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The Man Who Was There

By Jennifer D. Shirar

I did not have a daddy until I was four years old. Sure, the biological sperm-donor who was present for my conception had been a part of my life up to that point....that is, as much as drug-addicted, wife-abusing, loser could be. I was three when my twenty year old mother finally worked up the courage to leave the "sperm-donor." That is when she met Buddy: a loud-mouthed, Mohawk wearing, tattooed truck driver with a kind soul.

Buddy was in love with my mom and stubbornly pursued her. She resisted his advances for quite some time having left such a terrible relationship. However, he was not going to be rejected and eventually his perseverance paid off. My mom decided it would be okay to allow him into *our* life.

I liked Buddy. He was a human jungle gym. I could climb and jump all over him. He could even lift me up with his pinky finger! He hid Easter eggs for me to find, read me stories, and played games with me, and most importantly he loved my mom. He brought her flowers, hugged and kissed her, and told her she was beautiful. All the things this wonderful woman deserved. My only real memory of the "sperm-donor" interacting with my mom was him screaming at her and pushing her out the door onto the concrete driveway.

It had been almost a year since my mom began dating Buddy when she came to me with some life changing news. We were moving to Arizona with Buddy, so he could be closer to his two sons.

"Arizona?! That's where the sticker cactus and snakes are. I can't go to Arizona," I protested, stomping my foot in anger. Alas, my objections were futile, and my whole Oregon world was packed up and moved to the inappropriately named Mammoth, Arizona.

In Arizona, we began to make a new life for ourselves. Buddy worked at the Trucking Company and my mom stayed home and cared for me. Then they decided to make things even more complicated, they were going to get married. I wasn't sure how I felt about that. I liked Buddy, but married!? That is a pretty big deal; even a five year old knows that. But again who was I to question this; I wondered what this meant for me and my relationship with Buddy.

I remember when I decided that Buddy was "My Dad." I was sitting outside on a concrete fence, my legs draped over the side swinging back and forth waiting for Buddy to get home. I watched as his beat up Chevy lumbered into the driveway after a long day's work at the Trucking Company. He glanced my way as he climbed out of the car. A huge smile spread across his face, as if seeing me there, waiting for him to get home, had made his whole day. I finally realized this man loved me too. I wasn't excess baggage that came with my mom; I was part of the whole package, a package he wanted in its entirety. That was a lot for my five year old brain to take in.

"Hi, Daddy," I squeaked out as my face flushed all shades of red.

Buddy stopped and laughed. As he swept me into a giant bear hug he said, "Hi there, *my* little Jen." I was ecstatic. From that point on, he would always be Dad to me, and I guess I was okay with this whole married thing.

Dad told me many years later hearing me call him “Daddy” for the first time was one of the sweetest moments of his life, a moment he would never forget.

While my dad may not have come in to my life until I was four years old, he has been my dad since then. There have been many lessons I have learned from him that have shaped me into the woman I am today. We may not have always agreed on everything and quite possibly drove my mom to the brink of insanity with our constant arguing when I was a teenager. But those arguments and disagreements were his way of guiding me. He took his responsibility as my dad very seriously and never faltered in it. He has always been *there*.

He sold his comic book collection to buy me Christmas presents. He took the training wheels off and was there to pick me up and wipe the tears away. He fixed me peanut butter, marshmallow cream, chocolate chip and honey sandwiches, and even convinced my mom it would be all right for me to eat it. He was kept up all night by my incessant giggling whenever a friend would stay the night. He met my boyfriends at the door and then proceeded to scare them off with descriptions of the baseball bat he kept in the back of his closet. He was there when “Pomp and Circumstance” played and I received my high school diploma. He walked me down the aisle and proclaimed “Her Mother and I do” when the deacon asked “Who gives this woman away?” And he has been there to tickle his granddaughter and grandson with “mustache kisses.”

My dad may not have been present for my conception, but he is the only man I will ever call my daddy. Being a dad is not about blood, genes, or any other biological makeup; a dad teaches, loves, guides, and disciplines. A dad is *there*. This is what this man did for me. I may have gotten my green eyes and short stature from my mom, but I undeniably got my dad’s stubbornness and gift of the argument despite our lack of biological similarities.

About Jennifer D. Shirar:

I am pursuing my Bachelor’s of Arts in English through AMU.

