

Progression 2

Becoming Me (Almost Final Draft)

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Who am I? What are the main factors that have shaped me? In short, I am the collective manifestation of my experiences, emotions, and responses to them. The main factors that have shaped me include my childhood upbringing, my parents, religion, and philosophy. The debate between nurture vs. nature is ongoing, but honestly, it's both, this becomes obvious the more conscientious I have become. I usually enjoy talking about myself, but being vulnerable has not always been easy for me. It's easier to open up in person, where I can gauge reactions and slowly test the waters. However, expressing myself here feels like exposing my heart and expecting it to be okay. I feel anxious and find excuses not to continue writing.

Parents are the ultimate role models for children. Every word, movement, and action have an effect. No other person or outside force has a greater influence on a child than the parent¹.

In my preteen years, I can remember respecting but fearing my parents. I looked up to my father as I assume most sons do. I remember waking up some mornings around 4:00 AM to watch him shave and prepare for work. He would bring us some candy or chocolate every day when he returned from work. He would go outside to do errands while listening to his favorite rock stations 95.5 KLOS or KRTH 101. I would spend a lot of time with him, I was so eager to learn about music and I wanted to help him with the house chores. My father loves music and even when he was growing up, he listened to music out of his time. He taught me so much history ranging from the '50s to the '70s. My 1st concert was the Rolling Stones at Dodger Stadium when I was 12, still the most badass concert I've been to date. Although I have many good memories there were plenty of bad ones. There was a quick shift when I entered my teens, I was older and capable of handling most chores on my own, but I only enjoyed doing the chores because I was spending time with him. The illusion of seeing your father as a hero tends to fade at this age, he sensed it. A point came where he would just drink and isolate himself, so I refused

¹ Bob Keeshan

to do the chores to force him out. He didn't spend much time with us then, but he thought of us frequently; I can still see our photos on the dashboard of his truck. My father didn't have his father in his life and his mother died from cancer when he was 16. I can't imagine how hard his life was having to help raise his little sister. He didn't have an example of what a father is, but he did his best. Occasionally he would get drunk, throw food, break things, and scream at all of us. As a child, I couldn't understand why he was so angry, and I think now that I'm older I understand. "*Machismo encompasses positive and negative aspects of masculinity, including bravery, honor, dominance, aggression, sexism, sexual prowess, and reserved emotions, among others.*" (Mirandé, 1977; Niemann, 2004). He didn't have someone to talk to or trust to be vulnerable to, and so his perception of masculinity is dominant by controlling through fear and fear him we did. He was quick to anger, and could never take constructive criticism, he acted as if the world conspired against him. I quickly learned to read him; the slightest facial expression would hint at an eruption. He could never apologize and even when he did, he'd excuse himself and ask that we just forget it, as if it were that simple. I lost a lot of respect for him, and it wasn't until my time in the military with Lieutenant Sparks that my perception changed. I did, however, take the good he taught me to heart, I learned; responsibility, a sense of duty to the family, and to work hard. I admire the fact that he moved to this country at 19, worked his ass off to provide for his family. He has overcome many challenges on his own; and though it has worked out for him, I can see the scars left behind.

I love my mom, she's beautiful, kind, smart, and charismatic. She would spend a lot of time with me and my brother, educating us as much as she could, especially when she saw we had an interest in specific subjects. I didn't like reading much, but I loved games. She would buy puzzles and educational games that I would play on our computer. My brother and I attended

Magnet programs thanks to my mother's research and guidance. Our growth and development were important to her, and she went above and beyond to prepare us for success. I remember her singing along to 80s music while making breakfast for us, she seemed so light and happy. She didn't understand the lyrics all too well, but she loved the music, and I began to as well. We didn't have much money growing up, so we thrift shopped a lot. She would tailor the clothes to fit us better and I learned to recycle and be frugal when possible. She also discussed finances with me, and I was very aware that money was not to be wasted. I purposefully didn't ask for brand new shoes and clothes, nor to learn an instrument or ask to go on optional trips like space camp. I grew up resenting my brother since he did all those things. It wasn't his fault but was under the impression I would be told 'No'. She eventually supported my idea to sell candy and drinks in middle school to earn my own money. This was the first sense of freedom and autonomy I felt and got hooked on the idea that I could provide for myself. Almost everyone says they love their mother's cooking, but I genuinely believe she could have been a top-tier chef. She frequently saw many cooking shows such as Martha Stewart and Rachel Ray, she would experiment with different foods. She would practice with me and my brother; I remember enjoying most of her meals. She was eager to please my father, but he wasn't always a fan of her experiments. Over the sounds of plates breaking and yelling my brother and I hid in our room. Whenever we tried to get involved things got worse, so we learned to stay away. To my surprise, she would defend my father even when he mistreated her. I didn't completely understand why but I saw how she handled it. She would write letters and leave them in my father's car for him to read in his own time at work. Through her, I learned to write down my feelings to have a clearer image of identifying a problem without hurting the other person. I remember being fascinated by fire and although it terrified her, she knew that it be best to supervise me and allow me to explore my

interests. She designated a section outside in the dirt where I was allowed to burn certain items and materials that she approved of. She is the most empathetic, loving, and patient person I know. I'm extremely grateful for the mother I have, she gave me the opportunity and the environment to grow so much. Although I challenged and rebelled against both my parents in my teen years, I see that they both did their best and I'm proud of their influence.

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom the emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder, and stand wrapped in awe, is as good as dead; his eyes are closed. The insight into the mystery of life, coupled though it be with fear, has also given rise to religion. To know what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms-this knowledge, this feeling is at the center of true religiousness².

Religion has been a big part of my life, and although I do not follow a set religion, many of my beliefs and morals are Christian-based. My mother was Catholic, studied some Christianity, and eventually settled with Jehovah's Witness. This was the predominant religion I grew under and learned from. What I always appreciated from it was that it encouraged questioning and challenging our perception of God and ourselves. Whenever a brother didn't have an answer, they didn't give me the typical: "It's God's will, who are we to question God", or any other bogus answer. The teachings encouraged research, historical evidence, context, figurative versus literal writing, and much more. As a teenager, I wanted to explore and try so many things and yet it seemed like my religion forbade many of those things. In the Jehovah's Witness religion, I could not celebrate holidays; this was strange and isolated me from my school friends. I would do my best to celebrate with my friends and hide it from my mother. The true purpose for participating was selfish as it was a requirement from my mother to be able to hang out with my friends. She set a standard that I must take the initiative to answer at least one question from our watchtower studies to the entire congregation by memory while quoting a

² Albert Einstein

relevant text and providing an example. Unbeknownst to me I was learning to research on my own and improve my public speaking. Some of my closest friends came from my time in this congregation, Jesus, Mario, Ariel, and Claudia. We would go to the park often to play football or basketball, take random trips, explore new restaurants, and have amazing conversations. We all attended the congregation but mainly for each other, we all had our doubts about God. It was hard for me to understand why people believed in a God. It seemed they believed in a better potential future rather than forging it in the present. I loved many of the teachings and stories when it came to morality, but I could not by default accept 'God'. I distinctly remember a day I stood in silence observing everyone smiling and happy to be there, I could sense a powerful emotion from everyone, but I couldn't feel it for myself. That was the day that I prayed to God and asked; "What is it that these people feel for you and why". I didn't know at the time but my answer was love, unconditional love.

Life got very difficult in my teen years, I was challenging my parents a lot. I see this problem a lot with many teens with their parents. Parents perceive their children as incapable of making decisions for themselves, and the child wants to prove their autonomy and independence; the inevitable result is usually a rebellious child. I took much of their advice into consideration but knew that they came from a different time and so I tried to adapt. I would sneak out often to go to concerts or parties with my friends, at 15 I looked 19. I was eager to have a girlfriend and I valued the advice and opinion of my mother. My father never had the 'sex' talk with me, he said, 'I figured it out on my own, thought you would too'. Although it was weird at first, my mother did and I'm glad it was her, she gave me insight and perspective into the female mind. She was scared about how fast I was growing up, but she was more terrified of me making mistakes, such as having a child so young. She told me that if I wanted a girlfriend while also following God's

rules, I should pursue dating with the end goal of marriage. I was young and horny and two of my closest friends were already having sex which only intrigued me more. I eventually met Nikki and she looked nothing like I remembered. I had originally met her in middle school, but we didn't get along then, she was dating a friend of mine, but I could tell they weren't right for each other. She went to Bishop Alemany a private school, her family wasn't rich, but it didn't seem like they were struggling either. Her Japanese father and Chinese mother adopted her from China. We were each other's first in many ways; love and life. I remember trying to impress her on her first date by using chopsticks. I had assumed she loved Asian food and when I saw her impale the food with the chopsticks, we locked eyes and laughed and took the opportunity to teach her. She brought a side out of me I never knew I had, the inner artist and romantic. I had no idea what I was doing but I knew I was going to do anything and everything to have her. We were high school sweethearts, and everyone believed we'd end up married. To be 'in love' is incredible; you feel invincible, powerful, and light as a feather. We ended up dating on and off for about 6 years and the question I had asked God long ago was answered. It was limitless, boundless, unconditional love.

Agape love is filled with kindness and wants only the best for the other person.

Agape love accepts others unconditionally, with no expectations of being reciprocated.

Agape love is not envious, proud, or boastful.

Agape love is patient, giving others grace. It doesn't hold grudges.

Agape love sacrifices for the good of the other person. It can sometimes even be viewed as a thankless type of love³.

Throughout our relationship, we were parents, siblings, friends, children, and lovers to each other. I know how strange that sounds but to paint a clear picture, whenever she had a concern, I would give her different answers based on the perception or role I envisioned. I did this because I truly believe that if someone genuinely and selflessly loves you, they will want

³ [LaKeisha Fleming](#)

you to make your own decision with as much knowledge available to you even if it conflicts with their interest. My mother did this for me and I realize now I was sharing the gift my mother gave me with her. She dreamt of going to the University of Hawaii and was willing to stay local for me. I loved that, but I couldn't in good conscious not let her go to her dream school. Adulthood was around the corner, and I had an irrational fear that one day Nikki would blame me for not following her dreams. What I was truly scared of was failing and being like my father. I broke up with her and although we kept seeing each other every chance we could it chipped away at our souls bit by bit.

She was the first and only relationship I had up till that point, how was I supposed to know she was the right choice? Fear is bitch; it will destroy your dreams if you let it. There is no such thing as 'meant to be', there is simply a 'choice'. Make it, honor it through commitment and things will always work out. If they don't, well you learned plenty along the way but don't let fear be the end of you. It may sound like I'm still in love with her, but I'm not, I'm in love with who we were, and those people don't exist anymore. We were kids, excited to discover each other and build a future. Our race didn't matter, money didn't matter, our parents' opinions didn't matter, and nothing but our character and how we felt about each other mattered; but your character can change under the right conditions.

I enlisted in the Marine Corps straight out of high school, people always asked me if I feared going; Truth be told I was more fearful of staying. I saw what my future would be like, and I desperately wanted to run away. I haven't gotten deep into the negative reasons why I wanted to leave, and they don't matter anymore as I've overcome them; but know, that at that time I was suffering, and I needed to run. I never expected to reconnect with my family, I had it set in my head that they were in the past and that if I ever did see them again it would be on my

terms. Boot camp wasn't difficult, the drill instructors were sweet compared to my father. The drill instructors yell and insult you to harden you so that you can stay composed in a stressful situation. My father did it for a different reason, but it still had the same result. Many things my mother taught me got me much further, but I didn't realize it until just now. Teamwork, charisma, and initiative; with these qualities, I gained friends and favor including the drill instructors. I admired every drill instructor we had because even though they were aggressively yelling and insulting all of us, I could see it came from a place of love and a sense of duty to prepare us; to shape us into warriors.

Amongst fellow marines, the Marine Corps is a constant dick-measuring contest. We could smell weakness, and just like chickens if you didn't want to be at the bottom of the totem pole you had to peck a couple of heads. I learned this quickly, it came easy. I used to bully in middle school after I was bullied. I stopped back then because I learned people needed a friend over a bully, but this was different. I would insult and belittle people in front of my friends whenever we came across a new person. I did this as a test to see what type of person we were dealing with and to establish order. Most times they didn't know what to say since they saw the majority laughing, and they didn't want to upset the group. I would quickly dismiss the insult and ask a genuine deep personal question. This way I showed kindness but still established order. Needless to say, this works well in the military and even amongst other men, but it bled into my relationship with Nikki. In the military, you learn to disconnect your emotions because emotions are distractions and can get you killed. Bootcamp will shave your morality down to the point that you are willing to kill another human being on command, without question in the name of duty, honor, and self-defense. I'm mixed about how I feel about this as it made me a strong warrior but a shit boyfriend. She never gave up on me, even after breaking up with her multiple times. I

could treat her like shit and I knew she'd always come crawling back. It fucked with my head, I loved and hated her equally. Even though she's forgiven me I still feel guilty about it.

I reached a boiling point where I hated myself to such a degree that I disconnected and chose to see the psychologist on base. Lieutenant Sparks was easy to talk to and even easier on the eyes. She understood how to help me, taught me mind mapping, and helped me work through interpersonal issues. One of the most memorable questions she asked was, "If you're going to blame your father for all the bad, should you not also thank him for all the good?". This question infuriated me, but she was right. It wasn't until later in life that I realized the fastest way to forgiveness is showing appreciation, the moment you do you begin to balance the scales. Rather than feeling the immense gravity of pain and emptiness, you begin to feel some light. She also recommended certain philosophical/metaphysical books as she saw how conflicted I was with morality. She held me accountable to my words and thoughts, for thoughts unchecked can poison the mind and spirit.

All I know is that I know nothing⁴.

Nearing the separation from the Marine Corps I had looked forward to coming home. I began to read Western philosophy starting with Socrates and Plato. The first book I read was *Introduction to Aristotle* (McKeon, 1947). I was fascinated with the questions and answers posed. I had a filter and a clearer understanding of my thoughts. I began to self-isolate and detached even further. Many of these ideas were things I felt I couldn't share with others; I knew they could be used against me and so I was living divided. Carrying forth a false persona while internally conflicted. I was aware of being an 'asshole', but it was working for me, or was it?

⁴ Socrates

When I came back home, I didn't realize how much my personality had changed and that I was much more aggressive and sarcastic towards people. I was still making friends, dating, and having fun when I went out so why change? Well, the quality of my relationships was not the best. I became the type of friend that I used to have, one I despised; a friend who was great to hang out with but one-sided and used others. I was good at compartmentalizing, and I was eager to unravel my id⁵/shadow⁶. Trust was difficult for me; I knew how it could be used against me because I knew how I could use and manipulate someone else. Much of my self-hate came from opening my unconscious mind to who/what I was to people, specifically those close to me. Though I acted through the unconscious mind for survival, I still held myself accountable for causing such pain. I had momentary peace for I was getting many answers, but my ego and id grew. I eventually discovered that Western philosophy comes from a place of ego, as above, and is separate from nature and others. In Eastern philosophy, there is a union and balance with Nature/God. I briefly studied the "Three Teachings" (Sanjiao); **Confucianism** situates the self hierarchically within a social order, **Daoism** attempts to free the self from society and realign it with the more fundamental natural order, and **Buddhism** ultimately strives to liberate the self by dissolving (identity/ego) any, and all order. I developed great peace through these teachings and felt a sense of unity and rebirth. The ego, however, can fool you, I was in a pseudo-woke phase. You may know the subject matter and regurgitate it to others but was I truly living it? If you aren't sure, meditate for a moment, and ask yourself if you judge yourself as superior to those who aren't woke/aware/conscientious. Are you casting negative judgment and insults? Or do you

⁵ /id/ - the part of the mind in which innate instinctive impulses and primary processes are manifest.

⁶ The **shadow** is conceptually the blind spot of the psyche; the repression of one's **id**, while maladaptive, prevents shadow integration (the union of id and ego. is an unconscious aspect of the personality that does not correspond with the ego ideal, leading the ego to resist and project the shadow, leading to a conflict with it.)

accept them for their current place and journey in life, weren't we there before? Enlightenment is not a destination; it is an odyssey.

(Here I plan to talk about Ego death and conclude my assignment...but I am at 4000 words now.)

(Draft conclusion) In conclusion, the factors that have shaped the individual in this essay are deeply rooted in personal experiences, family dynamics, religious upbringing, and philosophical exploration. The influence of parents, the impact of religion, the challenges of relationships, the lessons learned from the military, and the nurturing guidance of a loving mother have all played a significant role in shaping my identity and worldview. The journey of self-discovery, introspection, and growth has led to a deeper understanding of the complexities of human emotions, relationships, and the pursuit of personal fulfillment. My life reflects the intricate interplay of nature and nurture, and the ongoing quest for self-awareness and personal evolution. Through introspection and critical analysis, I have come to recognize the profound impact of my upbringing and experiences, and the transformative power of empathy, forgiveness, and the pursuit of knowledge. This journey of self-discovery serves as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the enduring capacity for growth and self-realization.

(Additional material I am planning to use)

Hugo (Hugh) - German and French (mainly Lorraine): from a short form of any of several ancient Germanic compound personal names with the first element hug 'heart mind spirit

“Unlike the typical perception of machismo or masculinity today, I believe the divine masculine leads through love and example. Fear and control aren't needed when someone loves and surrenders to your authority/law, and although takes longer to develop and earn, its an honor to receive.”

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