My Past, Present, and Future

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I never thought I would be 42 years old and writing a paper like this one. I had planned to go to college right after high school, but life does not always happen according to plan. In this paper, I will present a brief description of a few of my life experiences that have helped shape the person I am today and analyze some of these experiences using the adult development theories from this class. I will also look ahead to the goals I want to accomplish in the future.

I grew up in a military family. Both my dad and my mother had enlisted in the U.S. Air Force after they graduated from high school, and they met when they were stationed at the same air base. As mom tells it, my dad asked her out on a date several times, but she always refused because she thought he was a little wild. However, Mom was an early-morning person, and Dad was a night owl. One evening, my mother was assigned to work the graveyard shift on a security detail, and she had trouble staying awake. Dad did her a favor by working her shift for her, so she thought she at least owed him one date. The rest, as they say, is history.

My earliest childhood memories were of growing up on Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi, as the oldest of five children. As the family grew, my mother left the Air Force, but my father continued in military service. My siblings and I are all about two years apart in age, and my childhood was fairly ordinary until I was about ten years old, when my father was deployed to Japan. My family planned to join him there, but we had to wait for about a year until Dad could arrange housing for us.

When we finally left for Japan, I was excited at the opportunity to visit a foreign country. Dad flew home, and the entire family boarded a military ship for a 12-day cruise across the Pacific Ocean. The military transport vessel was nothing like the luxurious cruise ships of today. My most vivid memory is of staying in the cabin while my family ate in the dining hall because I
became sick whenever I smelled food cooking. I think I ate primarily fruit and bread on the voyage.

My exciting trip abroad turned out to be very short-lived. After we had been in Japan for only about a year, my parents called us kids together one evening and announced that they were getting a divorce. I was devastated. My mother, four brothers and sisters, and I boarded a plane to return to the States. I waved goodbye to my father at the airport, and it was the last time I would see him until a chance meeting when I was 21 years old. Whenever his tour of duty was nearing an end, he requested another remote assignment to remain overseas. He was never part of our lives again. Eventually, he remarried and started another family.

Mom, the other kids, and I settled in a small rural community in northern California. My mother liked the small valley town and wanted to be near her sister, who lived about an hour away. Life for a single mother with five children must have been rough, but Mom rarely complained. She found a job as a secretary for a local furniture store, and we always had a roof over our heads and food on the table. My mother’s job paid only about $300 a month, however, and our rent was $100 a month. So, not much money was left for groceries and other expenses. We ate pasta and beans quite often, but my mother was very creative and invented names like “Italian Delight” for her concoctions of pasta, tomato sauce, and leftover vegetables. We never knew that we were “just making do.” We thought this exotic-sounding dinner was a special treat!

Since I was only 10 years old, and my siblings were younger, we could not get jobs to help support the family. However, in an agricultural area, everyone was needed at harvest time. So, about six months of the year we worked in the fields after school. We also got our school lunches free under a program for “needy children,” which helped with the grocery bill. When I grew older, I was hired at the town library and worked year-round after school. On Saturdays,
Mom made sure that, in addition to schoolwork and play, we all practiced our typing. “If you can type,” she said, “you can always find a job.”

Sunday was always my favorite day of the week. One of my fondest memories from my childhood is coming home from church, changing into casual clothes, and heading to the river with my family. The road to the river was heavily traveled, and we always drove slowly, so we could stop to pick up beer and soda bottles and cans that littered the roadside. The recycled value of these discarded items usually amounted to enough money to buy all our picnic supplies. We would play all day at the river and a riverside park, have a great lunch, and cap off the outing with root beer floats at the local A&W Root Beer stand on the drive home.

When I was in high school, I worked after school as a waitress at our local ice cream parlor. This was my dream job. I made a decent salary and tips from waiting tables, and I had all the ice cream sundaes I could eat! I had planned to attend college when I graduated from high school, but then I met Joe.

Joe was different from the guys I had dated before. He was five years older than I was, and he was much more mature than boys my age. Joe and I dated for about three months and, when I was 17, I lied about my age, and we eloped to Las Vegas to get married. I was much too young, but no one could convince me, at the time, that marrying Joe was a mistake. I expected to live happily ever after. Unfortunately, it was not meant to be. Our marriage lasted less than two years. I do not regret it, though; the marriage gave me my wonderful son, who is the light of my life.

Like my own mother, I became a single mom with no college education. Thanks to Mom’s insistence that I learn to type, I was able to find clerical work to support myself and my son. But, I missed the companionship that a good marriage was supposed to provide, and I
remember this period as one of the loneliest of my life. My great joy, though, was spending time with my son. I have great memories of serving as his Cub Scout leader, attending his Little League baseball games, and watching him perform in the school band.

At work one day I met a terrific guy named Frank Graduate. Frank was about my age and was also divorced. He had started college but had dropped out to obtain his real estate license to support his wife and baby. Frank’s daughter was a couple of years younger than my son, and our children immediately became friends. Frank and I dated for a year, and then we were married. I am happy to say that this marriage has been a success. Frank is a wonderful husband and father. My son is now a senior in high school, and Frank’s daughter will finish middle school this year.

In our studies of adult development theory, I was interested to learn about Erikson’s theories of psychosocial stages. Our text tells us that Erikson believed adolescents “anguish over who they are and how they fit into their social world.” (Witt & Mossler, 2010, section 2.3, para. 9). I certainly went through this stage. At age 17, I did not know who I was or what I wanted to do with my life, and I believed that becoming a wife and mother would give me a sense of identity and belonging. However, I discovered that until I matured and found my own identity, I was unable to have a fulfilling marriage.

The last few years of my life have been happy and busy. I was hired in an entry-level position at a large bank, and I have earned several promotions. Frank continues to be successful selling real estate, and we both enjoy raising our two children. Last year, though, I overheard my son tell a friend that college was not important because his parents had not graduated. About that same time, my manager told me I was not eligible for a promotion at work because the position I wanted required a college degree.
My son’s comment and my manager’s statement made me realize that it was time for me to go back and earn that college degree. As our text explains, modeling is an important source of learning (Witt & Mossler, 2010), and I also want set a good example for my children. So, a few months ago, I began to research my options.

Now I find myself writing a college paper. My skills are a little rusty, but I am enjoying this new challenge. I had forgotten how much fun it could be to learn new things, and I enjoy sharing my new knowledge with my family. I hope my excitement rubs off on my children and that they choose to go on to college as well.

I am also motivated to graduate because I hope to become an operations manager at the bank. I think I would make a good manager and enjoy the challenge of that job. Though some of my friends think I am too old to return to school, my family is very supportive of my decision to earn my degree, and I have learned that this type of support may help me succeed in my college courses (Chu, 2010). I believe you are never too old to follow your dreams, and I think I may have even convinced Frank. He is now talking about returning to college himself!
References
