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Resilience

Natalie Hollo
Nova Southeastern University

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scared. The missing children posters and uniformed police everywhere made me feel so small and vulnerable.

“When you’re in a Slump, you’re not in for much fun.” – Dr Seuss

My dad became a very religious person. Although we were Jews, one day when we went over to his house, he announced we would be attending church from now on. “How come?” my brother asked. “Because the rabbis wouldn’t help me in my quest to find God. When I went to church, the minister answered all of my questions and made me realize that God was right in front of me. He will help you too,” he said. I didn’t like the idea of switching religions. I had found God already. He was in Heaven watching over us. Nevertheless, every other day we spent with my dad, we spent in church. I didn’t get to see him because I was in the preteen section of the church. Now God was taking my daddy too, I thought, as I listened to the minister preach away about how Jesus was my savior.

“I’m afraid that some times you’ll play lonely games too.” – Dr. Seuss

And then they started the lectures. Whenever my sister and I got in a fight, whenever I accidentally did something wrong, I was shuffled into my dad’s room. There he would look up at the sky, complain about how God was tired of my messing up, and explain how my dad was giving me a second chance. God was, apparently, also giving me another chance. I was running out of chances, my dad would explain. I became frightened and would start to cry. I didn’t want God or my dad to leave me. My dad would hiss that my mom was taking me away from him. He would talk about how I needed to behave better. Finally he would allow me to hug him. Then he would send me off to my room. I was to be grounded to my room the entire day. My dad gave these demoralizing lectures to both my brother and me. My sister was spoiled rotten and was allowed to do whatever she wanted. She was taught to be rude, and my dad looked on her with pride. It didn’t make sense that I could end up getting yelled at for not saying thank you, while my sister could just steal and would end up being praised.

“And when you’re alone, there’s a very good chance you’ll meet things that scare you right out of your pants.” – Dr. Seuss

When my siblings and I went to our dad’s house another time, we found out that he and Leia had gotten married. “I was afraid you would embarrass me,” he explained, showing us the tape of their wedding vows. I looked on in disbelief. What was happening to my dad? He wasn’t the same caring person as .

before. He loved religion, but it seemed that he hated us. I was confused and hurt. The building felt like it was caving in as I watched my dad gush words of love for Leia.

“You’re too smart to go down any not-so-good street.” – Dr. Suess

My dad forced me to go to school, even though I was throwing up everywhere, because he said I deserved to be sick. I decided that I had to do something. I gathered my siblings together in a room at my mom’s house, my home. “I think we should stop visiting Dad. Maybe we would only go out for lunch with him or something, but I don’t want to sleep over his house. He always gets really angry the next day,” I mumbled. The thought of leaving Dad terrified me. I still loved him. I loved who he used to be before he met the Satan who pretended to be God and before he met the lying Leia. Everyone agreed unanimously: my brother, sick of being verbally and mentally abused, and my sister, just to go with the flow. My brother wrote my dad a note explaining that we no longer wished to stay over his house again. My dad wore a pained look that got uglier as he read. When he finished, he crumpled the paper up and threw it into the trash. “We’ll still visit you,” I pleaded, tears forming in my eyes. “Well, I see the devil has infected you,” he replied. He led us to his car to take us to my true home. No one cried. My eyes welled up. I pulled out a pencil and paper. I drew both my dad and myself as stick figures. In the picture we were holding hands. I wrote underneath it, Dad + Nicole Forever. My dad looked into the rearview mirror. “I bet you’re writing me another letter about how you wish you had never had to stay with me. I don’t need it. You have already hurt me enough. God will not forgive you,” he called out. I burst into tears. Everyone sat awkwardly in the car, listening to my loud sobbing. I crumbled up the paper and jammed it into the crack of the car seat. I felt cramped, sitting in the tight car, bad vibes radiating from my dad. I didn’t understand how everyone else could hold back tears. Kaitlin didn’t even seem to care. I found this strange since she was the one he favored the most. When the car stopped, we all rushed to get out. My dad gave us each a tense hug. “I love you and you let me down,” he said. “We’ll visit, I promise. We just won’t stay overnight,” I hiccupped, willing him to realize how wrong he had been and to immediately turn back to the person who he would sing to so long ago. “Yeah, right,” he muttered, walking back to the car, the shadows cast from the houses making him look like a black, lurking monster. We watched as he drove off, my loud sobs echoing through the street. Little did I know, that was the last time we would be seeing each other. Sometimes we would be in the same place at the same time. He would plaster a smile on his face and walk by as if we were invisible. My siblings and I liked it that way. We did not want his love anymore and he didn’t want ours. The experience made me more resilient. I accepted others’ mistakes and learned from them, trying to help them instead of tearing them down.