

Found Audio: One male and two female voices singing "Summertime" from *Porgy and Bess*

One, two, three.

Summertime

And the livin' is easy

Fish are jumpin'

And the cotton is high

Oh, your daddy's rich

And your ma is good lookin'

So hush, little baby

Don't you cry... [end preamble]

Dana: [start intro] **Welcome to I Swear on My Mother's Grave. My name is Dana Black, and in 2016, I lost my mom. And now I'm talking to other people who have also lost their moms. And I don't just mean in death, because there are so many ways you can lose a mother. And we're going to get into it. So let's talk about our moms.**

As the great Alexandra Billings likes to say, "Hi humans." Welcome back. I hope you're staying safe. I hope you're staying sane. And I hope you are taking deep breaths when you need them. I also hope that you're able to get out into nature if you can. That's really been helping me in the last year. I live in a big city, and I had no idea there were so many forest preserves 20 minutes from my house. And it's been awesome to just get out into the woods and walk around a field, or leap carelessly over a creek. It's been really good for my mind, body, and spirit. So that's my hot tip of the day: nature, go out in it. Two thumbs up.

At the top of this episode, you got to hear the voice of today's guest's mom taken from home videos from over 30 years ago. I met this guest through a mutual friend named Tyler when I was doing a show down in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Tyler and this guest grew up down there, and, well, they're besties. I got to see today's guest perform a solo show at the University of Arkansas, where she was studying performance, and I'll never forget it. It was a solo piece devised and written around a tape—a tape that she had received from her mother many years after her death, a tape that her mom made in the last days and weeks of her life—to be given and listened to by her two children, her two twin children, a boy and a girl.

In this episode, my guest is going to question why she's crying over a woman she didn't even know. We're going to talk about what it's like to find your mom's birth journal years after her death, and go, "Wait, what? She was 140 pounds, and she was pregnant with twins?" We're going to talk about singing, "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" with your mom, and that being one of the final memories you'll ever have of her. We're going to talk about the selfless act of coming in, and helping raise two children that aren't even yours. But we're really going to talk about that tape, that magical, mystical tape that I still can't even believe is real—but it is. It's real. And her mom recorded it in the last days of her life for her two children, who were four. It served as a beacon of love and hope from beyond the grave when they heard it many years later.

This is Halley Mayo. [end intro]

Halley: I cry about everything. I can cry happy tears, sad tears, angry tears. My therapist several years ago was like, "Okay, so you don't experience anger. You suppress anger, and it comes out as sadness. But you're angry." And I was like, "Oh." That's just how I express myself. And when I was younger, I didn't know that it was probably a trauma response. And I was told all the time, "I can't speak to you if you're crying."

Dana: You were told as a child?

Halley: Yeah, because that's just how—I would get in trouble, or I'd have to talk to a teacher, and it would be fine, but I'd cry to the teacher, because it was overwhelming to speak to an authority person. And it would just be about something blah, like, "When is this paper due?" and I'd be crying about it. And I was told by boyfriends, my parents, teachers, "I can't speak to you if you're crying." So I spent a lot of time trying to control it. And now it's just like, "This is just me." I've been to therapy. I just cry. Sorry. (laughs)

Dana: [5:00] Did you see your mom cry, that you can remember?

Halley: I don't know. I have to imagine I did. She talks in the recording at some point about the first time she ever saw sadness in me. And it was after she lost her hair, and I had made up this song for her that was like, "Your hair's going to grow back. You're still beautiful." And I guess I sang this to her, and then just started sobbing. And she said it was the first time she recognized true sadness, not just a child crying about a toy or something. But I don't remember her crying. Honestly, I don't have many memories of her that aren't sparked by pictures or home videos.

Dana: Remind me how old you were again.

Halley: I was four.

Dana: That is young.

Halley: And she was young too. She was 41.

Dana: Oh, that's my age! I don't know what I was whispering that. I guess it took my breath away. I thought if I said the actual—if I admitted that was how old I was—it would be intense. Whew.

Halley: I'm approaching the age she was when she was diagnosed with breast cancer, and I'm starting to get very paranoid. But when I was 27, I got genetic testing for the BRCA genes. And I was negative, which means a little, because we don't know if she had the BRCA genes. But it kind of alleviated some of that fear.

Dana: Well, let's go back to this recording. So you just referenced that. And I did get to see you do a beautiful solo performance at your grad school in Arkansas, where I was doing a show. So tell me a little bit about that. And what inspired, not only that performance, but about that recording itself? Tell us about that.

Halley: I think I was about 16ish, and my stepmom Vicki said, "You know there's a recording of your mom speaking to you and your brother." And these people who were family friends, but

once my mom passed away, they kind of didn't remain in our lives, they have that, because they were going to transcribe it, and put it into something more permanent. It was on a cassette tape or something. And I thought, "Okay, well, I'd like that." (laughs) And so years went by, and I was living in New York, and I was 23, and I was depressed and lost. And I thought, "I would really want that tape." So I reached out to some people who knew these other family friends, who still were friends with these people. And I emailed this guy, and I said, "Hey, I'm 23, and I'd love to listen to these tapes, and could you please send them to my parents' house so that we can get them." And his response to me was, "Considering our mutual connection to your mother, I'd love to give them to you in person." (laughs) And I was like, "Okay. 'Our mutual connection,' to my mother."

Dana: "Who are you?"

Halley: "Cool, cool, cool." So some months went by. I don't think I responded in the moment, because I was just like, "What? We don't have a mutual connection." So anyway, months go by. Eventually I get them. I move back home—my dad had cancer, so I came home to help. And I got them. And that day, I listened to the tape. It was on a CD. I listened to the whole thing. I want to say it's an hour long—I don't know.

Dana: Where were you sitting?

Halley: I was in my apartment in Fayetteville on Garland Street, by the university. And I was on my bed. The CD was in my computer. And I just sat there. And I cried the whole time, as I do. And I had plans that day to go out and get a drink with a friend. And I texted him—and he had lost his dad—and I said, "Hey, listen. I just listened to this, and I'm going to stay in." And he was like, "No, come out." (laughs) And I was like, "Okay." So I went out, and I went about my day, and I actually felt so uplifted—I felt so much more held by her—and I didn't ever feel the need to listen to it again. But I have it.

So fast-forward to graduate school, and I'm in this one-person-show class. And the goal of the class was to write [10:00] a one-person show, but the first couple of weeks were to just work on writing little, tiny pieces of anything. And so we got specific assignments. And the second week was a three-minute piece that was autobiographical. And I was like, "Oh god, what am I going to say? I like to sing and dance?" And then I thought, "Oh, you know what? I'm going to play my mom. I'm going to be her as she decides to do this tape." So I did it, and it was just a three-minute piece. And it ended up being in that show. She says the date, and she can't remember the date, and just why she's doing this tape.

Dana: And remind me why she was doing it.

Halley: She started about a month before she passed away. And my dad had said, "I think if you have anything that you'd like to say, you should say it, and you should record it." And on the tape, I remember her being like, "Well, this is really weird. I'm just talking to this tape player, and I don't know what I want to say." And then eventually she gets to, "But I guess this is really for Halley and Electro. And, ugh, that I want you to know that I was here." And it's really beautiful. And it goes on for a few weeks. And the last recording was I think the week before she passed away. And I just think how strong she had to be to do that.

And thinking about it now—I don't know that I've put this together—but she cries a lot in the tape. And now I'm thinking, "Oh, maybe she also cried about everything." I don't have any memories of her crying, but here she is on this tape. And at one point she said—and I think this was in my show—she had stopped the recording, and she gets back on, and she's composed. And she's like, "I'm going to try not to cry anymore." And then (laughs) she cries again.

Dana: Did she share life lessons? Or was it more just, "I want to just tell you"?

Halley: No. (laughs)

Dana: (laughs) "Come on."

Halley: She didn't give me any advice.

Dana: That's what I thought. I feel like I remember from the show that you made a joke about something about the future or money or just like, "Give me something I could use." (laughs)

Halley: "Can you give me anything other than just, 'You love me'?" (laughs)

Dana: It's like, "Come on."

Halley: Like, "Tell me where the treasure's buried."

Dana: The winning lottery numbers. It's like, "Come on, Mom."

Why is it that it is so magical? It feels like a film. It feels like that doesn't happen in real life, that that can't possibly, and that a movie would be someone giving you life lessons, and telling you all, right?

Halley: Yeah. "And here are the answers."

Dana: The fact that she just said, "I just love you. I'm present. I'm going to speak to you as me in these last moments, and tell you, 'I love you'," that is not a film. That is really beautiful. And yet there's a mythology around. That's why I thought I remembered that story being not a real take, because I mythologize. I was like, "There's no way she got a recording. It's so magical!"

Halley: It is.

Dana: I think I just forgot that part about it. Anyway.

Halley: Well, it would be cool if I had just come up with that all on my own. (laughs)

Dana: Yeah, really grad school, really, "Wow, okay."

Halley: "Wow, she is talented. Get her to Hollywood!"

Dana: "Give her a film." (laughs)

Halley: Alas, no.

Dana: You didn't hear it until much later, so when you were five, six, seven, eight, nine. Why?

Halley: Well, I guess because those people had it.

Dana: And who were they? We got to get to that.

Halley: So they had been friends of my parents. And then shortly after my mom passed away, they moved. They got jobs in I think in New York, Ithaca, New York. So it was far away. But I had people in my life that were friends of my mother's who are still in my life, who maintained relationships, who called and wrote cards. 'Cause how at four years old can you do that? At 35 I still have a hard time. Maybe, to give them the benefit of the doubt, they didn't know that they had the only copy. I don't really know what their logic behind that was.

Now that I'm talking about this, I remember Vicki, [15:00] my stepmom, reaching out to them at some point, and they said that they didn't think that my brother and I were mature enough to listen to them. But I was so—I think a lot, "What if I had heard these when I was 12? What direction would my life maybe have taken?" She talked about tennis. Maybe I would have taken tennis, and been a tennis star? (laughs)

Dana: Did she play tennis?

Halley: Yeah, she did. She did say—which gave me a lot of peace and solace—she said at one point, "I'll never see your legs dance on stage. I'll never hear your voice in a choir." And I was like, "Oh my gosh. That's what I've done."

Dana: Did she have no idea? You were four years old.

Halley: Yeah.

Dana: She had no idea you were going to go sing.

Halley: And so it was cool to know that that's maybe what she wanted for me. I did that little three-minute piece, and then I still didn't know what I was going to write for my full piece. And I just kept coming back to, "What do I really want to explore?" And I thought, "Well, I'd love to explore my mom, and be my mom." And at first, I was just going to be my mom the whole time recording this. And I thought, "Ugh, that's maybe a little too heavy. How do I get some breaks in that watching-a-woman-die-tell-her-story type thing?"

And it was really difficult, and it was hard to get the feedback in class. And I cried the whole time. And my professor was like, "Why? What do you—what does this woman want?" And I said, "This woman wants to know why, after 30 years, she's still crying?" She's still crying about this. And that gave me a lot of clarity.

Dana: And is that the anger? Like, "Why the fuck am I still crying?"

Halley: Yeah. I'm really hard on myself. And when I get like this, I say to myself, "You didn't even know this person. Why don't you just get over it?" My godmom said to me once, who lost her mother—her mother died in childbirth, and I can't imagine the guilt that she must feel.

Dana: Even though it has nothing...

Halley: No, nothing to do with her.

Dana: Of course. But your brain—nothing to do with you.

Halley: I mean, I often think that, "Oh, because my mom wanted kids, and she was 36, and it was the '80s, that's why she got breast cancer." And it's like, "No." But she said to me once, "When you are young, you look to your mom to know who you are, and you see yourself in her eyes. And when that connection is broken, you are searching, searching, searching for who you are."

Dana: You didn't get to be fully formed in their eyes. You only got the hope. They have hope that you'll become something. And then your stepmom had to take on that responsibility.

Halley: Exactly. And she did it with a lot of grace.

Dana: When did they get remarried? Or, when did your dad get remarried?

Halley: They didn't get married until nine years after my mom passed. But this is interesting. My mom and my stepmom, Vicki, were cousins. So my mom really wanted my brother and me to still have her family in our lives. And I think she really was worried, because she knew my dad would need to get remarried or have a woman in his life to help. And so she had this idea that she was going to introduce my dad and Vicki, and encourage them to get together. And growing up, when I would tell people that, they were like, "Ugh, that's disgusting." And I was like, "Actually, it's really beautiful." (laughs) And my dad isn't related to my stepmom. But I think in Arkansas, people would be like, "Ugh, your mom's your cousin?" And I'm like, "Get over it." And there is really something beautiful about grieving families coming together. So we, very shortly after my mom passed away, got in an RV, drove across the country to LA, where Vicki was. And they went on a date. [20:00] And couple months later, she moved to Arkansas. She raised us. And I just can't believe that. I just feel so lucky.

Dana: How did she talk to you about your mom? And how did she want to be called? What did she want to be called? Mom?

Halley: We still call her Vicki. My brother started calling her mom two years ago. (laughs) And I was like, "Is that a manipulative tactic? What are you doing?" And I remember one year, for her birthday—I want to say I was six—I got in the car—she picked me up from school—and I said, "Hi mom!" And we both were like, "No."

Dana: Even at six, you're like, "Eh, sorry." (laughs)

Halley: (laughs) I was like, "No, you're Vicki." And even my nieces and nephews, they call her G-Vicki. So she's just Vicki. But I don't remember her talking about my mom that much. I did find recently a picture of the two of them from Christmas in the '50s, and it's the cutest thing.

Dana: Isn't it weird seeing photos of your mom from a life that you never knew her in. And you in particular have probably many years, 'cause you were so young. But that feeling of, "I'm seeing her in a whole other life, in college."

Halley: She was alive without me. Isn't that crazy?

Dana: That just takes my breath away. And it's so discombobulating when it happens. Or letters: I found a bunch of letters that my mom had written my grandmother from college, while she was meeting my dad, and talking about this dress that she wanted to borrow, and it was this beautiful green dress. And recently I moved my 93-year-old grandma out of her beautiful retirement apartment to a nursing home, and I found that green dress. I was like, "This must be the green dress my mom was referring to in this letter."

Halley: Did you keep it? Do you have it?

Dana: Uh, yeah. I'm a size 10, and it's I think a size 2. But anyway. We'll get it down. We'll get it down. I'll probably give it away, but right now I'm holding on to it.

Halley: Or you can have it made into something else.

Dana: That's right. It could be a blanket or a pillow. It's that lacy knit. Anyway, it's totally the dress. My grandma was like, "Are you sure?" I was like, "That's the dress."

Halley: It has to be.

Dana: "Grandma, don't ruin this for me. I'm going to use it on the podcast. Don't blow this memory."

Halley: I found her pregnancy journal. Questions that I'd always had like, "What was that like for her?"

Dana: What'd she say?

Halley: Oh my gosh. Well, first of all, most of it was a food journal. (laughs)

Dana: (laughs) You're like, again, "Mom, give me something to work with here. Give me something."

Halley: She was 32 weeks pregnant with twins, and she'd write what she ate and her weight. And I was so offended. She was 146 pounds at 32 weeks pregnant with twins. And I was like, "That is so rude." And it was like, "Snack: glass of milk." And I was like, "The '80s sucked. The '80s sucked."

Dana: And the '70s, and the way women were.

Halley: Oh my gosh, no. Give me a snack, a.k.a. a cheeseburger, and then I'll eat two more. Most of the time I see these things, and I don't go back to them. I'm just like, "That was enough for now."

Dana: 'Cause it's too much. It's too much to take in. It can be a salve. And I wonder when you do want to go back and hear your mom's voice, and when that helps, 'cause it can help. But it's overwhelming. And to have it sitting around you all the time—I understand why you would want it out of your space.

Halley: But she did write when each of us walked for the first time, and who liked to crawl more, and what we liked; which was cool, because my friends will talk about whatever, and they're like, "Oh yeah, and then my mom says this was her birthing story." And I'm like, "Oh, I don't know what that is." Why would I ask that at four? And if I did, how would I remember it? (laughs) So it was cool to read. She didn't write a ton about it, but it was neat to read through her—and I imagine what it sounds like.

Dana: Did she really want children?

Halley: Yeah. In fact, she didn't want children, and then she met my dad. She was 21 when they met. My dad was 40. And they fell in love. They were together 17 years before they got pregnant. My dad had had a vasectomy. And one morning I guess my mom woke up and said, "I have to have kids." And he had it reversed. And then I think they had a hard time—this is stuff I've inferred from things I read—I think they had a hard time getting pregnant. And then she did. And they were blessed with two bratty kids. And I think if I ever do decide to have kids, I will adopt. [25:00] I think there's something so beautiful about being raised by someone who's not your mom.

It's hard. Oh god, it's hard. I still tell Vicki every day—she just had cataract surgery, and so I'm having to do all this stuff, and I'll be a little short with her. And she'll be like, "Well, Halley, I'm sorry, it's just," blah blah blah. And I'm like, "Well, where was that when I was growing up?" (laughs) And she'll be like, "I'm sorry that I was hard on you." And I'm like, "Too little, too late." (laughs) But we have a great relationship.

Dana: What do you think is so beautiful about the sacrifice? You said, "There's something so beautiful about being raised by someone who's not your biological."

Halley: Well, in our case, Vicki did not have to. It's not like she and my dad just met and fell in love. I think they did. They did end up falling in love, and she was with him for 25 years.

Dana: But there was a duty there to your mom, or a promise.

Halley: But I think more than anything—I asked her once, and probably ten years ago now, "Why did you stay?" And she said, "Halley, I just saw how badly you guys needed a mom." Probably because my dad was so old. (laughs)

Dana: (laughs) So he needs help.

Halley: That, and also I think she just saw in us two kids that were really broken. So I feel like there's something really selfless about deciding to be a mom when you don't have to be, and wanting to help a child get that love that they're missing. But no, I don't want to be pregnant, because I already weigh 146 pounds. I don't need to add to that. (laughs) I don't want to snack on milk.

Dana: (laughs) Just milk and a glass of water.

Did you ever say, "You're not my mom"?

Halley: I never said that.

Dana: So there's the cliché of, "You're not my mom. You're not my biological mom. You don't know me."

Halley: I never. I never said that. My brother did. I don't know what it is about me, but I think—I mean, I was a brat to Vicki, don't get me wrong—but I've always honored what she's done. And I've always thought of her as my mom, while still honoring my biological mom. I've always really respected her sacrifice, really respected the fact that this was a choice for her. I think that probably there were many times she wished that she hadn't made the choice.

Dana: Why do you think that?

Halley: Perhaps my dad was difficult to be with. My dad and Vicki had very different ideas of what parenting was. My dad believed if you love them enough, that's all. There's no discipline. Electro, my twin, also had a lot of behavioral issues and dyslexia. And so it wasn't just raising kids. It was also dealing with that, and really fighting with the school system here to get him education he deserved and needed. And I think because of that, maybe another reason why I really just toed the line and didn't ever try to make Vicki feel—

Dana: Rock the boat, or make it any harder?

Halley: Yeah.

Dana: How did people talk to you about your mom? I wanted to go back to that question. What were the stories that people told you? How did they speak? Sometimes when you lose a mother and you're young, she becomes a monolith. Or all of us, even at any age, in a way—you can treat her like she was perfect or, "There were no problems here." (laughs) Or you start reminiscing about this person, when they were complicated. But because you didn't know her very much, what did people tell you? What have you learned over the years?

Halley: Most of the things I have heard about my mother are from people who I don't really know, that I meet at family gatherings. I met somebody at my grandfather's memorial service, probably ten years ago now, and people always know exactly who I am. And they'll come up to me, and they'll say—the thing I've heard the most, and it's hard to hear, because I get jealous—but I hear that she lit up every room.

[30:00] I also asked my godmom once, because my godmom and my dad smoked a lot of pot. And I asked her if my mom smoked pot, and she said, "Very rarely. She did everything in moderation." And I was like, "No wonder she was so skinny." (laughs)

People don't talk to me about her a lot because I cry, and it's uncomfortable for people. But I remember when I was in my twenties, I was visiting my grandparents, and my grandmother brought to me a stack of paper.

Dana: Your mom's mom?

Halley: Yes, sorry. And it was letters that my mom had written to her parents. And one was about how she couldn't get on this flight, and so she threw a fit, and then she got on the flight. (laughs) And I just thought—I remember thinking, kind of going back to her crying on the tapes, "Maybe she has the same mental issues that I have had." This inability to control emotions.

Dana: And you said people told you not to cry, or said, "I can't take you seriously unless you stop crying." And you mean teachers, your dad, or your stepmom—not your own mother. You don't remember your own mother saying that to you. Other people in your life: "I can't understand you until you stop crying," or suppress those emotions so that you can speak clearly.

Halley: "Compose yourself."

Dana: Were there any memories of your mom that you can remember? I know you were young, but any vivid memories specifically?

Halley: (laughs) I do have one. It's pretty morbid. I remember my dad waking me up, and us sitting by her after she had passed. I have a very vivid memory of that. And I remember knowing what it meant, but also not knowing—it was a weird thing of knowing and not knowing, not understanding—knowing that she had died, not understanding what that meant. I also—this is so bad—I only have bad memories of my mom. I remember the first time I got spanked. (laughs)

Dana: How old were you?

Halley: I must have been three. Her favorite flowers were peonies, and they're mine too. I love them. And she had a big arrangement of them. And I wanted to pick one of the flowers out of this vase. And so I reached up, and I pulled the whole vase down, and it broke. And I just ran outside and hid. And she found me, and she spanked me.

Dana: And do you remember how that felt?

Halley: I remember not liking it, and knowing I was in trouble, knowing I had done the wrong thing. (laughs) So those are my two memories that I know are mine of my mom.

Dana: Was there anything you two did together?

Halley: We sang. We sang together.

Dana: What did you like to sing, do you remember?

Halley: "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." And we also would just sing to each other in conversation. So it would be like, "Mommy, what are doing?" And she'd respond in song.

Dana: You were made for musical theater. I mean, come on.

Halley: (laughs) My life is a musical.

Dana: She's like, "Spanking you!" You're like, "Mommy, what are you doing?"

Halley: "Mommy, ow, that hurts!" "One, two, three spansks for you!" "Dun-dun-dun!"

Dana: "Dun-dun-dun!" "Sorry about the vase!"

Halley: "I just wanted a pretty flower!" I probably wanted to put it in my hair. But I've heard that from other people too, that they witnessed us singing to each other. And she loved to sing too. I have a home video of her singing "Summertime" from *Porgy and Bess*. And my dad would join in too. It was really cute. And they're eating bananas, so they sing, and then they take a bite of banana and sing with their mouth full of banana. And it's really charming and sweet.

Found Audio: One male and two female voices singing "Summertime" from *Porgy and Bess*

Summertime
And the livin' is easy
Fish are jumpin'
And the cotton is high
Oh, your daddy's rich
[35:00] *And your ma is good lookin'*
So hush, little baby
Don't you cry

One of these mornings
You're going to rise up singing
Then you'll spread your wings
And you'll take the sky
But 'til that morning
There's a'nothing can harm you...

Halley: In most of the video she is taking the video. But I just love hearing her voice. In that show I did—she was from Houston, and had a pretty Houstonian, Southern-belle type voice. And I loved the way she said my name, "Halley."

Found Audio: Recording

Marilyn: Halley. Oh, I hear her coming, do y'all?

Halley: I thought it was just so pretty. "Halley and Electro."

Dana: "Electro." It's so beautiful. I wonder how he feels about it.

Halley: I think he loves it. I think he feels really cool. I remember in junior high, he was the water boy for the football team. But the coaches would always be like, "Electro Mayo, you need to be a football player." But he was 60 pounds. (laughs)

Dana: So, no. That feels like the perfect time to ask you the question that I ask all my guests. If we're talking about names and lineages, can you, Halley, tell me your mother's name, and what's coming up for you today, on this call, with me, and how you're feeling in this moment?

Halley: Her name was Marilyn Denise Schiller until she got married, then she went by Marilyn Schiller Mayo. And what's coming up is I just feel really warm and fuzzy. I just feel, as painful as it is to lose a loved one, it's such a privilege to have someone you came from, someone who you know loved you. And I feel her with me. I feel both my parents with me. I don't know my life without grief—I don't have any memories of that—but I do think that grief makes us able to be compassionate and empathic. And it's so cliché, but to have grief means that you had love. And I feel really lucky. I know that their love is all around me. I know that she's with me. Every time I see a rainbow, I know that's her. And I feel really lucky. I feel privileged. I feel so grateful to you for asking me to do this. I love talking about my mom. As painful as it is, I think it's just wonderful. I think she was wonderful. And I'm glad she was my mom.

Dana: Thank you for talking with me.

Halley: Thank you for having me.

Dana: "'Somewhere Over the Rainbow,' it plays." We get the rights. "The song plays."

Halley: Absolutely.

Dana: [start outro] So we did not get the rights. Sorry. You know what we did get though? That tape; that tape that we spend most of this episode talking about; that magical tape that her mom made in the last days and weeks of her life for her two children; that larger than life, mystical tape that I haven't been able to stop thinking about ever since I saw that solo show, or ever since we did this interview. I've been, well, I've been kind of obsessed with this tape, and I've been trying to figure out why. I think it's because, well, I don't have any tapes of my mom. I don't even have my mom on VHS. I have one voice file of my mom, one. And I recorded it privately in her bedroom, while she was crying one day, and talking high on hydrocodone about her life and her grievances and memories. It's a three-minute voice file. And trust me, you do not want to hear it.

So this tape, this idea of a gorgeous tape [40:00] of a mother talking directly to her children, well, yeah, it became a monolith, this thing I was chasing. And I was like, "It better satiate everything that I want. Everything that I'm yearning for was put on this tape. Where is this tape? Who has this tape? Is this tape on CD? Is this tape on a disc? Has this tape been digitized? Who has it?" I learned this tape, which is actually a CD—they took the original cassette and put it on CD, and gosh, thank goodness they did that—I learned this tape was in Colorado with her brother Electro. And after a bunch of emails and tracking

numbers and waiting patiently, and even pushing back this episode so that we could get it, the tape arrived. And I finally got to hear it, and I'm so grateful I did.

My editor recently said that we're never fully satiated. We always want and we're always chasing something related to our parents. We're chasing this thing outside the frame. You look at a picture, and you're always wondering, "What else am I missing?" Or a video: the clip is never long enough. The photo is never bright enough, because she's not here.

This file isn't for me, and it isn't for you. It's for Halley, and it's for Electro. But in listening to this, all I could think about were all the kids who might need to hear this. And there's something so beautiful in that. I also for the first time in this entire podcast journey felt intense sympathy and love and sadness for the mom, the mom who's missing out on our lives, the mom whose journey got cut short. I always thought that I was the one. I was the victim. But man, my mom's missing out.

This is Marilyn from 30 years ago.

Found Audio: Recording of Marilyn talking about sitting down to make this tape at the end of her life. She isn't sure what to say but she knows her kids might want to hear their mommy someday. She talks about not being able to nurture them the way that most parents can since she is leaving them so young. She talks about finding enlightenment in the final weeks/months of her life, near death enlightenment, and that has given her some peace. She talks about how sad she is that she will never get to watch her kids play tennis, or dance on a stage, or hear Halley's voice in a choir. She ends the tape by saying she is going to take a break and then come back on and try not to cry.

Found Audio: Voicemail

Dana: It's me, Dana.

At the tone, please record your message. When you have finished recording, you may hang up or press 1 for more options.

Halley: Dana, hey, sorry I missed your call. I am so glad you called me, because I was going to ask Tyler for your number later today, because I wanted to share some other things about the tapes. But I tried to send it in the email, and it just didn't seem cool or fair to anyone, to send it in an email. But thank you for your message.

It was really—I listened to the first 11 minutes twice through, because I knew if I just tried to listen to it—I just needed that. But it was crazy how much of it I remembered, and had been in my show. Some things were word for word.

But anyway, the thing/things I wanted to tell you: when my mother died, in her will, she said that when my grandparents die, my twin and I would split whatever she would have inherited. So when my maternal grandmother passed in October, I then became heir with my brother and my aunts and uncle. And that money [55:00] has allowed me to buy a house. And I closed on that house today. And I'm sending this to you—there might be an echo—from an empty house, which is now my house, that I was able to get because of my mom. And so I was waiting, waiting, waiting all day yesterday for the CD, and had tracked

it. And it said it would be delivered yesterday, and it said by 9 p.m. And at 9 p.m. I checked the tracking again, and it said that it had just left Memphis. And I was like, "Okay, well, that's fucking bullshit." And then as I was leaving this morning at 9:30 to go drive to my closing, the mailwoman came and dropped off the CD. And so my mother sat next to me on the way to closing, to getting this house that in essence she gifted to me.

And I mentioned in an email how much grief had come up since my grandmother passed, and a lot of it was because of what I inherited. I just felt incredibly undeserving, and I had a lot of anger about it. When my partner Grant or Vicki would say, "Oh, that's so great that you have that money," I would just say, "Yeah, it's great that my mom died." (laughs) 'Cause clearly I would give anything for her to be here. But recently I kind of reframed it, and I feel so lucky. And it's like she's in this house with me. And she was with me this morning driving to the closing. And then I listened to that tape, and she said, "I hope you feel me. I'll be there." And I feel her. So I'm just really grateful that you asked me to be a part of your podcast. It has brought up so much lovely stuff for me, and opened up my heart to explore my grief and things that I haven't thought about in a long time, and watch videos I hadn't seen in a long time. And I didn't think I would ever listen to her CD again, and I'm so glad that I did this morning.

Anyway, thank you. I love you too. And have a great day.

Dana: Talk to you next time. [end 58:11]