Defining the Greatest Good

Final Essay

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 Every day, the sun rises and sets. Human beings and animals alike go about their business - whether it is while the sun shines or under the light of the moon. Methodically, eating, producing, sleeping. Some have it easier than others, yet one might argue that those that have the *easy* life, may not indeed have the *best* life. So how does one get *the best life*? Is it always at the hands of hardship? Probably not. Yet I would argue that experience is an important factor and many times, experience is not easy. Further, allowing that experience to lead to change within ourselves is often the hardest part yet.

My final (and greatest) good in this life is one that I would have never anticipated in my younger years; all that I do is in service one way or another for my daughter in the name of family. Despite growing up close to my family, I never wanted kids myself - or even a kid. Selfish as that may seem, I felt my tolerance and patience were poor for such a job and certain events surrounding my parents’ divorce further pushed the idea out of my head. I wanted to be independent and somehow, a child would interfere with that independence. In all of my stubbornness, I should have known that life will do as it pleases to redirect our wills.

As a child, my sister, mom, dad and I spent every Sunday at my grandparents’ home with cousins, aunts and uncles. Most of my favorite memories come from summertime at Grandma and Grandpa’s. The pool was large enough for the whole slew of cousins to practice cannonballs and belly-flops off of the diving board while Grandpa meticulously manned the grill - because there is nothing hungrier than a dozen soggy aquatic acrobats. In the winter, my grandparents would leave Michigan, traveling south to their home in Florida. Every Spring Break meant another 3,000 mile round-trip slapped on the odometer of the family vehicle as we followed them a few months behind their departure. We would spend a mere five nights bunking with Grandma and Grandpa, a time that seemingly lasted forever as a child. Every morning waking up to the salty sea breeze blowing in from the canal, I would glance outside to offer a “Good morning” to Clyde - the resident pelican, while listening to Grandpa scrape his spoon across the bottom of the bowl just one last time, ensuring he had collected every last crystal of sugar that missed his grapefruit. Somehow those bowls endured his abuse from the early 1960s, and still to this day, have a home in their cupboards - silver streaks etched in the bottom from each stroke of the spoon, synonymous to wrinkles upon their aging faces, I suppose.

My teenage years brought upon the beginning of my love for softball. I was determined to be a pitcher. My biggest fan - my dad - set up a pitching mound along our side yard for me to practice as he played catcher. His patience with me was big and steadfast even if he was constantly running after the unruly pitches as I learned my form. Eventually his efforts, and mine, paid off as I made the team in high school. I appreciated that he was at every single practice and game, even if the other teenagers deemed it *uncool*. He was always the loudest cheer from the crowd.

On came college, and shortly after a career of my own. Even throughout my parents’ divorce, my dad was by my side, showing his support regardless of his own hurt. In an attempt to heal myself of the severe betrayal I felt from my mother’s actions, I pushed everyone close to me away. I moved a distance away for a job and hoped it would give me space to collect my thoughts on life as everything I had known to this point came crumbling apart. He did not let the distance stop him from visiting and checking in each week.

Years later, I had my daughter and all of my dad’s efforts began to make sense. As a parent myself, I now knew that this tiny life was mine to nurture into a great human being. Holding her each night before bed, I feel a cosmic pull to become the person my dad was and still is to me, to my daughter. I want to give her the confidence to be her own person and know that no matter what, she will always have her biggest fan cheering her on. I want her to have memories that she can look back on, like I have, of family, traditions, and travel with the people she loves and those that adore her. Life is not absent of mistakes, so with that I want her to know that she has a support system that is always there for her, even in her darkest hours.

As part of my efforts, I have recognized that I need to be wholly honest with myself about the person that I am and what I need to work on changing to be the person I want my daughter to see and remember. Counseling has served me in a large part to recover my ability to trust my own emotions and define my responsibilities as they relate to others’ emotions. By breaking through barriers I had internally built, I am able to offer my daughter a mentally strong and healthy mother. I have learned to slow down to process situations, responding with a deeper, more profound style of communication by offering empathy and compassion. Not only has the use of this knowledge tool strengthened my patience, it has further developed trust between my daughter and I, and made me a more complete human.

Who knew the pressure of those precious little eyes watching my every move could make me desire to be a better person? Who knew the toothless smile of a five-year-old had the power to melt away the stress of the day? With the birth of my daughter, the path of my life changed. I am now challenged to show her what a strong woman looks like. What love and family can be. Determination. Goals. Integrity. It is with great honor that I accept the challenges that come with being her mother. She makes me proud every day and I can only hope that someday, she will look back and know that I did everything in my power to give her a life full of love and hope. She is my final, and *greatest* good, and for her I want to live our best lives.