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### Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child

Shawn Jones  
*Loyola Marymount University*

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Remember those childhood days when all your friends had the new, fresh out-of-the-box “Barbie” doll? You know the one with the Pepto-Bismol-pink colored heels that somehow always got lost? Unlike my friends, I was the only one who didn’t. Figuratively, that’s kind of how I feel about the situation with my mother. I was that child without the new “Barbie” who would awkwardly sit in a corner and wonder why I didn’t have what everyone else had.

Growing up as a shy and naïve child, I didn’t feel as if I was any different from the children that I knew. I had a loving dad, an old-school grandma and grandpa, and two annoying, yet loving brothers. Nothing out of the ordinary except that my typical family was missing one thing: my mom. You see, my mom passed away when I was one year old. February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1995 is a day I’ll never forget. I don’t think it affected me as a kid because I had no clue what was going on. I don’t think I was ever told that my mom had passed away. In my head, she just existed but I didn’t know her like the rest of my family did. She was Karen or Patsy to me. She was the woman who made everyone laugh and smile. She’s the woman who had the worst temper you could imagine, but in a quick second be the sweetest person you’d ever meet. She was the woman who wanted to be a teacher and loved drawing and painting. She is my mother. A woman who I am told about through stories from those who knew her. I wish I had my own personal stories to share, but I don’t.

As a young child...easily, I could have figured she was on some never-ending vacation. But obviously that wasn’t the case, and somehow I knew that. I remember in elementary school the Friday before Mother’s Day, my teacher would announce an art project that required us to make a card for our mothers. You could feel the excitement in the room on that day before we all went home for the weekend. The classroom was filled with hyper children as the helpless teacher stood in the front of the class trying to take control. Kids scrambling to get out their Crayola Crayons 64 box with the sharpener on the back, kids rushing to be first in line to get the best construction paper and even rushing to get the best scissors that actually could cut. It was free time just to color, make something pretty, and just show off your creativity. It was the epitome of the statement ‘no homework’ for a high-school student. Or that email you get that says, “Class is cancelled” for that one class you rather not go to in college. It was relaxing and a time to do something you want to do.

As I got settled in my desk to work, I perfectly wrote out “Happy Mother’s Day Grandma!” on the card. Not once did I think twice to put anything different. I remember my friend came up to me and said, “*Why did you put your grandma on the card?*” And my naive answer: “*Because.*” I’ve learned that because is never an answer, but what else was I supposed to say? It was a question that I never really thought about. It made sense to write my grandma’s name on it because I knew nothing different. My grandma was my motherly

figure as a young child, and even as I entered into my teenage years, I realized that there are certain things that she couldn't help me with. My grandma got sick when I was around middle school. She developed a condition called dementia, and just wasn't the same as I remember. There were times she didn't even remember my name, and constantly called me "Karen." *I hated that.* But as I grew older, I began to take on the role of taking care of my grandma, and doing things that many at my age weren't doing and had no clue to worry about.

Entering my teenage years was a very awkward period in my life. Usually it always is. The phrase "becoming a young woman" barely registered in my mind in those years. Of course, I knew what it meant but I didn't feel fully comfortable talking about it with my dad or anyone else. I didn't have my mom there to talk about "girly stuff" with me and make me feel comfortable with the situation. I didn't have her there to answer my questions and concerns. I barely knew how to do my own hair when I was younger; you can imagine how many times my dad put a ponytail in my hair along with a hideous baseball cap on top. I barely knew anything about makeup or how to wear heels. Seriously, I had to teach myself to cook. These are all things you learn from your mother. *These are all things I wished I learned from my mother.*

Do I resent the fact that I didn't have her there to help me? No. Not really. *Maybe?* How can you resent someone who didn't choose to be away from you? Honestly, I don't think I ever will or feel like I should. Or maybe I'm just giving you the politically correct answer. I learned from my Dad that there are certain situations in life that are thrown at you and you may not understand it but the best thing to do is to move on and not dwell on them. Now that I think about it, that advice seems like a "get over it" line. Yes, it happened but don't dwell on it and don't think your life is more tragic than someone else's, but growing without a mom was tragic, and life changing. As a young woman now I would have never guessed that my experience would shape who I am today. I will not get the chance to have my mother at my wedding. I will not get the chance to have her give me advice on parenting. I won't have her at Thanksgiving parties or Christmas parties with my family. These are things I would love to experience with her, but will not get the chance to. I resent her for that. I resent that I won't be able to learn and experience with the woman who gave birth to me. Even with the help of my dad, grandma, and brothers I've learned that I'm not much different from anyone else. There may be things that I don't have, and even some things I'm privileged to have, but I should never feel entitled to using my situation as a crutch to get what I want in life. Use the experiences you have been given in life and turn it into something positive. The few things I learned through this sad and wonderful experience with my mom is that I'm a strong, resilient, and independent young woman who can overcome setbacks no matter how big or small. Even if my mom isn't physically here, I can proudly say that I did learn that from her.

I know her as Karen Patricia Jones. The woman whose smile lights up a room and whose laugh brought everyone joy. She is the woman with the fiery personality who wasn't afraid to let her anger show. These are the stories that I'm told.

She is my mother. A woman who I am told about through stories from those who knew her. I wish I had my own personal stories to share, but I don't. She is my mother. And I appreciate every little thing about her.