

Peggy Wallis

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In the Crack

Definition of crack—a line on the surface of something along which it has split without breaking apart; a narrow space between two surfaces which have broken or been moved apart; a vulnerable point, a flaw...Oxford Living Dictionaries

Were they ever happy? My brother would say no. There was a sense of simmering anger about my mother, like heat lightning, ready to shoot through the atmosphere with its jagged light. My father, on the other hand, had a temperament that was drawn to happiness, and needed smooth calm spaces to survive. He was a man who, out of pure joy, would clasp his hands in a pretend golf swing and bless you with a smile. Although playing golf could smooth the surface of his day, that surface would ripple and break on the jagged edge of my mother's moods. He was drawn to her light, but backed away from her fire, often falling into a deep crack in the surface of his love.

My father always said, "If you don't feed a fire it will eventually go out." I used to agree, and tried not to engage with my mother's anger. Despite my successful avoidance I no longer believe that this is true. For fires are tricky things, and if you ignore the lingering sparks, the coals that continue to glow, hidden but not yet igniting, you are likely to miss your chance to fully extinguish the blaze.

My parents survived a war, and were emotionally vulnerable when they created a new life together. In that life they seemed to live in the narrow space between their two surfaces, not noticing when they had broken or moved apart until the anger erupted. I believe that they lived in that crack, that narrow space that seems smooth until you spot the flaw.

My brother's belief that my parents were never happy became the sad truth of his life, and restricted his ability to find his own happiness. He also lives in the crack, nurturing the belief that he was mistreated and blaming his brokenness on his childhood. He sees only the heat and ignores the warmth of those early fires, created by love. For again, fires are tricky things and can bring great beauty as well as destruction.

I prefer to warm myself in those formative fires and believe that with each crack, each point on the surface of my life that has split without breaking apart, there is a small miracle.