

One More Time

In my father there is a child who was not allowed to play. Part of my father was perfect, and he was compelled to punish us in order to pull us toward his perfection. My father's daily lessons in becoming better than the rest of the world were often interrupted so that a belt, paddle, switch, or yardstick could teach a valuable lesson in father's daily whims. My father had punishment ready for his children. My father was the master of many punishments. There was the disapproval at having been caught doing something simple incorrectly. I was taught that all things are simple if you give them the attention they deserve. This brought on a glare that said I see you now as one of the idiots of society and I am ashamed that you are my son. The threat of receiving this punishment or its present internal equivalent drove me to be better, smarter and faster than anyone at anything. It also taught me to impose my father's shame on myself when my imperfection shows like it does in all those idiots in the rest of the world. There were the fits of rage directed at me as I was doing something imperfectly that affected him. The speed and intensity of the explosion made it often impossible to correct my behavior before I was hit for being too slow. Later I became much better at thinking and acting while under attack. One example that I remember so well that my stomach tightens at the thought is the chore of holding a flashlight for my father while he worked on a car. In spite of my aversion I am still drawn to hold the flashlight for others hoping to do it perfectly just this once and once again and again and again. Then there was the surprise attack, a smack in the head, face or behind whatever and whomever he could reach. This reminded me that father had no need for warnings and had long ago used up his patience and tolerance for children. The surprise attack was often used in public when I was more likely to be less focused on father and too focused on playing, fighting or the rest of the world for his tastes. In public fathers rage had to be even more restrained than usual, this was difficult for him and for that we paid even more later. Under these circumstances if I was stupid enough to be playful, loud or childish again, the worst punishment of all would be dispensed. The promise of being the sole target of his barely restrained rage when we arrived at our destination. I believe that if he allowed his rage to be completely unrestrained he would have beaten me to death. The helpless fear, the prayers that he would forget, begging God to fall asleep before we arrived, as if that would make a difference. The complete lack of power I felt knowing that nothing would stop it now.

The ultimate lesson and at the same time welcome climax was the beatings. There are many feelings I have no words for, no frame of reference in order to make sense of. But they all began during that walk to the bedroom. My bedroom, unless we were away and he could not wait, with father behind me sliding his belt out of his pants or grabbing the paddle out of his room. As we walked he would talk of things I could not hear over the sound of fear in my head. I think at those moments I learned to split the, animal side of me twitching and searching for an escape from the predator bearing down on me and the logical self calmly assuring me that there was no escape and I would have to handle it one more time. I would enter the room, he would close the door. I would begin to plead just as someone who falls a great distance will scream involuntarily, I would plead and whimper. My father would order my pants pulled

down. I would comply and bend over the bed. Then began the statement that preceded the pain. At this point all I could do was listen and pray. Listen to the sound of his voice and the sounds of the room for a clue as to when the beating would begin while praying that it began soon. Father would explain what I did or did not do or did not do correctly. After the speech had worked him into a rage he would begin to beat me. I would count the first few strokes to distract me from the pain that I do not remember. Father would use the strokes to emphasize his words. Words like "**I don't ever want to see you or hear you do that again**". The more words he could pull up from hell the more pain I received. He would use the word disrespect a lot. I would lose count of the strokes as I screamed promises to obey him, to be perfect, to become him. I won't I won't over and over again. Sometimes I would be unable to keep from covering up my backside with my hands. That would give him a few more words "**keep your fucking hands out** of the way". Five more strokes if the ones to my hands did not count. Again I learned to think and control myself while under attack. Then it would be over "pull your pants up and get back out there" he would say. I was ordered to apologize to my mother, stop fighting with my brother, go clean the house, take care of his guests or if I was really lucky it would be late and he would order me to stop crying and go to sleep. I would lay there on the bed feeling my bottom burn relieved it was over and begin to feel shame and embarrassment because of those whom had heard. My brother knew I got it, my neighbors, my friends, family and friends in the house. I would then empower myself, stop the pain, fear, shame and embarrassment because of I lingered too long father would return and offer me something to cry about. I would leave my room still wishing to hide but knowing I **had** to make them happy. I would clean the house, act friendly do whatever I could to push down the pain, fear, shame and embarrassment because if father saw it or thought someone else saw it that would result in more pain for me. One of the hardest things for me to accept is that on a few occasions when I was beaten my mother came in afterwards, not to sneak away risking herself to comfort her baby. But to inform me that I should feel bad for what I made my father do and to inform me that my father was in their bedroom weeping. In some ways that was an even more painful punishment than the beatings and more difficult to forgive.

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