



CHALLENGES

“Unshakable Worth”

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PART OF ME IS MISSING. IT'S an identifiable, yet indescribable absence. It is odd how I can find more information about the initial supposed creators, Adam and Eve, than I can about my own. I don't know my father, and I doubt that I ever will. He left two weeks after I was born because I lacked a certain male member. Fidelity to personal convictions was more important to him than a life that he had just shepherded into this world. Because of his definitive choice, I will only be able to associate with him as a support check number until I am eighteen years of age. After that, who knows?

When I was eleven, my mother decided to call this long-gone man in search of owed child support. After eleven years of nothingness, financial distress caused my mother call this absolute last resource. In my house, we had an early 90s telephone that had a speaker/mute function. I can still see that outdated piece of technology in the corner of my mind. That speaker/mute function granted me the only contact with my father that I have ever known.



I was a mischievous child; I knew that day that my mother was physically on the phone with my birthfather. I was naïve. I thought that hearing my father's voice would fill the void created by years of absence. I thought that hearing his voice would allow me to place my father on the same grand plateau as other fathers who had always been there for their children, loved their children. I snuck into the room with the technical phone and silently listened in on the conversation. I felt smart and sly as I pressed the button that put the stranger's voice on the speakerphone. "Hah," I thought, "he can't hear me, but I can hear him." Maybe if he would have known the simple fact that his daughter was listening, maybe then some shred of human decency would have shined through.

Those few moments provided me with the only ounce of a man that comprises half of my biology that I will ever know. Unfortunately, the stranger didn't know I was listening. Like my life before, he never knew that I was there. As he yelled at my mother, I could hear the fear in her voice as he responded to her pleas with such malice. My mother tried to convey to my father that I was not just his incarnation to be provided for, but rather, a spectacular human being. As I sat there, listening intently to the conversation, I felt validated as a daughter by my mother's words, but shattered as a human being by my "father's" insolence.

In the moments that followed, that little girl, initially so excited at the prospect of finally being able to physically hear her creator, was eternally crushed. "Just because she exists doesn't mean I have to love her; it doesn't mean I have to know her. I don't love her, and I never will." Crash. Is it possible for the strongest muscle in your body to simply break in half? One of my genetic halves had declared that he loathed my very existence. Those words succeeded to shatter my heart into a million pieces. I didn't know how to react. I turned off the phone and slithered back to my room. How could someone be so heartless? How could someone that heartless be a part of me? No words.

I have been sobered by pain in a way that no psychological study ever could attempt. I may never know my father because of his decision, and in turn, he will never know me. In the end, his loss will be the greater one. My "father's" shining example of misconduct ironically guides me as a moral, ethical person. Rather than searching for any fault within myself, I use my father's failure as a tool. I take an earnest



and honest stance in life. I know my great worth. I have nothing to prove to anyone, including myself.

ANALYSIS

Sarah's essay is written with candor about a difficult and highly personal topic—growing up without her father. She presents her thoughts in a way that elicits admiration for her strength, rather than pity. In writing about tragedies and tribulations that affect us but are outside of our control, it is important to think carefully about what kind of tone to use, and what kind of reader response this tone invites. For example, if Sarah had chosen to write an essay entirely fixated on the extreme anger she felt toward her father, readers may have felt alienated; if she wrote an essay that conveyed only sadness, we might have felt pity for her. The strength of Sarah's essay is that she is honest in displaying a spectrum of emotions. She conveys both confidence and vulnerability, which humanizes her story and also suggests to readers that she has invested valuable time and energy in a process of maturation and healing from the pain that she has experienced growing up.

The opening paragraph of the essay gives us a sense of the emptiness that Sarah has experienced: she writes about “an identifiable, yet indescribable absence.” The paragraph is slightly risky in that it devotes several sentences to describing her father's decisions to leave her family, though the space allotted for the entire essay is limited. In this case, though several sentences seem to be redundant in telling the basic fact that Sarah's dad left two weeks after she was born, they work to create a sense of loss, of something “missing.” This is an excellent reminder that not all sentences need to convey new information; they can also help create a mood or portray emotion. Sarah's first sentence creates a sense of bitter irony and sadness around the situation with her father, setting the context for the dialog with “this long-gone man.”

The story about the phone conversation builds suspense. We, like 11-year-old Sarah, wonder how her dad will react, and hold expectations that he might redeem his absence. Sarah mentions the “speaker/mute function,” a more memorable symbol than simply “the phone.” The suspense continues with the foreshadowing sentence, “Maybe if he would have known the simple fact that his daughter was listening, maybe then some shred of human decency would have shined through.”

The remainder of the essay focuses on Sarah's reactions to the phone conversation. The second to last paragraph is particularly powerful in the way she juxtaposes the conversation she overhears with her emotional reactions: “Crash,” “No words,” and questions like “How