

## "AND THE LITTLE ONES CHEWED ON THE BONES"

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[Assignment: Describe an experience which caused you to grow or to change significantly. This may have happened recently or long ago. Make the narrative interesting by recreating the experience for the reader, using clear time signals and effective details. Looking back, was the change positive or negative?]

(1) "Oh the fox went out on the town one night, prayed to the moon to give him light, he had many a mile to go that night before he reach the town oh . . ." This folksong echoed through our old Chevy as my dad drove along the winding country road. I was getting excited because my favorite part of the song was coming up. "And the little ones chewed on the bones oh, bones oh" sang my dad, as I pretended to be a "little one" and chanted "mmn good, mnm good" as well as I could in time with the music. We were on our way to the Care and Counseling center where my dad was training to become a counselor. Every Tuesday for almost a year I went there with him, because babysitters were expensive for us those days and because my mom had to work.

(2) I had the best time with my dad when we went on our outings, as he called them. On the way to his appointments we would sing all my favorite car songs. There was one in particular about a soldier and a woman who wanted him to marry her, and how he said he needed all these new clothes before he could marry someone so pretty. With this song, like the others, dad would sing in his plush tenor voice and I would pipe in on the parts that I knew. We sang almost the whole time we were in the car. He would even sing the silly songs I learned at preschool with as much enthusiasm as if he were singing his favorite spiritual.

(3) During that year when my dad was going to school we sang so much together. Poppel, as I called my dad, often had to take me with him when he had something to do for school. My mom had to work a lot to support our family since Poppel was going to school and didn't have a job. It was, therefore, his job to take care of me. So, much like the participating fathers of today, my dad stayed home and played the role of the "mother."

(4) On weekdays, Dad got me up and made sure I was dressed and fed. He combed my hair and sometimes, though it wasn't very tidy, he put it in a ponytail. Then he would send me off to the nearby preschool for the morning. When I came home, he fixed my lunch and sat and listened to how my day at school had gone. He sat there and comforted me when I had a rough day, and gave me objective advice when I had fights with my friends. In the afternoons after our talks, I would listen to records while Poppel studied. He was never too busy, though, to calm me when the scary part of my favorite record, "The Purple Puzzle Tree" came on.

(5) On weekends, Poppel, my older sister and I would go to the zoo or to the park so my mother could relax. The three of us would pal around and my dad would tell us about when he was young. I liked hearing about his childhood and about the grandparents I never knew. Hearing him talk about his past gave me a mystical feeling that I can still recapture today.

It is the same kind of inexplicable feeling I got when we sang our folksongs--a kind of "warm flannel" feeling.

(6) After my dad finished school, we moved to a new city and I no longer had occasions for these "warm flannel" feelings. The singing stopped. My dad had a job and no longer had time to take care of me or to sing songs. My mom, though she also had a job, took over the reins. She now got me ready for school and did my hair. She made sure I had a hot breakfast and that I remembered to take my books and homework to school. I loved my mom and I liked it when she took care of me, but something was missing. It was true that her breakfasts tasted better and that my hair was tidier than when my dad did it, but there was still some kind of emptiness. It was as if I was always listening for something. It was something I felt I should be a part of, though I didn't know what it was. Like the little ones chewing on the bones in the folksong, something was chewing away at a part of me. A scrap of who I was had gone away or lay untended.

(7) Today, I recognize that the something I was listening for were the songs that connected me to my dad. After my Poppel started his career and was too busy to sing, I lost my special access to the folksongs I had loved. They remained lost for a long, long time. My dad and I were always close, but never quite as close as we were when our folksongs tied us together. I regret that my dad didn't remain the unconventional father he started out as, but I love him nevertheless.

(8) A couple of months ago as we made the solemn journey to Valparaiso, my father, with a tearful eye, began to sing a tune that brought a familiar echo from the past. Tears streaming down my face, I struggled to choke out my part of our old song. "Mmn good, mmn good," I sang as " the little ones chewed on the bones oh."