

The Battles of Thompson House

“Nancy, repeat after me: Four score and seven years ago.” I mimicked him, “Four score and seven years ago.” Since vocabulary began exiting my mouth, I mimicked my father in every possible way. Every attribute of my father was something that I so severely wanted to be a part of. Since my father was a Civil War historian, I had learned Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address in its entirety by the age of four. Heck, I have over 30 books on President Lincoln! My dad always disliked slang and derogatory words, so at a young age I also referred to my excretory matters as “defecate” and “urinate”. My dad played piano, so I learned. He loved summer, I did too. He loved to read, and would help me find interesting books, many of which were historically based. I learned a lot of how I wanted to be from him. Very deliberately, my father formed me into his perfect child. I was flattered to have his attention and affection, and his word was most certainly the law in my young mind.

I got used to being my father’s “attraction”. He took me to the symphony, Civil War banquets, dinners, and meetings. I met all of his friends, and in a way they took me on as a friend of theirs as well. My dad and I were a team, and we could conquer and do anything together. My mom would reprimand me for bad behavior, and my dad always took my side. Of course, this I loved as I *never* got into trouble unless he actually got mad at me (which was very rare). I remember one event specifically, my mom had gotten upset with me because I had been giving her attitude and undermining her authority. When my mom asked for my dad’s support, he denied it, telling her it was her fault if I didn’t respect her. Looking back, I certainly did deserve punishment for the way I was

treating my mom. She was trying to teach me a valuable lesson, and it was lost when my dad entirely denied her as a parent. I was so young that it didn't matter; I just knew that my dad and I were a team and a great one at that.

We all grow out of our shell and become “productive” contributors to society, but there is a stage between childhood and adulthood that is crucial to make that transition. Being a teenager is the hardest and strangest phase of life. We want to be accepted by our peers, follow our own hearts, and do things without the advisement of our parents. For me, this stage was two-fold: it affected me, but it also dramatically affected the relationship that I shared with my dad.

As I have grown up, I realized that I am not the only one changing and evolving. I watched my mom try to please my dad for years, but to no avail since he didn't even like her. I've watched my brothers follow in my footsteps, make choices in hopes our dad will be more affectionate or like them better. But, my opinion of my dad always remained the same positive way. That is, until I reached the seventh grade.

My dad is an older parent, and comes from a much more conservative time. His interest in the Civil War has created in him a very soft spot for southerners and the non-existent Confederate States of America. He loves the stories, and his interest in the time period is contagious. Unfortunately, there are repercussions to being entirely immersed in the past.

Over the summer of 1999, the first major difference I ever had with my father occurred. I met some friends that were very different from me. I dyed my hair bleach blonde without permission, and had a “relationship” (if that's even an appropriate word for a 13-year-old) with an African-American guy named Brian. I decided to tell my dad

about it, because I was very excited about this new prospect in my life. My dad unfortunately did not respond well. He put it blatantly that “blacks and whites don’t mix”, and “being with someone of color will only make your life difficult, and I will disown you if you EVER bring one home!” I was appalled, and offended. In response to my dad’s hurtful words, I wrote a letter to Brian, cursing my father and his opinions. Regrettably, I saved this letter to the hard drive on the computer and my dad found it. I was grounded, and my mother just stood by and watched my father try to instill his racist beliefs into me. It was the first time I recognized that I had differences with my father, and that he very was *not* the man I thought he was. That was the end of the summer of 1999, and it ended with the harsh reality that the relationship I so greatly treasured with my father would never be the same.

My parents never got along. Throughout my childhood, I never witnessed kissing, or any other signs of affection that most children view. It was strange to me how other couples kissed on an every-day basis. From what I had seen, I presumed kissing only happened on holidays! I guess it could be inferred that the only physical contact that took place was the abusive kind. In a way, we had our own Civil War in that house.

In the winter of 2000, the biggest fight between my mom and dad happened, Gettysburg. There was shouting and threatening, which was normal. But I saw a different fire in my dad’s eyes that day, and knew I had to leave. I ran out of the kitchen, not wanting to turn back. The moment I let go and caved into my curiosity, my dad had a chair raised over his head and was about to hit my mom with it. I had thought that my opinion of him changed before, but now it changed more dramatically. Never once had I seen my father be physical with any of us. The fact that he could resort to such drastic

measures kindled a fear in me that I never knew I possessed.

Despite the differences that my dad and I now had, I elected to move out with him into his new condominium. I suppose that if history were different, this would be the part when the south secedes from the union, and the war (at least in some ways) would be over. Things started off okay for the two of us, but I quickly realized my dad was not fit to be alone with his parenting. He had illogical rules (no talking on the phone after 9pm, and no computer usage), and a lack of concern on important issues (like who I was hanging out with, or getting my homework done). Needless to say, my dad and I had a lot of trouble getting along. It also didn't help that he had a new love interest, and was neglecting both my brothers and me for her.

I lasted six months before I needed to go back home. I missed the feeling of the family unit that my mom provided, and I dearly missed my brothers. My mom always cooked dinner for us every night, helped us with homework, and made sure we were doing okay. My dad neglected all of those simple things. Moving back was one of the hardest things I had to do. It was harder to move back than it was to leave, because it was the first time in my life I had ever slapped my dad in the face with a "you're wrong". It may have been necessary, but it changed everything for us.

Change is necessary for evolution. Nobody learns without making mistakes and experiencing life. The hardest lessons are learned in the hardest ways, and that certainly is the way it was for my dad and I. I sometimes wondered how he could have raised me to have such different morals than those of his own. So strange that for the first thirteen years of my life he was my role model and mentor, and now he was strictly my "father".

The Civil War is long over, and we've all learned from it in history classes. In the

end, the north and the south had to let go of certain things in order to make life easier. My dad and I had to make that same choice: to let go. We have accepted that we won't always make the other happy, and we deal with our differences. I can't say we celebrate them, but it's nice to have "discussions" rather than "arguments". Obviously the way I used to view my father has changed immensely, but I can't say that it hasn't been good for me. I have learned so much from him, and ironically enough, I have learned how important it is for me to accept the differences I might share with other people.

The ending of the Civil War did not entirely end disagreements in the United States. But, instead of looking for an escape from problems, the North and South learned to work together. This "reconstruction" period was just as necessary then as it was for me. I learned to get along with my parents, and we became a family unit that wasn't necessarily always together.

The other day, my dad and I made plans to see Joan Baez in concert. We share a love of her beautiful folk music, and together have most of her albums. We talked a bit about school, and Hurricane Katrina. I told my dad that Bush was not acting the way he should be for his position as president. My dad disagreed (he's extremely conservative), and we both ranted for awhile. "Sorry that I don't agree but it's BUSH!" My dad responded with a huge smile, "We'll never agree, but I still love you anyway."