

Monica Mihai Hanneman: Testimony concluding “Preserving the Sanctity of Life Within a Community,” Oct. 15, 2005

I was born in a big, loud, Romanian family. I grew up on a farm and I have a lot of fun memories from my childhood, growing up with so many brothers—we basically had our own soccer team!! We are 12 kids, 8 boys, 4 girls, including 2 sets of twins, but I was the 11th in order and my parents had lost 2 girls few years after they were married, and I don’t think they knew how to grieve together on that loss.

Today I know that my parents never planned to have that many kids but my mom always assured us that from the moment she felt us she loved each one of us. As for my dad, he never shared any affection or love. I don’t remember him playing with me, kissing me or hugging me as child, and I grew up jealous of other kids in my neighborhood whose dads were so involved in their lives.

My dad was a very angry person. His anger would come from nothing and it was impossible to please him, no matter how much work you did or how well you did in school. I never heard him say please or thank you. He actually never knew exactly our age and what grade we were in. But life was hard and he was the one who provided money in the house. He worked so much and being away from home most part of the day, my mom was left to run the farm, take care of the work in the fields, feed us, clothe us, educate us.

But every time my dad was home, my parents would get into huge fights. He would falsely accuse my mom, telling her that she is worthless, that he is the only one who does any work. Often times my dad would get angry with my brothers, and my mom would interfere in order to make peace. My dad’s anger would come out in loud screams—so pretty much the whole neighborhood knew what was going on in our family. He would call my brothers animals, sons of the devil, and always wishing them to die, or to go away and never come back. And all that just because he was angry, not that my brothers or mom did anything wrong to him.

He often physically abused my brothers, but never my sisters. He never physically hurt my mom, not even once, but he wounded her with words—and sometimes I don’t know which one hurts most, the physical wounds or the “soul wounds”. My mom would fight back, with words, but then she would lock herself in a room and cry for hours. My dad just knew how to hurt her—how to touch with his words the most sensitive part in her. Latter on, we would suggest to mom to divorce dad, or to move out of the house and leave him alone. We would tell her that we would take care of her just not to see her cry anymore. But my mom knew the commitment she made when marrying my dad.

He often disappointed us. My mom had this reward system—if we worked all summer and got everything done she promised us to take us to the sea side. My dad first agreed and we were all so excited. My mom even took one of her few dresses and made bathing suits for us. Can you imagine...8 boys on the beach wearing the same funky flowery Speedos? So we would be all ready to go and my dad would start to do some work in the garden telling us that we are not going anywhere, that there were so many things to be done around the house. Then my mom would try to convince him and he would get more angry, and after a few hours he would agree to go. My dad was just impossible. And every time we planned to go somewhere, he would do that.

I grew up as a witness of all this, and even more. My family was part of a legalistic Lord’s Army church. So every time someone from church would visit us, my dad knew how to put on the most holly face, often quoting verses from the Bible, and would get into long theological conversations on how to live as a Christian. That was so hard for me and oftentimes I wanted to scream out loud and tell him that he has no right to call himself a Christian. But that is how it was and no one outside of the family, except our neighbors, knew who my dad really was.

I became the target of my dad’s anger when I was about 13. He would scream and call me stupid and animal and slut and a lot of other words that are too awful to even translate. I would usually just be quiet, but one day I could not stand him talking to me like that and I screamed back at him that he is worthless and that his mouth is like a dirty pot. I still remember how angry I was when my mom turned to me and said, “You should never talk to him like that. No mater what he does or says, he is your father and he will be responsible for all this in front of God. But you, you should respect him and never talk to him like that.” I then thought that my mom is crazy, because if there is any God, then He would kill my dad right then—and that’s all I wished, for him to die, because whenever he was away we had peace.

I was very happy to go to a different town for high school. I lived on my own, far from home, and those were good years in my life. I became a Christian but still carried a lot of anger for my dad. When I wanted to go to college, my dad said I was too stupid and that everything will be just a waste of time and money. However, I did pass the exams and went to college. But every time I had to pass an exam in my life, I’ve always had my dad words in my head—that I am too stupid and that I will never make it. And, whenever I was down, the evil one would use the ugly words that my dad hurt me with to make me feel miserable and to make me believe that God does not forgive my sins.

I first heard about grace at one of PBCC’s Camps. Until that point I thought that every sin makes me more ugly in God’s sight. And then here is grace—New Covenant and unconditional love—love that doesn’t care about the past or the future. That was 4 years ago, and a long process has followed.

I’ve tried to understand my dad, and his anger, and how he could be so cruel as to wish for my sister a husband who would beat her and abuse her. Then I realized that until that point I didn’t know anything about my dad’s past—about his childhood. So in one of my visits home I asked him. I found out that he grew up with an abusive and violent mom, 3 controlling sister and without a father. He was told his father died in War World II, but he met him when he was 20 years old, and all that his father told him was to go away. Finding out about dad’s past helped me understand his lack of affection for us. But the fact that I sat down and asked him questions and listened to him meant a lot. Before I left home from that visit I gave my dad a hug, and he kissed my cheek for the first time that I could remember.

In 2003 I got a work and travel visa to come to the States, and that was another level of God teaching me about grace. At the end of that summer I got baptized in the Ocean and friends and dear ones from PBCC gathered at the beach to hear my story. Then, for the first time I let go of the past, and all the bad memories with my dad, and I felt that God, with that cold sandy ocean water, clothed me with a shield and I knew that no matter what my dad will still say and do, it will never hurt me. That night I was able to write down in

sand the words that my dad had hurt me with. Another hand deleted them and wrote “My little girl, I love you!” Those were the words I never heard from my father.

After that summer I went home with a big assignment: to tell my father that I love him. I was so scared of rejection. But no, I gave him a hug, looked him in the eyes and told him, “I love you.” And he could have said, “Me too,” but he said, “I love you too!” It was snowing outside, and I thought that the snowflakes were angels who were celebrating this moment with me.

Later on, when all my brothers and sisters were home, we gathered and shared, and everybody shared about dad; they were all hurt and they were all carrying a luggage of memories. Then my turn came, and I shared about grace and how I told my father that I love him. They were all crying. My brothers—34, 32, 30 years old—all grown men, crying like little kids, because they all wanted to be able to say that to my dad. And especially my oldest brother, the one who walked me down the aisle on my wedding day. His front teeth are broken, because one day, when he was trying to escape from my dad’s anger, he slipped on a wet floor and hit a metal thing.

On my 23rd birthday my dad wanted to see me. So he traveled one full day by train to come to the town I was in to bring me some of his wine and goodies from home. I will never forget that day. I was so surprised, because he never has done that for any of his kids. When I took him back to the train station he told me he was sorry—sorry for everything he has done that hurt me, and that I shouldn’t let any man in my life hurt me like that. I gave him a hug and he cried on my shoulder. I cried too, because I never imagined what unconditional love can do. After that event I wrote a poem about my dad and that meeting:

Poem...

*Sorry...you said.
Eyes searching through the window,
Your words echo in my heart
Like arrows of light to my soul.
All memories that I have with you
Are so empty, so cruel.
Only words that wounded me deep,
Things that my mouth does not want to speak.
And I wonder...Will you ever know,
What your words have done to my soul?!*

*I can't be a little girl anymore.....
Can you be the father that I've longed for?
How can I fix the time we missed?
How can I put back together
A childhood, the broken piece?!*

*Oh, by grace I've tasted the unconditional love
And dared to speak the ugliness
By grace a new father comes from miles and miles away,
To pray and listen to a daughter's pain.
By grace my hand wrote in the sand
The words that cut so deep
Another hand erased them all
Writing the most beautiful poem of all
“My little girl, I love you!”*

*“Sorry for everything I've done and hurt you.”
I hear you say again
Eyes searching for eyes.
Deep look into my father's soul
Heaven touches earth
A father weeping in his daughter's arms
I am sorry...
You are forgiven tata
By grace, I choose to love.*

Well, this last summer, in our visit home a lot of things had happened. My brother Vas—the one with the broken teeth—took my dad for a long walk in the vineyard. They were gone for hours. They shared and cried and prayed and my brother told my dad that he loves him. I saw my dad hold one of my nieces, the only one that would go into his arms. And I cried looking at them, because this is the scene that was missing in my life.

Two weeks ago, my younger brother left for college and my dad cried. He said to my mom, “I am looking at all of our kids. They turned out all right and I haven’t been a good father for them.”

My mom used to say that she lost all of her hopes—that my father will ever change. I was on the phone with mom yesterday, and she says that he has changed. There is peace and there is love between them. And this is just an example of what God’s grace and unconditional love can do. And I pray for more years to be able to love my dad.