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### Sympathy for People with Absent Fathers

I haven't seen or spoken to my father since I was six years old. No phone calls, no birthday cards and there was never any goodbye. It's a terrible thing to hear that a friend has had that experience and no longer gets the chance to talk to their dad. Many people feel bad when they hear something like that happened to their friend. So, if I got the chance to talk to my dad maybe I would feel happier than I am now. That's what most people think or assume when they hear about my situation. I always appreciate it when people care, but it isn't always necessary. I don't think people should feel sorry for me just because I don't have a dad.

People always feel the need to give me sympathy once I tell them I don't have a dad, for example sometimes they give me a sullen look and tell me how sad it is. Although it may have been sad when I was younger, I no longer feel that way, and my experience is just something I mention from time to time so friends can understand my family and me better. I remember one time when I was at dance practice, while I was still relatively new on the team, the topic of my father was indirectly brought up. It was just three of us dancers at the time, but one went to go to the bathroom. I was just getting done practicing a skill, and my other teammate turned to me and started talking about public bathrooms. I was confused as to why she mentioned that topic specifically, but she ended her rant by asking me if my dad ever had to bring me into the men's bathroom in public because I was too young to go by myself. I was caught off guard by the

question; I had forgotten she didn't know about my dad. So, I finally answered her and told her that I didn't really know him, and I have very little memories of him. She responded with the usual look of shock, and then she profusely apologized that she brought it up. She said something similar to "That's so sad, I'm sorry, I had no idea." Although there isn't anything wrong with this type of response, hearing that phrase every time my dad gets brought up gets to be slightly annoying. I don't mind talking about my dad; in fact, it's refreshing to be able to mention him from time to time. I get sick of the sympathy I receive from others when I talk about him; I would prefer empathy over sympathy. Rather than a pitying look and an apology, I would prefer others to just understand and listen when I talk about him.

Sometimes others will point out father-daughter experiences I'm missing out on, or they ask me if I feel sad about it. I understand when people ask or point those things out, they usually are just making sure I'm okay. Most of the time I don't feel like I'm missing any of those memories. A friend once said to me, "Aren't you disappointed that your dad isn't around to see all your dance competitions?" Another time, someone asked me, "Don't you wish your dad was in your life to take you camping or teach you how to drive?" I heard questions like these most in elementary school when we had father-daughter dances. I understand why people ask, usually they're simply curious or they want to make sure I'm okay. It's quite the contrary though; I don't feel like I'm missing these types of experiences often. I actually think about missing out on things more when someone brings it up. The reason I don't feel like I'm missing out is because I can still do fun things like learning how to drive with my grandpa, and I can make other memories with my family and friends. Just because I don't have a dad doesn't mean I can't experience those things with others.

Furthermore, friends and parents of friends have shared their opinions on whether I should try to find my dad and talk to him. I always thought that if I wanted to, I would, and it would be on my own time and in my own way, not how other people think I should approach it. The first time I was left alone in a room with my ex-boyfriend's mom, I was just standing in the kitchen while she made food. It felt awkward; she wasn't talking to me as she was focused on the food. I had no idea what to say or do, I just kept thinking should I go on my phone instead of staring, or will going on my phone seem disrespectful? I went back and forth from petting their dog to just standing, and then taking a quick look at my phone even though there was nothing to do on it. Eventually she started talking to me and asking questions about dance and school, but when she ran out of those types of questions, she asked me the one question I always dread: "So, what's the deal with your dad?" It's a long and complicated story, so I tried to make it as simple as possible. Even with my best efforts it just sparked more questions, until she finally asked if I had any way to contact him. I told her I did, because he had recently emailed my mom and asked her to give his phone number to my brother and I if we ever wanted to talk. I also told her I hadn't decided if I ever wanted to reach out and I felt no rush to do so. She responded with "Well I think you should call him; it would make him happy even if you don't want to." While I can see the point she was trying to make, it wasn't helpful, I want to decide for myself what the best option is.

In addition, friends have assumed that I hate my dad and have asked if I am angry with him. I do not think I could hate or be mad at him because I didn't know him long enough. When friends have asked if I'm mad at him in the past, they assume the answer is yes. They think that I don't reach out to him because I'm just too angry. When I tell them no, they're surprised. One of them asked me "How could you not be? He left you and your brother." Although that may be

true, I don't hate him or feel mad. I have never tried to talk to him because I don't feel the need to, when I was younger, I barely even thought about him. So now that I've lived ten years without him, I think it would feel very odd to talk to him. It would be like talking to a stranger. Maybe if I had been older, I would feel differently.

In summary, there are many times when people with both parents will give me a reaction or opinion I don't want. I understand why people feel bad or pity someone who is missing a parent, no one wants to be insensitive, and everyone is different. Just remember to emphasize rather than sympathize. I hope this essay was insightful and remember to thank your father the next time you get a birthday card from him.