here is how to run the practice on yourself or with someone else.

1 ASK THE QUESTION.

What was your favourite thing about that person? What was their best quality?

Two questions, handcuffed. Ask the first one. Wait. Then ask the second one slowly. The second one is the one that opens the door.

If the answer is hard to find, try one of these: they were generous, they were authentic, they were a place you could speak and not be judged, they could find a laugh anywhere, they noticed the quiet ones. Or something only you would know. The smaller and stranger, the better. Specific beats poetic. 'He always had a cookie in his pocket' beats 'he had a kind heart' every time.

2 HOLD THE ANSWER.

My sister Tammy was a place I could go and feel seen and heard. That was her echo. That was the thing.

Once you have your answer, you have something portable. Not a memory. A quality. Memories live in the past. Qualities can be carried.

3 CARRY IT FORWARD.

This is the part most people skip. They read the question, they think about the answer, they put the page down. The practice happens AFTER the page. In the next conversation you have. In the next stranger you sit with. In the small thing you do today that you would not have done yesterday.

Be that thing in your life. Today, in some small way. If your person was generous, be generous to someone today. If they were a place to speak and not be judged, be that place for someone today. You are not pretending to be them. You are letting their best quality keep happening in the world. Their echo. Through you. The best of them is still alive. They live in you now.

4 THEN SHARE OPENLY.

As far as I have experienced there is no 'too many times' to share this with others. Get comfortable sharing. Live the echo of someone you have lost.

I cannot tell you how long it will take but I can promise you that eventually doing this process will give you something good out of something that hurts right now.

I have done this with people close to me and with complete strangers. It is a beautiful process of connection and healing. It is not about trying to get something right. As you keep doing this process for yourself, it can be easily repeated for others if the space feels trusted. The practice is to get comfortable sharing the echo of someone you loved. The gift is you yourself then become a space for someone else to grieve in a healthy, repeatable way.

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