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Family Roots

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Family Roots

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"I can vividly remember the day of my parents' wedding, a memory that exists only in photo albums and stories for the vast majority. When I was in fourth grade, I had the unique privilege of being my mother's maid of honor. I walked down the seemingly endless aisle of St. Mary's Church and stood beside her as she entered the sacrament of marriage with my father. The roots of our small family were planted, and to this day they hold steadfast. My mother is the strongest and most selfless woman I know, and without her I would not be who I am today. My father is a hardworking man who is full of knowledge, and he has taught me to foster a passion for learning. I am very grateful for the support and encouragement they have provided me throughout my life."



Kelsey Castro (Dec. 2017)

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I can vividly remember the day of my parents' wedding, a memory that exists only in photo albums and stories for the vast majority. When I was in fourth grade, I had the unique privilege of being my mother's maid of honor. I walked down the seemingly endless aisle of St. Mary's Church and stood beside her as she entered the sacrament of marriage with my father. The roots of our small family were planted, and to this day they hold steadfast. My mother is the strongest and most selfless woman I know, and without her I would not be who I am today. My father is a hardworking man who is full of knowledge, and he has taught me to foster a passion for learning. I am very grateful for the support and encouragement they have provided me throughout my life.

It is apparent that my upbringing was not what most would label as "conventional." Rewinding to my mother's childhood is necessary to understand the full picture. My mom and my uncle were both adopted by my nana and papa, who desperately wanted a family but could not have children of their own. They were 37 and 41 when the adoptions took place, respectively. They adopted my uncle when he was 3 years old, and my mom when she was 3

months old, through a Catholic Charities adoption agency. Their family was made complete by the addition of my uncle and my mom. When my mom was in elementary school, my papa had the wonderful opportunity to join one of the first classes of ordained deacons in the United States. He served as a deacon at St. Rose of Lima Church from his ordination in 1980 until his death in 2008.

I was born a month after my mom turned 19. Having a child at 19, before marriage, likely does not seem consistent with being the daughter of a Catholic deacon. This, however, was the reality for my mom. Although she was terrified to tell her parents, she was met with a great amount of support when she did. My papa told her that he was just relieved that she had never considered getting an abortion. I was eagerly welcomed into my nana and papa's home, where I lived with my mom for the first 5 years of my life. After I was born, my mom knew that she needed to be able to support me. She enrolled in a dental hygiene program and graduated when I was 3 years old. During the time she was in school, my nana took care of me.

It is relevant to disclose that my biological father made no effort to be a part of my life. My nana was a very influential part of my early childhood. Essentially, she was my "second parent," with the absence of my biological father. Unfortunately my nana passed away from melanoma when she was just shy of her 62nd birthday. I was 6 years old, and my mom was 25. Even at a young age, I recall noticing the strength my mother displayed during that time. Nearly 10 years later, her strength became apparent again when my papa passed away from esophageal cancer. My mom selflessly brought him into our home and cared for him during his last month of life. At age 34, my mother had buried both of her parents and never once displayed an ounce of self-pity.

There were times during my later childhood and adolescence where I focused on my family being abnormal. I struggled with the feeling that I was a “mistake” who should not have been born. One of the most important lessons my mom has taught me is that my life is a gift. God does not make mistakes. My mom often tells me that I gave my nana the opportunity to be a grandmother. Since she was older when she adopted my uncle and my mom, she often joked that she would not live to see her grandchildren. Had I not been born when I was, my nana would have missed out on those six years of being a grandparent. My mom has also expressed to me that my birth made her realize the importance of choosing a successful path in life. Any time that I am struggling with self-doubt, I know that I can turn to my mom for guidance.

As previously mentioned, my parents were married when I was in fourth grade. They met when I was 4 years old, so my father has been a part of my life for a very long time. Family transcends blood relation, and sharing DNA is not a prerequisite for being a parent. My father is an arborist. A bearded man with calloused hands, he listens to lectures on philosophy, religion, and world politics while he works in the woodpile behind our house on his days off. Our relationship did not form instantaneously, but it grew organically over the years as many of my interests began to line up with his. Today, we bond over our mutual love of science, theology, philosophy, James Taylor, playing acoustic guitar, Labrador retrievers, and the art of picking out the perfect Christmas tree.

This past May, I was blessed with the opportunity to visit Rome and Vatican City. Upon entering the Holy Door of St. Peter’s Basilica, I took a moment to reflect on my life thus far, and the roots of my faith. In my mind I felt the cold pew beneath me, smelled the comforting aroma of flowers, oils, and candles, and heard the voice of my papa enthusiastically giving the homily at St. Rose of Lima Church. I thought of my nana, and how she cared for me while my mother

was in school. I thought of all that my mom has done to provide me with a stable life. The many theological discussions I have had with my father swirled through my head. I felt the love and support that my parents have offered me, and continue to offer me. Of course, no family is without its faults, but I wholeheartedly cannot imagine my life without the influences of my parents and grandparents. When I think about who I am, without compromising my individuality, I always consider who they are, and were.



(Photo taken by Kelsey Castro)