Indicate a person who has had a significant influence on you, and describe that influence.

The person who has had the most significant influence on me is my mom. Her actions in many situations has taught me important life lessons. When I was a little kid my mom was still finishing graduate school which is difficult without a child to think about. Her determination to finish school taught me that you can achieve anything that you set your mind to, and that education is extremely important. My mom was involved in a bad car accident when I was seven, and as a result suffered permanent ankle injury. The doctors told my mom that she would be lucky if she ever would walk again. However, my mom defied the odds and continued to do all the things she loved such as swimming, skiing, and taking long walks. Her persistence in doing the things she loved demonstrated for me that life doesn’t always go the way we want it to, but that we can get back up when life knocks us down. When I enrolled in my first dual enrollment class at CMU I was nervous because it was a speech class, and I struggle with speech anxiety. To help with my anxiety my mom would always listen to my speeches, and time them to make sure they reached the required length. Her encouragement and ability to listen helped me control my anxiety, and understand that we all deal with anxiety in life.

The most pain I have ever felt was when my first love broke my heart. Most adults would say that is something silly to feel, but when you find out that you have been lied to for most of the relationship it hurts. I learned that the person I thought cared and loved me simply put on a facade of love and care. I found out that most of the sweet words he said such as “I love you” were empty words, and that our relationship had meant nothing to him. To me he was the first person I loved, and felt a connection with. It was painful to realize that what our relationship had meant to me was so much greater than what it had meant to him, but it also hurt to realize that our connection was nothing more than a facade built up by insincere words and actions. After we broke up he added insult to injury by one day wanting to get back together, and the next day hating me. During this cycle I often found that I was angry with myself for being so naive. At the end of it all I knew in my heart that I deserved so much better.

I believe that emotional pain is often more painful than physical pain, but it is necessary to learn from our experiences. Through this experience I have learned to not rely on someone’s words to convey how they feel, but to look at their actions. In this experience I also realized that I am alot stronger than I thought I was, and that I can handle anything life throws my way. Along with making us stronger, our bad experiences also help connect us to others because we can connect through that shared experience. These bad experiences connect people because we are all human, and in order to understand life we have to experience both happiness, and pain.

When Ivan sat back down he finishes writing his father’s words. As Ivan finishes writing Boris gets up from his big, brown, leather chair and stokes the fire. Ivan glances to the cherry wood grandfather clock that stands next to the stone fireplace when the grandfather clock dings marking that it is four o’clock in the afternoon. The chiming of the grandfather clock brings Ivan back to when he was a little boy, and would often walk to his parent’s room because he was afraid of the noise. His father would tell him it was just the grandfather clock downstairs and that there was nothing to be afraid of. Ivan now understood why his father was had always seemed like a fearless man because life’s hardships had made him that way.

“I remember when you were a boy and you used to be afraid of the grandfather clock,” Boris says as he sits back down in his chair.

“I remember very well dad because Arseni and Dmitri would make fun of me for it,” stated Ivan.

“I remember I would tell you to not let them bother you because we all have fears. I used to be afraid of having to depend on others, but my time in the camps taught me sometimes we have to depend on others. Sometimes it is hard to believe that even something that horrific could teach you something quite positive isn’t it,”

“Yes, it does but like you always said we all go through things for a reason,”

“In case you were wondering what happened to Leo after confessing over twenty names to the KGB, and realizing that most likely he had signed their death warrants he committed suicide on the steps of the KGB building. It was Abram who told me and I remember what he said “Oh God in the highest thank God the bastard’s dead” but you must realize Abram didn’t know about the torture that Leo had endured, and only saw what he had done.”

“You sound like a man who has forgiven his enemy,”

“I have because I realize that Leo was a victim of our times even if he hadn’t personally been in the camps. He was tortured by the guilt of knowing that he had sentenced those twenty people to their deaths. “

“Father, you truly practice what you taught us as children despite all of your suffering due to his mistake you have forgiven him,”

“Ivan, you will realize that it is one thing to say forgiveness is important people always say that, but often times they don’t practice forgiveness. I may have forgiven Leo for his actions, but remember forgiveness doesn’t mean you have to forget. I will never forget what I have gone through because of his mistake,” stated Boris.

“How did you find out that Leo was a victim of KGB torture,”

“It was actually Anton’s friend…and for the life of me I can’t put his face to his name, but he was friends with some of the underground writers, and had heard through the grapevine that many of the names given were coerced through torture,”

Boris gets up again from his brown leather chair and strokes the fire, and says

“You know that friend of mine Abram K he slipped me a note before they sent him to the cells telling me that it wasn’t him who was meant to tell the story of what happened at Kolyma, but mine. At that time I didn’t believe that I was going to be one of the lucky few who got out, but here I am,”

As Ivan’s black ink pen works its way across the pages Ivan can’t help but notice how life has aged his father. He remembers his father’s jet black hair and bright green eyes, but now his hair has turned gray and his hands calloused a reminder of the years of hard labour. In his heart he feels a sense of inspiration at the fact that somebody who has suffered so much at the hands of another could forgive the person so easily. He sits in awe when his father begins to speak again.

“When I got out at first I didn’t want to go back and think of the people that I had lost there Ivan, Vladimir, Abram, and many more. For a long time I couldn’t help but think not only of them, but of the people that were still there. Wondering what they were going through, and what suffering awaited them around the corner,”

“I can’t imagine the thoughts that came to your mind. If I may ask father when did the camps first begin anyway,” asked Ivan.

“The first camps were opened when Lenin first took power, and were dramatically expanded under Stalin to meet the goals of the Five Year Plan. The Five Year Plan was meant to increase the Soviet Union’s industrial output by 20%, and the collectivization of agriculture. To this day I remember the day that the Five Year Plan was enacted because my father being an economist saw the price we would pay, not with money, but with human lives. My father being a strong, highly respected member of the academic fields, thought that certainly they would never put him in the camps,”

“Why didn’t he want to live if he knew of the cost,” stated Ivan.

“Your grandpa Ivan was stubborn and more importantly he didn’t want to leave the country of his ancestors, he embodied one of the key values of many Russians loyalty to one's country, Little did he know that the new administration didn’t care about your status, but party loyalty. In 1937 my father was sent to Kolyma the same camp that I would end up at. It is strange to think about because not long after I was sentenced my father was released,” stated Boris.

“I didn’t know that grandpa Ivan had been in the camps as well,”

“I am not surprised that you didn’t know he never talked about it even after I was released. I remember when your grandpa died he said that he wished he had told people his story, and that is why I want to share mine with you I don’t want to leave this world with regrets,”

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