

My Father: I Want to Be Everything He's Not

By Troy Shawn Welcome

1. **M**y father was very popular in Guyana, South America, where we lived until I was 9 years old. His friends used to tell me how it was difficult to walk down the street with him without being noticed. I could only wonder about that because I never spent time with my father. I saw him only on those rare occasions when he slept at home.

My father was what you'd call a playboy. He had a son with one of his mistresses and also a daughter with a second mistress.

But despite all of his faults, I still admired my father. When his friends heard me speak, laugh, or walk, they'd say, "That's Terry's son alright." I was just like my dad, and I felt proud to be like him. He was my role model.

After we moved to America, he and my mother started to fight constantly. I hated when they fought, because he'd hit her.

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He started disappearing for days and then weeks at a time. For some time I'd only see him on weekends. One weekend, he took my brother and me to a Yankee game. I don't like baseball; the only thing I liked about the game was that he was there.

But the thing I remember the most was the weekend when he taught my brother Rob and me how to ride bicycles at the track and field next to Yankee Stadium. I remember going down the straightaway part of the track with my pops at my side. I felt a bond with him.

2. Weekends Together

Those weekends were great, but they didn't last. When I was 11, I started to see him less and less each month. I'd wake up on Saturday mornings hoping to see him that day, but most of the time I'd be disappointed. After about a year he called and asked Rob and me to spend weekends with him in New Jersey, where he was now living. Even though I was happy to be with him, I didn't show it that much. I was hurt because he had left us for so long.

Those weekends with my dad were great, but they didn't last.

The weekend stays at his house went so well that he asked us to spend the summer with him. I enjoyed that summer.

He'd leave money on my pillow before he left for work in the morning. I looked forward to hearing his van pull up when he came home. I felt mad good because I had a dad again.

3. Wedding Bells

The year that followed was good because I saw him almost every weekend. Then one day my father picked up my brother and me and took us shopping. He bought us suits, shirts, and ties, and we went to his house in New Jersey, where he was living with a woman named Fay.

The house smelled like a bakery and there were a lot of suits lying on the couch. I had no idea what was going on, so I joined

two of Fay's sons who were playing video games.

Suddenly my pops came into the living room, called me and my brother over into the corner, put his arms around us, and said, "We're going to a wedding on Saturday."

"Whose wedding?" I asked.

"Me and Fay's," he answered.

I had an idea that he'd say that. I was happy for him. I rejoined Fay's sons at the television, hoping to start a conversation because I really felt like I didn't belong. "Yo, you heard... your moms and my pops are getting married," I said.

"We knew that for a year already. You just found out?" Shawn asked.

I was embarrassed because my brother and I were the only people who hadn't known. I thought that everyone was laughing at me. "Now he has new sons and he doesn't need me anymore," I thought.

4. **Treated Like a Stepchild**

On the morning of the wedding, my brother and I had to help decorate the hall where the ceremony and reception were to be held. It was hard work, but hours later the hall was transformed with tablecloths and all kinds of decorations. I didn't mind doing all that work because I was looking forward to being a part of the wedding.

But I didn't have anything to do with the ceremony. When it was over, I was still hoping to sit with my father, but I could have waited years for him to notice me. I was disappointed and upset. I felt as though my pops used me as his maid, as though I wasn't important to him.

After the wedding I spoke to my father only when it was absolutely necessary. As years raced by, the number of times that I saw him decreased.

I was angry at my pops for treating me like a stepchild at the wedding, but I still needed him in my life. It was very hard, and still is, to be a teen and my own father at the same time. I'd

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question whether I was good enough to be considered a man. I couldn't get through a day without stressing myself out about whether I acted, talked, or looked like a man. All that stress affected my life in many ways.

5. The Confrontation

Finally, about a year and a half ago, after years of keeping my feelings inside and many, many sessions with my counselor, I raised the courage to call my father up and confront him.

"What kind of father are you?" I asked him. "You don't call, you don't come to see us. If anyone met me in the last two years, they'd think that I didn't have a father. I don't understand what's going on."

"Ah, um, I have been calling and coming by," he countered calmly. "But you are never there."

The way he spoke to me made me feel like we were two executives at a board meeting.

"You haven't been calling or coming cause I would've gotten a message," I said. "I think it's because you got your new sons and Karen [my older half-sister] over there, so you don't need us anymore."

I was hoping that he'd say that it wasn't true and that he still loved me, but that didn't happen.

"I don't think you should be taking this tone with me," he said. He was starting to get upset. "You call me up and tell me this bull about—"

"Bull?" I interrupted. "This ain't bull. It's the way I feel. I'm telling you the way I feel and that's all it is to you—bull crap!"

"OK, it's the way you feel. But I'm still your father and you shouldn't be speaking to me like this," he said.

"As far as I'm concerned, you're not my father. You haven't

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been and will never be my father," I told him.

"You will always be my son and we will be together in the future," he said in a patronizing voice.

"If you're not here for me now, what makes you think that I'm going to need you in the future?" I said. "Listen, I have another call so I gotta go, a'ight."

Click.

The conversation pissed me off. First, he had an annoying tone throughout the conversation. It made me feel like he wasn't taking me seriously. Second, he made me realize that I was right—he didn't want me.

But I felt a little relieved to at least know how he felt. It was the hardest thing that I ever did. I was trembling while I was speaking to him. My emotions were so strong from keeping them in for so many years. It was good for me to get them out because now I don't think about him enough to get me depressed anymore.

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6. **The Last Straw**

Surprisingly, he did call me back a few weeks later. He told me that he wanted to hang out with my brother and me that Friday. I canceled my plans just so I could be with my dad.

At 7 o'clock on Friday night I was waiting for him. Nine o'clock came and I was getting frustrated because I hate waiting for people. I finally decided to call and find out if something happened to him. Fay answered the phone and told me he was sleeping. She woke him up and he gave me some story about having a long day. Then he asked if he could see me on Sunday and I agreed.

To make a long story short, he never came on Sunday. From that day I realized that I was never going to have him in my life again. I haven't seen or heard from my sperm donor (that's what

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I call him sometimes) since that conversation—a year and a half ago.

7. **Mom Says I Should Love Him**

My mother still tries to convince me that I should love him because he's my father. But how can I love someone I don't know and who doesn't know me?

Today things are better. I've managed to hide my feelings for my father so deep that I'd have to dig to find them. I still think he doesn't want me. But I realize that no matter what he did to me, it's no excuse for me to have a messed-up life.

Strangely enough, he did teach me something. He taught me that the best man I could be is his total opposite. I now know that having children left and right doesn't make a man. Staying around to raise them does.

Troy was 19 when he wrote this story. His relationship with his dad continued to affect him (read more about it in p. 212).