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Family Communication

### The Story of My Father: A Personal Narrative

As I developed into the woman I am today, I have two people to thank for my positive upbringing. One is my mother, and the other is my father. Though we may not have always had the best connection, today I truly value my relationship with my father. He and I have become very close due to our similar tastes in entertainment; however, my father and I were not always the same. My father and I differed in our youth. My father was a rambunctious, healthy young boy, and despite his family moving around he was able to maintain healthy relationships with those around him. **Throughout his life, my father experienced many different events, and through those events he learned the importance of family and how family can be self-defined and I was able to see how our differences in upbringing was attributed to our different gender socialization. Through this interview I got a better understanding of his life story.**

My father was born in Colorado in 19xx. He was the second son to his parents, and he lived in Colorado until 19xx, after which he moved to Virginia. After living in Virginia until 19xx, my father moved to Wisconsin where he finished high school and attended college. Despite moving location twice, my father had no negative impacts despite having moved during the era where technology was not advanced enough to keep him in touch with his friends. His moves transpired during the natural shifts of friends and friend groups that most children experience, and since his personality was more extroverted than introverted, he was able to make friends and thrive no matter where he moved to. This was beneficial for him since making

friends early and maintaining those relationships on helps improve academic performance (Ladd, 1990 p. 1096). My father does not fully remember those he played with while in Colorado, yet he does remember some names proving that he had meaningful relationships there. Continuing that trend, my father has fond memories of the large group of friends that he had while living in Virginia. He was able to get back into contact with the one he considered his best friend from Virginia once Facebook was invented. According to Ladd (1990), my father's ability to make and maintain relationships in the places he moved two greatly contribute to not only his social enjoyment but also his overall ability to thrive. However, despite having close friends while in Virginia and Colorado, my father's current best friends are the one that he made in high school and college, both of which were once he moved to Wisconsin.

While moving around did not have any effect on my father's ability to make and maintain friendships, it did place a stress on his family and relationships in his family. When my father made the choice to move to Wisconsin, he spent about a year there living with his Aunt and Uncle before his parents joined him. During his time alone, he had to have emergency surgery to remove his appendix. This caused stress between him and his parents since they were so far apart. However, the distance between my father and his family hit the hardest on the relationship between my father and his brother since his brother was four years older and had already graduated high school and enlisted in the Navy. This distance caused further stress on my father and his brother's already strained relationship. My father's mother disliked that her sons did not get along as well as she had hoped, and my father did not like that his relationship with his brother was less than satisfactory; however, my father also recognized that family is not necessarily defined by blood. Much like Turner and West (2018) describe, family is self-described; some parts of this self-definition are as follows: there must be interaction within the

family and with others outside it, relationships can be voluntary and involuntary, families create literally, symbolic, internal, and external boundaries, and the family itself evolved overtime (p. 8). My father was able to recognize this self-definition, particularly that family is not necessarily defined by the involuntary relationships created by blood, while struggling with the lack of deep relationship with his brother. Where his relationship with his brother was less than content, my father found friends who made him feel at home. He had a friend who fulfilled the role of brother more than his own. This man quickly became my father's best friend once they met and hung out in college, and to this day they have remained close, close enough that my siblings and I were raised to refer to him as "Uncle."

My father was a healthy young boy while growing up, and he managed to get into some crazy stunts in each of the locations he called home. While in Colorado, my father recalls accidentally starting a fire due to his involvement in Boy Scouts encouraging outdoor activities, like camping, for young boys. Likewise, in Virginia my father recalled his group of friends, all male, starting a fire to throw in a handful of bullets they had found in the woods one summer afternoon to see what would happen. Naturally, once placed in the heat, the bullets fired and one of my father's friends was nearly shot in the process. Luckily, he was alright, and not wanting to get in trouble, my father and his friends all lied about how the boy received his injury. These simple examples of my father and his friends show what was expected of my father and his friends in their gender role which, as defined by Turner and West (2018), discusses what is expected of males and females (p. 102). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, it was expected for young boys to be playing outside and to be wild and dangerous. Yes, playing with literal bullets from a gun is an extreme example, but this shows that the expectation of boys was that they be outside and have adventures instead of staying inside and reading.

However, being a reckless goofball in his youth did not stop my father from experiencing his share of relationships. My father had his first real girlfriend in 8th grade, but his first serious relationship was in his Junior year of high school. Throughout college he dated roughly 11 people, a large number when compared to today's standard, but of those 11 very few were serious relationships and even fewer lasted longer than a month. It was not until my father met and began a relationship with a woman named **T** in 19xx that my father experienced his first real adult relationship. My father's relationship with **T** was rocky to say the least since the two would constantly break up after finding new people to be with before eventually getting back together, but after several consecutive months together, the two began talking about marriage. While this may be a strange course of action considering the history of their relationship, according to Wayment and Campbell (2000), the motive to feel better about one's relationship may have encouraged my father's desire to propose (p. 33). Sadly, this choice to ignore patterns did not turn out well for him. **T**'s desire to be an EMT took her away, and, similar to fashion, she called my father in 19xx to let him know that she had found someone else and could no longer be with him since she did not want to lead him on. My father was heartbroken, and after returning the ring he made the choice that this relationship was over for good. They would never get back together.

While his breakup with **T** was difficult, everything happens for a reason since, not too long after, my father met the woman who would become my mother. The two met while they were both working as camp counselors for a summer camp. My dad first started talking to her because she was a new counselor, but their relationship quickly became more intimate as my father found himself confiding in my mother. Since they met soon after my father's failed engagement, he was adamant that he was not looking for nor interested in a relationship.

However, as time passed, he realized that he was becoming interested, and the two began dating in 19xx. As my father finished his college education, he got an internship in Washington state. This was far from the summer camp that my father and mother both worked at, yet since it was a job opportunity that fit perfectly what my father wanted to do at the time (working as a natural scientist), it was an opportunity he could not pass up. Since there was no internet to help the young couple communicate, create shared meaning, or have a shared space, the young relationship was threatened by the prospect of distance since, according to Janning, Gao, Snyder (2017) all three of those requirements are necessary for a healthy relationship especially is that relationship is long-distance (p. 1285-1286). Against her parents' wishes, my mother drove out with him to Washington and said goodbye for what they believed to be the last time. However, as my description of them being my "mother" and "father" alludes that there is a happy ending.

The summer of 19xx, 5 months into his internship and 5 months after his goodbye to my mother, my father had a revelation that changed his life. While staring out toward the lake that his internship was near, my father witnessed an eagle swoop down and pick up a fish. After witnessing this majestic movement, my father had the revelation that there was only one person he wanted to share this information with: my mother. Making up his mind, my father pack all his stuff and hopped in his car to drive for roughly two days straight from Washington to Wisconsin so he could surprise my mother at the summer camp where they first met. Needless to say, she was extremely excited to see him. After two more years together, the two married in 199x, and in 199x they welcomed my elder sister into the world. In 199x they welcomed their second child, me, and in 200x they introduced my younger brother.

Through this interview I learned a lot about my father. Despite my original belief, I learned that we were not as different as I originally assumed. We grew up in different eras, yes,

but we both played outside and tried to live our youths in the freedom that the outdoors provided. Of course, we do differ in the sense that my father did some crazy thing in his youth, but me not doing those things remains a testament to him learning from his actions and making the choice to not let his children make stupid, wild mistakes. I know now that a majority of the differences between my father and I were not due entirely to gender differences or even generational differences; most of the differences between my father and I are due to the fact that he wanted to fix for my siblings and I what was wrong with his youth. As I learned through my interview, my father had two goals for his children: the first was that we not move around since he wanted to give us a stable place to call home, and the second is that he wanted his children to be close in the way that he and his brother were not. And, as my father stated in his interview with pride, that goal has been accomplished, and he views that accomplishment as one of his best.

## Works Cited

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