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Dear Mama: An Open Letter from a Prodigal Son

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Dear Mama: An Open Letter from a Prodigal Son

Abstract

Dear Mama,

This may seem a bit unconventional, and it may be a bit difficult to understand (both why I did this and the words I'm writing), but I guess the time came where I had to get some things off of my mind. I'm in my last year of college, and by this time next year, 7 days after my 22nd birthday, I may no longer be in your household, under your guidance and protection, eating your pupusas and pan con frijoles, or having to beg you for money. I also won't be disregarding your requests to clean the kitchen, ignoring your reprimands until Pops comes in and demands I listen, or forgetting to call because I'm too busy getting drunk with friends and trying to get into trouble.

I'm writing this to you because I owe you an apology. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, mother, family, appreciation

Disciplines

Family, Life Course, and Society | Gender and Sexuality | Inequality and Stratification | Sociology

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](https://cupola.gettysburg.edu) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

DEAR MAMA: AN OPEN LETTER FROM A PRODIGAL SON

October 28, 2013

“And since we all came from a woman got our name from a woman and our game from a woman/ I wonder why we take from our women, why we rape our women, do we hate our women?/ I think it’s time to kill for our women, time to heal our women, be real to our women.” – Tupac Shakur, “Keep Ya Head Up”



Dear Mama,

This may seem a bit unconventional, and it may be a bit difficult to understand (both why I did this and the words I’m writing), but I guess the time came where I had to get some things off of my mind. I’m in my last year of college, and by this time next year, 7 days after my 22nd birthday, I may no longer be in your household, under your guidance and protection, eating your pupusas and pan con frioles, or having to beg you for money. I also won’t be disregarding your requests to clean the kitchen, ignoring your reprimands until Pops comes in and demands I listen, or forgetting to call because I’m too busy getting drunk with friends and trying to get into trouble.

I’m writing this to you because I owe you an apology.

From 6:30am to 6:00pm, 6 days a week, you rode the metro from Glenmont to Crystal City, worked all day cleaning hotel rooms, sometimes bathrooms, for well-off, fat-pocketed guests at the Sheraton Hotel for about \$13 hour, then rode the metro back home. Before and afterwards, you took care of the four of us – feeding us, keeping us from fighting, cleaning up after us (because we were too lazy to do it ourselves), and making sure our homework got done. All this for no thanks, no reward. You were our mother, so we expected you to cook, clean, wash, and take care of us. It didn’t matter that you were tired to the point of death, or that your feet were so sore it hurt to lift an arm, or that no one stopped to appreciate your actions. It was how it was supposed to be.

In my 18 years of living under your roof, you remained quiet for most of it and usually the lectures came from Pops. One of those lessons, one I will never forget as long as I breathe, was “I don’t care if you forget about me. You can get rich, leave, and never come back, but never forget about your mom and everything she did for you.” Now we were raised to believe that a man must be strong, care for his family, make sure they are provided for,

and that he must be the one to lead them to where they need to go. I was also taught that I was extremely fortunate to have my father in the picture at all. Abuelo was gone, so Abuela and Pops had to find their own means of survival for much of Pops' early life. Many of my peers either had abusive fathers, no fathers, or became fathers. Through all of this, the story of the mother was often overlooked. So what fascinated me about all of this was that although the final decisions were his and our discipline was up to him, in his eyes you were above all. In his eyes, he was king, but his subjects were nothing without a queen.

I often give credit to Pops for influencing my decision to take the path of higher education instead of going to the streets. When I was handed the option of holding a red rag in my back pocket or a book in my arms, I chose the latter and never went back. I knew I could never survive the street life, but that never stopped me from trying to emulate those that were in it. While I praise him for steering me the right way, too often have I overlooked the one who held me from my first seconds on earth and continuously whispered in my ear that I would grow up to be somebody, not another number.

While Pops preached respect for you, I was busy trying to garner the respect of the thugs and hustlers I went to school with every day. At Parkland Middle School and Wheaton High School, I saw young men in North Face jackets, Air Jordans, crisp jeans and White T's, and hats with different sports teams on them getting all the attention from all the women I wanted to talk to and receiving all the respect from different people my age. I was the fat, broke kid wearing K-Mart gear that couldn't get a date if I had a gun to head and it was the only thing that could stop it. So I, like many young men my age, tried to mimic the traits I saw in the "gangsters." You used to always tell me to pull my pants up and get shirts that actually fit, but I had an image to create.

I stopped viewing women as my peers and more as bitches I just wanted to fuck because every time I told a girl I liked her it ended up embarrassing me in front of everyone. I remained a virgin all through high school because, where you raised me, the nice-guy lover-boy wasn't going to get anywhere because he dressed like shit and he always fell victim to the verbal harassment of the social circle above him. Forgive my language, I try never to swear to you but sometimes there just isn't another way to say things.

This transformation is not special to me, but affects many young men across the country who, like me, are born into an environment of mediocrity and hopelessness – and that is where we are supposed to stay. If we don't adapt we aren't going to survive. The decade-old run-down buildings and broken malt liquor bottles serve as headstones for all the dreams people have for a better life, and the 1st and the 15th as the only services provided in remembrance. As young men, many of us are forced to see our Papi's and Tio's get in line and beg for help because they cannot help themselves, or work so hard for so long only to get so far, then hide themselves so they can cry without their kids seeing what is supposed to be their mountain crumble into pebbles. Therefore, we embrace the roles of thugs and gangsters to preserve the manhood that would otherwise be stripped from us. But in order to do so, we must let go of feeling.

I was brought up in a man's world. My role models were either men like Pops who sat at the head of the table or like my peers who sat with joints in their mouths and "hoes" all around. One thing was a constant, however – I was taught to put myself before you and others who carried these men in their wombs and bore the remarkable pain of bringing us into this world.

Your role was created and taught back before you ran from El Salvador. Those same expectations were bred in our neighborhood, and that hindered our ability to appreciate what you did to nurture your children. Because you seemed to only be there to serve and care for us while remaining in the same rooms you've been stuck in all your life, it was difficult as a boy to see your value. We didn't allow ourselves to cherish the work you did because we were too busy trying to find the love you gave us every day from others in the neighborhood. I can't apologize

enough for never showing the gratitude you deserved, not even a small gift on your birthday to commemorate the life you gave us. I can never make up the years you gave to us. With calluses on your feet and blisters on your hands, you ensured we never saw the nightmares of true poverty, hunger and want. I bathed in water from the tears of your pain for 21 years, hoping to cleanse the curse of my people and make something of myself despite what America believes we can do. Never once did I send an appreciative thought your way.

I love you Mami, and while it's no excuse, hopefully this letter helps you understand.

I promise to call more.

Your son,
Mauricio

"And there's no way I can pay you back/ But my plan is to show you that I understand/ You are appreciated." –
Tupac Shakur, "Dear Mama"

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<http://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com/2013/10/28/dear-mama-an-open-letter-from-a-prodigal-son/>