

Stanley Lopez

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Influence for the Next Generation

In his article "Virtue", Robert Wilson defines a virtue as "the willingness to put the general good above their own self-interest." Values and virtues are one of the great facets that set us humans apart. With them, we would be no different from other animals. They give us goals as well as guidelines, so that we may strive to achieve better. Because I was raised by my step mother, she was able to instill a set of virtues and values that no other person would have been able to teach me.

My mother passed away when I was two years old. That meant that I, being the youngest out of all the siblings, was looked after and sheltered much more than my brothers and sisters. I did things that would have normally gotten them punished, but I was let off with a warning, or a slap on the wrist. And when all else failed, I was very good at crying in an instant. I was too young to realize what was going on, or why I was being pampered the way I was. So, for me it was all great. I got to do what I wanted, when I wanted.

That was of course until my father met my step mother. She was like a machine. At first, she was very mellow and collective, but the start of their relationship, meant the end of my pampering. Our father sent us to live with her in the Dominican Republic. Much to our dismay, she did not abide by the same rules my family members did. She didn't care that my mother had passed away. She only cared about two things. What I did, and why did I do it. That would determine the punishment I received.

There were no excuses. No breaks. She continued educating me the same way for years. In a weird contrast, my family continued to try and pamper me on the side. While my step more was simple, either I fixed myself, or she would fix me.

For obvious reasons, I disliked my step mother. She wasn't my birth mom, and she wasn't sympathetic toward me in any way. That dislike boiled into an argument, when I was ten, because I had taken food that belonged to my sister. My anger had flustered into one statement. She was not my mother. Her response was clear and direct. "Are you your mother's son?" (Personal Communication, may 14, 2007)

Her question was one that was very hurtful and truthful at the same time. But she was right. Every time they spoke about my mother, it was to say how great of a person she was. Respectful, giving, honest, patient, and rough if she needed to be. And I was none of those things.

The problem that I had failed to realize because I was too young, was that being pampered did nothing to ease the pain I would feel when I understood that my mother had passed away. Nor did it make me a better person, which my step mom made very clear, was exactly what my mother would have wanted. She wanted me to be authentically good. Not a farce.

Nor did I notice the virtues it took to raise someone else's kids by yourself. It opened my eyes, as if I could see for the first time. All the punishments and her strictness were simply for that one reason. All of the arguing and educating I got come boiling down to one point.

A couple of months later. We woke up early, in order to get photographs taken for our passports. The office was very busy, and a large crowd of people were stacked up to one place. As me and my brother spoke about wrestling, a man in front of us dug his hands into his pockets and pulled out his wallet, unbeknownst to him dropping one hundred dollars cash.

I saw it. Then my brother saw it. We looked at each other in awe. One hundred dollars was a lot of money, at least for a ten-year-old. So, I did what any person would, and slowly picked it up. My step mother did not see what had happened, so I could have easily pocketed the money and continued about my day. How I would have explained where I got the money from or how I was going to change it into Dominican currency did not cross my mind but any other family member of mine would have done so.

A mere five seconds with the money in my hand, and I tapped the man's back, showing him the money he had dropped. He was shocked, first because he had dropped it, and secondly because not only did I find it but I gave it back to him. His reaction encapsulated all of the virtues my step mother had taught me. He praised her for having raised decent human beings, and he thanked me and praised me for being wise and honest. My step mother smiled from ear to ear, with her hands on my shoulders.

Soon the man finished, and as he left, he came up to me and handed me some money in Dominican currency, about twenty dollars' worth, and told me to continue being who I was. All I could think about was that I was who I was not because my family tried to baby me, or because my my mother had died. I was who I was my step mother had instilled all of these virtues behind my back. I could never forget the feeling I received inside when I gave him his money back. Before the praises, or my step mother being proud. Which were very pleasing in and out themselves, but just knowing I did the right thing showed me that all of the virtues my stepmother instilled in me through hard work and dedication, we're all worth it. They are the guidelines I use till this very day, and hope I can continue using and passing down to the next generation myself.

My step mother always quoted the bible when me and my brother did not listen to her. She'd say "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." (Exodus 20:12) then she would remind me of that day at the line.

As written eloquently in the poem "Wave of Light" by Elena, "The values of our relationships, and the commitment to our virtues inspire and open our eyes."

Sources:

Wilson, Robert. "Virtue." *The American Scholar*, 2016, p. 2.

Castro, Yosi. Personal Conversation. 5/14/07.

The Holy Bible: Containing the Old and New Testaments. Trinitarian Bible Society, 2010.

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