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Marriage and Family Autobiography

Marriage and family have a major impact on everyone's life, whether they realize it or not. Examining how the marriages between my family members have affected my life will also allow me to enter into reflection about the importance of marriage to me, the kind of spouse that I am looking for, and how prepared I am for marriage.

To learn more about marriage in my family, I interviewed my parents and both of my grandmothers. The first question I asked them was "What did you look for in a spouse?" A common thread that I found among all of them was that they weren't necessarily looking for a spouse when they entered into relationships with the person that ended up becoming their spouse. Grandma (my paternal grandmother) even remarked that she was thinking about becoming a nun, but then she met my grandpa. Some of the qualities that they mentioned attracted them to their significant others were being kind, considerate, respectful, smart, hardworking, and having a good sense of humor. My parents both mentioned that even though they weren't very strong in their faith at that point in their lives, being with someone who was also Catholic was something that they valued. Abuelita (my maternal grandmother) mentioned multiple times how my abuelito's attentiveness was something that drew her to him.

The next question that I asked my parents and grandmothers was "Why did you get married?" Grandma and Abuelita gave me the same simple but beautiful answer: "Because I loved him." My parents both had strong marriages to look up to with their own parents. Because

of this, they just thought that marriage was something they were supposed to do. My mom said, “I never thought marriage would not be a part of my life.” She told me that once she found someone who fit all the qualities from the previous question, she didn’t want to risk waiting and losing him, and so they figured they might as well get married.

My third question was “What was marriage like for you?” Mom, Dad, and Grandma all used the phrase “ups and downs” to describe their marriage. Overall, though, my parents and my grandmothers have/had incredibly happy and beautiful marriages. My mom and dad talked about how important it was that they were both in firm agreement on the important issues in their marriage, and for any other little things they disagreed on, they were able to discuss and be respectful of each other’s views. My mom told me that there are ups and downs in any vocation in life, but with marriage it’s just a matter of sticking together through it all as a couple. Because they both knew that marriage for them meant a lifetime commitment, they do what they have to do to make it work. Mom also said that faith makes their marriage stronger and she can’t imagine faith not being at the center of everything. Both Grandma and Abuelita emphasized that they did everything together with their spouse and their family.

Next, I asked “What were some strengths and weaknesses of the family situations you came from before marriage?” My parents both mentioned a similar strength in the family backgrounds: their parents stayed together and were committed to their family. Dad said the biggest weakness in his family was the differing faiths between his parents; his mom was a devout Catholic and his dad was not. Mom said that finances have always been a struggle for her family, but they were always able to work through it and they all got along well. Similarly, Grandma said that her family was very poor, but her parents had a good marriage and her family life was good. Abuelita had the toughest family background, with her parents divorcing when she

was three years old. She told me that it was hard seeing her mom dating guys, especially since she was deaf, and the guys were hearing and wouldn't make any effort in communicating with her.

The fifth question that I asked was "What are some problems that arose in your marriage and how did you solve them?" The most difficult problem brought up was the issue of religion between Grandma and Grandpa. That is something that brought her a lot of distress, but she made sure to stick to her guns and was adamant that her children were baptized in the Catholic faith. My mom and dad said they haven't faced any major problems in their marriage; the only thing that they struggle with from time to time is finances. Dad told me, "There's no secret sauce, we just figure it out together." Abuelita said that her relationship with my abuelito was very peaceful and that they were always respectful of each other.

The last question I asked my parents and grandmothers was "What are some things that you would advise a young person about marriage?" My dad told me to think, consider, and to pay attention to the little things when choosing a spouse. My mom said that before getting married you need to figure out who you are, what your most important values are, and make sure the other person knows these are things you're not going to compromise on. She also mentioned that it's vital that both you both hold marriage to the same standard as a one-time thing that is a lifelong commitment. Grandma told me to look into their family and mentioned a piece of advice she was given from one of her teachers: "How they treat their mother in tough times is how you're going to be treated." She also said that you need to really, really love them and never give up on your faith. Abuelita told me that the most important things are attentiveness to each other, doing things together, prioritizing each other, talking about things, and keeping a good relationship with the family.

Engaging in these conversations with my parents and my grandmothers gave me the opportunity to learn so many things about their marriages that I've never even thought of asking before. I remember the first thing I thought after concluding these interviews was "Wow, everyone should do this." One thing that stuck out to me the most through all of this was how incredibly blessed I am to have parents who have such a strong marriage and love each other so much, and that their parents had the same love. In this day and age, it's getting harder and harder to come upon a person in my generation who comes from a family with two parents who stuck it out, stayed together, and loved each other. Marriage just doesn't seem to hold the significance that it should. For me, with my Catholic faith, marriage is extremely important. As such, reflecting on all of this is a great opportunity to think about how prepared I currently am for marriage and the kind of spouse I am looking for.

Having recently gone through a situation in which I was discerning a relationship, the idea of thinking of the qualities that I want in a husband is fresh in my mind. I even physically wrote out a list of the things that I expect from a man. There are a lot of characteristics you hear of all the time about being ideal for a boyfriend, such as being kind, smart, respectful, exhibiting the traits of a provider and a protector, having the same faith, etc. It's also vital to communicate your core values and make sure you're headed in the same direction in life. But through this situation I learned that there are a lot of other things that are important to me in a relationship, such as the way that their personality and communication style aligns with mine.

During my interview with him, my dad mentioned that you shouldn't pick a spouse that is the polar opposite of you. While I agree with this, there are also some areas in which it really helps to have different strengths and weaknesses among partners. My anxious, introverted, indecisive self would not be a good partner for a man who is also anxious, introverted, and

indecisive. We would never be able to get anywhere with anything. Although you shouldn't be looking for someone to change you in a relationship, as my mom said during our interview, you should be continuously striving to help each other become the best version of yourselves. The only way this can happen is by being able to support each other in different ways.

Me being stronger in my faith than either of my parents were when they were my age means that I am approaching the issue of marriage in my life much differently than they did. I am consciously aware of the fact that by dating, I am looking for the person that I am going to spend the rest of my life with. Because of that, it is important that I am in a place in which I am ready for marriage before I start dating someone. This offers me a great opportunity to reflect on myself and how prepared I am to enter into marriage and family life with a man. I will admit that the most obvious weakness that comes to mind on my part is communication skills and vulnerability. I find it extremely easy to hide behind a screen and text about things whenever I'm too scared to bring them up in person, whether that be because it's confrontational or deeply personal. Something else that I think I might struggle with a bit is expecting things from men that just aren't in their nature. There are certain things that you get out of female friendships that make you feel known, seen, and loved, and those things won't be the same for a romantic relationship with a guy. Learning more about how the roles of men and women complement each other is something that I'll probably only get through personal experience, but it is very important when being in a relationship with someone of the opposite sex.

Those weaknesses being said, there are also some strengths that I think I bring to the table. Coming from a family with fantastic examples of what a good marriage should look like will certainly be of help for me as I look for my future spouse. I also think that my commitment

to my faith will give me the strength to tough it out through any problems that may come up in my relationships before and through marriage.

Through this process of asking questions about the marriages in my family, reflecting on how those have affected me, and thinking about where I am in my life right now concerning my readiness for marriage, I have learned so much. Marriage to me is a holy thing, a sacrament, a covenant. I hope to find the man that will be by my side till death do us part, and beyond then through eternity in heaven.

Works Cited

Interview with Bill Mills, Emma Mills, Joanne Mills, and Alma Sotomayor on January 29, 2024