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English 165H

Dr. Haffner

Staying Calm Through the Storm

Every child grows up in an environment that shapes the person they become for the rest of their life. They encounter situations that push them to make decisions and decide how they are going to build their foundation. I grew up without a key part of a child’s life, a father. My puzzle had a piece missing, and I had to find a way to fill that empty space with what was left from the other pieces. I am hardened, full of strength and empowered by my childhood and it encourages me every day to be strong and empower the people I interact with every single day. People face different problems every day and face them with the background that they have and the experiences that they had growing up. I faced a situation where I was left feeling unwanted and broken, but I was faced with this challenge and I kept strong and took care of my mother and made the world think I was strong in a time where I felt insignificant to the world.

I grew up in the home of my grandparents, Nana and Papa, who took care of me while my mother finished high school, as I was born when she was 16 years old. She would sometimes take me to class with her, and many people in Powhatan knew me and my family well and supported my mother as she tried to raise me on her own. My father left my mother before I was born, scared of the reality in front of him that he was going to be a father. The day my mom went to the hospital to birth me, he drove to the hospital and convinced my mom he was going to stay and so my last name became his although my parents never married, and I was born Tyler Matthew Bradley, having his middle name and his last name. I always told my mother I had his charm every time she asked me about a girlfriend, and she said that was the only good thing about him, and she wasn’t wrong. My mother never talked shit about my father, and as an adult we had a conversation about why she did, and she told me it was because she wanted me to develop my own opinion of him since he was my father and it was a decision my mom made so I deserved to have any opportunity with my father that I desired. But I grew up too quickly to realize that I didn’t have a place for him in my life.

Soon after I was born my father left my mother, then enlisted in the marines and got deployed overseas for about 6 days before he claimed to have inhaled toxic fumes and returned home to continue his life rejecting my mother and I and drinking in bars. I never spoke to my father until I was 11 and one day he showed up at my door with an 8 year old girl. He knocked and my mother answered as I hid in the bathroom, telling my mother I didn’t want to speak with him, and she texted me and said it was important and that I should come out. I slipped out and walked to the front door to be introduced to my sister, whom my mother and I both had never even known existed until this very moment. This was the hardest thing I had ever done in my life, coming to terms with the fact that I had a sister all this time that my father refused to tell me about.

The afternoon after meeting my sister Joni for the first time my mother and I decided to do some research to see if there was anything else, we didn’t know that would be important to me, and we found out that I also had a 2 year old sister named Annabella. My father had 3 kids with 3 women, none of which he married and none of which he had a relationship with. I had realized the ideals that my father had were nonetheless ideals that I was scared would occur in my life. I began to cherish relationships even more and built a strong foundation with the friends I chose to surround myself with. I looked for people who would make me a stronger person, but I also made a huge mistake on how I dealt with my own pain.

I became severely depressed as I clouded my life with helping other people with their own struggles and refusing to tell the world about my own. I would spend my days with a fake ray of sunshine on my face, keeping my heartache inside where nobody else could see it. I did a great job of hiding my feelings as I never really had anyone ask how they could help me, or if I had anything going on in my life that they could help me with. I bottled up my feelings, and thought I was helping myself by giving advice to others and trying to make new friends by being there for people who were never there for me themselves. In later high school years, after pushing past the feelings I was dealing with, I became hard-headed and very disrespectful in a sense. I had heard stories of what everyone else was dealing with, and I constantly gave advice but always told myself that nobody had it as hard as I did and looked at others as weak and thought of myself as superior.

This led to me living my social life and going to school every day, then coaching my own track team in the absence of a coach, working my 3 jobs I had to take care of my mother, and then returning home to sleepless nights where I cried a lot on my own and woke up the next day with the same fake smile. I had come to terms with the fact that I never was going to be good enough because nobody else has it as hard as I do. The summer after my senior year I was hit by a truck, quite literally. I was such an emotional wreck I could barely get out of my own bed. My mother and I decided to go together and see a counselor, and he helped me talk about what I was going through. I then decided to quit two of my jobs early and prepare myself for what was ahead of me, college.

I lived my life afraid of what was going to happen instead of focusing on what was going on in my life at that very moment. I learned to appreciate people around me who deserved it as well, and I began to understand my place in this world. After trying to turn to drugs and alcohol myself, I quickly realized how badly I needed to be that good example, for myself, for others, and for my mother. I needed to be the one that lived an incredible life where I could do anything imaginable.

The point of this background is not to shame my father but to show what kind of a person he is and the values that he has in his life. I learned a lot from him by discovering what not to do in my life in order to live a fulfilling life and please the people around me in my actions. On the day that I met my sister, I made a very hard decision. I chose to switch gears and refuse another encounter with my father. I was done with receiving birthday cards a month late and only every 2 or 3 years, never getting told Merry Christmas, never being told I was appreciated by my own father. I refused to be let down by someone who had never even said good morning or how was your day, and I chose to be strong and be as positive a person as much as I could so I wouldn’t let my mother down. My mother always brought up statistics about how likely I was to fail out of school, or have a child before I turn 18, saying 8 in 10 children whose mother was under 18 have a child of their own before they graduate. I never knew how to deal with this, and I was always so worried that I would never end up being good enough, and my dad reminded me of that every time I thought of him.

My mother was an emotional wreck at this time in my life. She was burdened with a lot, having a kid of her own, trying to stop a drug addiction, getting married to my stepdad, and moving out into a home of her own for the first time in her life. On top of all this she was guilted with the fact that she thought she had ruined my future. She thought that since I lived a life different than every other kid I grew up with, I wasn’t going to be as successful as if I had lived a “normal” life. I had to show my mother that I could be good enough, and so I worked 3 jobs while being the captain of the Powhatan Track and Field team all 4 years at the school as well as being an ambassador for my school while maintaining an honors GPA status. I worked so hard to make my mother proud because she deserved to not live her life feeling that her reckless decision ruined her and her son’s life.

I try to keep in touch with my sisters as often as I can, Joni is an emotional wreck at the moment, and I believe that it is because she turned the situation she was in into hatred for our father, and doesn’t take life for granted as I do. I’ve tried to forget about this time in my life, coming to a huge realization all at once, but it’s hard to forget something that shaped you and founded the person that I am today. Now, many years later, I’m not even sure if my father knows I’m in college right now, and how successful I’ve been so far in college, let alone the fact that I still think about him, and the lasting impact he has made on my life. Contrary to what people might think, I am very grateful for my father. The strongest people are those that persevered through the hard times and have chosen to push past their fears.

At times I lay in my bed and think about what is to come. I think about my past and smile upon my future, even when both are excruciating to look at. When I reminisce on my struggles and the good that has come out of the struggles, I think about the future struggles and sometimes become frustrated with it. The most prominent future memory is that of my wedding day. I imagine myself looking at the most beautiful woman in front of me, tears rolling down my face with joy, and a smile from ear to ear on her face. Next, I look into the crowd. I see my mother, my siblings, my grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, friends and family alike. The worst thing about this is that I even see my father, waltzing around drunk in the back, showing up late, only for the after party. He doesn’t even congratulate me, because he can’t figure out which person is me. I can’t imagine the wedding without him there because as much as I know in my heart that he won’t show up, I have that desire in my heart that he will change and become what I always wanted. I never wanted a father, I wanted someone to throw a baseball with when I got home from school, someone to drive me around in their truck with a dog in the bed, I wanted someone to toughen me up instead of carrying around my burdens with me everywhere I went. I never wanted a haunting memory that will seemingly never leave me.