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<div align="center">To Set Myself Free</div>

I believe in the power of forgiveness. The concept of forgiveness is fairly common in our society, and while it may not always be easy to practice, most people have no trouble understanding forgiveness as something positive an individual does for another. It is common to explain a core belief is and how it may have a positive impact on a person's life or the life of others surrounding her. The most meaningful way I understand my core belief of forgiveness is quite the opposite by explaining what my core belief is not and how it has negatively impacted my life. We, as humans, have to go through life experiencing both negative and positive situations. If we never see negative, we will not know what is positive.

The act of forgiving someone does not mean forgetting or putting up an offense. It does not mean behaving in a frail or timid manner, failing to hold the offenders responsible or pretending that no offense actually happened. As Julie Exline stated in the *Encyclopedia of Social Psychology*, "Forgiveness is best understood as an internal process: a change in emotions, motivations, and attitudes that often leads to behavioral changes" (360). The act of forgiving is physically and mentally healing for both the person who forgives from the heart and for the person who is being forgiven.

I've learned to forgive the one person who has hurt me the most in my life. The one man who I thought would never walk out on me, my siblings or even my mom, or even cause us as much pain as he did. He abandoned a young woman with three young children and made it seem

like the easiest thing in the world to do, as if it was the only solution he had. My Father walked out on us when I was only seven years old.

I always saw him as a good man only because he was. He was very hardworking, loving, but most importantly, his sense of humor brought a smile to everybody he talked to. I never once saw my father as a bad person because he wasn't. He just made a few bad decisions that impacted his family and those closest to him. When my father would drink, he turned into an entirely different person who was unrecognizable from the person he was before he reached for the alcohol. He became abusive, demanding, and inconsiderate toward those around him.

Anytime my father started acting differently, my mom always made sure that we were unable to see this side of him. We were young; we didn't understand what was happening. We didn't know why he was acting the way he was. I remember always being so frustrated and baffled at the thought that someone would do this to his own family and feel no remorse the next day.

I remember coming home from school one day, and suddenly my father wasn't there anymore, as if he disappeared from thin air, without an explanation and without any kind of warning. My siblings and I were so confused as to why my father wasn't there; we thought maybe he had gone somewhere to run a quick errand and he was going to be right back or maybe he had gone out of town to visit family. So many thoughts and so many questions came rushing to us, and we went straight to our mom as if she had the answer for everything that was happening around us.

My mother is a very strong woman; she is incredibly smart and always puts others before herself. But the moment we came up to her and started drowning her with questions of my fathers' whereabouts, I could see the sense of being overwhelmed take over her entire body,

from the expression on her face to her body language. She looked at our young, innocent faces unable to come up with the right words to explain to us what had happened and why it happened. She had feared that our hearts would have been broken and the perspective we had on our father would be changed into something she did not want us to perceive.

Eventually, I came to realize that my father was never actually coming back. I was overwhelmed with the feeling of anger and hate for the only man I loved in my life. The more I thought about how he could just get up and walk out of our lives like we meant nothing, the angrier I got and the more hatred I grew for him. I always told myself that I would never forgive that man for what he did and there was absolutely nothing he could do to fix all the damage he had done.

Over the span of five years, he called numerous times and wrote multiple letters reaching out to us and explaining the reasoning behind his actions. My siblings forgave my father a lot sooner than I did, but I still refused to talk to him. I hated him, to say the worst. I saw him as a coward and as someone who was scared to face conflict and find a resolution, not only for him but for those he hurt.

As more time passed, I had realized an important truth. I realized that by ignoring him and avoiding forgiving him, I was only setting myself back. My father loved me unconditionally, and I knew that if I were to ever make any kind of mistake, he would be right beside me to help me grow into a kinder and smarter person. I know that I needed to forgive him for what he had done years ago, so I could finally move on from the pain, the anger, and the hatred I had felt for him.

I needed to forgive him not only to have a relationship with my father again, but also to find peace within myself. I needed to forgive him not because he asked me to or because he

deserved it, but because I did not want to be a prisoner in my own hatred. I believe the power of forgiveness is stronger than the feeling of hatred and bitterness. After years of feeling sorry for myself, I finally decided to forgive him, so that I can be free and not stay a prisoner for the rest of my life. This I believe.

Works Cited

Exline, Julie. "Forgiveness." *Encyclopedia of Social Psychology,* edited by Roy F. Baumeister

and Kathleen D. Vohs, vol. I, *Sage Publications*, 2007, pp. 359-362.