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## Winter Term Paper

To gain access to the methodology behind my field study of pilgrimage, the ultimate goal to reunite with my Father, you have to go to the beginning. First I came to the conclusion that I would take a pilgrimage to see my Father. I took the plunge and decided to filter through some old feelings I had been working through. I was scared and nervous for what this trip would contain but also excited for the result. I was on the cusp of something huge.

When I was younger I had what some would call an unpleasant childhood. At age five my parents would divorce and my Mother would leave my Father for another woman. Our family was torn and now my sister and I had to deal with our parents on split time. At first my Father was the weekend Father that so many children deal with when they grow up. We would see our Dad on every other weekend and every other holiday. It wasn't the best situation but it was the only one we had so we enjoyed it as much as we could. My Mother had full custody and both my sister and I lived with her and her partner and her partners children. We came into a family already living and it wasn't pretty. The children took a liking to my sister and shunned me at the same time. I would be abused by these children and made to feel less than adequate in my life. There would be times when I would think, at such a young age, that there was nothing for me in this life. I would think that I was alone and no one was there to help me. There came a time when I had had too much and I spoke to my Father.

I spoke to my Father after months of abuse at these children's hands but the hurt that cut the deepest was the fact that my sister, my flesh and blood, joined in on the abuse. I had no one to turn to since when I turned to my Mother I was told that I should deal with it myself even though I was too young to see that I could change it all with a thought. So I turned to my Father and then it happened. I was told that given another bruise or another terror story that Child Protective Services would be called

on my Mother. I told this to my Mother and immediately I was thrown into a car and driven to my Father's home where I was taken to the doorstep and left there. Luckily my Father had been there although when he saw me I got a mouth full of screams. It was not the welcome home I had envisioned. So after this talk with my Mother and the ensuing drop on the door step I was given over to my Father. I was to live with him and grow in his care.

*Lost like so many other souls*

*Waiting for life as the pond*

*awaits the stone so that ripples*

*may shine.*

Then at age nine another woman came into the picture. Her name was Denise and she had a son. Yet another family that is already lived in and I had to find my place all over again. From age nine until I moved away at 18 I was already second best, no not second, I was last. Denise took her son into her heart and shunned the two kids my Father had, my sister and I. We lost our Father to this new family. As I grew, I grew apart from the family of my Father. I was thrown to the wayside and made to grow alone in a home stuffed by people. When there was trouble my Father never would lift a finger for help. I was berated and torn down. I was told all of the things you never tell children and it made me cold and hard. I told myself when I was older, say thirteen, that I would never look back when I got the chance. I would leave this home and these people and make my own family where I would treat them as people and not a leper. I grew apart from my Father at this time. I knew that to argue would bring only pain to myself so I bit my tongue and let life take its own course. Not once did my Father speak up to show his children the same respect as that of Denise's child. I was alone yet again and this time I was even less prepared for it.

Through a tragic series of unfortunate circumstances, Denise was murdered in her apartment in Panama over one thousand dollars, and nothing more. I attended the funeral but I wasn't really there. I told myself while looking over her dead , lifeless body that it was over and I could finally reunite with my Father. That time would come years later when given the chance for my field study. I took a chance and decided to take a pilgrimage to see him. I would have my Father back come hell or high water.

*Freedom to choose the path*

*Lets us see that the blank, empty stares*

*Were those of the jealous eyes.*

When I arrived at my Father's home I had been on the road for more than 15 hours. I pulled into his driveway and the most amazing thing happened, we embraced in a hug. I was taken inside and placed my things in their proper locations and then I sat with my Father. We turned the television on and just sat together. It felt better than anything I have felt in a very long time with him and I knew I had made the right choice. There came a time when he had to go to sleep for work in the morning. You see my Father is an extremely hard worker and to do this he rises early in the morning. So to sleep we went and after 15 hours on the road I was more than disappointed to find that I had to sleep on a chaise lounge which couldn't even support my whole body, I am a tall individual. I was scared that this was leading into something that I have done before, I was an afterthought in this house of his. Still I would rest my head and watch TV and just know that my Father slept no more than 15 feet from me. I was here and I was ready for anything that could come.

The morning of the following day I awoke with my Father and we got ready for the day, it was 0530 in the morning. You should know that my Father has some kids of his own now that his true born children are grown. His kids include two Saint Bernard's and two Australian Shepherds. His new children

are dogs and he loves them unconditionally which threw me for a loop at first, but as the morning grew longer I saw that he loved us all the same. I was loved as much as the dogs he now calls kids and with my Father this was an incredible showing of love. So we took the morning and got ready for the coming day. We spoke but not in-depth and when he left I was alone, again. He would be back in the evening but I would not be there, not this night, this night he would be alone and that weighed heavy on my heart.

When I came back to my Father's home we had some time to actually be together. I wanted to dive into our deep talk as soon as possible just to get some kind of closure but I knew that if I would push it I would lose him. So we took some time and spent it together. I would spend this time getting to know who my Father is. Who had he become since the death of his second wife and does he still harbor any guilt about how his children were treated. It would be some time before this could be brought up so in the mean time we just stayed together. We talked about his work and who he hangs out with and who is a part of his life. I found that he is in love with another woman, someone whom has been one of his closest friends before his marriage.

When he got married to Denise everything took a back seat in his life. He was consumed by his feelings for Denise and I don't know if it was love or the comfort he felt but whatever it was he decided to stay with her because she was, if anything, unique. Our time to talk would come and I would be ready. I had been waiting for this talk for years and by God I wouldn't miss it for the world.

1: I had to know what was going on in my Father's mind and I didn't know how to go about that. I sat with him for hours and we didn't say much. I wrote in my journal and I meditated on the topic. I did a preliminary internet search on what a pilgrimage was and I found that the definition was: a journey, especially a long one, made to some sacred place as an act of religious devotion. I wasn't making a religious journey, I was making a sacred one. I was there at my Father's home and he was sitting right across from me. I had to know what he was thinking and I knew that this was my chance.

2: I began to ask questions of my Father. I was curious and I wanted to know more. I was seeing that I was being too focused and I was not letting the conversation take on a life of its own. On the second chance we had to talk I had to check myself and stop asking questions and let the conversation flow naturally. I opened up my heart and let his voice surround me. I was greeted with silence. I was not deterred though and I sat in silence with my Father. I was beginning to feel let down by the fact that there was no back and forth going on and then something happened. I moved and began to do something different. We left the home and went to the movies which is something we used to do pretty regularly and it always gave us something to talk about.

3: We came home and I took it upon myself to flow with the situation. I waited for him to talk to me and I knew I had to keep my heart readily available for anything that would come of this. I sat in silence and felt for the opening that would eventually present itself. I was drinking a beer and sitting with my Father when we talked about the past. I sat in silence and felt for the opening in which I could converse but I held back thinking it was not my turn to speak. The sense of calm radiated through me and my heart beat and breathing slowed and all stress and anxiety was washed away. My Father was about to speak. Emotions came flooding over me then. I ran the gambit of the emotional timeline. Calm led to anger which led to sadness and then fear, which led to more powerful emotions such as love and forgiveness. I was feeling all of this in such an intensity it was a good thing I was sitting down. I was beginning to see that this conversation was twofold and not just me asking questions and getting answers.

4: I noticed that my Father was his own Universe. He has stood my entire life as someone I looked up to, someone I modeled myself after. When I sat with my Father I treated him as an elder of my tribe, as someone whom I absolutely respect and admire.

5: I started to feel like I belonged with my Father, like this was something coming for a long time. When we would talk during my time with him I would wait and sense my calm flooding over me. I would wait for the chance to speak and not rush the conversation. When my time came to talk I would speak quietly and emotionally and I would free my heart. We would talk about the things we had missed in our time apart and I would tell him about what would bother me in this life. I wouldn't talk to him about Denise and my childhood, I was scared to lose him again.

6: My Father had not changed much in the past three years since Denise's death. He had found his old friends and had built a life around his own making. He is a hard man to talk to since his emotions are kept on the inside. I was realizing that to have this conversation I would have to change my own thoughts about how this would play out. I had to take my Father into account instead of my own feelings. This was a conversation with two people and not one sided. I would sit back as we spoke and release my heart to feel for an opening in my Father's tough exterior. I would find it while we were sitting outside on the porch. As I was leading into my questioning I felt my body physically relax. I was surrounded by calm and I was steeling myself for this conversation.

7: I was feeling the world around me at this point. I was talking to my Father and I was in his home. I was right where I had to be and all I had to do was reach out and take what I came for. My Father is a quiet man and does not show much emotion. It is when you can sense his emotions that you know you have found that sweet spot of conversation. So as we spoke our conversation led to my childhood and that of our time with Denise. I asked why he was not there for me when I was younger. I asked why he had let Denise walk all over our family and why he had let his children fall to the wayside. I asked and I asked and when it came his turn to talk he looked me in the eyes, deep into my eyes to make sure I was paying attention. He leaned towards me and placed a hand on my hand and spoke in a hushed voice. He spoke and I listened. It was not a long speech about what had happened it was simply three words, *I am*

*sorry*. This was what I wanted from him. I wanted him to know I was torn by emotion but I loved him. I wanted him to know that I was not going to let him go no matter what and I wanted him to know that he was sorry. My Father is a quiet man and a simple statement of apology was all I ever wanted. I knew my Father was sorry and I knew it pained him deeply. When he spoke I listened and now that I had listened it was my turn. I stood up from the porch setting and walked to my Father. I looked at him and told him I knew he did what he could and that I forgive him. We hugged then and inwardly I cried as the tension disintegrated. I had come for something that only my Father could give me. Something as simple as an apology but something much larger. I came for his love and in our conversations I found just that.