

Concept Statement: *You Can't Take It With You*

We've all heard the saying "blood is thicker than water", meaning that relationships with outsiders will never usurp the bonds of blood relations. It's comforting to think that those of your flesh and blood are preconditioned to love you and perhaps there is some truth to that. Perhaps deep down in our DNA there is love for our family coded in adenines and thymines. I can't deny that I love my parents and my little sister fiercely; I would do anything for them. But I also know that this isn't the case for everyone, and not every family is made up of a neat mother-father-two child package. In fact, most are not, but does a lack of blood relation mean that we consider those families to be somehow less than? Is the love between adopted children and parents somehow weaker? Is the bond between half-sisters only worth half that of a full blooded relationship? And what about those people whose family have forsaken them or never even cared in the first place? Are those people doomed to be bereft of love forever? It seems that there must be something greater than biology that determines a family.

The actual proverb reads "blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb". To me, this means that strength lies in the families that we choose, rather than the ones we are born into. It means that familial love is a covenant, something that is earned every day, not presupposed by DNA. It means that our love for other human beings is generous and capable of carrying far more people than the Norman Rockwell traditional American family. The truth is, the people who drop in unexpectedly and push us towards our dreams *are* family and deserve to be considered as a such. No one illustrates the flexibility and expansiveness of love that belongs to a chosen family quite like the Sycamores. If there is a genetic prerequisite for what makes a family, then they are suffering from a delightful mutation that causes them reach out and draw in people from all walks of life. Their doors are always open and if someone wants to stay, they will unhesitatingly make space on

their cluttered shelves. They are trusting, gregarious, and uniquely skilled at bringing people together.

As much as *You Can't Take it With You* is about family, it is also about art, or rather the places that art and family connect, the art of having a family. The Sycamores, much like myself, believe that everybody has virtuosity, some skillful pursuit that fills them with joy. They are exceptionally generous in their support of everybody's right to pursue that which makes them happy. To them, it doesn't matter if virtuosity is profitable, or if one even has talent (in the conventional sense of the word). To the Sycamores, everyone is an artist. This speaks of the unique way that creative action can facilitate connections between vastly different people. The Sycamores are a true family of artists because they understand that loving someone also means providing a home for their imagination and supporting their creativity. They love each other not in *spite* of their oddities and creative obsessions, but *because* of it. They may initially seem to be living in chaos, but it's important not to mistake their enthusiasm for dysfunction. Their family is a mosaic, each piece being utterly and unmistakably unique, but somehow fitting perfectly into a larger work of art. Because of their ability to welcome and support the creative life of others the Sycamores are an exquisite example of familial harmony. They show that within the embrace of a chosen family, virtuosity flourishes.

Imagine what the world would look like if we all lived like the Sycamores. Imagine if we allowed ourselves to really care about others, especially those who were under no biological obligation to love. Imagine if we considered strangers as potential family members, and held an open door in our hearts for them to walk through. I feel like we could achieve so, so much more. I've noticed a sort of cynicism lately on every level of our society, that asks us why should we be responsible for caring about those who are outside of our family, our community, our country. It's as if we've stopped believing that there is always space in our hearts. The Sycamores challenge this

idea with their wonderful oddness, their chaotic and expansive brood. But Is it really so crazy to embrace humanity and unselfishly allow others the space and support to create? Is it crazy to open up our narrow concept of family to those we could never predict entering into our lives? Is it crazy to lean into the madness, the pandemonium, and the sheer joy of creating along side the people you love most? I don't think so.