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Creative Writing: Nonfiction

Memoir

11 February 2021

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COVID struck right around spring break for me last year; however, my family and I still decided to visit my grandma in St. Petersburg, Florida. Unfortunately, only my mom and brother came down though. After being there for about a week, I left to go stay at my boyfriend's house in Columbia, Illinois to quarantine, because my dad was petrified of us bringing COVID home. My mom and brother left a few days after I did and quarantined at my grandma's house because it was empty. I never thought anything of it.

After spending two weeks in Illinois, I felt that I had overstayed my visit, so on April 7th, I left for home. It was a six-hour drive back to Ames, Iowa. Leaving around noon, I arrived home in the early evening hours. Only my mom was home. I wasn't surprised when she asked me to go on a walk with her, because she had been working out more recently. Initially, I declined due to the sheer exhaustion of driving for so long, but she persisted and eventually convinced me to go.

We decided to go to McFarland Park, which had really aesthetically pleasing trails due to them being remarkably untraveled and encompassed by the surrounding nature. The weather was perfect outside, a nice 80 degrees. Nothing seemed out of the norm. I had no clue how long we were going to walk for or which trail we were going to take. We just started walking. Moments later, my mom broke down crying.

Like most people, I hate seeing my mom cry. A child seeing their parents cry is the worst. I was instantly confused and flustered. I could see her mascara dripping down her face. She

could barely get the words “your dad cheated on me” out. I didn’t want to believe it, but there I was, blindly walking and on the verge of bawling myself. After a minute or so I let it all out. I couldn’t breathe.

I had no clue what this meant for my family. Was this an ongoing thing or did this happen while I was away at college and she was just now telling me? I had so many questions. This wasn’t how I wanted the night to go, and it foreshadowed the potential for a horrible quarantine period.

After I finally calmed myself down, I was instantly filled with rage. I was pissed. Pissed at my dad. Pissed at my mom for letting it happen. Pissed at the world. Pissed. I just kept staring at the ground. Constantly having to watch my step, so I didn’t trip over a branch. The trail was more worn down than I remembered; I assumed it was because everyone began walking outside more once quarantine hit.

I used to think that I wanted to find someone that could help me recreate what I *thought* my parents had. I knew they had issues as every married couple does, but that didn’t matter as they had always worked things out. They held hands while walking. They cooked dinner together and binged watched Netflix shows. I enjoyed watching them be together. I guess things had changed since I was away at college.

My mom told me everything on that walk. Their affair started back in January. She was actually a family friend, Tina, so I knew her well. Worse yet, she was the ex of my dad’s best friend. My dad and Tina started talking within weeks of them breaking up. This woman was not ideal as she had many personal issues. She also had a son, who was eleven, and Tina herself was also ten years younger than my dad. In my mom’s eyes, Tina was everything she wasn’t.

The worst part was having my mom tell me that while we were on vacation in Florida, my dad was with Tina. What would have happened if we never took that trip? Would my mom have ever found about them? This affair was complicated. In other words, my dad didn't know whether to end it with Tina or to try again with my mom. According to my mom, she was trying to fix my dad and her relationship.

At this point, we had been walking for over an hour; time had flown by. It was getting late and the sun was going down, but I didn't care. I wanted to let my mom be vulnerable and say everything she needed to at that moment. I knew she had been bottling it up for a few weeks. She gave me her side of the story on those trails, but she also gave me reasons why my dad did it, things that she thought were her fault.

My mom asked me to do three things: not to tell my dad I knew everything because he didn't want the story to be one-sided, not to tell my brother because they needed to tell him together and to not tell my friends because she didn't want their families to judge her. That last one was hard to hear. She was terrified of how people would view her and our family. I did too. Why would I want people to know my dad as the one who ruined our family? I lived in a small town, with a population of a mere 1,000 people. People knew us. My family consists of farmers, so we were widely known in our tiny town. Word would get out.

Immediately after I had gotten home, I broke that third promise my mom had asked me to keep. I called my best friend and told her everything. I needed to as there was no way I could keep my emotions to myself. I don't think I slept for a single minute that night. My mind was constantly racing, thinking of things to say to my dad. I knew I would have to act normal around him and that frightened me. How could I have a conversation, when all I wanted to do was scream at him?

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It's almost been a year since I found out that my dad had an affair. I love my dad. Our relationship over the past year was rocky, but I think we are closer now than we have ever been. I do not agree with what he did, nor will I ever completely forgive him. My mom finally left my dad in June and I am so proud of the growth I have seen in her. At one point, all of us had to go to a therapist, because the consequences were interfering with our everyday lives. In the end, this helped me reach a better place emotionally. I have come to terms with what has happened and I no longer hold it against my dad. Today, I think the hardest part for me is how my dad has finally realized how the mistakes he made affected our family and is currently trying to get my mom back. I haven't decided if this is what is best for our family, but I will support my parents either way.