

Second Place
My Father, A Good Man*

by
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*"Honor thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the
Lord thy God givith thee."*

-Exodus 20:21

The car is silent. I stare out the side window, mindlessly tugging at the end of my braid. My father sits across the worn apoulstry in the dodge, his hands turning white, he's gripping the wheel so tightly. His jaw is clenched, leaving me to interpret that there are many things he wishes to say to me but he does not feel that this is the time to do so. Moreover that he is extremely angry and if he had just half a chance, but no, this is why he is controlling himself to prove to me, and maybe himself, that he is stronger than his anger. Silent in the corner furthest away from him, I let thoughts of all the horrid thing I could say to him scramble through my head, secure in the self-righteous way only youth can be, that I am right and he is being completely unreasonable in not admitting that mine is the only possible right answer. But tight lipped and staring blandly out the car window, I to am silent. Once or twice both of us have opened our mouths to confront the other with the bitter truth about themselves, but as we both think better of it the silence continues unchecked. Yet as the quiet grows the anger diminishes. Dad switches on the radio, soft at first, then raising the radio with the miles. I open my book and continue the narrative interrupted by the spat. A Beatles tune is announced and Dad cranks the station, singing off-key and keeping perfect rhythm on the dash. I join in on the chorus, not quite off-key but far to high and behind the beat. As the song ends the volume goes down, and I am imparted once again with the knowledge that when Dad was younger he really could sing, but the years had taken it away. I laugh and ask something trivial about John Lennon, reviving for my effort a three minute montage on his life and career. Another song comes up, I return to my book and dad taps the rhythm on the steering wheel. The fight, more than likely over something I have done/forgotten to do is put out of mind until we are home and the subject of the fight is cleaned, picked-up, straightened or put away, depending on the subject. Both he and I know, however, that I being eccentric, sporadic, opinionated, and stubborn, and he, being orderly, precise, opinionated, and stubborn, will once again clash over some matter. And it will be resolved again, presumably without apologies or a discussion, but one of us (me) giving in and doing as the other asks, and this is O.K. The way you fight with your parent is special. This is how it should be. To successfully fight with your parents you must first prove to them you are right, and still remain respectful. Right, as, of course I always am, because I am young and arrogant, and my perspective is unique and remarkable, unquestionably better then any outmoded thoughts of his, can mean many things. For, after Dad has proven once again that with age does come wisdom, he has left me with enough equanimity to still be grateful that I have a father who encourages me to think for myself, granted if every once in a while he has to prove me wrong.

I respect my father. I do. Probably if you asked him, he would agree, merely terribly surprised I would admit it. He and I are profoundly different. Or perhaps we appear so different because we are so alike. We disagree on almost every major political issue. He dropped out of Catechism class in ninth grade, I have contemplated joining almost every major religion. He has a decisive was to do

everything, I do little twice and less in the same manner. We witness the world through different eyes. Yet, I respect his eyes. Those eyes care about people and family, history and pride. They hold honor and dignity, and yes even wisdom in their depths. I too, wish to someday hold these virtues in my eyes, in my soul. Proud to let the world see his legacy, my love for, my father, and the honor in knowing the man.

Honor thy Father and Mother. Sounds nice doesn't it? A biblical decree bringing to mind droves of young boys and girls brought up kindly, wisely, to good men and women who are happy to honor their parents by caring for them as they age, as they had cared and nurtured them in their infancy. Pleasant, no? But there are flaws in the happy fantasy. Perchance the parent want their freedom, or more conceivably, the children do. If there is no parental bond of love to bind the children the parent is merle a tiresome burden, not as they should be, a guide who is been through the path you are now facing and can see its pitfalls. So bitter anger grows to festering hate, and the child merle waits for the parent to die. Is that honor? Or is real honor awareness and admiration of what your father and your mother have taught you. to care and love and yes, to forgive, those who have cherished you. for in the endless acts that lead to your adult hood, they became a part of you, for better of for worse. Their hope and sorrow, heartbreak and loss, redemption and faith, their history became apart of yours and the truest way to honor thy father and thy mother, is in the acceptance of their love.

Yes, I respect my father. I wish I could believe he was perfect, as I did when I was very young. When the world was brighter and my daddy was still invincible. But now I am older and I see my father as a man and I'm not even certain if I want him to be invincible. A man, a real man, with faults and flaws, as most men do. who, can be beaten, and has been beaten, and has become stronger for it, therefore is better than invincible. A good man, truly deep within him a good man. I see this in his eyes, the dignity and honor that I repeat. For a moment I let myself be young, imagine my father perfect. Reality intrudes, I find him not a God, but a man and I am prouder for it. And in this, I honor him.

*essay reprinted exactly as author submitted it.