

Timeless Transformations

Divorce: The Death of a Family

After spending this week in Las Vegas with Curley's children, I'm inspired to reflect on the impact of divorce. It's like a tsunami that rolls in with a great force and destroys every structure in place. After the waves recede, everything and everyone is left in a state of total devastation. There's an emptiness and stillness that's difficult to describe. With children involved **divorce is the death of a family**. I will share my experience of how divorce affected me, Curley's children and mother in the context of devastation, deprivation, distortion, duplication and determination. I will depict divorce from my personal perspective.

My perspective is unique. It's firsthand. I was there day in and day out, listening to conversations, observing the relationships and taking it all in – year by year, holiday by holiday, with every significant life event. I was and still am emotionally unattached. I never had a real father anyway so Mother leaving my adopted Dad at 12 years old wasn't a loss. It didn't matter to me one way or the other. Mother's emotional state was already in shambles because of Spencer. After struggling with epilepsy and mental health issues, he had moved to a boy's home for disturbed children several years before Mother married Curly. The greatest emotional turmoil for me was having to move out of our "Day street" house. That home was my stability. We moved from a 3-story split-level house in the nicest part of town to a cheap apartment (that I don't have a picture of) then to a small two-bedroom house across the street from Aunt Niecy.

These are pictures of those two houses. The first one is the Day street house. Several years back when visiting Aunt Betty, I drove around and took pictures of every house I lived in while in Denison. The Day Street house looks much older and smaller than it did when I lived in it but it was built on a steep hill so the back had a 3rd floor and it was multi-level. It had 4 bedrooms, a sitting area in the kitchen along with two cool staircases and a bathroom on every floor. It was considered upscale for the 1960s. I was proud to live there. The 2nd picture is the house we moved to which was old, small, broken and at the bottom of a gravel hill in a run-down part of town. I was devastated. Moving out of that house was like a death.



Mother and Curley got married when I was 13. The 2nd house was the house our split family moved into. I hated it. I previously had my own room but in a two-bedroom, one-bathroom house, when Curley's kids came to visit, I had to share everything including my room. Because all of his kids lived in town, they visited regularly. Further, that was the year that Curley's kids found out about James Waylan, Curley's oldest son and their half-brother. To make things worse, he started visiting. He was atrocious. The house was crowded. After child support, extra kids and losing their rental business, there wasn't any money. I would be starting my first year of high school. While Jayne Ann was starting out as head cheerleader, I felt I had hit rock bottom. I moved from feeling devastated to deprived.

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By this time Spencer had worsened. He was moved to Galveston into a mental hospital, John Sealy. We drove back and forth every other weekend. That is when Mother and Curley decided to move. At 38, Curley started a new job as a boilermaker, working in the oil fields around Pasadena and Baytown. On the positive side, it was a lucky break for me because I felt I could start over and save myself the embarrassment from all of the mess of my family situation. As hard as it was to pack up and move, it was a welcomed opportunity.

I remember rolling into Baytown in an old van packed with a couple of old suitcases and few clothes. We moved into South Colon apartments on Massey Tompkins. It was a dump. I remember inviting a new friend to spend the night my freshman year, Cindy Tebo. Her mom wouldn't let her come over because she thought it was unsafe. The apartments are still there. I remember taking you girls by there one day when you were very young. You were arguing. I can't remember the exact details of the argument but it was something about not having something you wanted. I turned the car around, drove down the dilapidated street and reminded you about how fortunate you were. We drove home without another word being said. I knew it made an impact on you because when we got home, there was no arguing. Your entire behavior shifted. I sensed there was more of a feeling of love and gratefulness between you three. You probably don't remember this but I surely do.

The next year, as I entered my sophomore year at Sterling high school. We moved to a house on Pecan Manor. It was a fairly nice 3-bedroom brick home over off Kilgore and Ward road, close to Cedar Bayou and Roseland Oaks. This is a picture of Curley's kids visiting during the 1st summer after the divorce. Both Terry and Sandy's birthdays are in June. This was their birthday celebration in 1975. Look how young Patty is at 6 years old.



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I remember feeling distorted. I felt out of place. I felt like I didn't belong there. I was 15 and in a new town, in a different house with 5 other kids. Even though I knew them previously because our families were friends, I never wanted to live with them. I'm sure they felt the same about me. This was the time that Ronnie and Terry decided to live in Baytown and start school in the fall. When the summer ended, Gayla, Sandy and Patty went back home to Pauline's apartment. Can you imagine how they felt when they had to split up their brothers and sisters? I'm sure they felt like it was a death and they too felt even more devastated and deprived than me. The sad thing is that Terry dropped out of school that year and never graduated. I found out recently that Sandy didn't graduate either. Pauline was bitter. She caused issues in the family through gossip and negativity. Though she probably had a right to do so, it was still difficult.

Just when I didn't think the housing and family situation couldn't get any worse, entering into my junior year of high school, at 16 we moved to the Battlebell house in Highlands. Can you imagine getting picked up on your first date in this old house? Is there a description any worse than dilapidated? If there is, this house is a picture of it. To make matters worse, James Waylan and his new pregnant wife and her 3 year old daughter moved in, on top of me, Mom, Curley, Ronnie and Terry. But wait, it gets even more worse if you can imagine. Spencer was moved from Galveston to a boy's home outside of Austin. That fall he died in a drowning accident. Not only was it **the death of a family** due to divorce. It was the physical death of a half-brother and an emotional death of a mother. Mother never recovered. The entire family was not only devastated, deprived but everything and everyone was distorted.



Life has a way of marching on. That Thanksgiving we packed up and went to Oklahoma to visit Curley's family. This is a picture of us on Thanksgiving Day in 1976. I remember staying with Curley's sister, Bernice. With 5 kids, she lived in a government project housing complex. I had never seen poverty like that. Never say to yourself that things can't get any worse because they can! That was rock bottom. It was a turning point for me.



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When I returned home I thought I have two choices. It was my junior year. I could either adopt a mindset of duplication or determination. I knew if I didn't make a change, my family situation would duplicate itself in my life. You know I chose determination. Luckily we moved into the Harvey street house the summer before my senior year. I buckled down and got everything in order to get a job, support myself and get through college.

This is a picture in 1978 at Thanksgiving. By this time I was at Lee College and working at San Jacinto hospital in the computer department. You can tell by the look on our faces that things were looking up. For me, my determination was stronger than ever. There would be nothing that would stop me from turning my life around.



So why go through all of this negativity in this inspiration? All of this doesn't sound so inspirational but it is. You can learn from it. I know I did. I came out of it more independent and with more respect for life. The opposite of death is life. I was filled with determination to make my life extraordinary. I learned at an early age that life isn't fair and we play the cards we are dealt. Life is filled with tough decisions. It's always about how we respond and what we chose to do about any situation no matter how bad it seems at the time. Here's the key point. **DIVORCE is the death of a family**. The children suffer the most. They either enter into a life of duplication where divorce is passed down to the next generation or they possess the determination to change it. After spending time with Curley's children this week, sadly for the most part, none of them were determined to change their situation. Their cycle continues.

Last night before we went to dinner we tried duplicating the picture from 1978. It was actually Gayla's idea. Now, 40 years later, we've all taken different paths. Each of the Knapp kids (that's what Aunt Niecy called them and it made Mother furious) have suffered. The divorce was **the death of their family**. My family died before I was born. Curley's children follow the proven research and statistics. They suffer from poverty, sickness, divorce, dissension, bitterness, childlessness, lack of enthusiasm and sadness.



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I believe the difference between the Knapp kids and me was the love and bond between Mother and I. Through it all she had a marvelous way of loving me unconditionally and shining a brighter light on me. She had a way of bringing out the best in me and expecting the best. Together, she and I built a small family between us two. For that I am eternally grateful. I'm able to pass all the great things on to you.



There is a time and a place for divorce, no doubt. However my inspiration is this. With children involved, do everything in your power to make it work in your relationships. When you say I DO, say I DID and I am committed. I remember Mother telling me not too long ago that if she had it to do again she would have stayed with my adopted Dad. She said she traded one set of problems into a bigger set of problems. The problems she had with stepchildren, step grandchildren, Pauline and a broken family was far greater than she ever imagined. Any issue that you have in your relationships, do **EVERYTHING IN YOUR POWER** to get passed the issue by forgiving, moving on and working through your problems.

I love you more than all of the emotional devastation that I've endured and overcome in my life – Love Mom