

DEISHA MARSHALL

10. GROWING UP WITHOUT A FATHER

As a child, I never knew what it was like to have a father who took me to the park, or called me his little princess. It never really crossed my mind that I was different than the other little girls who had fathers.

I had a loving mother and a stepfather who cared enough for me, to the point that I didn't need my real father. I never understood why my father wasn't in my life, and when I asked my mom she simply said, "I'll talk to you about it when you get older."

From that day on, I chose never to bring him up, and life moved on until I finally got to meet my father. It was my tenth birthday party at Odyssey Fun World. My mom pulled me to the side and told me that my father wanted to meet me.

In my mind I would make up what he looked like, the kind of job he had, what kind of car he drove, and what his house looked like. I was scared I would meet someone who was nothing like I imagined. As I walked out the door to meet my father for the first time, I noticed my mom crying hysterically. He reached out his arms to give me a hug, and at that moment I felt complete.

At the age of twelve, I went to live with my father for seventh and eighth grade.

The plan was to live with him for those two years, then come back to live with my mom for high school. School in dad's district, visits to my mom's on the weekend. During those two years, I got to know my father and a new side of my family I never knew about. I gained a grandmother, four aunts, two uncles, and a lot of cousins.

My father taught me about budgeting, how to cook breakfast, eating healthy, how to drive a stick shift, and most importantly he taught me about love. I never understood how important the love and protection from a father was, until I no longer had it. I am now a junior in college and I haven't seen my father since my eighth grade graduation.

You may be wondering why a happy beginning came to such a sad ending. When my mother was pregnant with me, my father stabbed her multiple times. It is a blessing that both my mother and I are alive today. My father was sentenced to six years in jail, and when he was released, he changed his life around and made a good living for himself. My mother made the bold decision to let me live with my father despite the things he'd done to her, so that I could get a chance to get to know him and form a relationship.

Today, my father lives with his new wife and newborn son. I tried to keep in contact with him and believe that I wasn't being excluded from his life, but I learned that he was doing just that. My father doesn't know how beautiful I looked on prom,

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or that I graduated from high school fourth in my class with honors. He doesn't know how well I'm doing in college, nor does he know what college I attend. My growth has been simply amazing, and I didn't let *not* having my father in my life affect my life in a negative way.

Instead, I use it as motivation, and it keeps me going. Even though my father is not in my life, I surround myself with loving and caring people who remind me every day that I can make it without him.