

Dana: 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.

Has your mom suspected that you've been having sex just by looking at your collarbone? No? Me neither. But today's guest's mom has. In this episode, we're going to go to Houston, Texas, to a small apartment where three kids are being raised by their immigrant parents from Sierra Leone. We're going to talk about how hard it is to straddle two cultures when you're growing up. We're going to talk about her mom's amazing jollof rice. We're going to talk about how her mom taught her how to shave her legs and keep her privates clean. We're going to talk about hating our moms, because sometimes, well, you just don't like your parents. And we're going to talk about how she wished she knew her mom more, the mom before she was born. Don't we all?

I just wanted to warn you that this guest occasionally enjoys a swear word or two or eight. So put your kids to bed. Put your headphones in. Do whatever you need to do, and buckle in. I also wanted to give you a little flavor of this guest before we start. I reached out to her via email as I was working on this cutting with my editor, and I said, "Hey, is it okay if we keep in all the references that you make to drinking and weed?" And she replied, "Yes, please use all those references in regards to my drinking and weed intake. I'm turning 40 this year. I'm grown AF. And as Tabitha Brown said, 'That's my business.'"

This is Lucy Sandy. [end intro]

Lucy: I'm nervous. Yes, I've talked about her, but this is going to be different. This is going to be interesting. I had to not drink. I didn't take a hit of a pen or anything. I'm just straight up sober. And I was like, "I need a hit of vape or something. Come on."

Dana: (laughs)

Lucy: And then I was like, "No." And then I was thinking of Mommy, 'cause I'm sure she's watching. And I'm like, "Fine, this first time around, I'll be fucking sober for this, for nerves." But it's like, "No, bitch. You need to feel this."

Dana: You need to feel it, be in it.

Lucy: So we grew up in Houston. It was five of us: my mom, dad, my sister—her name is AnnMarie—me, and then my brother Justin—we call him Junior. And we grew up in an apartment complex, so you got one door, two bedroom, and my dad made the den area

into my brother's room. So my parents had a room, and then my sister and I had a room. It was literally across the hall. There was a tiny hall.

Dana: So privacy?

Lucy: No privacy.

Dana: None.

Lucy: If everybody's in the house, and my dad just took a shower—one bathroom—so my dad took a shower. He's leaving, going into the room to change. My mom gets in the shower, then she comes into our room. If we're doing stuff or whatever, she's changing. Or if she's in the bathroom, and she needs something, she'll call me.

Dana: Do you remember the first time you saw her naked?

Lucy: That's a great question. I feel like she was always naked. When she would moisturize, she would always be in my room or in her room. And she would call me, and I would always rub her back, moisturize her back. So she worked as a mail clerk in the basement of a hospital in Houston called Ben Taub Hospital. And so she prayed every morning. My mom would pray every morning before she goes to work, every morning.

Dana: Where did she do it, if you're saying you had a small place?

Lucy: Exactly. So I grew up in a household where both parents worked, blue-collar workers. My dad worked in a warehouse, Ruska Instruments. So as we got older, my mom would always get a ride to work or she would take the bus to work. My dad didn't take her to work just because of the distance. So she always had a friend pick her up to go to work, and then take the bus home. My mom never drove. She never learned how to drive. She never (laughs) learned how to drive, and that's another story, 'cause that's my dad. My dad was like, "Why do you need to learn how to drive, when you have me and you have three kids?" And then as we got older, I was like, "Bitch, now I want to go out. You need to go to the grocery store. And now this is what happens. You listened to Daddy all these years, and now you can't drive. And now I'm trying to teach you how to drive, and you're crazy. I can't teach you how to drive."

Anyway, they would pretty much leave around the same time. She'd wake up at 4:30 in the morning, and then go in the closet in her room, and open up this Psalms book, and start reading it. And my dad was like, "Look, we all get up around the house." [5:00] And of course I'm saying it in this way, but they spoke Creole in the house, a different language. But basically, it got to the point where she ended up switching in our room. And I was like, "Why are you in our room?" And basically my dad was like, "Dude, I have

to wake up at 5:00. You're waking up at 4:30 to pray. I need 30 minutes, so if you're going to that—and blessings on that—you got to take that somewhere else." So she would come in our room.

Dana: At 4:30 in the morning.

Lucy: And go in the closet, and she would just read for a little bit. And then she would get ready to go to work.

Dana: Could you hear her?

Lucy: Sometimes. I don't know if I would hear her. But sometimes, I always could see her reading. I always remember that.

Dana: So they are both immigrants from Sierra Leone?

Lucy: They got married in Sierra Leone. And when they got married, from my understanding, they did not have a honeymoon. My dad was like, "Hey, I don't want to live here. I want to go to America, and I want to take you."

Dana: What year was that?

Lucy: I would say mid-'70s. And so I think my dad came here first, to New York, established himself there for a little while, made a little bit of money, brought her here. And then they moved to D.C. So in the '70s, if you're any immigrant, this country was the land of milk and honey. Everybody was coming. Everybody was coming. So if you're African, or I would assume Middle Eastern or whatever, it's for school. But they didn't come here for that. They just came, and they just established themselves here. So they established a huge African community in D.C., in the East Coast area, huge African community. And then in the late '70s/early '80s, with all that oil and everything in Texas, a lot of people migrated down. So in Texas, there's a huge West African community, Houston, Dallas, major. So my dad came first after they got married.

Dana: Did he have family here? Did he have family or friends already in the States?

Lucy: Yeah, I think it was his older brother or something like that, they established in New York. My dad was one of I think eight, and my mom was the eldest of eight or seven.

Dana: My dad's in a family of eight, but my mom was pretty much just her and her sister, who also died.

It's over by Ghana.

Lucy: Yeah, but Sierra Leone doesn't get a lot of shout-outs. And that's a little bit of a problem.

Dana: What's that about?

Lucy: When people think West Africa, they always think Nigeria, and that's where I get a little nationalistic. And I'm like, "No, big up to Salone." Sierra Leone is an amazing country. It's not just Nigeria. Salone is this small, little, but—the capital is Freetown. Freetown literally is free slaves that came back. And I don't even know that history, and that's another deep thing. They came back to Sierra Leone, and they named that city Freetown. And so when I say Creole, people always are like, "Oh, you can speak French and stuff like that, like New Orleans." And it's like pidgin, I guess, broken English. So I can sometimes understand people from Nigeria that have a broken English pidgin, or from Liberia.

Dana: Did your parents move for opportunity?

Lucy: They moved for just opportunity. And my dad was just a restless dude, and he had a hot chick, and he was like, "Let's get the hell out of here," I'm sure.

Dana: (laughs)

Lucy: And she was like, "I don't know about all this, but fine."

Dana: What did she say? Did she have to be convinced, did your mom?

Lucy: My mom is a very—we say when we talk about her, she's deep. She's very complicated. I think my mom had a lot of stories. And I think being the eldest daughter, there's still things about her I don't know.

Dana: Like what? Is there a mystery around something?

Lucy: Like how was she when she was young. "Did you date?" I was that child that was trying to get into all that kind of shit. I would find out other stories. She's deep like, there was a lot of things there I'm sure she just kind of kept to herself, because I feel like when she came here, it was just about like, "This is my family. I'm providing. It's not about me anymore. It's about them." And almost to a point I probably will have to deal with it later. It's almost, towards the end, almost too much of a martyr. So the things I missed out, me being 30—I feel like if she was alive, at 30—when she was dying, even though she was sick, I think we were just getting to that place where we were beyond mother and daughter. I think we could have got that level where we could talk really as women.

And we started to, 'cause I was just that kind of child. I had the biggest mouth. I would say crazy shit. I was a rebel. Me and her always were fighting. Oh my goodness. [10:00] Me and her were always getting into it. I was always lying, partying. She always had a tight leash on me.

But yet she was always coming to see my shows here. She loved to come visit us at school, because she can just get out of the house. We were just blue-collar. We didn't have money. So it was like "Come see my play" or dropping us off at college was an excuse for her, because they didn't get the chance to save up to travel. They still live in an apartment complex.

Dana: They stayed in that house as you went off to college?

Lucy: Oh my god, girl, in my lifetime, we moved in the apartment complex, just different buildings. But they stayed in the same spot. Everybody in the African community were like, "Damn, y'all still live at that thing?" We were one of the only that still lived in an apartment. All of our aunties and uncles got to a place in life where they had houses and stuff. But I think my parents—which as I'm getting older, I get it—it's like, damn. It's almost like they sacrificed too much. They were like, "Our lives don't matter anymore. It's just about our kids." And one, that just puts a lot of pressure on your kids. And then also, you see a lot of memories of them, they're just working. Some of the questions you're asking me about...

Dana: "What did you do together?" and memories of you mom?

Lucy: Yeah, and I'm like, "Do together?" What the?

Dana: You must have done something.

Lucy: A regular Saturday was like, "Daddy stepped out," which means he went to go get bread, was fixing the car, went to the park. By midday I'm sure he probably was somewhere with my uncles, or we were getting ready for a party. But for us at the house, it's like, you're cleaning. She's already started prepping food for if it was a party that weekend, 'cause Africans, we're always partying. Somebody died, somebody is born, somebody graduated, somebody just came up from Africa. There's always a party.

Dana: Were you prepping with her? Were you helping her?

Lucy: Yeah.

Dana: There's something. (laughs)

Lucy: So I do have memories. But first it's a pressure of I don't remember my mom reading me stories as a kid. I don't remember my mom doing it. It doesn't mean that she was heartless. But I don't remember cuddling with my mom. I don't remember my friends coming over, my mom having playdates. It's like, "Nah, dude." Or my mom baking. My mom didn't fucking bake. She cooked.

Dana: Mine didn't either.

Lucy: She was a badass cook.

Dana: What was a favorite dish she made?

Lucy: My favorite dish that my mom would make, it's called fufu, and traditionally it's made with cassava root. And you can get it at the international store, African food store where it's already patted down and frozen. But because we were American kids, we were like, "This is gross," 'cause it's this big doughy thing. So she's like, "Okay, you're going to still eat African foods." So she would make it out of tortilla flour. So literally it's just a heated pot, pouring tortilla flour in it and mixing it with water until it just becomes a big dough. And we would eat that. And then the stew would be a plasas, which is a big thing of spinach with lima beans, meat, and stuff like that, and you'd eat it with your hands. Most of African food that I grew up with was based on rice, and then there was a thick stew on top. It was so good. And it was always better two or three days afterwards. So she would make it, and she would always get annoyed because I would eat it, but then I would really get into it two or three days, 'cause it's always sweeter. So she was really good with African food, plasas and then jollof rice. She made fucking fire jollof rice. Jollof rice was really good.

Dana: Do you cook?

Lucy: I am a good cook, and I can cook, but things like African food, or just cooking cooking. I don't want to be cooking, and I'm talking to a guy, and that just becomes a thing where he lingers around.

Dana: For the food?

Lucy: Yeah. And no, I can't do that.

Dana: Is that what your mom did with your dad?

Lucy: What do you mean?

Dana: Was your mom the cook, and your dad loved that about her?

Lucy: My dad did not eat anybody else's food but my mom's food, nobody else's food.

Dana: But you're saying you're resistant to almost being someone who's beholden.

Lucy: Yeah, it's just issues. I don't know. My therapist and I, we'll figure it out.

We never went to restaurants with my family. Fridays we'd get pizza or Popeyes. That was one of the weekdays—Fridays were days where you could eat American food and stuff like that. But my dad, he only ate things that my mom made. If you sat him at a restaurant and gave him a menu, he wouldn't know how to order. Even if she's like, "Look, I'm tired, I don't want to. We're going to get Popeyes or something," my mom would still have to make it for him and prep it. Even when we would go to African parties and stuff, my dad would not eat any other woman's food. My mom would have to make his plate.

Dana: (laughs)

Lucy: It's a lot. It's a lot in a way which I think gives you pressure. Even though as you get older, these people are not perfect, and there's things about her—there's totally times in my life I remember being embarrassed of them, why not. Or hating her, of course, because she doesn't get it when I'm in high school. [15:00] But in the grand scheme of thing, it's a lot of pressure seeing whatever that ride-or-die love is, because that's a lot, dude. That's a lot to both put up with or commit to.

Dana: I think for me the same, same. My parents were married for 37 years, and then they got divorced. But I thought they'd be together forever. And they were perfect, I thought. And then they're not. And so that influences my decision and my own journey now to be married to my boyfriend of nine years. I'm on a, "Do I want to get married? Do I believe in marriage?" It can just end. It can fail. He could turn on me. I could turn on him. And you have to grow together. And again, my boyfriend is not my dad. There's some similarities. But, yeah, I get that whole—and living up to the expectations. My mom was an amazing host, and beautiful, and fit, had it together, had it together.

Lucy: So did my mom.

Dana: And I'm like, "How do I live up to that?" And then she also had all these other problems. And as you learn, as they go, they're not a monolith anymore. They're a real person.

Lucy: I don't know anything about your mom.

Dana: How much time do we have? (laughs)

Lucy: Sounds like your mom had secrets.

Dana: For sure. My mom was a biology teacher, so I talk a lot on these interviews about how my mom was the same: showing me how you put a tampon in, lifting her leg up. No privacy, I'm just saying, very open about anything. She'll talk about it. She'll share about the ovaries of a plant. She's just very open about talking about things. But that same thing you're saying about, "Tell me about you as a kid, and give me all the skinny." She didn't not share. But she didn't really want to get into it. And even as she got sicker, my mom had neuropathy, a bad back. She developed addiction issues of opioids and drinking. And then she lost the ability to walk, and she died in her bed. She had a blood clot. But as she was dying, I was even like, "Let's talk about addiction. Let's get going. I'm ready to talk about it." And she would say like, "I don't have an addiction problem," as I was pulling vodka bottles out of her bed, and then all these pills. But she was this "perfect, beautiful woman" for so many years of her life, in quotes, because she wasn't perfect. What I'm saying is, I get that sense of, "I tried to get to know that woman sometimes. And I would get close. And then she'd be gone." But I hated her a lot. And I was embarrassed by her. I talk about that a lot, being ashamed of my mom being sick.

Are you the middle, the oldest?

Lucy: I'm the middle, which makes sense.

Dana: I'm an only child.

Lucy: Oh, must be nice.

Dana: Well, some days. (laughs) Some days it's not. Some days it's like, "Oh, it's just me having to deal with the death of my mother." It's complicated. It's so complicated.

Lucy: My siblings are all close. But I can say it in a very non-resentful way: I personally think that my mom favored my brother. And I think that she also had a very just different, interesting relationship with my sister. And her and I—I think she was just like, "This bitch is wild, and I am going to hold on tight, because this one? Hell no. I will be damned." So there were moments of that battling, but yet at the same time, she didn't teach me about tampons, but when I got my period, she taught me about my period. We didn't have major sex talks, but she was always just like, "Don't get pregnant, because your daddy going be kicking you out of the house." Not pressuring me about dating, or who you should be dating, or why aren't you dating, things that like. But then at the same time, really being comfortable being like, "This is your vagina. These are your pubic hairs. You have to keep this maintain and clean."

Dana: Clean?

Lucy: Or like, "Let me show you how to trim it." And it was never connected to men, when women do it. My homegirl taught me how to shave my legs, and when my mom found out, she was like, "Why the fuck are you shaving your legs? You don't need to shave your legs. You're black and your skin."

Dana: The same, or, "You're too young. You don't need to do that."

Lucy: She's like, "What the fuck are you doing?" And so I think that's where some of that hate came from, because I was coming in—they put us in a private school, where I was going to school with one Irish and Italians. Nobody looked like me. And they don't have time to break that kind of shit down, that life sucks, race is—you just have to deal. They're just like, "Yo, yeah, we're immigrants. Are you fucking kidding me? We trying to make this American Dream. You just need to do what you got to do." And so when you have one culture at school, you have another culture in the household, and at the same time—I talked to my sister about—sometime of a slave mentality that I feel like they had, to the point of almost too appreciative of this, "Hey, let's just be happy that we're doing what we're doing. Y'all are doing what y'all got to do. Let's not ruffle too many feathers."

So when I was having these conflicting—or trying to [20:00] assimilate the culture that's out there in my mom and dad's household, that's when she'd be like, "Uh, no, you're black. Let me spell it out for you." I would vividly remember these kind of conversations. She's like, "All those friends at school, pretty much they don't give a shit about you, because at the end of the day, when shit pops off, you do not look like them, and they do not have your back. We have your back. But if you don't want to have our back, and you don't like this? Fine, awesome. So here's the deal: you can leave. You can leave the house. But here's the situation also: you can't leave with the clothes on your back, because we bought that. You can't leave with this, because we bought that. You can't do this, because we got that. So if you don't want to deal with this, because you are embarrassed you live in an apartment and all your friends live in houses."

And my mom's like, "What the fuck is this spend the night shit? That's weird. I don't like that." (laughs) She's like, "You're not spending the night in anybody's fucking house." She's like, "I know your ass. If they really like you, if they're really your friends, why don't they come over here? Oh, interesting. They don't want to come over here." Just real shit.

I'm like this, so upset, 'cause I'm just like, "What the fuck are you talking about?" And then as I get older, I'm like, "It was a little intense, and she probably could have done it in a different way." But it's like, "Oh, I get what she's trying." But she doesn't know how. She's literally trying to just manage all this shit. I can't even imagine.

Dana: And you hear those stories about immigrants, some of the people from the '60s, '70s, '80s, coming in, and that whole, "We are here. Don't ruffle feathers. Blend it."

Lucy: "Blend in, but you have to be better than what you're blending in. You have to be a hundred."

Dana: Better, work harder.

Lucy: You have to.

Dana: And then this feeling now—which I hear these stories of friends of mine whose parents are immigrants saying—"We're here first," to that feeling of, "Hold on, there's new people coming," and, "Hold on to what we have." But did your parents put you in that school because it was Catholic? It sounds like it, then.

Lucy: I think one, it was Catholic.

Dana: Private, Catholic.

Lucy: Two, and I think—this is all from my experience and what I say, so if I say, "Africans," I'm saying "Africans," not like "I'm speaking for all Africans." But I would say, that's when Africans are like, "Oh, we're just giving them a better education." And it's like, yeah, but really what that really is, now that I think about it—and I would have these kinds of conversations with my dad, and deeper and deeper I would have them with my mom as well—but I'm curious of how she'd really feel about it, 'cause it's getting too touchy-feely. But it's also, at the same time, what they're really trying to say is, "We need y'all to assimilate, because we don't agree with how the world works. But we don't know what to do."

Dana: "We don't make the rules."

Lucy: "We don't make the rules, but we came this far. We can't have you being one of these other motherfuckers out here. You just can't do that." There's no whys. You don't really talk about that. You just have to do that. We didn't have time to have these touchy-feely conversations in the house, man. We were just trying to pay bills. Every two weeks, somebody got paid. There was no explanations. Things just needed to get done. And so when you're battling two different cultures, it's confusing when you're a kid. It's just very confusing.

Dana: Did they pressure you to work, the kids?

Lucy: Actually, no. It's all about school, school, school, school, school. "You don't need to be working. You need to just focus on school." It's just school, school, education,

education, education. That's the immigrant mentality. It's the knowledge is power. So you have to learn. But sometimes there needs to be an explanation of, when you're a kid and you're growing up in America, you want to know why. But if culturally, my parents didn't ask why. They just were told to do things, and they just do it. So it's hard to break that cycle of just, "You got to just do it."

So I went to grad school for acting.

Dana: What did they feel about that? How did they feel about that, you being an artist?

Lucy: Well, shout-out to my sister, 'cause she took that first bullet before I came in. But that was not—they were like, "What?" at first.

Dana: She's an actor as well?

Lucy: No, she's a opera singer. So she's the eldest. And when she did work, she was working at my uncle's pharmacy, or she was just the front desk at the dentist's office that maybe my other uncle had a friend. Everything that's leaning into health and medical, or a lawyer, or an accountant. And my sister auditioned for something in high school, and they were like, "What is Triple Trio?" And it turned out my sister can sing. And I think my dad had a really hard time with it. I think my mom low-kay was supportive. I think that's where she was very progressive. But I don't think my sister and I, when we talk about it, we didn't realize it when we were kids. But she was very progressive in that way.

Dana: Why do you say that your brother was her favorite?

Lucy: Because I just think in African culture, the son is always the prince. It was her only son. And I think African moms [25:00] are harder on their daughters, and they're always easier on their son. I think it's a traditional thing. I think my daddy really was hard on Junior because Daddy and Junior are exactly alike. And so when your husband is (laughs) berating or challenging the next, your second love of your life—it's literally, that's her second husband.

Dana: Have you always used the phrase, "Mommy and Daddy"? As an adult, you're using it now, and I've never heard that.

Lucy: Really? Oh, I feel weird.

Dana: Well, no, I love it. That's why I'm going, "Oh, I want to talk about that!" Were those always their nicknames to you? Were they Mom and Dad when you were young, and they became Mommy and Daddy when you were older? Or they always stayed that way?

Lucy: No, I always talk about my mom and dad like that, Mom and Dad with other people. Mommy and Daddy, I would always call them Mommy and Daddy. Or we create our own nicknames. Towards the end of Daddy's life, we used to call him the Dude, from *The Big Lebowski*. We'd call him the Dude.

Dana: Did he like White Russians?

Lucy: No, he was just one of those kind of guys. I just called him the Dude. I was like, "The Dude." I was like, "The Dude." Or, this is weird. So Mommy was always Mommy. But traditionally, I grew up—all of Mommy's siblings would call her Miss, 'cause my mom's name is Priscilla. So they would call her Miss Priscilla, or in an accent, Miss Priscilla.

God, I just wish I knew her a little bit more as a woman. I still have kind of a childlike thought of her, 'cause we were getting there when we—I taught her how to text message. I talked to her about guys, dating, sex, and things like that.

Dana: What did you say? What did you talk about with sex? What advice did she give you?

Lucy: She discovered I had sex before I even told. I never told her. She just looked at my collarbone one day and was like, "Did you have sex?" It was really weird.

Dana: Your collar? Did you just say your collarbone?

Lucy: Yeah, it was really weird. I'm sure she was a witch too, 'cause I know the spirits are with her. I'm sure she was connected to the gods. So I'm sure low-key somewhere she had some witchery going down. Anyway.

Dana: But what does the collarbone have to do with sex?

Lucy: I have no idea. She scared the shit out of me. And it doesn't matter.

Dana: I'm going to google that. I'm going to google that.

Lucy: I lied, too. I was like, "No."

Dana: I'm going to google witches/collarbone/sex.

Lucy: I just think it's just mom shit. She put me on the pill, but we never talked about it like, "This is what you need to do to satisfy a guy." No, there was always just like, "Don't get pregnant, and don't lose your independence." It was her, and she's the eldest of seven or eight siblings, and the majority of them were women. They're all beautiful.

Their mother was beautiful. Both sides of my family were names in the community here and in Salone. And I think my mom grew up with a mom that kind of treated her daughters like trophy girls. They were all beautiful girls. And I think my mom deep down was wanting to be more than just a pretty person, and wanted to actually—all these American things, like wanting to love somebody—I don't think my dad, even though he came from a good family, he was kind of a rebel. And I'm sure my grandmother wanted my mom to marry somebody else. But I think my mom really felt a real thing for my dad, 'cause I was like, "There's no way Daddy was your first." And she's like, "I'm not going to talk about that." But for I think my sister—I think both my parents were both experienced before they got with each other, but those were things we didn't talk about. My mom would just be like, "Your dad and I really had a good time before we became parents."

Dana: I want to know my mom, not just—she was a woman before me. That's so crazy to think. There's just so many things. What's the first time she masturbated? What was it like? I don't know. I want to know those things.

Lucy: Or if she ever masturbated. Or just, my mom would fucking flip that I said that word, but still know what I'm talking about, be like, "Don't even—what are you talking about?" And it's like, come on. But things like that.

Dana: Looks at your collarbone, and is like, "Have you been masturbating?"

Lucy: I would have been like, "Girl, for years. Yes, for years."

Dana: When you say, in those years, as she was getting sick, you felt you got close to knowing her better. Were you making a conscious effort? It sounds like you were always trying to. Were you and all your siblings trying to close to her in a different way, 'cause you knew time was short? Or was it just you?

Lucy: I wasn't doing it because of a timeline. I just think I was in a place in my life—I had just graduated, and she couldn't come to my graduation, 'cause she got sick. She was getting sicker. And that's part of some resentment or anger. She really played it down how sick she was. I knew it was bad, but one of the biggest regrets I have, [30:00] one of the times when she was on chemo—chemo's so weird. They have these really clarity-high moments, when the whatever kicks in, where my mom sounded—or more my dad. I could tell in and out, there's almost like, "Oh my god, you sound like how you were ten years ago." There's this clarity of strength. They just sound very healthy. And we just got in this argument, and she's probably high off of the—and she was really trying to pressuring me into coming home. She was like, "You know, you should just come home." And I was like, "I don't have time. I'm doing the arts. You know I'm on my grind." And it was one of those things where really, she was like, "I want you to come home,"

and she didn't really want to say that, but she had her way of saying it. But I never really—and maybe it's my selfishness, and maybe it's my guilt—I don't really think I understood how sick she was. Hospice means—I didn't really understand any of that. And I just think they were like, "Oh, she's in school. Let's not do it." And it's like, "Nah, dude. You can't do that."

Dana: Protecting you, trying to protect you.

Lucy: Yes. And so me trying to get to know her—I think I was just in a place where I wanted to open up with things. She knew about all my friends and things like that. We'd kiki about all that kind of stuff. And it was just getting more comfortable saying things, or her being like, "Hey, sometimes I feel you drink too much when you're calling." Those kind of conversations, where it's like, "Were you drinking?" if you were in college or high school or something, now it's like, "Hey." And I'm being like, "No, don't worry about it. It was a long week, and I'm good. I'm good," just that kind of casualness. Or just talking shit about my brother, because he's a fucking idiot. Or my dad being annoying, and being like, "I can't believe you're still married to him. But you know what, girl, that's your thing," just that kind of shit. I just wish I had more of that. But, it is what it is.

Dana: I want to talk about hating your mom, those moments when you feel you literally her, and were so angry, and that feeling, 'cause I have a lot of regret from being really nasty to my mom.

Lucy: Yeah, same, same.

Dana: Or just like, "You're sick, so I don't want to stick around to watch you cry about my dad or when they got divorced, or I don't want to help." I just have a lot of resentment, 'cause she was sick, and then we'd just get really angry. So I don't know. That hate, when that hate comes out. Obviously I don't hate. Even when my mom's yelling at me, she doesn't hate me. She loves me so much. It's either the addiction or the pain in her body. That's what's mad at me. That's what's causing her frustration. But it feels like she hates me back.

Lucy: I felt like that. Sometimes—and my sister's always like, "Girl"—but I feel like my mom didn't really like me. And my sister's like, "You will never really know how much she would talk about you." But I just felt like I could never—she would just say these things. And it's in the midst of when I was high school. I was going to raves. I was doing drugs. And it was all low-key stuff that she was still hiding from my dad, and she knew what the fuck I was doing. But because she was still kind of covering up for me, because if she didn't cover for me, my dad found out—if I'm in trouble, then she's in trouble, then the whole household, then nobody wants that—but she would always just kind of say things about like, "You can't really trust people." Her way of talking about—

not race, but you're black—like, "Remember you're black. And I was always like, "Stop saying that." And really, she's like, "Bitch."

Dana: It sounds like she said that a lot. You brought that up twice.

Lucy: Oh yeah. "You're black. You're African."

Dana: And yet you're saying she didn't talk about race. That's so interesting. You say she didn't talk about race specifically, but was reminding you every time you're black.

Lucy: And I think where I would get mad at her is because I feel like she wanted me to be a certain way, and she didn't like seeing me accepted outside of the household, or she thought I was going to forget where I came from, and like, "Why is she talking like, 'These are my real friends. These are real people that get me?'" And everything she said, she was probably right. She was, but it's how you say things. And when I was a kid, it's how you said things. And she just always made me feel like I could just never—it was just like, "God, I just can't just have fun." It's always—I could just never just—

Dana: But is that a generational thing, that idea of how she was raised, or a cultural thing?

Lucy: Yeah, I think it was a little bit of both. I think a lot of it was cultural. There's no handbook on raising a kid, and I don't think there's really a handbook on raising kids in a different country. You want them to have all the opportunities that they can get here, but you don't maybe agree the things culturally for them to get there. [35:00] They don't get it. And they're not going to open up to other people to ask those things, because it's none of their business, "And we don't talk about our business." So we just, "I'm going to discipline and do it my way." It's okay not to like your parents.

Did your parents ever hit you?

Dana: No. My dad pushed me once.

Lucy: Oh my goodness, same, my dad. My mom hit me, but my mom was always like, "You know what your problem is?" She was like, "You're the only one that hasn't gotten hit by your dad." And I was like, "Oh my gosh."

Dana: How old were you when she said that?

Lucy: I'm sure I was in high school or something. She was just like, "Okay." Oh yeah, my mom—oh yeah, I was always getting, girl.

Dana: Spanked? Slapped?

Lucy: Spankings, slaps.

Dana: Did you ever hit her back?

Lucy: What? Who?

Dana: You.

Lucy: Hit who?

Dana: Sorry.

Lucy: I don't even know that sentence. I don't even know what that means.

Dana: So that's a no.

Lucy: I was scared to roll my eyes.

Dana: To roll your eyes, you couldn't. So no, you could not even imagine.

Lucy: I was scared to think. I was scared to, one, I did not roll my eyes. I couldn't even suck my teeth. Oh my, girl, to be in my room, if I was in trouble, and I just went to my room, you got to be careful how you walk out. Don't storm out. And first of all, you can slam the door, but there's no lock on the door, so anybody can come in. So if you want to set yourself up for that, you could. Nobody wants to deal with that. Just thinking about mean things about her, I would be scared that she would come in and be like, "What were you thinking?" Oh no, girl. Oh my god.

Dana: For real? And you would be like, "Keep it neutral. Keep it neutral. Try not to."

Lucy: Oh my god, oh my god. Hit, what? No, no.

Dana: How do you guys talk about that now as adults, being hit? Or do you talk about it, I guess, looking back?

Lucy: Yeah, I think we joke more about it. I think that's our way of coping with it. Yeah, we talk about it, but it's not anything where it's like, "Oh my goodness, I woke up in the middle of the night because I had another flash memory." I know all the times when I was got. I knew when I was going to get beaten. That's not good either, but that's that psychological warfare that parents do, or some parents do, or my parents did—or my mom. When you fucked up, man, you were getting an ass-whopping, hundred percent. Of course, it didn't go through high school and college and stuff. That would be weird.

Dana: My mom started throwing shoes. When she got really drunk or sad, she would throw shoes, all my shoes, up the stairs, at her condo. She didn't want them down by me. Or she would come upstairs—she couldn't walk very well—but she would sometimes come upstairs and then throw them on my bed. Just weird, not trying to hurt me. But I was like, "Those are my shoes, and they're all down there because I don't want them up in my bedroom." But those were later-in-life problems, and sad when days were hard.

As you approach ten years, what are you thinking? What's going through your head? And it's a very hard time right now. There's all this collective grief and trigers.

Lucy: I keep thinking I'm so happy both of them saw our first black president. So coming onto the ten years, I just think I'm happy to start processing this, just see what happens. It's just time. Ten years, it's just a good time to start thinking about allowing myself to think those feelings, whatever that means about her, who she is, who am I, how much am I like her, how much am I not like her. I think she's with me. I think there are so many things like her that I'm like, "Oh my god." I have to just allow myself to be okay with the memories I have of her, and not apologize if there's things I forgot. And then also, if I'm curious about things, I have to ask those questions.

And also just know that I think I'm getting better at, as an adult, knowing that my mom was not perfect at all. I know that for a fact. But the older you get, and you get to meet a lot of other people, and you kind of see who they are in their lives and how they are. And how I grew up, Mommy and Daddy always would say, "It's about your foundation." Because they would always be like, when you go outside, they don't say, "Hey, look at Lucy." They say, "Look at Priscilla's daughter. Look at Justin's daughter." So it's just, I'm realizing that with the good and the bad, they did a [40:00] pretty fucking tremendous job, because I don't know how the hell they took care of three kids, all education up to high school, because they didn't financially help us out with college, which they couldn't, and that's why it's financial aid. And that's my cross to bear, that's my credit card debt, is student loans. But I just don't know how they did it. I can't even imagine how they survived on their yearly income, their salary. I don't know how those two people did it, making under \$40k a year. Seriously, we were low-key, we were probably for sure poverty line. We were probably, I bet you, accumulative household was maybe \$30,000, maybe. I don't even know what that is.

So I have to look at all that kind of shit, and be like, "Look, girl. You had your mama for 30 years. Some bitches don't have their mamas for 30 years. Some bitches have their mom's alive, and some bitches and their moms are literally vindictive and low-key intentionally do things to hurt each other. So you got to just keep the memory that you got with your mama, because it could be so much worse out there, and you got to just

be grateful." So I'm just going to take it how it is. It's sad, but I had her for at least 30 years, shit.

Dana: I talk about it a lot.

Lucy: You can sit and cry and all that kind of shit. And some of the stuff that I'm doing now, I'm kind of glad that she's not around, because I think she would be so wanting to be so careful and like, "Okay, well, take your time. Take your time." And it's like, "Nah, dude. That's why you have fucking kids, man." I'm going to do shit that you couldn't do. I'm going to just do stupid shit and ball out and do shit and spend frivolous money, because I want to, because you couldn't. And if I want to spend it on you, or if I just want to roll up—if she was around—if I just wanted to roll up to Houston and be here for a weekend, and just hang out with you, I can fucking do that, and do what I want. And it's hard sometimes when they're around, and so it's scary 'cause she's not around, because I feel like I'm missing certain milestones of how to be a good woman, a black woman, a good black African woman, a good just-American. All of that that I think she could still help me with, you just got to know confidently it's there, and wherever you are in your life, those enlightenments will happen when they need to happen. They will happen when they need to happen.

Dana: And therapy?

Lucy: I'm working on that. I'm trying to get back in the game, man, because these motherfuckers—this is where I get discouraged, because then it takes three days, and she's like, "Hey, what's your insurance thing?" I'm like, "Girl, it's PPO, BlueCross BlueShield. Can we get this going?" So I'm working on it.

Dana: You're saying, you're trying to get back into therapy, you're saying?

Lucy: Yeah, I've never really done therapy.

Dana: Oh, you referenced it earlier like you were.

Lucy: Yeah, for a session or two in grad school, and then I was like, "Yeah, I don't know who you are. And you know what? I'm going to go work out." That's my therapy. And now it's like, "It is, Lucy." But also it's like, "No, you've got to talk to people."

Dana: I always end these calls saying: Tell me your mom's name, and how you're feeling about her in this moment, today. What is coming up for you?

Lucy: My mother's full name is Priscilla Joan Coker. When she married Justin Sandy, it became Sandy, so it's Priscilla Joan Coker Sandy. And how I feel about her is that this is what she does. I was very nervous. I was worried I was going to cry and make it all

this thing. And now I realize that I feel so lucky to have—guess I'm going to cry now—but I think I—it's so funny. She's so annoying, in a good way. She always knows, she always has a way of making her presence known, of showing me who I am, and being okay with that, and actually knowing how much of an amazing person I am, sometimes more than I think so. And by talking about her, it makes me think of how, [45:00] in a weird way, I'm happy I got to know her. The little snapshot of the life that we had together as mother and daughter, which is, when you think about it, really not that long of a time, but it was long enough.

I'm really glad that—I'm proud to be her daughter. I'm really, really proud to be her daughter. And all these thoughts I have in my head of my guilt and how I'm sorry and stuff, she always has her own cheeky way of revealing like, "I don't know why you think about that kind of stuff. You shouldn't be worried about that. You should be proud of what you've done. You've done so much, and you're going to be doing more. And this is part of how I raised you. This is how it was going to be. You just didn't know it. I've always known it." She's always known it, and it's just so funny. She's always known it.

There was a lot of things she could have done. I'm sure, in a way, we limited her journey, coming to this country, because she could have done a lot of other things. And just, okay, they're here. "I have kids here, and they're doing their thing." And just kind of really get sucked into this, what she thinks this American Dream was. And I think she stopped her American Dream because the American Dream was having kids here. And that was American Dream, and expanding on that through us. So this is the Dream. And I need to be okay and appreciate and thank her for—'cause I know she probably limited herself, but it's just for such a good reason.

She was a mom. She was not a stay-at-home mom. She didn't bake cakes and make cupcakes and things like that. I think she went to one school trip when I was a kid. And I was like, "Okay, this is so weird. Don't come back." But she really was a mom. I had a mom. I actually had a mom. And that's really cool to say. And actually I like my mom. I do. She was a really great mom. And it's not the traditional way you think. But she was a really good mom. And she instilled a lot of values in us that will just carry us on. And she's with us. So that's what I think about Priscilla Joan Coker Sandy, one of the baddest bitches in the game.

Dana: You're the best. Thank you for sharing.

Lucy: Thanks. We almost went through without no tears, dammit.

Dana: You got so close, and I was like, "Uh-uh, uh-uh."

Lucy: Damn, I was so proud. I was going to be—

Dana: Sometimes it happens really early, sometimes it happens in the middle, and sometimes...

Lucy: Dammit, I was so good. I almost had it. But thank you for letting me go there. I needed it. My mom also is probably like, "Bitch, please. Like, no."

Dana: She was there. She was like, "You're not getting off this call until you shed a little for me."

Lucy: She's like, "Are you kidding me? Like, good god. What I've done for you? You're not going to shed a tear?"

Dana: "You can't shed a tear?"

Lucy: "A tear? Then what is all this for?"

Dana: Well, take care of your heart today.

Lucy: I will. You're amazing. Love you, sis.

Dana: Bye.

Lucy: One love. Appreciate you, queen.

Dana: [start outro] As always, you are invited to come to our website, which is mothersgravepod.com, to see some behind-the-scenes images of this episode, and all of the episodes that are out to date. And you can also read more about the March of Dimes, which is an organization that was really important to Lucy's mom. The March of Dimes leads the fight for the health of all moms and babies. They advocate for policies that prioritize their health, and they support radical improvements to the care they receive. And I guess, when Lucy asked her sister about an organization that her mom might really, really love, her sister said, well, it turns out that there were pamphlets all over her mother's house, from the March of Dimes. So go to our website to read more about that organization and to see pictures of Lucy and her mom. You can also come to Instagram for more content—ugh, it's so gross, just saying it. But come follow us on Instagram, which is [@mothergravepodcast](https://www.instagram.com/mothergravepodcast).

I just wanted to thank Lucy again for coming to the table, and being so real and generous and fun, and I'm just grateful to know you. So thank you for your time, and for sharing your mom with us. And thank you to Lauren for your re-introduction to Lucy. I appreciate it. I also want to thank Suzi Pond, one of the best editors in the game and one of my oldest friends, with Redbird Media Group for editing and producing this podcast; Alice Anderson for her amazing sound mixing; Na'Toria

Marketing and Design [50:00] for the best website; and Meredith Montgomery for her gorgeous logo and individual episode designs; and Matt Chapman for his rad theme music. And special thanks to Jill Wolf (my therapist), Heather Bodie, Lora Nicole, Danny Bravman, Jonathan Baude, and all of my friends for your love and support, and all of you for listening and sharing and doing all the things you're supposed to do for podcasts. It really means a lot.

When I started working on this episode a couple weeks ago, I wrote in the Word document for this podcast, I wrote in the note section for this episode that in the closer, I'm going to talk about how I hated my mom sometimes, and how I called her a bitch, and the shame I feel around that. And I have been putting off doing this closer, well, for days. I'm actually late. I owed this to my editor about five hours ago. Yeah. I can't stop thinking about how many times Lucy called her mom a bitch in that episode, but in the loving, "This bitch," kind of way, which I use that turn of phrase a lot. I reference my friends like, "This bitch, get a load of this bitch." And it's said with so much love. And if you could have seen Lucy through most of that conversation, she's smiling. And there's so much joy, and so much love. And even though clearly we talked about hating our moms sometimes, and getting reprimanded or being frustrated with them, there's still this love, this little touse of like, "Oh, moms will be moms," and generational things and cultural differences abound.

But when I was in my thirties—not in high school, in my thirties—I looked right at my really, really sick, addicted, neuropathy-riddled, divorced mom, and I said, "Why are you being such a bitch?" I told my mom multiple times, "I don't want to come here ever again." I wouldn't return her phone calls. Sometimes we would start out really well. You know those visits that you have complicated relationships with, and you show up and the first 30 minutes it's going well. And you're like, "It's going to be different this time. It's going to be different, I can feel it. Everybody's on their best behavior." And then within a second of saying something wrong, you've spiraled to this, "I'm now 15 years old again," and everything's being rehashed. Yeah. And in those moments, just the utter anger I had at my mom for not getting help, the sadness of what was happening to her body and her mind, and the sadness of what was happening to my life—their divorce was affecting me, my mom's addiction was affecting me—and I hated her. I hated her for that.

Sometimes I feel like I'm putting this thing out in the world, and I'm releasing these episodes, and I'm like, "My mom was really sick and had problems. But I was really great. I was perfect. I'm the good one. I can talk calmly about all this." And the truth is I was not a perfect child to my mom sometimes, and I have so much shame from that. I feel really badly for calling her that, 'cause I love that bitch. I love that bitch.

Talk to you next time. [end 53:51]