

## **Life Span Rubric**

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There is a saying that when you look back over your life and consider where you are from where you have been you cannot help but give God the praise. For me that is the story of my life. When I look at the different developmental milestones, I can relate to how they have affected my life. Who I am or more importantly who I have become is based on how my life has gone through transitional periods at the correct time in my life. As I have navigated the middle stage of my life, I have learned to embrace the fact that every person has different seasons in which a person must pass through. Some of those seasons will define you and some as you grow, will be seasons where you will define the season.

I was adopted at the age of nine months by the great aunt of my biological mother. I consider my adoption between family members a blessing because I was able to know my lineage, whereas other adoptees do not know where or who they came from. I had a foundation even though I didn't realize it or appreciate it until I was older. Being adopted can be considered by some to be a blessing because you are chosen by someone to give you love. Adoption can also be a drawback because in my case it can lead to having abandonment issues, especially for me since I am the middle child of seven children by my biological parents.

I had a normal childhood up until the age of eleven when I was able to understand that I was adopted. From what I was told from my biological mother, I was able to reach my milestone of early childhood easily. I spent weekends and summers with my siblings and because they were older, I was talking and walking by the age of one. I was potty trained within a year and half. In southern cultures children do not stay on baby food for long. I was eating mashed soft solid foods by four months. In today's society eating at such an early age would not be considered healthy but when cultural society norms are of such and during a period of the early sixties, in many instances people did not have the means for diverse types of food so a child ate what everyone in the family ate just in a different form.

I started kindergarten at the age of four and half because of my birthday falling at the end of the year. My adopted mom introduced me to reading at an early age. I remember she had a big book of Hans Christian Anderson fairy tales and every evening she would read me a bedtime story no matter how tired she was. In school, I always had a love for reading and writing. In my home I was an only child and reading was a way of entertaining myself. My mother never censored my reading but would explain things to me. She would buy me books not just for my imagination but also about African American history that was age appropriate. I believe that reading is one of the reasons I am able to articulate, write, and have an open mind.

Children are naturally inquisitive between the ages of 5 and 8. I was no different. I had an imagination, and it did include imaginary friends. I would come home and what I would learn in school would be taught to my imaginary students. Little did I know I was helping myself study by repeating my lessons. My classroom was complete with tests, report cards, attendance book, and other objects that I would see my teacher use in class. I would yell at my students for being bad and even have teacher conferences. Looking back, I laugh because it seems crazy to have paper spread out on the floor and yelling at no one. What I later came to realize was my adopted dad did not know how to read and write. He would be the one who would pick me up from school and spend time with me in the evenings before my mother got home. I would ask him to help me with my homework and he would always tell me to wait until my mother got home. I never knew he was unable to help me until I was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade. In my young imaginary world when I was instructing my students, he would be listening and looking at my childish handwriting and trying to figure it out like my students were. Little did I know I was helping him to read and write. I never question my dad but now I understand why education was a crucial factor in my household.

Conversations and books are had about nature vs nurture. I believe that I am a product of both. While I have the biological traits of my father whom I look like. The things I get from my biological father are my looks, cooking, pride in culture and a love of reading. I do believe who I am as a person reflects a lot on what I was taught by my adopted parents. It was the nurture aspect of my environment that grounded me in my identification and morals in helping me to become who I am today. My adopted mother introduced me to books, culture, operas, plays, traditional outings at Christmas to Radio City, museums, traveling, how to be a young lady. Growing up my mom would be considered bougee. She and her sister, which was my grandmother were the matriarch of the family. My mother would be the one who called people out and manage the business or crisis that was happening within the family. My mother was dignified in her speech and the way she carried herself in business. My grandmother ruled in a quiet way, but her word was law. I was taught from an early age, how to take care of things, whether personal, family, or business from these two women. My adopted dad instilled in me a sense of pride as to who I am. I grew up in a time when there was busing, and racial unrest was still prevalent. My mother insisted that I go to schools in a more upscale section of Queens, which at that time was predominantly Caucasian. I experienced being called nigger and worse. I was made ashamed of being dark skin. I was questioned about having long wavy hair and being black. I would cry because I did not see dolls who reflected me, so I wanted to be like Cindy on the Brady Bunch. By the way I hate being called Cindy now because of how I had related to it in my younger years. It was my father who was also dark skin that would instill in me a sense of pride in the way I looked. I would listen to the stories of their sharecropping days, migration north, Jim Crow laws and holdbacks that my parents had to go through to get to where they were. I sat at the knee of the elders to learn my history. And in all their struggles there was God. Sunday mornings were not always church, but you heard church sermons on the radio EVERY Sunday. It was my mom and dad who saved and bought a house and many relatives who migrated north, stayed with my parents before moving on. It was my mom

whose kitchen people would come too on Saturdays and especially Sundays for cooking. Never was a person turned away. It would be the shoulders of my parents and through their teachings that when I reached the darkest chapters of my life, I would remember their strength and teachings to give me courage to help me overcome my obstacles.

Another aspect of the nature vs nurture that I have witnessed is the difference between my siblings and me. My upbringing has allowed me to want different things in life. I have goals and I do what is necessary to achieve them. I am motivated and do not settle for less. I have always worked and strived for a higher education. I am outgoing and travel. My morals are a little old fashioned when it comes to things such as marriage, children, and respectability as a woman. As much as I love my siblings they are not grounded. Many struggles with things in life. They have more of an attitude like my biological mom, in the areas of being clannish, grudgeful, and not motivated to achieve better things in life. It is a generational cycle of settling for less. I am not looking down on them, but it is an honest assessment of how they are. They call me bougee because of how I live my life and how I have raised my children. There are nieces who on the other hand have told me I am an inspiration to them to do more, want more, and to never give up.

As idyllic as all of what I have written sounds, I was also raised in an abusive household. My mother had a drinking problem, and my father was abusive to my mother. The glue for them was me. I was the one who had to console my mom. I would get my dad to do things around the house she could not get him to do. I was the peacemaker from as early as four. Verbal abuse from my mother played a role as I grew and contradicted what I was taught in my early years. When I became rebellious around the age of twelve after learning about my adoption it was at that same time my mother drinking became worse. I question my sense of self during my early teenage years. I would describe it as a period of interruption while I tried to understand the dynamics of who I was, where I belong, loyalty, and my

sense of worth. Author Santrock, (2019), describes adolescent children experiencing a period in which, “adolescents may have difficulty incorporating their adoptive status into their identity in positive way” (66). It would take years for me to make peace with the younger me. When a person has an addiction such as alcohol, which my mom did it did not make the transition easy for me with my family members. My mom as much as she loved me would become verbally abusive when drinking. The destruction was in the words that was focused on who I was as a person. I allowed myself not to be affected by them, and I resolved it by engaging in destructive behavior. Alcohol and marijuana were my go-to. It was a trait that ran in the family. Alcohol would play an important part because of the learned behavior of my mother.

Just when everything was turning around in my late teens, I suffered another setback. I was attacked while coming home from school. While I always had a healthy self esteem despite my family situation, the attack left me in a state of despair. I was functioning but it was at a cost of allowing what had happen to me to define who I was. The plans I had for myself to go to college took a back seat and for a few years I lost myself into drugs and alcohol to numb the pain of what had happen to me. In a course of an hour my life was changed. I got a state job, quit college, and really did not have a care. I allowed the words of my mother, the abandonment issues caused by adoption, and what had happened to me to define me as a person. I agree with the author Bovin, (2017), that a survivor of rape, “stive to get their lives back to normal, they may experience depression, fear, anxiousness, posttraumatic stress disorder, increased substance abuse, and suicidal thoughts for months or years” (419). At different points of my life, I experience each symptom while going through life. I allowed people in my life who had no business being there to have a role. I continued to live a double life. One that seem as those I had it all together and one that was a mess due to the people, places, and things that surrounded me.

I knew by my mid twenty's things had to change. I was always mature for my age. I became a mother and a wife who was not going to continue in a cycle. I was determined to break past traumatic cycles that had affected my family. Over the years, I made a home, I became the caretaker of my parents until the past, had a career, and would become the go to person in my extended family as well as ex-in laws. I was nurturer by nature. It is who I am as a person. I learned and came to accept that sometimes you don't create your destiny, but your destiny is created by God. There are chapters in your life and it up to you what you do with them. God gives you no more than you can bear. Everything I have been through I feel is for the betterment of others. I utilize my life to help others to overcome the obstacles in theirs. It hasn't always been easy; I have lost everything only to gain so much more.

As a person who is in my fifty's I realize that things that were once important, no longer has the sway over me. Even though I still enjoy places and things, the material things are what have lost their appeal to me. One of the things that had help me was counseling. In my family counseling was frowned upon. Even when I had my traumatic experience instead of getting help for me, it was not talked about. Prayer is good but sometimes it is not enough. When I was young, I would say when I grow up, I will be a teacher or a child psychologist. Life has its own plans, and I went in another direction. It is now that I find myself going to school to be a counselor. I am working as a case planner for a preventive agency. In helping families, I can utilize my life experience to help motivate others. Before now, I worked for the NYS for thirty-two years in different areas of customer relations. I have always been able to utilize my skills, empathy, and knowledge in helping others. I believe that the trajectory I am taking now in gaining more insight into how to apply the various levels of the counseling profession with my prior experiences and knowledge will only enhance my ability into helping others. Every situation and household I enter, I go in with an unobstructed vision of understanding in order that I may make the right decisions in a family's life. I previously answer a question as to how counseling has impacted my life. I stated, "**Life** experiences have been lessons to me. I believe that the experiences I have

had, whether good or bad, were not for me but for me to use to help and encourage others less fortunate than whatever they may be facing, God's help is available to them as it was for me to overcome. I stand on the scripture from 2 Corinthians 1:4 (Life Application Study Bible) states, "He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us. "People have always gravitated towards me to listen to them and give good counsel to the best of my ability."

To understand someone, you must get to know them. In my current job I conduct cultural and background assessments on families. I have learned to ask open ended questions as well as hard personal questions. I need to gain the information for me to establish the right treatment plan for the family. You cannot help someone by assuming or having personal biases. Every situation is different, and some questions may not be appropriate for every situation. I have learned to assess the situation first and establish a relationship with the client that they may feel comfortable enough to answer the questions I have for them. I utilize empathy, understanding, and compassion when I am dealing with anyone. Author Neukrug (2014), refers to the purpose of questioning clients is, "helpful in uncovering patterns, gathering information quickly, inducing self-exploration, challenging the client to change and moving a client along quickly to preferred goals." (p. 159) Uncovering patterns in a person's behavior and life span can help you to understand what has happened, what is going on, and

what needs to be done to change that pattern. Most people who are seeking counseling are hiding facts that need to be explored from their past.

Life has not always been easy, but it has been a journey that I got to experience. People look over their lives and want to change the outcome of situations. I may tweak some areas but, I would leave my story just the way it is. I believe that God had me on a path and He makes no mistakes. What he has started He will finish. Everything that has happened has caused me to be the woman I am today. I dedicated to using myself for the betterment of God's people.

#### **References**

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