

Life Span Paper

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Looking back and taking inventory of what my life consisted of and how I came to be for this assignment came at an interesting point in my life. I have recently attempted to clean some skeletons out of my closet, so to speak. Completing this paper not only challenges me, but forces me to take a hard and honest look at how growing up has shaped me. It forces me to look my problems in the face and be able to point to the reasons behind why I have the strengths and weaknesses that I do. There are a few aspects of my younger life that I had accepted in a very matter of fact way until learning that I had to not only look at my past as fact, but as a piece of my life that shaped me and that still affects me today. Whether that be in ways that I like or dislike, maybe even hate.

It feels fitting to begin my lifespan story with some history of my mother. Born and raised between New York and Puerto Rico by a single mother, the youngest of three children and by far the most obedient. My mother has better intentions than most people I know. When she grew up and met my father, she was told that she would not be able to conceive, and that news was heartbreaking. Shortly after marrying my father, she became pregnant with me. She considered her pregnancy a miracle. Psalm 127:3 says that “Children are a gift from the Lord.” So her miracle baby was just that, a gift from God. Throughout the pregnancy she experienced many complications, and at some points her life was in danger due to her pregnancy. She was bed ridden for the final months of her pregnancy, but that was a small price to pay if there was a baby at the end of the fight. When she gave birth prematurely to that baby, to me, she was severely ill and had to be kept in the hospital for a week to be monitored. Her blood pressure was an extreme concern. Medication wasn’t working and the only thing that would stabilize it was when they put me in her arms. Due to these complications, she was unable to breastfeed me for the duration of my infancy.

Now that the background has been set to explain the world I was born into, I can shift focus to myself. One of the skeletons I have been dealing with is my relationship with and feelings towards my mother. According to Edford, breastfeeding releases oxytocin, which causes the feeling of love and closeness. Although I do not feel that my mother lacks love for me, I think her inability to breastfeed me may have deprived our relationship when it first began. Edford mentions how attachment is a bond that occurs between two people, commonly between a parent and an infant (2018). I believe that breastfeeding is a big part of that relationship's formation. In addition to not being able to breastfeed me, once my mother had recovered from her pregnancy she shortly after returned to work, which meant leaving me in the care of her mother frequently. At one point, when I was about three months old, my grandmother took me with her to Puerto Rico. My mother was working and my father has had the same night shift from midnight to eight in the morning for his entire life. So when my grandmother had things to take care of in Puerto Rico, she took me with her. I have heard stories from multiple of my relatives from Puerto Rico of that trip and how I was essentially wailing my head off the whole time. Any time my grandmother left me in someone else's arms I threw a fit and was unable to be consoled even after being returned to her. I think everyone looks back and laughs at how much of a "bad baby" I was, but after learning about the different forms of attachment, I now see that as an infant I was deprived of any sense of stability. Although I was loved and cherished by those around me, I did not have a single person that was attuned to me. I was not with anyone enough for them to understand that when I cried it was because I was in need of something. I was in desperate need of someone to understand and soothe me accordingly. I can see how my upbringing as an infant and toddler during that time of my life shaped me. I know myself to be

an easily stressed and anxious person. This is quite fitting for babies who are unable to form secure attachments.

It is common for grandchildren to attach to their grandparents, especially when they live in the same household, according to Edford (2018). The process is typically harsh on the infant, as it usually requires detachment from the parents. I believe that this is something that I went through. I know the level of love and comfort that being with my grandmother brings me. That comfort is not present when it comes to my mother, which pains me to admit. I know that to my mother I was her little miracle, and to say that I feel more strongly towards my grandmother than to my own mother is difficult.

My constant need for stimulation also adds to my parent's sentiment of why I was a "bad baby." According to my mother, even if I was simply hanging out in my rocker, I needed someone to bounce it. If I was in the stroller, it had to be rolling. I could not be calm unless I was experiencing a sense of movement or was otherwise entertained. As I grew a bit older, this transformed into my inability to entertain myself. I was not good at playing by myself and always preferred to have someone entertaining me. Honestly, I am not sure what the cause of this tendency was. I could take a guess and say that it was because I was the first baby born into a house where there was a mother, a father, an uncle and a grandmother all over me all the time and I simply grew accustomed to and eventually dependent on others to feel safe and satisfied. I hated being in a room alone and I let people know that I felt that way as a baby. My constant need for stimulation still holds true today. I always have something to fidget with, constantly have my leg shaking or have my attention split between more than one thing. I was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder when I was a junior in high school after my first

major concussion. I believe that even as an infant I displayed these tendencies for hyperactivity and the need for constant stimulation.

Although I may have been called a bad baby, I would say that I was a good toddler. As the only child surrounded by adults most of the time, I excelled quickly in my language development. I was exposed to both Spanish and English as a baby and when I first began talking I was able to speak and understand both languages equally well. Along with my ability to understand both languages, I also began using full proper sentences by age two. In this area of development, I would say that I was ahead of the normal curve. Another area which I would claim to have excelled at was potty training. By the age of two I was completely potty trained with the exception of some accidents at bed time every now and then. In addition to language and potty training, the textbook also mentions a toddler being able to dress themselves. As a toddler and into my early childhood, I was not really permitted to dress myself. Not that I was unable to, but because I needed to look perfect all the time which my mother saw to. I was an intelligent child. Not in a boastful way, but simply as a matter of fact. Because of this even as a toddler I was able to excel in language, potty training, and even gross motor skills as I began walking earlier than most children do. I was a healthy kid, I excelled in what I was expected to accomplish in my short life up to that point, and to my mother this was further proof that her little gift from God was indeed the perfect miracle.

The first home I remember having was the one that I lived in from the time I was about six months old until around five years of age. In that apartment in Corona, Queens I went from being an infant to a young child, and from being a single child to one of three. I don't remember my sister being born, or bringing her home from the hospital. What I do remember, was losing my ball pit to a crib. Yes, I had a ball pit in my room, and yes, I was a spoiled only child. The

apartment we lived in was a two-bedroom, which meant as the only child, I had a whole room to myself. *Even my parents have to share a room*, I remember thinking. *But not me*. That was until my sister was born, and I had to trade my ball pit for a crib. Then, on top of that, there was a loud baby that was placed in the room with me. Saying that I was unhappy about the change would be an understatement. When my sister was born I lost all the attention of those around me. Going from the center of attention to being tossed aside was difficult and painful for me. Edford states that it is not uncommon for one child to feel that another child is receiving more attention and therefore feel jealousy towards that sibling (2018). I was a prime example of this. So, naturally, I tried to rid myself of the intruder. For the first year of my sister's existence in my life I quite literally tried to kill her. I tried things from poking her with the end of a broom through the bars of her crib, to slamming her in between doors to even on one occasion trying to drown her. Thankfully, she is completely fine and my attempts were unsuccessful. Because of my actions, my parents took me to a child psychologist who confirmed I was feeling neglected and jealous. Then 10 months after my sister was born, we had another addition to the family. This time a little brother, whom I accepted with a lot more grace than I did my sister. Being an older sibling to them, although I started it off on the wrong foot, has been something that has shaped me. I accepted the role of example maker and leader. For almost the entirety of my life I have felt their admiration for me. Edford mentions that oldest siblings have tendencies to be the most traditional and responsible (2018). In my case I would agree that I am definitely the most traditional, I cannot claim to be the most responsible. Edford also claims that the oldest sibling is likely to be the most anxious and in terms of my family this would be correct. I do not believe that my brother knows what stress or anxiety are while I feel that I am under constant pressure from them and I will admit I am jealous of that characteristic.

When my brother was born space became an issue. We didn't live in a very nice neighborhood and I had to take long bus rides to get to and from my private school. I even remember walking over an unconscious drunk man on our way to Sunday school one morning. Eventually, we moved out of that apartment and into a house in the suburbs. This was just in time for me to start first grade, the beginning of middle childhood. This was when I can first remember feeling pressure to succeed. I mentioned earlier that my mother saw me as a gift from God. Which I would say that all children are. However, I believe under my mother's circumstances, she took things a little further with me and expected that I would be perfect in everything that I did. This became evident for me when school began. Performance and results began to be a big part of my life, and if expectations were not met then there was no play time, no friends. Only rewriting schoolwork and completing assignments that my mom conjured up in an effort to ensure that I stayed at a high level. I remember one year for Christmas I couldn't open up gifts from Santa because I didn't get all the state capitals correct on a quiz. Instead of unwrapping gifts with my siblings and cousins, I sat on my own in a separate room with my flash cards. The fear of not getting good grades in school pushed me to do well no matter what the cost. As a result, and against my beliefs, I cheated in the classes I struggled in. Looking back at how the fear to succeed affected my development I wonder how seriously I would have taken my schooling had the circumstances been different. Currently, my intelligence and accomplishments are something I consider to be part of my identity and something to be proud of.

During my junior year of high school I experienced depression for the first time, adolescent depression. I had pressure from home but also from friends and teachers at school. It was around this time in my life when my friends started to venture into drug and alcohol use and when romantic relationships were lasting more than a few hours. Above all else, I felt pressure to

get into college. The driving force behind this pressure and anxiety were the SAT's that were fast approaching. After taking the practice exam, my subpar math skills were evident. I had never been a strong math student and because that was a decent portion of the SAT, my mom decided to get me a tutor that I met with multiple times a week in order to bring my grade up. These tutoring sessions were stressful and I remember breaking down during a couple of them because my score wasn't improving. One day shortly before the SAT test day I had a soccer game. I ended up getting a severe concussion and was unable to take the SAT. The amount of relief I felt after getting injured is something I remember washing over me to this day. That injury was what opened my eyes and made me realize how much stress was on my shoulders for the first time in my life.

The drive to excel academically didn't end with high school. It continued throughout college as well. Not only did I do my utmost to perform well in college, but I also burdened myself with one of the most difficult majors my college had to offer. This wasn't a major that I was interested in, but honestly, I was an obedient child and when my mom told me that I should pursue it I didn't ask any questions. I went on to get a Bachelor of Science degree in Biomedical Sciences and minor in Psychology all while being a full-time varsity athlete. After I graduated, I felt more lost than ever. I had a degree in a field I had no interest in pursuing and parents wondered why I wasn't going out there utilizing the education they spent so much money for me to get.

Earlier in this paper I mentioned how my family of five was living in a two-bedroom apartment in Queens. Living there was not a pretty picture. But as we grew, so did my father's business. He was not around very often growing up because he would be asleep when we were awake, but he worked hard so we could live better lives. Each time we moved, a total of four

times, we moved into a bigger home, a better school district, and a safer area. He was and still is an amazing father and provider. I am thankful that he was able to provide so much for me. I have grown up with a sense of privilege because I remember the first home I lived in. Compared to the home I share with my family now it is quite the difference.. I feel a separation from my younger siblings because I was shaped by growing up in the city while being pretty poor, while their younger developmental years were spent in more middle class areas. They may not have felt out of place going to an all-Jewish high school, but I sure did. I noticed that I was the only Latina in my classes while life in a Jewish neighborhood as a member of the middle class is all they knew. I am blessed to be able to say that even though I was in the minority, I have never considered myself a victim of racism or prejudice in any of my schooling.

Overall, I am nothing but thankful that God has placed me where he has. I have received more love in my short life than many have had in their lifetime. No one grows up without influence from their parents and the world around them. Sometimes that influence is for the better and sometimes it is for the worse. I am only just beginning to see how dealing with the hurt in my past can improve how I live my life moving forward. Which those simple words cannot do justice to. Writing this paper in conjunction with the current time of healing I find myself in has been all the more rewarding and extremely beneficial in unpacking many deep-rooted emotions.

References

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