“Your father isn’t going to be living with us anymore,” my mother said as she, my father, my brother, Elliott, and I sat around the kitchen table for the last time as a family.

“Why?” I asked, my twelve-year-old brow learning the true meaning of “furrowed”.

“Sometimes people just fall out of love,” she replied.

It was the only time I had ever seen my father cry and it was the moment when my childhood was lost to the annals of time. Chronologically, I had not yet reached adulthood, but that day my brother and I were left to fend for ourselves so our mother could live out some kind of unrequited youth.

My father, fourteen years my mother’s senior, was well into his thirties when I was born, whereas my mother was twenty-four. He provided her with a sense of security and she was his beautiful, young bride. I think they would both claim that they were in love at one point, but I don’t think I ever really experienced that side of their relationship. My father worked long hours away from home and my mother was in nursing school in most of the memories I have before the divorce. Sure, they would have friends over to drink beers or celebrate the holidays. They’d crack jokes and laugh, but I don’t recall them ever being truly affectionate toward one another. They “loved” each other, but didn’t really seem as though they liked each other.

After they split, my father spent ten years in a melancholy stupor, hobbled by the sudden loss of his family and struggling to bounce back financially because he gave everything to his ex-wife. My mother almost immediately started dating again and would spend most of her free time away from the house on a quest for the man who would spend the most money on her.

My brother and I were left to raise each other and when we were old enough, we got an apartment together so we could wash our hands of the whole thing. Neither of our parents checked in on us that much. Our mother would help us with the rent now and again, but in her eyes, we were doing well because we weren’t emotionally dependent on her and she could focus on living “her life”.

My brother and I found refuge in psilocybin, THC, LSD and anything else that evoked the slightest bit of magic and self-transcendence. We huddled around the words of Alan Watts, Aldous Huxley, Baba Ram Dass and Lao Tzu, scrawling chicken-scratch notes in endless notebooks like we’d been handed the meaning of life itself. We wiped our harddrives clean and reinstalled our operating system so many times that the sun became our father and the moon became our mother. We were born anew as the best of friends - true brothers. If the blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb, we were a blood-water cocktail, shaken not stirred.

The psychic weight of suburban, midwestern living weighed heavily on us and this led our minds to wonder if there wasn’t something greener over the proverbial fence. We sold our belongings until we could fit our lives in backpacks, purchased a burgundy Chevy Astro conversion van, ripped out the seats and headed west until we reached the Elysian peaks of Wy'east, or as the sightless colonizers that came before us call it, Mt. Hood. We found freedom in the ancient cedars, compassion in the coastal waves and peace in the ubiquitous mycelial presence that connects it all behind the loamy veil.

My parents are just people now. I am grateful for their biological contribution to my life, but even though they’re still alive, they are like a distant memory. They’re like a holiday card from a distant relative containing a blithe message and a five-dollar bill.

I still grieve the demise of our family unit from time to time. I can’t help but think what it would have been like if they chose to let love persevere and not take themselves so seriously. If they had been able to get out of their own way, we could have had something incredibly beautiful together - a family. It’s at those moments that I shrug, look up at the moon reflecting the sun’s rays and relish in how amazing it is to be alive.