

Alexandra Samargia

Column 2

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Mom sat on my bed as I folded the pile of clothes to go into my suitcase. She was quieter than normal, sharing little about her day. The time after school and work was precious time for her and me, as we would share the extent of our days while she would make dinner and I would sit on the counter watching her. We did this up until I graduated high school, and it was a tradition I never knew I would miss until I had moved away for college. This time was different though.

I asked if everything was okay as she looked up at me with worried eyes filled and tears on the brink of crashing down on her cheeks.

“Neal and I broke up last week”.

Those words that would haunt me for years. Questions immediately flooded my mind of why and how.

Neal came into our lives when I was 8 years old. He was the first real father figure I had in my life, and he made mom happy. Though the bar was set low, he had a stable job and wasn't a drug addict, so he was good enough for us.

Born and raised in my hometown, he worked at a furniture store and bartended on the weekends. He was a tall and broad guy, his face resembling The Rock, and his smile somewhat taming the anxiety I had inside.

I remember loving when he came over because it felt like we were a small family. When I was younger, he would sit through all of my magic shows and as I grew, he would come to a couple of my activities such as dance recitals and marching band competitions and I would introduce him to my friends as my kind of dad. Everyone thought mom and him would get married because they were together for seven years.

I remember asking mom when I was younger if Neal was going to be my stepdad. She shrugged her shoulders and said neither of them really wanted to get married again.

Neal had two daughters, Alex, and Meghan with a third kind of daughter, me, though he never referred to me as his child. His previous ex-wife was extremely jealous of mom, which wasn't surprising because mom is so intelligent and beautiful, something he took for granted. The two of us always felt as outsiders with Neal's family, but they had dated for so long that none of us really thought that much of it.

Around the same time Neal came into our lives, was when my separation anxiety for mom spiked. I couldn't shake the feeling of uncomfortable and scared whenever she was alone with Neal. Many nights I would have panic attacks in my bed while my mom was downstairs watching a movie with Neal. But the worst part was knowing I was breaking her heart because she thought she failed as a single mom. She couldn't understand why I was having meltdowns; I couldn't even understand it myself.

That is until Dr. Cole helped me understand it was because of him. I was terrified of my mother being alone with a man because I thought all men were like my biological father.

Though, this is something I wouldn't fully understand until I started having relationships of my own.

"What happened," I asked.

She explained to me that they were unhappy for a long time, and she felt like they weren't a forever match. I think back to the last few days when she would normally call Neal before going to bed, or stop into his work with lunch, there was none of that recently. I asked if she was okay, and she nodded her head while re folding my clothes and putting them into my suitcase. She then asked if I was okay and I just nodded because in that very moment, I didn't know how I felt.

I always just thought that one day Neal would be my stepdad. But then he left my mom forgetting that he was leaving me too.

My mom slowly got over the relationship, though she grieved most of it while she was still in it. I think she knew in her heart that her and Neal would never last, but I didn't.

Months passed, and I still hadn't heard a word from Neal. He never said goodbye to me after being my father figure from the ages of 8 to 15. As my mom went on a couple dates with new people, my anger for Neal grew.

One day, four months after the breakup, he texted me, after mom told him to. He sent a surface level and basic apology. That was the last time I had ever heard from him.

Sometimes, I will drive past him in town. I look at him as though I am supposed to know him. As if he didn't take care of me when I was sick, hold me as I cried about my first boyfriend, and always gave me a lemonade when I visited his restaurant.

The worst part is, he looks back.

As if he didn't leave without a goodbye for me to fend for myself in this grief of a family that was never meant to be.

By the age of 15, I was left by two father figures. Neal, slipped out without a word to be said. And my biological father? Well, he never could get his shit together for his baby girl and loving wife.