

Monica Hopping
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Essay #1

The Upside of Divorce

Story time: My parents got divorced when I was five. I was young enough where I didn't understand what was going on, and my parents did a good job of not letting my sister (a toddler at the time) and me see the turmoil. The main reasons my parents divorced were money and booze. My parents were both working insane hours, my mother had two jobs, and debt was piling up. My father had a rampant alcohol abuse problem and was a very angry drunk. I do not have any memories of this, which I am thankful for. I feel for my mother and being in that situation, her being very young when she had me (only eighteen). She had seen a lot by her twenty-first birthday and had learned a few things about life. She finally got to the point where she couldn't deal with my father's alcoholism anymore: the situation was too much. She made the difficult decision to leave him and try for a better life for herself and for us. My father, a day late and a dollar short, realized his problem and what effect it was having. He quit drinking the day my mother left him. This still haunts him.

Divorce, not a word that gives people a warm and fuzzy feeling. People think of anger, sadness, and dysfunction when divorce comes up. The face that people make is the same one people make when they find out someone has died. This face is the face that people have made at me for most of my life. It gets really old, especially since I do not have the same negative perspective as them; I don't quite understand how divorce is parallel to death. The only thing that I understand is that some divorces do not turn out quite like the one between my mother and father. In divorce, it is uncommon that everything turns out in the end.

I have seen divorce as it affects my mother mostly, but also as it has affected other members of my family. My family has the rather depressing and unhealthy habit of divorce. I wouldn't say that I disagree with divorce. I believe, through my lifetime of observations, research and personal experiences that divorce has a place. This does not mean that I take the idea of marriage lightly. My experiences with divorce have only broadened my understanding of marriage.

I have heard people say that to truly succeed is to have a happy marriage. I don't think that necessarily true, but it is something that should be attempted. My most vivid and personal experience with divorce is the divorce of my mother and father. Marriage is an important part of life and of relationships, but I also believe that people fall in and out of love. My mother and father must have loved each other once, and they were happy for parts of their marriage; this love, however could not endure the circumstances. My experience with my parents, are mostly post divorce, but these experiences have shaped who I am.

To understand how my view of divorce is possible, you have to understand my outlook. I am by nature a very optimistic and very gentle person. I avoid confrontation, and I look for the best in every person and situation. I am incredibly naïve, so I do not notice something negative about a person until it is pointed out.

Divorce to me is a part of life, or at least a part of my life. My countless experiences have shown that divorce can take many forms; I've seen good divorces, bad divorces, nasty divorces and even nastier custody battles. The good is my mother and father, the bad is my aunt and her ex, and the nasty is my mother and stepfather. The custody battle between my mother and father was intense and incredibly difficult for both parties. They each believed that they knew what was

best and, unfortunately for my father, the courts thought my mother was right. The hardest part to deal with is the aftermath; working out how two divorced people can still interact with each other and, in my case, still do what is best for their children.

My being oblivious to their problems was a blessing to my parents. I, however, did not go without seeing the effects. The task of reconciling my parents has been my purpose for most of my life. My personality of not taking sides and of trying to please everyone never got me anywhere. The constant battle of doing what each parent wanted and still trying to make the other happy was difficult. I remember going to my father's and having him re-teach me how to put on socks because my mother had taught me wrong. Or going to my mother's and having her scold me for salting my tortilla chips (a habit I had picked up from my father). As a young child, I did not necessarily understand why I had to do different things at each parent's house, but I learned quickly that it was easier to just concede.

As I grew up, resolving conflicts became more upsetting to me the more I actually saw of it. My delicate disposition was being rocked, and I was finding it harder and harder to please both. Imagine going to work and having two bosses, each of them wanting separate things from you, and wanting you to do everything a different way. Each boss would be treated uniquely, and each project would have to be done two ways. You would have to devise a schedule to divide your time so both were happy. This was my life growing up. My parents had a difficult custody battle, my mother wanted to move and my father didn't want her to take us far away. My mother got her way, and my father has been unhappy ever since. This made the holiday situation a little dicey. While my sister and I were young, we had a pretty decent system of switching off each year. Then complications arose. My mother met someone else and moved my sister and me to Wisconsin, a long ways away from our native California. This move caused a rift when my

mother wanted to spend Christmas in Wisconsin; my father (who is known to throw a fit or two) was not happy. I had the task of explaining to my father that no my sister and I did not in fact hate him. My father is more than slightly prone to pouting and guilt tripping (more so the latter, he is a professional). The theme of balancing the two sides has been constant throughout my life. I was even born under the sign of Libra, the sign of balance.

The two sides of my family are polar opposites. My mother was very young when she had me, my father was middle aged. My father's entire family is (or grew up) very catholic. My mother's family comes from various religious beliefs, including paganism. My father has a very large family; my mother's is very small and tight knit. These differences made closing the gap even more difficult. Even while my mother and father were still married, the disparity strained relationships. When I was born, my uncle told my mother that I would "burn in hell" if I was not baptized. My mother, resenting this condemning of her child (probably rightfully so), refused to have me baptized and instead had me blessed in a pagan ceremony. Part of my role as the child of divorced parents is being a chameleon, being able to shift between the two cultures and being able to shift myself between my two parents.

This ability to shift has taken years to develop, but it is a very helpful skill. This has given me a hybrid of beliefs and customs. My view of religion is very scattered by my upbringing. Neither of my parents took me to church, and no major religious views were enforced; this left me to analyze religion and choose for myself. This I am thankful for; my parents allowed me (whether it was intentional or not) to create my own beliefs. In retrospect my parents combined to give me a very healthy set of values and manners. The culture clash made holidays with the family interesting, but not impossible. This is where being a chameleon is helpful. I developed, out of necessity, a set of specific rules for each side. The rules varied from

avoiding the subject of alcohol (for my father's side) to being wary of unusual baked goods (for my mother's side). These different environments have created in me the ability to blend into various situations. A very unusual benefit of divorce.

Every person has his or her own idea of divorce, their own opinion, and their own experiences. I happen to have developed a lot of these. Divorce is not a bad word to me; it is a word that is part of me. It is part of my identity. If someone asked me whether I would have wanted my parents to remain together, I would definitively answer no. This may seem strange, but I am not like a lot of the other children of divorced parents. I do not remember my parents being happy, and I do not remember being a happy family. I do remember what has happened later in my life, and I believe that my mother, father, sister and I are all better off because of the divorce. We have all found our place and have prospered. That is all I can ask for in this life.