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Toughing It Out

I always wondered why my parents were so hard on me when I was younger. I always thought they were super strict because they were just that kind of parent. I thought they were like that because they wanted to be and never explained why, and it bothered me. They were always tough on me about school and keeping my grades up because I was going to be a first generation college student and of course, I always wanted good grades. If it ever came to me getting a C on an assignment, my parents would get livid about the semi-bad grade but in my head, the C wasn’t really a big deal to me and I would make sure to do better the next time. They would get mad and ground me for that one assignment and even take my phone privileges away or they would make it impossible for me to hang out with my friends. Of course being a teenager, I was upset and mad that, that would happen because in this century, your phone was a big part of your everyday life and so was your social life.

I remember in 6th grade I had gotten a C for the first quarter of the school year and my parents were so mad because that was the first C I had ever gotten in my life. In my defense, I had just moved to Virginia from California because my dad’s job had moved us here and California’s education system was not as advanced as Virginia’s education system. When that happened, even though it wasn’t a big thing yet, they took my little slide up keyboard phone away for the whole year because of the bad grade. I was upset it happened because I still had friends back in California that I had contact with through my phone but never got to talk to because my parents had taken it away. I was about eleven or twelve so I got over it but I still got upset about it from time to time. I constantly and vividly remember every single time my parents would grill me so hard about getting a bad grade but then end up with almost all straight A’s and maybe a B here and there from time to time. I always thought the yelling was unnecessary if I ended up having good grades in the end. It had gotten to the point that I would get very upset when they would yell at me.

“We know you can do better.”

“You need to study more.”

“We’re disappointed in this grade. You need to try harder.” I mean, they were right, but sometimes that was the best that I could do. What if I was already trying my hardest? I studied forever and ended up with a bad grade and I would be upset about it all day because I had the feeling that I did well on it but I really didn’t. I don’t think my parents really understood that because they were blinded by their desire for me to go above and beyond and do great in school. This continued through high school and throughout high school my parents were still as strict as they could be.

My freedom to hang out with friends was very limited. I could only hang out with the friends that I’ve had to introduce to my mom so many times until she felt comfortable with me going out with them. I couldn’t sleep over at anyone’s house unless she really knew them and that was rare. I never went to birthday parties, never got to go to beach week, or really go to school dances. I never really lived a high school life and I didn’t know if it was because my parents didn’t trust me, didn’t trust the outside world, or again, just felt like it. I always look back to those years and wondered what it would have been like if my parents weren’t so strict on me. Would I have had more friends? Would I have been more social?

The first real boyfriend I ever had was when I was fifteen and I felt that he was fit enough for my parents to like him. This was a big thing not just for them but for me too because if I didn’t think he was good enough, I really wouldn’t have even talked to him in the first place because my parents held high expectations. I remembered how anxious and nervous I was this day that I couldn’t sit still. I was standing right at the front door waiting for him to get to my house, staring at my messed up nails that I had just painted that morning but ruined from chewing on them because I was nervous. It was a bad habit I picked up whenever I felt uneasy or nervous about something happening which was mostly whenever I was around my parents when they needed to talk to me. He had gotten to my house and my heart started to race because I felt even more nervous than I already was. I didn’t know what was going to happen and all I thought about was that I really wanted their approval of him because I really liked that boy. I introduced him to my parents before we even started officially dating because I felt that it was important for him to meet them. My mom was always weird about boys and my dad was just always on my mom’s side with everything that happened. To my surprise, they liked him and had nothing against him but I think it was only for my sake because I was getting older, and this was bound to happen at some point. We had dated for almost two years and school was going great for me, I actually had a good group of friends, and my marching band was going great that year. Out of the blue one day, my parents had called me to their room and it was always an immediate reaction for me to be scared because I figured it had to do with school and I was just getting myself ready to be yelled at but I did not know what it was because I thought everything was going great that quarter.

I walked into their room, messing with my hands because I seemed to fiddle around with my hands whenever my parents talked to me. I wasn’t sure if it was a coping mechanism or it was something to get me ready for what was coming. They started to talk to me about school and brought up the boyfriend that I was dating at the time. For their own reason, they told me to break up with him because I needed to focus on school more to be able to keep my grades where they were at the time.

I was upset, “My grades are fine, and have been fine. I don’t understand why you would do this to me.”

“We know you’ve been doing fine in school. We just think that you don’t need any distractions because it’s your junior year, and this is where you need to really focus in school and start looking at colleges.” It was always about school, I never understood that.

“How is he a distraction? School has obviously been good for me even with him and also with all the extracurricular activities I’m doing.” It didn’t make sense to me and I thought it was so extreme and wrong for them to do that. I would have understood if it was something like he was bad for me or if I was failing my classes but that was not the case and of course I fought back.

“I just think it’s unnecessary to have that kind of distraction right now and you don’t need it.” I don’t know why my mom was doing this. She knew that I really liked him but never comprehended my happiness for her to understand. They won in the end and I ended up breaking up with him and I never understood why because I was upset and felt like my parents didn’t care for my happiness.

“We just want what’s best for you.”

Did they really? I felt that they cared so much about my grades and school that they were so blinded by making sure I was the straight A daughter that they wanted and were’nt really seeing if I was happy or not.

The year had gone on and I never really had the same relationship with my parents. We were never close in the first place but after being unhappy and them not really noticing, my relationship with them distanced. If I was ever upset about something, I couldn’t go to them because they would just tell me it was stupid to be upset and to suck it up. The most we would ever talk about is school this and school that and maybe the occasional, “What’s for dinner tonight?” I barely spoke to my dad because he was at work while I was at school, and by the time I got out of school, I had to go to work and didn’t get off until late and he would have already went to bed by then. We would sometimes go two or three days without seeing each other. My eighteenth birthday had just passed and one day my parents wanted to talk to me. I was confused and nervous because I did not know what it was and did not know if there would be yelling involved, but when was scolding never involved?

This time it was different. My parents sat me down and my mom started talking about her life in the Philippines when she was younger. She talked about this man she had met when she was nineteen and I figured it was my dad at the time. She then kept talking about how she fell in love too fast to someone who didn’t have the same intentions as her. They got married very quickly and later made a child that was soon to be me but I didn’t know that yet. At this point I was super confused and flustered because I didn’t know where this was going. She continued to say that the man that she was married to just up and left while she wasn’t even a month pregnant with the child because he didn’t want that kind of life. It clicked in my head that I was that child and that my dad was not actually my dad. I had so many mixed emotions. I was upset that I wasn’t told this sooner and that someone could be so cruel to leave a child before they even knew their name. When I was born, my mom never went to college and proceeded to work different jobs in order to provide for me. At this point, I wasn’t sure if I was crying because I was upset or shocked or that it was so much to take in at once.

My dad started talking about when he met my mom. My dad never went to college both because he had to provide for his mom and his family and he didn’t have money. My dad’s father had left his family at a young age and had no contact with them. His mother got married a couple years later to his step father who was more a father to him than his actual father was but was lost to cancer. I guess he could relate to me for having a father figure leave at an early age but in my case, I never got to meet him. My dad joined the Air Force and was stationed in the Philippines where he had met my mom while she was working one of her jobs but didn’t know I existed because my mom kept that away from people until she knew she could trust them. My dad ended up really liking my mom and finally met me when I was around 6 months old. At this age, a baby won’t remember anything about a person so at this point of the story; it made sense on why I had never questioned my dad’s status. He adopted me like his own and my parents eventually got married when I was two.

I did not know about my biological father until I was eighteen years old and I do not have the wish of meeting him. My parents waited until I was eighteen to tell me because they felt that it was the right age to tell me about it where I would understand the story completely. I now understand why my parents acted the way they did. They were always strict on me about getting good grades and being a good kid because they wanted me to have a good future and go to college when they couldn’t. They could not experience the life of going to college and getting a degree and being able to go and work their dream jobs, so they put their hopes in me and my siblings. My mom had to sacrifice going to college in order to have a full time job to support me before my dad came into the picture. She only wanted what was best for me so I would not have to go through what she had to and in the way she expressed it was by being strict on me while I was in school. My dad never went to college and told me he regrets it and wants me to go to college so I can have a better life after I graduate and be able to get a job and support myself. Both of their reasons were valid but I always wished that they could have come upon it a different way.

I always think about what could have happened if they pushed me through school a different way. I wish they weren’t so extreme about the mistakes I made in school because they would get so mad at me and I was unhappy because of it. It was always engraved in my mind that I had to do well in school or else. The “or else” part was a thing I always tried avoiding because I never wanted to be under the disappointment and wrath of my parents. In school, I always wanted to get good grades and wanted to be able to graduate because I wanted to be a nurse, and I was going to be a first generation college student. I never really thought about it, that I was going to be a first generation college student until I realized I was going to have to start worrying about finishing high school and graduating and finding the college that was right for me. I’m here in college not only living out my dream, but also my parents’ dream as well. Our relationship is not the best but it is getting better. I have had to go through many struggles to get to where I am today, and even though my parents pushed me a little too hard, I wouldn’t have gotten here without them.