Ethical Autobiography – Part I

By: Ryan Bleile

**An Ethical Journey Through Life**

**A long time ago in a Galaxy far far away …**

*The Story of Ryan’s Life*

*Part I*

*It was a period of growth and development in a changing world filled with events which would affect the life of one child forever…*

While this seems to be a dramatization, we all have had experiences in our life which define who we are. This story is my own; a story who’s begging changed the way I see the world yet is somehow mostly hidden behind the hazy fog of long forgotten memories. However unclear much of my childhood is to me, events and people have stuck out in my mind as the greatest influential moments in my development, enough that the details still remain vividly in my memory. These people, events, and places that I have known, experienced, lived and visited have shaped the ethical worldview I hold; the values, commitments, and principles which I hold to be important.

Before we proceed, I feel it is important to mention my own reflection on the topic of my own foggy memory. While this seems like a common occurrence to lose memories or at least lose clarity of events, I believe it may be an aspect of my own nature which has affected the way in which the following events I will discuss and those left unmentioned affected my own development. I have never held onto memories of my childhood and while I have lived a short life so far, my ability to remember events seems especially limited. When compared to my sister, I feel I have almost no memory. She will recite events from when she was four years old more clearly than our parents. But because of this, I feel events affect me differently. I am able to hold a closer relationship with our Mother which you will see from some topics further on might be difficult. I feel that the limitations to my memory have added a natural tendency for me to simply accept the present as is and move on. This natural tendency to just go with the flow has affected my moral development as well and in ways I am not yet sure of. The following events however short or long, are those few moments that really stuck out to me and have shaped my views and development.

**A Moving Family - A Steady Home**

One thing most people ask as they start to get to know you is seemingly a simple question, here “Where do you come from?” For me this question is harder to answer. Do I answer ancestry? Most recent addresses? Where I was born? Or do I simple pick a larger areas around which most of my life has revolved. Throughout my life, I have moved houses twelve times. In twenty one years of life that’s less than two years per house. My family was not a military home; moving around the country or countries, but while our moves tended to be a short distance, it is difficult to ever feel a house is truly a home rather than just another place to live. The period of time when I was a new born until I was four we lived in Sacramento CA, Willamette Oregon, Eugene Oregon and back to Sacramento. As time passed, we moved through Santa Clara, Lathrope and multiple homes in Manteca. A majority of my life was spent in the Lathrope/Manteca Region as well as the Sacramento Region where extended family lived. So this comes back to the original question, where do I come from? At this point I am bound to just say the Central Valley and Sacramento area primarily, but in a session where people are all answering cities with which they identify, I feel it is hard for me pick just one. Each place I lived affected me and often in different ways.

One great influence that I had throughout the movement was the steadfast and reliable home that Farmor and Farfar provided. Farmor and Farfar is Danish for father’s mother and father’s father and since Farmor is from Denmark, we chose to go with Danish names instead of the standard grandma and grandpa. Much of my life as a small child was spent with my grandparents. Their home was a steadfast place to come and feel comfort. Because of this, my Farmor has always been a great influence on my life. Her intelligence and optimism was a driving force for me to want to impress her and make her feel proud of me. Her motherly influence over my younger years has always distilled in me much of the same values in terms of measurements of success and happiness, simple rules regarding basic right and wrong, and in somewhat most of my most basic fundamental beliefs. As you will see through these stories, Farmor played a role multiple times in my early development and I still look up to her for it to this day.

**The Lesson of Obedience / When Seen or Unseen**

As a small child I had a testing personality. I always wanted to know where the boundaries were and when they applied. I learned the lesson of obeying my parents set boundaries the hard way as a small child, around age six. I was given a certain range outside of our apartment building with which I was allowed to play. The boundary lines where defined by squares in the concrete and to be clear, my parents had defined exactly what square I could not pass very clear.

Because of my testing personality, I looked for many excuses to play on or near the boundary I was given. At times I thought no one was looking I would step off the bounding square into forbidden territory and sit and play with my action figures just outside the line. My parents would notice and I would be forced to come inside, take a time out and when allowed out again I was given one less square to play in. Eventually, the size of my boundary was down to one square. At this point, one might think I would have learned to stay in my square. However, this was not the case. Instead I looked around and stepped one foot over the line. I lost my one and only square.

Later on I learned that my parents were setting my boundaries and sitting on the balcony of our second story apartment building watching me look left and right and slowly creep out of my square. Here I thought I was all alone and yet I was still being watched and disciplined. For me, this experience taught me a lesson I would never forget. It does not matter where you are; your actions should be the same. In the context of the story, we see it as being obedient to my parents whether they are present or not. In the context of morals, it taught me here that morality is not about how you act in front of others but also how you act when no one is around to see you.

**The Lying Game**

Testing of my boundaries did not stop with physical boundaries. It also stemmed into other areas of my growth. As a child and still to this day, I inherently dislike being punished. I feel much happier when the people around me are happy with me. This feeling though started a short lived path of deceitful actions.

In order to avoid the lectures and punishments associated with actions I had done wrong, I would outright lie about them. Now at first my parents wanted to believe me but it became very obvious at times there was no way it was the truth. Even if I would not have gotten in trouble for something, I started getting in trouble for everything they could prove I lied about; small meaning less lie to bigger outright un-truths. I had a built in conflict avoidance mechanism that just made lying seem like the best path. This became such a problem that my parents resorted to setting me up to try and rid me of the habit. I spent day after day in trouble for the smallest stupidest lies. For example, my father might be watching me play through the window. He saw that I threw a rock in the general direction of the house and so he would go out to ask if I would not do that, so that there would be no accidents. However, as he started to tell me not to throw the rocks towards the house, I would respond that I had not done that. This would get me an instant three timeouts, which means thirty minutes of sitting silently on the couch, having to do dishes alone (without my sisters aid), and I had to go to bed straight after dinner.

It seems silly now looking back on the scenarios that I have been told about. My parents quickly imbedded into my being the importance of telling the truth and even to this day I would have a hard time with not being an absolutist about lying. Even a simple question such as, “do these pants make my butt look fat” is inherently challenging; if they do, I feel obligated to say yes. I feel in terms of the lying questions I tend to fall more towards the absolutist never tell a lie path.

**My Mother – An Experience Like No Other**

My Mother has been a primary influence on my life. While not all positive events, they have been some of the most eye-opening. Through my life I have witnessed many aspects of life which people tend to either be sheltered from or fully immersed in. My parents were divorced when I was two, leaving behind a constant reoccurring series of problems. After the Custody battle, which Farmor helped my father win by offering her assistance as a guardian, my mother and father fought verbally if not physically nearly every time they saw each other for the first ten years of my life and most of the time it was about my mother wanting her children and my father wanting to protect us from the chaos that was her life and my father trying to be reasonable but steadfast with the court established visitation rights. Through all of the continuing drama that I have witnessed being in the middle of a split family, with both sides trying to convince you why their point is the correct one, I have been witness to some of the most eye-opening experiences a young child can take in. Parents are not perfect; in fact in the case of my own they can have many flaws which will affect everyone around them.

There was a time when I was in fourth grade, in the middle of the school year, I remember my Mom showing up in the evening to my father’s house. She came in demanding to take us home with her. At this time she had an every other weekend visitation right which she had not been taking. In fact, it had been close to a year since I had even seen her. At this point I did not understand the situation, all I knew was that I wanted to see my mom but that I was scared of her as well and I didn’t know why. My Dad ordered us inside as my mom proceeded to chase him around the car attempting to attack him and make him give us over. My Step mom standing in the door way staying out of the conflict took my sister and me inside and closed the door. She escorted us to her room and turned on the radio so we couldn’t hear the yelling and profanity coming from outside. What seemed like forever of wanting to know what was happening I remember my dad coming in and telling my step mom that Rhonda, my mom had left. At this point I was so confused. It was not until I was older reliving the experience with my dad he had told me that while he always wanted us to be a part of our moms life, there was no way he was going to let her take us that day. Aside from it being a school night in the middle of the school year, my Mom had shown up high and crazed; ready to take on the world to see the children she had neglected for a year.

Moments like the one just described happened multiple times in my childhood and while this one seems bad, most of the experience I learned about after the fact. In fact, my step mother had stepped in just in time to stop us from seeing my mother do more than yell, which was a norm for her. But my father and step mother were not always around to protect us.

Probably the most traumatic experience I remember involving my mother occurred when I was in the sixth grade. We were staying for a week during the summer with my Mom. The day had gone like most, we stayed in her boyfriend’s house all day watching cartoon networking and eating roman noodles. She had asked us if we wanted to go to my Aunt, her sister’s, house for the night to see our cousin Cana. Of course my sister and I readily agreed and so she said we would leave in an hour or so. Considering that it was already dark, we knew this meant we would most likely not get to go. As Alishia, my sister, and I sat back down to watch more television we looked at each other and knew we were in for another night at a smoke filled home that made us both very uncomfortable. After we sat down our mother went back to the bedroom she shared with her boyfriend at the time, Chris. A few minutes later we could hear yelling coming from the back room. The voices got louder and more and more profanity echoed into the night air. The TV just didn’t seem to be able to drown out the fight. At this point we heard a crashing sound and then the sound of shattering glass. Alishia and I were scared. We paced nervously trying to figure out what to do. Then Chris came out from the room.

He came out yelling and screaming at my mother calling her words I didn’t understand fully but I knew they were “bad”. My mother came storming behind him yelling and swinging punches at his back. He picked up a baseball bat in the corner and threatened her with it. Her response was to yell more and threaten him; that if he tried to use that bat it would be the last thing he ever did. My sister and I were huddled behind the couch trying to hide from the scene as best as we could. Somehow their fight worked its way back into their room and that’s when my sister ran for the phone and we both went outside. The cordless phone had a long enough range we were able to call my Dad from the middle of the street in front of the house. I remember my sister talking to my dad on the phone, tears streaming down her face as she frantically tried to explain to my dad the situation and how scared we both were and how scared she was for mom.

The rest of the night felt like a haze. I don’t know how long it took but my Farmor showed up and it felt like a miracle. As she drove us away from Chris’s house, we could hear a cop siren coming to the house. Sometime in the night, I remember seeing their room; it must have been when they came out, my sister tells me that they actually went outside for a short period of time. Their room looked like a disaster film: Broken glass across the nightstand the floor and the bed, holes in the wall and everything in the room in turmoil.

Events like this have occurred multiple times in my life. This particular event stuck with me and opened my eyes to human behaviors many young people have never had to witness. Through all of the “bad” choices my mother made morally, ethically, or otherwise, I was able to really see many different life styles and choices people make on a daily basis.

**The Growth of Confidence**

I have always naturally been a quiet and reserved person. I mentioned in the beginning I had a go with the flow outlook on life which tends to put me in the passenger seat to a lot of events. This changed completely after I spent four years in JROTC at my local high school. I contribute most of my social growth and confidence growth during this time to my programs instructor, Dr. William Svoboda, Retired 1st Sargent of the 101st airborne; or as I called him, Top. Top had a Ph.D. in Psychology and an ability to see the traits in people like no one I have ever met.

As I entered JROTC in the 9th grade, I had seen and experienced some events thanks to my sister being two years ahead of me and also having been in the program. At first I thought this was why I was made into a company commander just after my first week of being in the program. The position gave me a measure of leadership responsibility that I had never known before. I had to do public speaking activities on a daily basis and maintain order among my peers, which for a freshman entering high school seems like an impossible task. But thanks to some help and encouragement and a natural leading ability I didn’t know I had, I was able to maintain more order among my class of freshman than most of the upper classman could of their classes. After a year of leading a company, I had already gained a huge measure of confidence. Then half way through my second year, I was promoted to a position I had not thought would be obtainable till at least junior year, Battalion XO. This position put me in charge of all of the officers, younger and older. Not only was I was still leading a class during the class period, but now I had a host of responsibilities before and after school as well. Following the early election to the Battalion XO, I was promoted once more to Battalion CO in my junior year.

These promotions and my ability to handle the duties surprised me at the time; but looking back I understand now why Top had promoted me. Each time I was given more responsibility; I took it eagerly and made the best of the situation. By the time I was a senior I was giving talks to the brigade, all of the JROTC’s in the local region, at events without even sweating a bullet; except maybe because of the heat. When during my senior year, the Instructors from all the local high schools agreed to let me step in and become a brigade commander at the combined events, I was more than ready for the job. I had gone from a quiet passenger to an outspoken and confident leader. This transformation surprised me a lot and still surprises me. When I start to feel nervous about a presentation or talk, I just realize that I have the ability now to do that and more, which fires my confidence up and allows me to present with in front of many crowds that would normally twist my stomach into knots.

**Moral World View**

Outlined here in this paper are a number of events or communities that shaped my development as well as the main participants and influencers in them. These are presented in this manner to outline the span of my development and an attempt to really convey the importance of these few moments in my life. More than this has shaped my development and most of what shaped me as an early child I have no hope of remembering. But in summary my moral view as it stands now consists of an array of loosely held convictions, and beliefs that are not yet firmly set. I feel above all I have held on to one belief more strongly than most, continue to question and find reason. I hold religious beliefs, but unlike certain other people, I do not hold them as perfect answers. I believe there are certain actions that are right and wrong because of them but more so because it is the nature of things and the benefit of humanity than for religions sake alone. I feel the beliefs I hold are to me justified by more than one source.

It is complicated for me to begin talking about my own beliefs. I feel it could very well be the topic of a short novel if I was to delve into detail to explain each view I hold. But because of this, I feel I have learned throughout my experiences to hold fewer convictions, and to really hold on to the philosophy of questioning everything.

To sum up the experiences I have shown here in this paper, I would say that they all boil down to opening my mind and discovering myself. Farmor helped to be a protector and guide in my moral development. To me she was an influence I could not go without mentioning. My Stepmother holds a huge influence through our bible studies together and her being a large part of my raising. My Father holds a huge influence as well since it was him I have always felt closest too. While these stories here do not show all the events, some of my greatest moments in life include standing on top of a mountain at 14,000 feet with my father and seeing the beauty in the world. To me, he has always represented a figure I would like to be like in many ways. My Mother has always been important in my growth; I would attribute to her the ability I have to relate to people of all walks of life. Also, her continued struggles and life choices have helped me learn from mistakes she has made so that I am not bound to repeat them. Top, Dr. Svoboda, was a major influence over my high school development. During this time my father had begun to pull away slightly from the family due to stress at work and also because he suffers from Bi-Polar Disorder which until recently was uncontrolled. During this time in my life Top was in many ways a father to me and pushed me to grow and learn and to take on responsibility. While others have influenced me, it is these five people who I feel have shaped me the most.

The events and communities I have outlined help to show some of the influential moments of my life. So while this is not a story taking place a long time ago, only over the course of 21 years 6 months, and not in a galaxy far far away; it is still the story of my life and the development of my moral world view as I see it today; Principles that include: doing your best always, not lying, questioning until the truth can be discovered and behaving the same in all situations of my life. Topics such as abortion and other common discussion points are still in my mind at least not yet completely set. So the Worldview that I hold today tends to still be one full of unanswered questions.