Hope Barnhart

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English 210

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Family Issues

 A little girl around the age of five, alone in her father’s house was waiting for him to come back. She had long, brown hair that was a tangled mess from running her hands through it in panic. She ran around the house looking for anyone, but no one appeared. As she started to cry, she heard the front door open and in came her father with his girlfriend who was covered head to toe in tattoos. He was supposed to be watching her for the day and had promised to never leave her, but that promise had been short lived. They walked in and acted as if they had done nothing wrong. The little girl ran up to her room wishing she was back home with her mother instead of with the man she called her dad. This little girl is me and for the time being, I had to deal with being in this house with a man who was not fit to be a father.

 When I was one year old, my mother and I were on our way to the Pentagon to see my father at work. There was a picnic, and my mom was going to drop me off with my father at the Pentagon on her way to work at Xerox. My father was a short man with short curly black hair and very tan skin. His eyes were like black holes that would stare into your soul when you got in trouble. He was the opposite of my mom, she was a tall woman with fair skin and bright green eyes. Her smile would light up a room and she had short brown curly hair. It was a cool September morning; my mom and I were running late because she overslept. While we were on the way, my mom was singing to the radio while I watched the trees go by in a blur. As we neared the Pentagon, there were planes flying low; however, this was not unusual for the nearby Naval base. She parked the car and as we were about to get out and head inside, a plane hit the side of the Pentagon where my father was. My mom didn’t know what to do. She was frantically looking around hoping that my father would walk out of the building but all we could see from the building was fire and smoke. We waited to see if anyone came out of the building and if my dad was okay. My mom tried calling him amongst all the chaos, but she never got an answer. There were screams and sirens coming from all over; there were a few people who were coming out crying and covered in ash, but none were my father. The first responders made my mom and me leave even though my father was inside. My mom ended up taking me to work with her; when we arrived at her office for Xerox, all her coworkers were bombarding her with questions concerning my father. Her boss sat on the floor to play with me while my mom made numerous calls to see if anyone had any word on my dad. Eventually, we got word that he was okay; however, many of his coworkers were not. The next time we saw him, his dress white uniform was no longer white, but a smog color. After 9-11, he was never the same, it was as if something changed inside him.

My parents got a divorce when I was four and my little sister was just a few months old. It was not a nasty divorce; after my father cheated on her while he was on deployment, it was a given that they would no longer be together. I was heart broken when they gave me the news; I did not want my dad to leave, and I wanted my parents to stay together. However, it was not my decision to make. Before the divorce, he was not the best dad, he would sit around and play video games all day instead of watching me. Whenever my mom went on a business trip, she would make my meals in advance because he would not feed me on his own without being reminded to. A couple months after the divorce, my father moved out and it was just my mom, my sister, and I. My mother and I were used to it only being the three of us because my father was in the Navy and got deployed frequently. The only difference was that my father would not be coming back to our house. He promised me he would call and come visit me and take me out; as the naïve little girl that I was, I believed him.

 Every Wednesday and every other weekend, my dad had visitation. I would get all dressed up and would wait for him to come get me. He never called saying he was not coming so I always assumed he would be there at six o’clock in the evening to pick me up. Unfortunately, he would never show up. I thought he had forgotten but the next week he was also a no-show. I always felt like I was not good enough for him to come see me. I soon started thinking he had better thing to do than come see his daughter. Finally, after a while, my mom and I would go out and do things since he never showed up. I always wondered what he was doing instead or who he was with. Once in a blue moon he would show up; I stopped getting all dressed up for him, and we would go out to eat. I used to think that he would take me out because he missed me until I soon learned that there was always an underlying reason he would visit: to decrease child support.

Back at home, a few months after the divorce when I was about five, my mom told me she went on a date; we were close and she always shared things with me. I wanted to meet him, but my mom wanted to have a few more dates with him before she let me meet him, all I knew was that his name was Jason. A couple months later, I met him; I was nervous but excited to meet him and his son who was a couple years older than me. As we pulled up to this apartment complex, there was a man with dark hair and his son who looked to be around eight, throwing a football. I thought we were just going to drive past them but the next thing I knew, my mom pulled up right beside them. My mom smiled and that is how I knew this was the man who she was dating. He was a tall guy with bushy eyebrows. His face was smooth with no facial hair due to him being in the military. His son, Alex, was taller than me with long brown hair and a freckle above his lip. The two had the same small nose and dark brown eyes.

Getting into the car Jason turned to the back and said, “Hey Hope, I’m Jason and I have heard so much about you.”

I smiled in return because I didn’t know what to say.

As my mom began to drive to the park, Jason tried to start a conversation, “So Hope, are you excited for the park?”

I eagerly replied, “Yeah, I love going to the park.”

This response seemed to make him happy because he began to smile and asked me what my favorite thing to do at the park was. I told him that I loved playing on the slide. Throughout this conversation with Jason, his son remained silent and stared out the window.

As soon as we arrived at the park, we all split up. I went to the monkey bars, Alex went to the slide, and my mom went to put our stuff on a picnic table with Jason and my little sister Paige. It was a hot summer day, and the monkey bars were slick. I was almost half way across when I fell onto my left arm. I tried not to cry and went to tell my mom who thought I was making it up. My arm slowly started to turn purple and I thought it was broken. I went to my mom trying to hold back tears, but she thought I was messing around. However, as soon as Jason saw it, he packed everything up, held an ice pack to my arm and we were off to the doctor. I started to cry because I did not want my arm to be broken. The car ride felt like it took ages, Jason held the ice pack against my arm the whole way to the doctor and repeatedly told me I would be okay. I was shocked by this because my father would have told me to toughen up and deal with it. At the doctor, he confirmed my thoughts that my arm was broken and I would have to get a cast. The cast was big and bulky, but I got to choose the color, pink. After the cast was put on my arm, I asked my mom if I could see Jason and I gave him the biggest hug I could muster.

When I was at my house with my mom, everything was perfect. We would laugh and play, and even though she was busy with work, she would always make time for me. Without her and her support, I could not have become the person I am today. A couple months later, my father decided to take me to his house for the weekend; I begged my mom to not let me go because I didn’t want to leave her, but she said it would be good for me and that if I wanted to come home to just call her and she would be there. We got to his house out in Virginia Beach, which was about twenty minutes away from my home; it was an average house made of bricks with a red roof and matching door. However, the red door was not what caught my attention about this house, it was the shiny black motorcycle sitting in the cracked driveway. My dad never drove motorcycles, so I kept wondering whose it was. Little did I know that as soon as I walked in the door I would find out: his girlfriend’s.

 The house smelt like cigarettes and wet dog; it was somewhat clean but gloomy inside. My father mentioned he had a roommate but failed to bring up how it was his girlfriend he was living with. Two dogs I could not see, were barking wildly, and down the stairs came a strange woman with long, black curly hair and covered in tattoos. Her skin was blotchy and wrinkled; the kind from years of drinking and smoking. She was wearing a plain t-shirt and jeans. There was a tattoo poking out from the collar of her shirt and her arms were full of colors, animals, words, and symbols. She worked for the Air Force on planes which is how she and my father had met. Her name was Ana, and she was so happy to finally meet me. She apparently had heard so much about me, yet I had never heard a thing about her. She had a room for me in their house, a room painted dark blue with a king size bed in the middle. I was shocked and grateful that I wasn’t going to be sleeping on the couch. I gave her a genuine smile to show her I was thankful for setting up a room for me. The weekend went by in a blur; I mostly stayed in my room. The dad I once knew was replaced by a stranger.

One night, I was so mad at him for not calling or coming to see me that when he picked me up, I wouldn’t talk to him. I had called him because I missed him, and he let the call go to voicemail and never called me back. Another time, we had just arrived at the AJ Gators, a bar and grill, near my house and he was getting angry that I wasn’t speaking so he tried talking to my little sister who said she wanted her daddy. But she didn’t mean him; she meant Jason, my mom’s boyfriend. I thought it was hilarious, but I knew not to laugh because it would make him more mad. We ordered our drinks and, being the stubborn and petty person I am, I talked to the waitress but still not to my father. He had enough and paid for the drinks we never got and took me back home. He called me ungrateful and told me that I was being a little brat. I wanted to yell at him, but I stayed silent for the ten-minute car ride back to my house. The whole time I was hurt that he did not understand why I was upset. The next week, he didn’t come to see me. Between visits, I would occasionally call my dad, but he would never answer any of my calls. I would always have to leave a message to get a call back, and it would normally take a week or two to hear back from him.

 As the months passed by, about a year after the divorce, Jason started coming to the house more often and my father would still be a no show on days he had visitation. Finally, one weekend he picked me up and took me to his house. I never liked going there because there was nothing to do, and my father wouldn’t spend any time with me. Ana was in the kitchen, and my dad handed me a little black box. He told me to go ask Ana to be my new mom.

I replied, “I already have a mom.” He did not like that response and we got into a small argument before he forced me into the kitchen. As Ana turned around, she had a look of surprise on her face. In my unhappiest voice, I asked her if she would like to be my new mom. The whole time, I felt like I was betraying my mom; the words tasted like vomit. After I finished asking her, I opened the little black box and my father came to stand behind me. She said yes and put her hands to her face while started crying.

I asked her why she was crying, and she replied, “Because it is so special that you asked me.” In turn I said, “It isn’t special because he made me say it. I already have a mom and you aren’t her.”

My father gave me a look that could kill, and I gave him the same look back. Ana stopped crying but still had a small smile on her face. I did not feel bad for what I said because everything I said was true. I had a mom at home and it was not Ana. Even after they got married, I refused to call her mom; I always called her Ana. I went up to my room and called my mom to come get me. I no longer wanted to be anywhere near this house or the people in it. When I got home, Jason and Alex were there, and we had a movie night with pizza. It was a good end to a bad day.

Eventually, he came to see me again; he told me that he and Ana were fighting, and he did not know if they would be together for much longer. I didn’t know whether to be happy or sad. I felt happy because I hated being in that house that smelt like smoke, but I felt sad because they made each other happy. He took my baby sister and me to a tattoo parlor in the bad part of Norfolk where Ana was in the process of getting another tattoo on her back. Norfolk is known for many shootings and robberies. My mothers house was about 45 minutes away because she believed this city was no place for a child. The parlor was dark, and all the artists were covered in tattoos just like Ana. We walked past multiple people who were lying or sitting in the process of getting their tattoos. We finally made it to Ana who was lying topless on a table getting a large black panther tattooed on her back with the tail wrapping around her shoulder. The man doing the tattoo scared me due to the piercings all over his face. My father and Ana made up at the tattoo parlor and ended up staying together. About a year later they had two boys.

When I got home that night, I told my mom everything and to say she was angry would have been an understatement. She could not believe that my father had taken his five-year-old and one-year-old daughters into a tattoo parlor.

As more time went by, my father came around less and less, and Jason became my father figure. He would sleep at our house and we even had a room for his son to sleep in too. All of us would go out and do different things together. Over time, Alex and I began to grow closer and became best friends. One cool summer evening, we were all at the pool. Alex and I were playing together while my mom was in the kiddy pool area with my little sister. Jason was in a secluded area of the pool under a while pergola. Alex and I went over to talk to him about what we wanted for dinner. While speaking to him, Alex and I both noticed Jason had a ring on his finger. I was silver with diamonds lining the band. We exchanged a confused look and soon ended the conversation with Jason.

We swam away and the first thing I said was, “Did you see that he has a ring on his finger?’

Alex replied, “Yeah I did. But they wouldn’t have gotten married without telling us, would they?”

I sarcastically responded, “Well Alex, it looks like they did.”

Later that night after we got home from the pool, my mom and Jason sat Alex and I down at the table and told us they had gotten married a couple days before. Shock was clearly written all over my face because after the news, my mom asked me if I was okay. I was so happy for her and that I would have a real dad, but I was also upset that they never told us. They explained that the next month we were going on vacation and they would be having a family wedding there. I was so excited because I wanted to be the flower girl.

 After he married my mom, I started calling him dad because he was more of a father to me than my biological father was. He would do everything with me, from daddy-daughter dances to camping with my girl scout troop. Jason also did not need to be reminded to feed me if my mom went out on a business trip. He was everything my biological father wasn’t, and I was so grateful he came into my life.

About two years after my mom and Jason got married, we were on vacation in the beautiful mountains in Gatlinburg, Tennessee. We were staying in a log cabin and the rain was pounding softly on the windows. From the windows we could see the steam rolling off the mountains in waves. We decided to stay in that day and my sister and I were watching a movie. I went to my parent’s room where they were talking, I climbed onto the bed and asked if I could talk to them. They first shared a look of confusion before saying yes. I last in between them and looked at Jason and asked him if I could have his last name. His face was a mix of pure shock and happiness. My mother and Jason both asked me if I was sure and explained what changing my last name would mean. This would mean that my biological father would have to sign away all rights to me and give them to Jason for him to legally adopt me. They both were unsure if my biological father would agree to it but promised me they would try.

At this time, my biological dad stopped coming to see me altogether, and he moved to Oklahoma with Ana and their two sons. Inside, I wanted my dad to fight for me and not sign away all rights, but I also wanted nothing to do with him anymore.

One day, my father called my mom and asked her again to lower the amount of child support he was paying because he had another baby on the way; this time it was a baby girl. My mom proposed that instead of lowering child support, he could sign away his rights all together. My father was all for it; this made me feel like a piece of dirt because he wasn’t going to fight for me, but at the same time I was going to have a dad who actually loved me and was going to be there no matter what. They went to court and filled out mountains of paperwork.

In May 2012, I was legally adopted, and my name changed from Hope Paz to Hope Barnhart. This was one of the happiest days of my life because I finally had a dad who cared about me and would take care of me without having to be told or reminded.

My dad, Jason, and I have gotten along ever since, and I have never heard or seen my biological father again. My dad and I sometimes fight but we always get through it, and most of the time we play fight; my mom claims we fight like brother and sister. He has continued to be there for me and take care of me. Having him in my life has shown me how a dad should act and that, while anyone can be a father, it takes a strong man to be a dad, especially when he is a dad to two kids who aren’t biologically his own. Even though my sister and I are not blood related to my dad, he still treats us as if we are. A true dad will do anything for his children and now I am happy to have someone who would do anything for me.