



My Translucent Father

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"Where you used to be there is a hole in the world, which I find myself constantly walking around in day-time, and falling into at night." (Edna St. Vincent Millay)

He still haunts my life, even though he is not around, or even dead for that matter. My father is a "deadbeat dad," due to the fact that he "has not paid his child support in over three months" (Folse 151). As a matter of fact, he has not paid child support in over three years. I cannot recall the last child support check my mother had received that was substantial in supporting two daughters. If anything, I remember that it was not even close to being sufficient as a support base for my sister and I to live off of for even a week.

Since I was about eight years old, my biological parents have been divorced. At first, my father seemed to pay his child support on time and visit his daughters regularly, if he could. Everything seemed like it was going to be o.k., even though I did not have a custodial father. Then dear daddy fell behind on his support and his visits. No real reason seemed apparent for this change. My father soon remarried, which was a good thing in my eyes because his new wife, my new stepmother, would put his child support attitudes in line. She kept my father paying the support on time, and with plenty of money. Life still seemed pretty satisfying. I had two families. Then

disaster struck. My father was, yet again, getting divorced. The money for support stopped coming. Dad stopped visiting. He moved to Buffalo, which at that time, as well as now, was 8 hours away from his daughters. He totally left us behind.

Since that second divorce my father went through, my mother has not seen nearly enough child support to take care of her daughters. She has been to court, hired private lawyers, written to congressmen, and still nothing was found. I have even asked my father for money for my college bills, and he did not respond. My mother's career was not able to support herself and her two daughters so we could live in this money hungry world. She was having trouble supporting her children's basic needs.

My mother soon remarried as well, and still, the monetary situation did not change. My stepfather only paid what he owed. He never took care of my sister and I. He was selfish and money hungry. He did not want to spend anything on anyone but himself. When it came time for me to attend college, I was paying half of my college bills, while my mother took out loans to pay the rest. My stepfather did not help one bit. In addition to not helping, my mother and stepfather claimed joint taxes, and I was not eligible for financial aid at that point because he made too much money. I never saw any of this money. I should have been eligible for financial aid.

My mother was having a very hard time with my college bills. She was also trying to better her life by going to college, so she could find a better career. I tried helping as much as I could, working 70 hour work-weeks during the summer months to raise money for college. My mother still had a problem supporting her family.

Another issue coming up soon in our lives is that my younger sister will be graduating high school this June. She is going to need money to attend college. Now, where will this money come from? It's not coming from my stepfather; I can guarantee that.

It's not coming from our biological father. He's a deadbeat with too many problems and who doesn't care. My mother cannot afford another college bill, and I cannot help support my sister's college funds. I can barely support myself in college. Fortunately, my sister might be eligible for more financial aid than I was because of my mother's second divorce. My stepfather will no longer be included on her taxes, so my sister will be eligible with my mother's salary. This might be the only hope of seeing my younger sister go to college.

Currently, my mother is getting divorced from my stepfather. It seems like my life is spiraling down. The U.S. Bureau of the Census' 1990 statistics found that "50% of all marriages end in divorce" (Berns 106). "When the divorced remarry, 60% of those marriages divorce as well" (Berns 111). I found this to be unnervingly true. Both sets of my parents divorced twice.

I am currently getting nervous about my mother's, my sister's, and my future. I decided to take some action and be the mature one in this family. I am going to find a way to make my father pay for his mistakes, and take care of his "old" family. My mother has enough to worry about, and I have decided to do something about our current situation. By conducting an over-the-phone interview with my beloved mother, I was enlightened by and angered at her failed efforts to receive her owed child support.

Since 1986, my mother has been trying to get what she is deserved from my father. She has been to court, written to Congressman Lieberman who wanted to change the child support enforcement for the better, written to lawyers, as well as written to family court. No one could help her with her situation, which was not even her fault, but the fault of my father.

The court decided in May of 1986 that my mother would have custody of my sister and I, and my father would be granted visitation rights. They were supposed to be

on alternate weekends, holidays, and birthdays. He was also allowed two weeks in the summer months when school was out. This never happened. He never visited like he was supposed to. My father was also supposed to provide insurance for his children. He had none. My mother had to get insurance from her job. The court ordered my father to pay child support on alternate Fridays by check or money order to my mother. He was ordered to pay \$300 every week, which would come to \$600 every two weeks. He never did pay this much. Mom never received checks in this amount, from what I can remember, ever. My mother was also granted, from the Retirement Equity Act of 1984, 95 months of my father's retirement pension. We are both unsure if my father will even retire, and if we will ever receive this money.

As far as emancipated children like myself are concerned, my father had to pay child support up until either age 21 or sooner if I emancipated from my mother. I still live with my mother, but I cannot receive child support anymore because I am currently 21. This is devastating for me, because I know that I cannot receive any sort of money from my father, ever again. My sister, however, is only 18, and still lives with my mother. She can still receive child support. The issue here is not that I am emancipated or not, but that my father owes us back child support.

I feel that I am strong enough to take on this task, and go for the child support he owes my mother. My mother claimed that she was tired of being "beat down" by my father, lawyers, and courts. She doesn't want to take on anything having to do with my father and child support. My mother said the same as most mothers who do not want to tackle this kind of issue. According to DiNitto "most mothers do not pursue an award because 'it's not worth it'" (172). My mother said exactly the same phrase. She is tired of not getting anywhere and having to pay lots of money for it.

As an example of how drained my mother is with this problem, she told me about a court incident she went through. My mother hired a lawyer, who was supposed to be a friend of the family, and paid \$600 for his services in court. My father did not show up for his court date ten times in one year. Each time, the judge postponed that meeting. This newly learned information enraged me. Wouldn't this kind of action be considered defiant in a court? I would think the judge would see my father as trying to get out of his situation. That's how I see it. Then when my father finally showed up to the court date, a terrible thing happened. My father said that he claimed bankruptcy. There was no proof. He did not have any papers, the judge did not have any papers, and the lawyers did not have any papers as well. My mother had no proof of his claim of bankruptcy. The judge told my parents that my father only had to pay \$25 a month because of his claim. Knowing the kind of person my father really is, I think he lied in court. So does my mother. What happened here? This was not fair at all. I was beginning to see what exactly my mother was going through.

This was disturbing news, which I had never known about, and had to live with. Now I know why my mother is tired of trying. She paid \$600 for a lawyer to sit there and say nothing about a reduction to \$25 a month for child support for two children and maintenance of daily life. How is this substantial for two growing children to live on for a month? I was enraged at this point in the interview. I made a promise to myself and to my mother that I would try to do something about this. Things have changed a great deal since this incident, regarding child support enforcement. I told my mother that I would take my own father to court if I had to. I am stubborn enough to fight for something I believe is right. I think my mother deserves this money for all she has put up with to this point.

There was also another issue at the sur-

face. It had to deal with Part D of Title IV of the Social Security Act. This part was also called the IV-D program (DiNitto 171). Under this program, child support could be collected in four steps (Children Today 7). The first step was to locate the non-custodial parent. We did not have to go into detail with this step because we knew where my father was. The second step we also had to sidestep, which was about establishing paternity. He acknowledged he was our father, and we knew it as well. This was not the issue. The third step was establishing child support orders. My father had already gone to court and received an order of child support amounts. This was established. The fourth step was collecting and distributing the support. This was where we had the biggest problems.

We should not have had any problems here, however. Because of the changes in child support enforcement laws, fathers had to bend over backwards to avoid paying something. Late payments were dealt with by "issuing warning notices, giving reports to credit agencies, wage garnishment, civil and criminal charges, interception of federal and state income tax refunds, property liens, and seizure and sale of property, as well as unemployment checks being garnished" (DiNitto 171). How did my father manage to avoid all of this discipline? Well, he claimed bankruptcy, doesn't own any homes, vehicles, or property. He does have a license to drive as far as I know. He could be driving without a license if they took his away. He would do something like this. The child support enforcements have nothing to take from him but his freedom.

I believe the only way to get into his mind would be to throw him in jail. The only way this would be possible is if I take this problem under my own wings. But then I have to deal with the ethics of putting my own father in jail. He did his family very wrong, and he deserves what's coming for him. What I have had to go through

in my life, he could think about while he is in jail. But am I being too harsh on my own flesh and blood?

I just don't understand how a parent could treat their children like this. I have grown up to be a rather intelligent woman, who is going to be a teacher in her future. I think any parent would be overjoyed by this kind of life success so early in life. My sister is a talented artist at age 18, and can really go far with her skills. She is extremely smart, and is a good looking young woman. I am proud of her and so is my mother. She is proud of us both. Why isn't my father? I would never do this to my child. Maybe I have this point of view because I went through such disaster in my early life, and later life, for that matter, because of my father.

From my father's perspective, maybe I just don't understand his situation. I know he used to have a good job as a jeweler for many years, but suddenly stopped working. Did he get fired, or did he quit? There is a big difference. I know he has a problem with being a liar, so I am thinking he got fired. He then became divorced from my stepmother, and probably has to pay her some money as well as pay child support. I can understand this point of view, if this is the truth. His life was going down the tubes. Currently, I know that he lives with a girlfriend who has a 12-year-old daughter as well as a son in college in Texas. Does he support them too? He is not married to his girlfriend, and technically has no obligation to support them. He already has a family with children to support as well as an ex-wife to give money to. This is a lot of giving. Maybe he tries to support all three of his "families." This would definitely be hard. This I can understand.

He might be thinking about giving his money to his ex wife, before he gives it to his children, because she has the power to take action and sue him for all he's worth. What he does not realize is that I can do the same. As of now, I am an educated adult

who can take responsibility for things that happen in my life. By learning about the issue of child support, I have educated myself on what I can do to help my family's situation. I just don't want to be thrown into poverty for someone else's mistakes.

You can see my problem. Unfortunately, I have struggled with this issue for many years, and I am getting used to the fact that my father could care less about his children's welfare. Currently, with the knowledge of future costs in my mind, I am very intimidated and frightened by the fact that my family might soon be on welfare of some kind. I do not want my mother to think she has failed in any way because she cannot provide for her family. She already thinks these things, and it kills me. I love her very much, and would do anything to try to help our situation. I just do not want the vicious cycle of poverty to grab my family into its never-ending vortex.

I already know that I am not the only child on this Earth who is not receiving child support. According to DiNitto "of all families due support in 1991, about half received the full amount due, about a quarter received partial payment, and about a quarter received no payment" (172). I am sure the rate of unpaid child support has gone up since 1991. This is uncalled for. I don't expect every single father who has orders to pay child support to pay everything. This would be perfect, and thus impossible. "Two-thirds of fathers stop paying court-ordered child support within two years" (Wells 133). I have a negative feeling that no one even looks for these fathers after they stop paying child support. What about all the children?

Many of the children that don't receive any support from their biological fathers become poverty stricken when they live with their mothers. Women in general do not make as much money as men do, regardless of marital status (Berns 104). "Evidence shows that children who live in mother-only families have almost a one in

two chance of being in poverty” (Berns 104). These statistics really scare me. I am going to be in a mother-only family very shortly, after my mother’s second divorce.

Does this mean that my family will be forced into the claws of poverty? It seems likely that the government will not help our situation for the better. This seems to be the fate of many divorced families. The government enforces a minimum wage policy, but it does not help support a family, or even just one human life. Minimum wage is a joke. No one can live on what the minimum wage is currently, especially those with children and families. These families work hours on end for little money to support life, and are expected to flourish. I don’t find this amusing at all. Even better, after millions are in poverty, the government blames them, the victims, as the cause of poverty in our country. What is wrong with this picture? The entire picture is messed up and blaming the wrong people. I refuse to have my mother blamed as one of today’s problems regarding poverty. This is also including all of the other single parents having to struggle with child support and minimum wage deficiencies. It’s not their fault.

Another additional problem, since September 11th, is that the homes in my area have gone up in cost, and thus finding an affordable place to live will be tremendously difficult. People from New York City began to move up to where I live because it is a nice area, not far from the city. The housing rates skyrocketed. The town house that I have lived in for 21 years is now worth over \$110,000. This is ridiculous. It is an old house that needs a desperate fix up, and has been lived in for over 25 years. Yet, circumstances that have occurred out of my control made my life so much harder. These include the terrorist attacks, and my father’s abandonment. Also, my stepfather bought out my mother’s share of our home. He now owns my house. My mother is being forced to find a run down apartment or

trailer that she can afford to live in. I do not want her living in this kind of atmosphere. She deserves better.

I might be overreacting, but it seems that our government is to blame for many things. If my father is paying child support services with the proper amount owed to the child support collection agencies, then where is our money? He claims he pays what he can to them. Then where is our child support? The agencies would be to blame at this point. I know it might take a few weeks to process things, but several years? I don’t think so. This is not fitting into the intricate puzzle I am trying to solve. I still blame my father. However, these agencies could still be doing things wrong. Why do so many families become poverty stricken because of no child support? Agencies sometimes mess things up. This is normal of a business. Mistakes happen.

These mistakes seem to happen a lot in child support collection agencies. Paperwork can get written up incorrectly, and information cannot be found. I understand this. That is why lawyers need to fill out the paperwork for people in this kind of mess. Then things won’t get so botched up. If my mother had a lawyer to fill out the paperwork she was given, she might not have been so frustrated and confused. People in poverty with this same kind of problem might not have good reading and writing skills. What are they supposed to do with the paperwork? Well, it gets filled out wrong, and they don’t get the support for their children.

In reference to the movie *Poverty Outlaw* viewed in class, I think that many of the women with young children might have avoided their desperate situations if the non-custodial parent had taken care of the child support. Many mothers in poverty seem to get no child support. This is probably because the mothers, many times, are not married when they have children. This is where the paternity section of the IV-D

act would come into play. Also, the issue of no work might be a keynote in the problem. The fathers, most likely, do not have any kind of steady work in line, and think that because they were not married to the mother, they do not have to support her children. These poor children cannot return to where they came from. They are here to stay, and they need to be cared for and supported.

This unfair treatment of children in general makes me sick. Children are living beings and deserve a fair chance at life. They have so much to learn. Many cannot participate well in school when they are poor because they have nothing to work with. If parents of these children would stop thinking only of themselves, these children would be better off. Many would not be in poverty, and many would not be taken away from their homeless custodial parent. The children are the future of our world and they need to get the support to get ahead in this kind of hard life.

I do not want my family ending up like those in the videos we viewed in class. This scares me. I am deeply pained by my father's actions. I cannot understand what kind of human being would act this way. Natural instincts make parents protect their young. What went wrong with my father's internal wiring? I cannot answer this question. I only know that my mother has suffered tremendous amount of stress in her life due to my father's ignorance.

I have chosen to take on the role of the responsible adult to substitute for my tired mother, and immature father. In my family, I am the mediator. I crave peace. If I cannot attain a happy medium, I keep working until I do. This time, the happy medium was lost a long time ago. Since my father moved to Buffalo, I have tried to keep in touch with him. I call him once in a while, and sometimes write e-mails to him. He rarely responds. Recently, at Easter, I went to visit him in Buffalo. I was scared. I did not know what to act like or how to talk to him, or even what to talk about. He treated me like

a stranger. I was there for several hours, and he said maybe a paragraph worth of sentences to me. He did not sit near me, and did not want to take pictures. I forced him to get up and at least take a picture with his oldest daughter. Is this too much to ask? I thought, maybe if I actually go and see him in person, he might see how much of his life is empty because of absent daughters. I guess he did not think the same thing. He still has not called or written to me since March.

I think I am going to lose my patience for him very shortly. I want to move on with my life, and try to fix what he couldn't handle. It's a shame that a 21-year-old college student is more responsible than a 46-year-old man. I look at the situation this way: If my mother can handle life until I find a full time teaching job that pays a decent salary, then I can help her with bettering her life. Until that time, it's just us working as hard as we can to live and be happy with what we have. What happens in the interim of my future will be what is the hardest. I think we will have a lot of struggle and conflicts, but I know that if my mother, sister, and I work together for our futures, we can better the outcomes of our lives. It is going to be hard. I know this for a fact.

What is going to be the hardest for me is that I have to fight with my own conscience about throwing my father in jail for the back child support he owes my mother. I am already having doubts about taking this extreme action against my own father. Someone said "courage is doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you are scared" (Troy). I just have to keep thinking how much my father has hurt my family, especially my mother, and I will become stronger. If I can change my life for the better after a hard struggle, maybe the same will happen with my father. If he struggles in jail with his actions, maybe when he gets out, he will be a better, more responsible and wiser person.

I think this is a lot to ask for, but I believe if I try, anything can be accomplished. Maybe if others see what I am trying to fix, those in the same situation will do the same. It will take a lot of courage and persistence, but I think I can help my mother attain a goal in life. The goal is to be happy.

Mencius said in 290 B.C. that "The great man is he who does not lose his child's heart" (VanSell). I believe that my father has done a wonderful job at losing his children's hearts. He has lost mine almost completely. He has become a fool for his misguided ways in his life. He is losing a great deal more than he knows. He has lost his daughter's hearts, and thus their lives. My father is translucent. He is nothing more than a ghost who will haunt the lives of his first family from now until the end of our lives.

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