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Prof. Sutton
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Divorce Papers

My father has not always been the selfless, grateful, God-driven, sober man that he is today. He has a demon that lives inside of him. His demon controlled his actions, words, and thoughts. His demon had the capability of taking him away from me and everybody else who loved him. And came very close too. His demon is called alcoholism. When I was four years old, the only world I knew was flipped upside down. My father decided to file for divorce. I remember hearing my mother crying in the shower from my bedroom. Her sobs were as quiet as she could make them, as she did not want my older brother, Harrison, or myself to hear them. I was confused. I did not understand what was happening. Why my home cooked meals suddenly turned microwavable. Why my brother was acting like a person I had never met before. Why my mother would ask for me to sleep with her, when just a year ago she insisted I sleep in my own bedroom. I have never been a person who is afraid of change. In fact, I usually enjoy it. However, this change terrified me. At the time, I had no idea how this change would positively impact my life.

The summer of 2010 was the summer of weddings. My mother, Stephanie, married an amazing man Richard, who I call RD. RD has two daughters, Mattie who is seven years older than me, and Catherine who is four years older than me, like Harrison. They got married on a beautiful September day at The Ocean Course on Kiawah Island. I was eight at the time. The venue was full of smiling faces of loved ones and friends. Everyone I knew was there besides my dad. My father, Marc, married an incredible woman named Jenni. They got married that June on our family's farm in south Georgia. This venue was also full of family and friends. Well, everybody besides my mom. At this point in my life, I knew my parents did not like each other.

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They did not really keep it much of a secret. Although, I still did not know why, and I could not help but wonder if maybe it was my fault. It was not until I matured was when I was exposed to the truth.

My father is an alcoholic. He knows it. And he is not afraid of telling his story to anybody, because he wishes for others to learn from his mistakes. In 2016, he told me about his demon and how he is replacing his demon with God. I was confused. My dad is an alcohol abuser? I had no idea at the time, however, the more I thought about it, the more it made sense. Like when I would come home from soccer practice or a friend's house and he would be passed out on the couch, I thought he had just been sleepy. The more I thought about my dad's problem, the more I thought of Jenni.

Jenni is an extremely significant person in my life, and it was not until about 5 years ago when I truly started recognizing that. When my dad and Jenni first got married, Harrison did not like her and made his opinion clear. He did not even give her a chance. I always assumed it was my dad and Jenni's twelve year age gap that made Harrison question her intentions. I soon realized it was the way she parented Harrison and me that made Harrison angry. The classic "I have a mom and dad. Stop telling me what to do. You're not my mom." argument. Once Harrison was aware of my father's demon, he began appreciating Jenni and all of the things we did not even realize she did for us. All Jenni has ever wanted was a baby. She married my dad at age 33. They tried several times and she ended up miscarrying. She was absolutely devastated. She told me not long ago, that after her final miscarriage, she suddenly understood that she is not meant to have a baby, but to take care of the children who did not even know desperately needed

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her. And so that is what she did. She hid our father's problem from us well. At least, I never noticed, but this was probably because of my age. Whenever Harrison and I were staying with our dad, Jenni was the adult figure in the house. She cooked for us. She drove us around. She shopped for us. And most importantly, she is probably the biggest reason why my dad is still standing on this Earth today. My dad told me that one day, when he was at his lowest point, Jenni said to him "You need to get your life together. I love you, but not this person you have become. I am not going to leave you because I also love your kids, and if you're not going to show up for them when they're staying with you then who will? You need to stop thinking about yourself and start thinking about the lives of the loved ones around you that you're affecting." After hearing this, my appreciation and love for Jenni grew, and I will forever be grateful for the sacrifices she has made to help pick up the pieces of our once broken family.

Another extremely important figure in my life is RD. RD (which stands for Richard Daddy- I made it up when I was 8), has been my rock for as long as I can remember. He was there for me when sometimes my father couldn't be, he constantly went out of his way to make me feel important, and he made it clear how he loves Harrison and me like we're two of his own. Without RD, I don't know what kind of person Harrison would be today. The divorce took a much larger toll on Harrison's world than mine. He was at a very vulnerable time in his adolescence, a time where every son needs their father the most. If it weren't for RD, I don't know if Harrison would have received all of the needed fatherly wisdom like he had. I was never told this directly, but from what I was able to gather, I believe RD possibly made an even bigger impact on Harrison's life than mine. RD is one of the most hard-working and dedicated men I

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have ever met, and most importantly, he loves my mom unconditionally and that is all I could ever want for her. Along with Richard came Mattie and Catherine. Without these two, I would not be the young adult that I am today. They have been an incredible support system to me throughout the years, and they always happen to know all the right things to say. Being a girl and having older sisters to look up to has really made a difference on the way I wish to perceive myself. Of course, my mother always says to behave like a lady, and I usually tend to do so. However, when my mother would constantly repeat to 11-12 year old me to “act like a lady,” for some reason, it made me want to behave even naughtier. Luckily, I had two older sisters who would get embarrassed easily to keep me in check. At the time, their tough love was irritating, but now I appreciate it because still to this day, it is helping me mature into the woman I wish to be one day.

My father began his sobriety journey on May 31st, 2016. The decision to remain sober not only changed my dad’s life, but our entire families’. In order for his sobriety journey to be successful, my dad started practicing good habits every single day including attending bible studies, volunteering, and going to AA meetings. Practicing these habits every day completely altered my father’s perspective on life. He became happier, healthier, and even started trying to rebuild relationships he had lost in the past, including my mother’s. At first, my mother was skeptical about allowing my father back into her life, which was completely understandable. However, as time passed, she was able to recognize that he was not the same person he used to be. And so with every ounce of grace she has in her body, she forgave him. Today, I am able to say that I am a proud daughter of divorced parents who are best friends.

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What is your initial thought when you see the word “divorce”? Is it sadness? Anger? Confusion? Until about 4 years ago, this is exactly the way I thought about the concept. Now, I think of the word in the sense of a new beginning. Instead of the ending to my family, my family’s divorce was the start to a new one. Without the divorce, four of the most significant individuals in my life would be strangers to me, which is a concept that is really hard to wrap my head around. Not only did the divorce bring me new amazing family members, but it also brought amazing attributes of my own parents to light. My mother taught me the importance of forgiveness and conquering every challenge life throws my way with grace. She is one of the most loving, caring, and strongest people I have ever met and I would be lucky to become half the woman she is one day. My father has taught me the importance of taking every day at a time and doing my very best every day no matter what. He has taught me the importance of thinking about others needs before my own and giving back to the community. Since 2016, my father and I have been volunteering at a Christian based organization called The Charlotte Rescue Mission where men who are suffering with addictions can receive a guided and well organized sobriety experience. The ways in which this organization has positively influenced my life can be expressed in an entirely different essay. Through this experience, I have also developed a stronger relationship with God, which I hope continues to grow stronger each and everyday.

Divorce papers changed my life for the better. Without them, I would not have the family that I have today, and I would not be the person that I am today. Divorce papers have taught me a valuable lesson about perspective. You get out of life whatever you put into it. Nothing good ever comes out of ignorance and laziness. Life is all about working hard for the things you want.

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Without my mother's grace and my father's dedication in becoming the best version of himself he can possibly be, my family would be unrecognizable. I never would have experienced the unforgettable family trip to Utah, the countless family dinners, and the incredible holiday and birthday celebrations. Life is too short to hold grudges. Life is too short to not like the person you have become. We as individuals are responsible for our own lives and what we choose to do with them. Taking a bad situation like divorce and turning it into something positive is a challenging concept to grasp, however with the right mindset and patience, it is not impossible. One day, I hope to share my family's story to the world. My goal is to inspire others to find happiness within life's challenges. I know it may be easier said than done, but coming from a girl who has received the biggest gift of her life through one of the hardest challenges in her life, I believe anybody's story can result in a positive outcome. Let yesterday's challenge become today's solution, and try to smile while you solve it.



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