

Parental Separation and its Impact - My Experience

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My parents were always at each other. They saw quarreling and fighting as a means of resolving their conflicts. My father, a typical traditional African man, would not stand his wife's yells and rants at him. For my mom, she never got tired of yelling at dad whenever she was angry with him. Simply put, dad was intolerant while mom was impatient.

I can't remember the number of times mom moved out of the house as a result of this. Sometimes, dad could support her by throwing her things outside. Mom could stay out for months before coming back to the house. This kept on happening on different occasions but the truth is, I was never used to it because I wondered why

other parents around were not experiencing it too. But when I grew up, I realized that they had such conflicts too but their approaches were different from my parents approach. As a result, I never had peace, stability and happiness growing up as a child.

Mom finally moved out of the house and never returned. It was 17 years of traumatic experience for me and my siblings without mom's presence and care. One would think that those years would have brought some sort of peace in the house but it was worse. Dad brought home his mistress. This instability forced our eldest brother out of the house to live with friends. On the good side, I obtained a degree from one of the universities in the state, later got married and relocated to another city with my new family where I finally, found the peace and happiness I've ever desired since childhood.

Currently, I live with my husband and our three children; Favour, Michael and Davies who makes me laugh every single day. How, one may ponder, did I survive all the challenges and now feel normal?

THE DAY MOM LEFT

Firstly, I want to take you back to the terrible day mom left us. I was 11+ and my sister 9+, while the others were 6 and 3 years respectively with an eldest brother. It was at noon time, I knew something was wrong between mom and dad because dad just dashed into the house from work without saying a word to mom. And mom did not make things better. The house was moody and I could feel it without asking what was going on. After dad left for work again that noon, my first instinct was to watch him through the window as he drove off and I saw my dad's siblings standing outside the gate. From the look on their faces, I could smell the smoke from the fire they came with. My suspicion was confirmed when they stormed into our house aggressively and picked up a quarrel with mom over a missing key dad was looking for. From previous experiences, my dad always reports his marital issues to them as if they were the head of the house. That I think, gave them the boldness to come and attack our mom. The quarrels escalated into a bloody fight that left mom severely wounded on her head. My siblings and I cried and shouted for help as our two aunts and uncle fought with our mom. I cannot remember how the fight ended but, mom got them arrested and never followed up the case before finally moving out of the house despite our plea for her not to. Dad came back and got his siblings released from police custody without any remorse for what they did to our mom.

At 11, I became a mother to my much younger siblings who kept on looking and asking about mom daily. Things were extremely rough for us as kids as dad never bothered looking for mom. Instead, he brought home his mistress who already had a baby for him! Then I understood dad's intention for not looking for mom. In a period of two months of her stay with us, she became a thorn in our flesh. We no longer had free access to things we did when mom was around.

Mom's absence brought untold hardship to us. At every little mistake we made or inability to carry out a given task in the house, dad would vent his anger on us calling us the abusive names he used to call our mom. Sometimes, he would threaten to send us to our mom or lock us outside - which he actually started doing to our eldest brother without remorse. Dad's mistress often withheld the money given to us for our daily upkeep. On one such instances, dad's mistress collected and seized the money meant to transport me to school without my knowledge. As a result, I did not go to school because school was a long distance from home. I had to trek sometimes without breakfast and lunch. It was when my aunt saw me trekking to school one morning that she confronted my dad and the secret of dad's mistress was exposed. These hardships forced our eldest brother out of the house to live with his friends. He embarked on a journey and never returned till this very minute. Mom searched for him and never found him.

Dad's mistress later had two more kids for him. I observed that the kids were always having the best when it came to clothes and education. On special occasions or events, she buys us second hand set of clothes while hers got new sets. Hers had the best kindergarten schools while our 3 year old sister got into an unconducive public school with few or no chairs to sit on during learning. At 14, she made me do street hawking. I was doing that until dad lost his job. Then, she started tasking my younger brother and sister, who were meant to be in school, for street hawking while her children stay attended school or were at home.

Consequently, things became rocky for me throughout my secondary school years. In order to cope, I sometimes stayed with mom who at the slightest provocation would send me back to dad. Dad was not an exception to that; he did same to me too. I became fed up with their attitude that I had to, pick up a part time job in a small ice cream factory to help myself and my younger siblings. At the end of my secondary school year, I moved back in with dad. Sometimes, I stayed at my friends' houses located in a different part of the state, just to have peace.

About nine months after my secondary school graduation, I took ill and was diagnosed with a kidney disease which later led to the removal of my right kidney (Nephrectomy). In a nutshell, I lost my right kidney because I was not promptly attended to as dad and mom were waiting for who would take responsibility for the treatment, until my pastor intervened. It was a horrible experience for me but I thank God that the surgery was a success.

Time will not permit me to note how many times my parents would criticize each other in front of me. Dad and his mistress were always making ugly comments about my mom that was not pleasant to my ears. These negative experiences and their consequences were the impact of my parent's separation on me. Frankly speaking, they shaped my life in many positive ways. Because of my parent's separation, I was forced to grow up faster. It pushed me away from their problems into Christ, books and studies. I learned to cope, grew stronger and to believe in myself instead of allowing their drama to make me a victim. Honestly, I sometimes see myself as a child masquerading as a sagacious adult.

If you are reading this, you may be wondering how I survived or how I managed all that without messing up myself! In a typical society like ours in Delta State, south of Nigeria, it is excusable for a young girl with such challenges to engage in affairs or prostitute to make ends meet. I had a friend with such challenge and she ended up getting pregnant at age 13. I felt for her because she was unable to cope and, guess what? The society didn't blame her because they knew she was pushed into it and that was how she became a mother because she wanted to meet up with her needs. But, my case was different for the following reasons;

- I learned to lean on close friends that were even older than me.
- These friends encouraged me with some money to help meet up with some of my needs.
- I learned to be contented with what I had.
- I learned to be open at all times to positive relationships.
- I got close to survivors of broken homes who finally became successful.
- Above all, I learned to be patient with the situation so as not to end up like my parents and my husband enjoys that attribute today.

I was determined to correct my parent's mistakes by getting married to someone who was ready to accommodate and adjust to our individual differences. I was initially scared of getting married because I thought I would end up like my parents.

But when I met my husband who is not from a broken home and also saw where I grew up as an unhealthy environment for children to grow, none of those fears materialized. I realized that I don't have to make my parents' mistakes and so I don't hold grudges. I communicate my feelings at the right time instead of fighting. All things, my parents were never good at. And that's what I told my mom before she passed on after battling with a blood pressure ailment which I suspect attacked her because of all the troubles she had in her marriage. I sincerely missed her. I wish she was alive to see a strong and better woman their separation and drama made out of me. I know she had regrets because before she passed on, she told me she would have taken better decisions that would have been pain-free for her children.

For all the challenges of the past, it may be strange, for me to thank my parents for separating, but I do really thank them for the woman I am today. If parental separation were pain-free, I could write the 'dos and don'ts' lists.

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