

THE SCARY MAN

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[Assignment: Write an essay explaining how you changed your mind about something. Perhaps you decided not to go out for wrestling your senior year; perhaps some series of events revealed something important about yourself or your community you never knew or suspected to be true. Keep in mind that you will want to recount events, incidents, perhaps conversations or things you read that helped change your thinking process.]

After my parents' divorce, times were tough. My mom had to work to make ends meet, especially because the support check was not always on time. My brother, sister, and I had the utmost respect for our mom. She taught us how to be happy and not to take what we had for granted. My mom gave us a roof over our heads, shirts on our backs, and toys to play with. As far as we were concerned, we had it made. She was a stickler about minding our manners and being responsible for our actions. We followed her rules; if we did not, then we would have to deal with the consequences of our actions. No matter how busy or hectic my mom's life became, she always had time for her kids. My mom also never breathed a demeaning word about my dad, even though they were divorced. She let us judge our dad for ourselves.

My dad picked us up every weekend. Since we did not live with him, he tried to make up for the time he missed with us during the week. We would jump into his yellow "bomb," and wave to our mom until our house was out of sight. My dad often took us to the park, took us swimming, and played games with us. He even let us eat junk food. Needless to say, when we would return home our manners that my mother so strongly enforced were obliterated.

This went on for roughly two years. Then it happened. I remember the first time he drove up in his shiny, black Supra. He walked up to the front door and rang the doorbell. I knew something fishy was up because we had always used the side door. Just as my mom opened the door, Julie, Jason, and I raced over to give her farewell hugs and kisses. The man looked horrified! I did not want my mom to leave with him. He had thick, black hair, strong eyes, dark skin, and he was well built. Compared to my slightly balding, blue-eyed, squishy dad this man looked like a criminal! Although criminals cannot be generalized into looking a certain way, my six-year old imagination had gotten the best of me. The next time he came to pick up my mom he was introduced to us. His name was Ed.

A little over a year passed by and my dad was still picking us up for our weekend excursions. After my dad dropped us off one day, my mom sat Julie, Jason, and me down in the living room. She asked us how our weekend was, and if we had fun visiting our Grandma and Grandpa Stockrahm. Then she told us the news: Ed asked her to marry him! She wanted to know how we felt about the proposal. My answer was easy. I told her if she married him I was going to run away. My brother was

easily swayed because my mom reminded us that her husband-to-be had a son who was only one year younger than my brother. Jason was ecstatic that he was finally going to have a playmate besides my sister and me. Julie and I eventually gave in, even though I had to wear a dress.

On January 28, 1986, Julie, Jason, Brian (my new step-brother) and I marched my mother down the aisle to my awaiting step-father.

In the beginning, Julie, Jason, and I were deathly afraid of Ed. Brian, on the other hand, was not scared of him because he was used to his personality. To Julie, Jason, and me he was a quiet, observant, powerful person. We misread these qualities and attributed them to meanness. If my brother, sister, or I were misbehaving he would only have to glance at us, and we would stop what we were doing in a heartbeat. For years my mom would be the mediator between Ed, Julie, Jason, and me. If my step-dad, Julie, Jason or I had a question to ask one another, we would rather wait until my mom came home. This way she could act as the mediator for her family.

About a year after my mom was remarried, my dad stopped picking us up. This caused a massive shift in my lifestyle. All contact was cut off between my dad's whole side of the family, which consisted of his fourteen brothers and sisters, all my cousins, and my Grandpa and Grandpa Stockrahm. To this day, I still do not know the reason this happened.

Although this was a traumatic experience, I think that it quickened the pace for me to accept Ed as I look at him now--my dad. On the nights that my mom worked, Ed would fix us dinner and tuck us into bed. At first this was very awkward because it was my mom's job to tuck us in. Eventually I became used to it, and I even came to expect Ed to come in and say good-night even if my mom was home. Sometimes he would take us to his mom and dad's house and let us run around on the farm. One day he bought us kites and videotaped us flying them there. On the tape, he "interviewed" me and I call him Ed, but my little brother called him Pa. The reason that this was a significant event was because when we watched the video tape later on that night with my mom, I noticed my brother called him Pa. Even though this was not the specific day that I started calling him Pa, the idea was implanted in my mind. Flying kites that day was definitely a mile-marker in building a healthy relationship with my step-father.

As the years went on, I would ask my mom if I could do something, and she always said she had to discuss it with Ed first. Because my mom included Ed in her decisions about me, I was forced into recognizing that he had become a main character in my upbringing. Together, he and my mom had authority over me. This realization made me aware that he treated me as more than a stepdaughter, and it led me to take a massive step forward in our relationship.

In high school, my mother and I would sometimes have a disagreement, and, more often than not it grew into a screaming match. Pa would sit quietly and patiently until we were through, and then he would make us sit down and talk out our differences. He always listened to both of our stories and then listed the pros and cons of both arguments. He

resolved problems by looking at them logically instead of emotionally like my mom and me.

One day before I left for college he sat me, Julie, and Jason down and told us a story that I will never forget. He told us that the day that he saw us staring up at him with our big, blue, innocent eyes, he wanted nothing more than to give us the kind of life we deserved. He also explained that the reason he works two jobs, and is not around as much as he would like to be is because he wants to give us opportunities that he did not have, such as going to college. His final comment was that he could have walked out the front door that day and been a rich man; he did not, though, because he would not be happy.

The scary man that came to my front door that day has grown with me and the rest of my family. He has taught me the virtues of controlling my temper, of thinking before I act, of always making a list so I do not forget to do anything, and of being observant. He has also shown me that it is sometimes necessary to make sacrifices in life. It took a lot of work for me to finally realize that the man I once thought was so threatening is a gentle, generous, hard-working man whom I have grown to love and respect. He is my dad.