

# Who was my real mom?

I was taught that Sylvia Lonberg was my mother, so I learned to call her mommy. But Julie, an Afro-American woman who lived with us till I was 13, was more my mother in many ways. My brother and I shared a room with her till I was 10. My mother spent time with us 1 day every other week, and I did not eat with my parents till I was 10.

I guess I looked more like my white mother, but I did not learn many of my ways from her. Her German European ways were very limiting for me in this country where children were free to express themselves. From a spiritual point of view, I identified with Julie and preferred her Christian Baptist ways. I loved going to church with her, hearing great gospel music, and intuitively felt that she was a happier person. Both my parents were gone by the time I was 18, and Julie was alive for another 40 years and always was a part of my life. I would call her when she was in her 80s with dementia. She always recognized my voice and was so happy to hear from me.

With the recent evolution in African American culture in the USA I feel more inclined to embrace publicly all that she brought to my life. There is quite a contrast between Julie's American black identity, and my parents German-Swiss immigrant culture. I did not learn German and had no interest in German culture. Julie introduced me to baseball, and I became a serious Brooklyn Dodger fan.

Julie was very well spoken, and had beautiful handwriting, so I was glad to model myself after her. I always felt that she enjoyed children, whereas my parents wanted us to be well behaved, seen but not heard, and did not appreciate much of my behavior.

Of course, due to the way people of color were then treated, I could not really choose to identify with Julie. In addition to all society's constructs, Julie was NOT my biological mother.

Through all the years up to the present time at age 80 there have been many changes in me around my relationship with my mother and Julie. I guess I have been very fortunate to have had both of them, and many qualities of both of them live in me. As Thich Nhat Hanh taught, we are all inter-beings, not the separate self we think we are.

Thich Nat Hanh has been my spiritual teacher since I met him in the 1990's. He just passed away 3 months ago at 95. This inter-being is something I will be learning about for the rest of my life. My parents, although ethnically Jewish, never spoke about being Jewish or their spiritual beliefs. Being part of this Unitarian society has been the best place for me over the past 40+ years, and I am very grateful to it.