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Personal Narrative

Mixed Emotions

People often say that they wish they knew everything, and that knowledge is power. I wish I could say the same. In my case, sometimes not knowing anything at all has a better outcome. People like to know who they are and where they came from, but sometimes I think not knowing is better. Growing up, I didn’t have a true father figure. My mother had boyfriends, but nothing that was stable. When I was younger, I didn’t really think much of not having a father. As I grew up a little, I started to think about what it would be like to have two parents instead of just one. Things in my head started to change, and my thoughts became more bad than good. I started to think that maybe I was unloved. After all, most of my friends had two parents that were there to support them, but I only had one. One parent that I didn’t think understood me at all. One parent that had no idea what I was really thinking. During eighth grade health class, we were discussing the topic of depression. The thoughts we talked about in that class sounded like the thoughts I suffered through every day. I talked to my school counselor, and she decided that going to Linden Oaks Hospital for a little professional help would be best for me. At Linden Oaks, there were multiple group therapy sessions as well as family sessions. During my first hospitalization, I lied my way through the program. Every family session consisted of me saying nothing, and my mother sitting there waiting for me to talk. I never thought that I would ever get anything solved. I never thought I would feel any different. During my second hospital stay, all of that changed. The person I was became the person I thought I was. I learned information that I don’t think anyone should have to learn about their lives. During one of my family sessions, my whole life as I knew it became something I never wanted to be living.

I sat in my room after a clinical therapy group waiting for my mom to arrive. The day was one I had been dreading for about a week, and before I knew it; the day was here. When it was time for my family session, Jennifer knocked on my door and told me that my mother was here and that they were ready for me. I was trembling. I had had multiple family sessions during my stay at Linden Oaks, but I could sense that this one was going to be different. I grabbed my folder off of the dresser, and started to walk with Jennifer down the long dreary hallway. I became very anxious, and I could feel the tension without even being in the room. The rainbow puzzled carpet seeming to go on forever. It felt like the walk took hours but there was nothing I could do to ease my anxiety. The door to a smaller group room opened, and I saw my mother sitting in a chair looking at me with her bright blue dramatic eyes. I had never seen her look at me the way she did then. I felt as though she had just told me a life shattering detail of something and was waiting for me to reply. Only, I had just walked into the room, and neither of us had spoken a word. I avoided her eyes, I had no desire to learn what that look meant.

I took a seat directly across from my mother, and Jennifer took the seat right next to me. I had been in this group room many times before, but everything seemed brand new. There was a picture on the wall of a meadow. In the meadow, there was a little girl holding a red umbrella. I could have sworn that the picture wasn’t there just a few hours ago. The chairs that had seemed so comfortable when I last sat in them, felt rough and ragged; like I was sitting on brush bristles. The carpet that once looked gray now appeared to have millions of colorful strands in it. Red, Green, Blue; anything to keep my mind off of my mother.

After a few moments of sitting in silence, Jennifer turned to look at me. She told me that this family session wouldn’t be wasted in silence like all of the others. My mother glanced at me as if waiting for me to speak. I felt frozen. The thought of sharing any type of emotion with her was as intimidating as swimming in a pool of sharks. Ever since I was little, I hid every ounce of bad emotions that I had. Now was not the time to give that up. I slouched down in the chair. The folder I had been holding since the beginning was now covering my face. I thought to myself *maybe if I avoid all eye contact, they will forget I am here and leave me alone.* But that was far from the case.

My mother became irritable with my unwillingness to talk. She hadn’t taken a day off of work to accomplish nothing. I could feel the heat of her eyes even through the folder I was holding. Then she spoke; “Danielle, I have something I need to tell you”. The seriousness in her voice was strong enough to tear down an entire nation with just one word. I knew that I wasn’t going to want to hear whatever it was she needed to tell me. I glanced at Jennifer, but she showed no signs of letting me go. Instead, she told me that I needed to put the folder down and pay attention. I didn’t listen; the folder was the only thing preventing me from falling apart. If I looked at my mother, there was nothing stopping her emotions from getting to me, and that was one thing I wasn’t prepared for. Since I didn’t show signs of speaking anytime soon, Jennifer urged my mother to continue. “Well, we both know how horrible Carl was,” She said. Carl was a man I grew up with until the end of second grade. He was the man I used to call dad, and other than my grandpa, the only male figure I ever truly had in my life. One day when I was in second grade I came home early from school because I was sick. He dropped me off, and then said that he had to leave. I asked him why and he told me, “It isn’t my job to take care of a mistake”. Back then I didn’t know what he meant. Even as I was sitting in this family session, I just thought he said it to be mean. I didn’t think he actually meant anything by what he had said. “What I have to tell you has an upside as well as a downside,” my mom continued, “The upside is that Carl isn’t actually your father. The downside is that I don’t know who is”. She paused then, and I could hear the tears rolling down her face.

I really didn’t know what to think. I didn’t really know how to feel. In a way, I was relieved. With Carl not actually being my father, there was a chance that he didn’t know what he was talking about when he called me a mistake. On the other hand, not knowing who my biological father was became a very scary thought. I sat still in my chair. The folder was still in front of my face, and the only person I would even dare look at was Jennifer. I tried to make my eyes plead with her. All I wanted to do was leave the room; but her eyes gave me no sign of escape. She looked warm; as if her heart had been touched by the way my mother and I were reacting. I felt the complete opposite. I grew more and more uncomfortable as time went on. I started to squirm in my chair, and my legs felt like they were running away, even though I was still sitting in the same spot. I just wanted the session to be over.

My mother continued, “Well, when I was in high school, there was this party. I went, and something happened afterwards”. *What was she trying to say? People go to parties all the time, there isn’t anything wrong with that*, I thought. “When I was leaving the party, I needed a ride home. There was this boy, I didn’t really know him, but he offered me a ride home and I accepted. It turns out he wanted more than to just give me a ride. He raped me, Danielle. He took advantage of me, and then dropped me off at home,” she said. I could hear her crying. Like she was trying to hide the pain she was feeling, but it was all too real for her at that moment. “That night your grandparents took me to the hospital. I was there for hours while they poked and prodded me for any evidence that they could find. I was cold and scared. They gave me this pill, and told me that there was the possibility that it may not work”. She was crying now. I felt like I was supposed to do something; like I was the one who made her feel this way. The things that she was saying were things that she tried hard to forget; but now, because of me, she is forced to remember. However, instead of doing anything, I just hid myself behind my folder. I felt bad for not consoling my mother in her time of need, but I was afraid of what would happen if I were to let my true feelings escape. “Danielle, that night was mostly horrible, but one good thing did come out of it. That good thing; was you”. She stopped then.

I felt like time had stopped. Any crying, any talking; everything sounded faint and in the distance. I could hear my heart beating as if it were a rock band playing in my ear. I wanted to ask my mother questions, but I couldn’t get my mouth to form the words. My worst nightmare became my reality. For the longest time I tried to get myself to believe that Carl was just a mean man, and called me a mistake just to spite me. However, this new information that I had been given made me feel like maybe Carl was right. I was a mistake; a horrible, unplanned mistake.

In that moment after my mother finished talking, I wanted nothing more than to break down and cry. Only, I felt like I couldn’t. I felt like if I started to cry, then I would never regain my composure. At that moment, I didn’t care what Jennifer or my mother thought. I dropped my folder on the floor, and walked out of the room. I thought to myself; *maybe if I don’t have to risk looking my mother in the eye, then I won’t have to show how I really feel. Maybe I will be able to just pretend like having a rapist as a father doesn’t bother me.*  I walked down the hallway past the other teenagers gathered in the common room, past the staff members who glanced at me with concerned eyes, and straight into my room. A few minutes later, Jennifer was in my doorway. She asked my roommate to leave so that she could talk to me in private. When my roommate was gone, Jennifer asked me if I was okay. I said my classic words, “I’m fine”. Not even seconds after I said those two simple words, I could feel my eyes fill with tears. There was no way that I would be able to hide how I felt at that very moment. When I started crying, I didn’t know if I was ever going to be able to stop. The most surprising part is that I didn’t care. Jennifer sat there with me while I cried. She didn’t criticize me, she didn’t try to calm me down; she didn’t say a word. She just let me cry. And in the end; I think that’s what I needed.

I never thought that one family session would be able to turn my life in a completely opposite direction. But this session did just that; it made me who I truly am today, for better or for worse. I feel like I have been through so many things in my life, and even if I thought that I didn’t want to know; finding out who my biological father was, was something that I think I really needed to hear. That family session was a blessing, but at the same time a curse. Without that day, I would have never known anything about my other half. Even though I still don’t know exactly who he is, I feel some relief in knowing that I really have nothing to miss. On the other hand, there are still days that I struggle with getting past the fact that my blood related father was a man who committed a very negative crime. I feel like there are a lot of things that people think that they want to know, but when they figure them out, they realize that they could have lived without knowing. I am still trying to figure out what my philosophy is. But, one thing I know for sure; Knowledge can be a scary thing. Once you know something you can’t un-know it, no matter how much you wish you could; no matter how hard you try.