

Some Trip

“You’re just like your mother!”

When I declared, that is, exclaimed, perhaps angrily, to my teenaged daughter "You're just like your mother!", I was not thinking of all the implications and consequences of such a statement. I knew nothing of the fear that my presence inspired, nor did I know how much affection my daughter felt for me.

What has become apparent with time is that such a statement uttered at a crucial moment to another person's psyche contains the potential of becoming a permanent cudgel within that individual.

Surely, outlining the circumstances are in need of some delineation and exposure, perhaps confessionally; if it is not already apparent that this writing will serve as some kind of propitiative, rather than some exculpatory, gesture.

It seems a general assumption that 'everybody (every body) has some redeeming quality'.

In the moment one forgets the assumption. 'Redeeming quality' symbolizes a token assent to our own lacks.

'Qualities' and 'lacks' become judgmental marks in our private ledgers.

It should be said at the outset that there is a difference, between a statement and a judgment, regardless of the perception. The key word remains 'intent'.

It might be said, if I had not uttered the statement, but had been a different person, using different tactics, like 'reverse psychology', for example, I would not have experienced the revelation of fact that arose from a recent discussion between my daughter and I.

Let me say, if I had been at all reflective, I would have suspected her fear, measuring it by the fears I harbored for my father. Also I would have realized the impact that certain statements make upon our only too impressionably hungry, also delicate, psyches.

Let me say something about the mother, mostly in a factual way, without rendering judgments as I do so. I will also omit the redeeming qualities, and the lacks. Pertinent to the implications and consequences inherent to, and directly related to, my declaration to my daughter is the fact that her mother suffered some form of mental and emotional collapse. This collapse resulted in attempted suicide, in a term of hospitalization for her own safety, and in a lifetime of dependence on psychiatric assistance as well as a lifetime of medications, and finally, Social Security disability. That apparent lifetime began at the juncture of our separation, and the permanent parting as man and woman, family, and whatever else had

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been a patterned existence within that relationship and circumstance. My daughter was nine years old at the time of this family rupture. Of course the rupture, preceded by much turmoil, and the comings and goings of her father, and the advent of another woman, was totally out of the control and sphere of influence of the nine year old and her ten year old brother. It was also out of the control of their mother.

Their father was caught up in the whirlwind of emotion which included both real love, and guilt over the abandonment of the other. Even though he was not living with the children, he did make an effort to telephone them each day, and to have them with me (and the new woman), as often as the occasion and the convenience would permit. The new woman was amenable to all such encounters, and seemed to encourage them. She very soon became their surrogate mother, and through marriage, their step-mother, all living as a new family, the custody of the children having become my (our) responsibility, and desire.

It is truly difficult to identify all the precipitants to another person's 'breakdown', and whether or not all people should be evaluated as to their capacity to function as parent and citizen. In saying this I am aware that such evaluations might mark us for life, and in a 'free country' they are regarded as invasions of privacy, and a violation of a person's civil rights. In saying this I am also concerned that 'early detection' might serve to prevent some of the disasters that are obliged to continue as 'injured' members of society, circulating within our midst. We might all discover ourselves under one kind or another of surveillance if we allowed ourselves to be evaluated and categorized, always on probation or parole as it were. For myself I will say that I visited two psychiatrists while in the U.S. Navy, two others later on, and a personal psychiatric friend of my fathers, as well as one marriage counselor. I do not discount or omit the many readings concerned with human psychology, and human behavior. One of the Navy psychiatrists was required to label me. One of the Navy psychiatrist's spoke of 'father figures'. Father's personal friend non-committally declared significantly, "The real world appears different to everyone". The second to last physician held to a basic pragmatic formula, that inevitably the individual needed to adapt to his social surroundings, and needed to remain within the confines of the Law. The last psychiatrist, a devotee of Fritz Perls, was instrumental in providing me with some much needed sleep with the assistance of Quaaludes. The marriage counselor was promoting the expression of anger, rather than the suppression of anger, ...a la *The Intimate Enemy*, between marriage partners. He offered his own marriage as example which also ended shortly thereafter (the two were not connected). Perhaps the most significant readings in psychology and psychoanalysis have involved the area of psychosomatic illness, plus the writings of Sigmund Freud, Soren Kierkegaard, David Reisman, to name a few.

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Although some of the foregoing is relevant, before I lose the thread entirely, I must return to the main theme. And what better way to emphasize the recognition scene than to utter another of those parental disparagements: "You're the poorest fuck I ever had!"

What father might have meant by such a statement is rife with possibilities, if I chose to exercise hindsight with regard to it. However, at the time I remember myself as a late teenaged woeful anomaly, sitting in our living room, engaged in some none-too-objective recriminatory discussion with father, who in his arsenal of verbal vituperations was quite capable of striking any part of the anatomy above or below the proverbial belt, effectively delivering verbal blows intended to obtain quiescence through pain and fear.

As I have mentioned, if I had been at all reflective, as I should have been, just out of love for my daughter, I would have held my tongue, merely as a reflex, knowing how easily one, particularly a sensitive (that is, sensitive, not 'sensitive') person is hurt by such hard angularly barbed groupings of phenome, diphthong, fricative, aspirate, consonant, glottal stop, vowel, as a property of hominid-matter-protoplasm-organ-larnyx-tongue-sound-word self expression.

I was not attempting to obtain quiescence through pain and fear; or was I? Or, was I not also attempting to obtain quiescence through pain and fear? I do believe sincerely, that I harbor far more love for my daughter than my father did for me, even though, upon such an demonstrative occasion, I would have had to suffer the same harsh judgment as he. This recognition pains me, for I do sense a difference between father and myself. Though perhaps not much less preoccupied with myself than he, I did not wish to dominate my daughter, I did not wish to, by any means, force her to think as I, to do as I. There were some basic rules, or precepts, if that states it more clearly, that I had established for her behavior, that may or may not have appeared reasonable to her. I will admit I did attempt to keep her on a fairly tight leash, for what all parent's declare are 'for your own good' (as she herself might so declare to her own daughter). I might say, by way of justification, its a pretty chancy world we live in (the hominid societal part, that is); I am not one of its yea-sayers; as a matter of fact I am one of its greatest cynical nay-sayers) Accordingly I was protective of my daughter's person in that arena, perhaps unfairly (and overly) so. However, if she was indeed inclined to grant her father some degree of wisdom, she might admit he did at least interfere in what might have become one sorry affair. She was careful not to allow me to become involved in what has become the affair of her life. Before becoming incontrovertibly committed, as it were, in this proposed permanent relationship I had advised her to at least live with the guy for a while before going so far. Imagine a father who had exhibited such stringency making such a recommendation. My liberality gained no

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beachhead upon the Fundamentalist ethos (in which she was, and may be still, completely immersed).

Again I stray from what is purposefully relevant. I did say to her something, without remembering having said it, which I recognize I was most capable of uttering, regardless of its contextual significance; and I do believe, even if it had not been that, it might have something else that could have become a pall upon my daughter's shoulders for the rest of her life. Taking the statement, however uttered, in whatever context, my daughter has had to struggle with her perception of the statement more than the intent behind the statement. The implication clearly reflects upon her mother's collapsed condition. "Does he mean I am like her in that regard; will I also suffer the same fate as she?" Could I ever answer such a question?

Well, as an adult, as a parent in her own right, immersed in a rocky marriage of her own, doubting her own mental and emotional stability, undergoing counseling, she has asked the question?

Did I see my daughter as some kind of 'deranged' thing that had its roots in her mother? Was this statement rife with genetic overtones? How assay her mother's background, her mother's chemistry, her mother's personality ramifications to conclude that such a statement harbored some apropos judgment of any kind? Who the hell do I think I am to give myself the right to make such judgments?

No. I did not perceive my daughter in any such light. But I did make the statement, and she has harbored it as a judgment of herself all these years. I should say that, at this juncture, being the 'poorest fuck' my father 'ever had' appears more humorous to me than painful (I had suffered more and longer, and more painfully, with his assessment of me as a 'moron') . If he was available to utter such a statement to my face today, it might cause only some moderate temporary discomfort, but not a lasting pain. I have survived a lifetime of cogitation, in one form or another, expended in attempting to understand the persona of father. I have found that, by understanding myself, one of his imitators, I have developed more understanding of him. But more than that, a life of reflection and meditation upon the human animal (with myself serving as the most immediate testing and proving ground of any basic thesis) has revealed its own clues and set of understandings about what we are and what we pretend to be.

Do I believe I was the 'poorest fuck' my father 'ever had'? It is entirely possible, in the real sense; but, if in addition, the 'poorest fuck' became me, a loathsome extension of the American thing, that spurned all that father stood for (which wasn't the case at all) then indeed one might question the efficacy of the reproductive urge in other terms that self-gratification. And siring morons does challenge one's self-conceits.

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Unfortunately for my daughter, my statement, with less harm intended, has caused a great deal of harm, has affected my daughter's self-image, has made her fearful of her eventual fate. All of her trials might be characterized as the trials of a very sensitive girl, with an acutely developed sense of guilt, or personal responsibility. This latter leads her to believe that when things go wrong in her interpersonal relationships, she tends to believe they find their origins in her personality. Without her father's harsh statement, she might have reflected differently upon her origins and her status within a situation, feeling instead, mostly equal to it and Captain of her own soul. Yes!, she might wonder if her mother's collapse might be indicative of some genetic susceptibility within herself. When my daughter's trials bring her low, through the tension of unresolved conflict within her home life, financial worries, with the lack of proper diet, with the lack of sleep, perhaps aggravated by the sickness of her child, or perhaps a sudden contracted illness within herself, she slips into an overwrought condition with which she feels she is barely able to cope. What she does not need in such a circumstance is to believe she is fated to the same breakdown as her mother, despite any real or imagined disposition to do so? (Oddly, but significantly, her mother speculated upon the course of her own life as possibly resembling that of her mother, which included a failed marriage, and a lonely life, with her child only occasionally and burdensomely by her side, experiencing little or no rapport with that child). Now I must free my daughter of the implications of my statement. Because I said it, this awful huge, overgrown, disproportionate presence of father said it, said it in such a way, at such a time, what credence does it possess?

Whereas there is understood to exist certain conventions observed during open warfare between nations, there is little to prevent the worst from happening within the confines of family embroilments. If one wishes success in his internecine family struggles he aims for the other's vulnerabilities no differently than Hector aimed for Achilles', with a whole lot less righteously avenging spirit. True it is the existing conventions are often breached and sometimes redefined, given the subtleties of cultures, tactics, and weaponry. However the trend seems to steer away from wholesale barbarity. However sporting the occasion, once the issue of war is settled, those of the defeated who were found to engage in malicious contravention of the understood practice pay an additional price beyond their defeat, they pay a personal price. What may be said of warfare must be said of what occurs when families erupt into bitter disputes. When it is all over, it is not all over. Some wounds fester for a lifetime because they were administered in such a manner, and with such intent to harm beyond what the occasion warranted.

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I hope I escape this last assessment, regardless of what has happened between my daughter and I. I am here making a distinction between statement and judgment, regardless of perception. Since we have had occasion to discuss my statement to her, at her instigation, having gingerly approached me on the subject in her 32nd year, I feel fortunate enough to have lived a sufficient length of time for this harboring to have become revealed. It has afforded me the opportunity to reassure her that I do not believe her fate is inevitably the same as her mother's. I have indicated to her that her mother was without any support in her mental and emotional life, that she was isolated within herself, a very prickly personality and challenging tongue that presented an obstacle to the formation of close friendships. She was without family support, her mother and father estranged from her early years, one who lived mostly with her grandmother, herself subservient to those with whom she lived. My daughter's mother was mostly on her own emotionally throughout her formative years, and physically and emotionally since her late teens. This was said to demonstrate a difference between herself and her mother. Also it might be added, judgmentally, more than inferring any correct insight into her personality, her mother projected a very self-confident, self-assured individual when she spoke, many times loudly, arrogantly, and defiantly; but with hindsight, reflecting a very poor self-image. Whereas the daughter projects that which she is. While her father (me) was a fearful presence, he was nonetheless concerned for her welfare and did genuinely love her as his daughter; her stepmother was and is a loving caring individual who consistently made and makes herself available to the girl. This relationship has continued, as well as an improved relationship with, and diminished presence of, the father, who reassures his daughter that he loves her, and still reserves a place for her should she find that need.

It now remains my daughter's task to free herself from the implications of a statement that does not include judgment; to realize she is master of her fate and captain of her soul. Yes!, she might wonder also whether what she has sensed about her father's personality defects, are not also manifested in her personality. We might all so wonder upon all such proximities.

Often one hears, "You've got good genes." if one's parent lives a long life. It does not matter the quality of the life, it matters only in its longevity. One might make reference to genes, at least upbringing, example, learned behavior, as a way of exculpating him or herself from personal responsibility, each time he senses some failed self, or each time he is assigned blame for his behavior, or actions. This is all without taking into account the mores assigned to life in a particular time and place that one might not feel are relevant to him or herself, in what I have identified as Transiencies.

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My continuing bias remains to earn and feel my daughter's affection, to have her believe I that I care for her beyond those mere words that have hurt her so. I must confess to not feeling her love for me, in her earlier teen-aged years, but suspecting her fear and resentment, without questioning myself deeply, allowing my frustrations with our lack of rapport to control my sensibilities. Somehow it seemed enough to me she and her stepmother appeared to have a good relationship, which unfortunately was not the case with her brother.

Soon enough the two children became adults, and like most of us, registered typical ambivalence about leaving the nest, however uncomfortable. While both left, and seemingly under duress, their ties remained in one manner or another, as is true with most of us.

At a much later date, thinking upon it some more; it would not be untoward if the daughter was somewhat like the mother, Yes! through some genetic means, but also through exposure. That is not to say at this late date that the author's statement was not loaded.

"You're just like your father", might be grudgingly applied to the author. While possibly true, to hear it spoken might prove a nasty affront. The author would declaim against such an imputation mostly because it isn't true. Does one become what he hates?