

Twenty Years Of Pain

Ike and Becky Abramson loved both of their boys, but they sure could not understand how two kids from the same parents and household could be so radically different.

Ike had worked hard, for many years, trying to build up the family business. He'd always dreamed of the day when he could change the company letterhead to read,

Abramson and Sons,

The Rocky Mountain Region's Heavy Equipment Repair Specialists

but as the boys grew sometimes the parents wondered if that was ever to be.

Harry, the oldest, was a true free spirit. His 1.7 G.P.A. was just enough to keep him eligible for varsity and that (along with impressing the girls) was the area of life where Harry truly excelled. Ike loved to attend Harry's games and Harry was always proud to see his "Pop" up in the stands rooting him on. Men at the shop often talked of Harry's athletic accomplishments as though he was their own and the boy's lack of concern for academics wasn't going to lose him any points with the employees (or their daughters!).

On the other hand the younger boy, Jake, was not terribly coordinated and really didn't have a heart for competition. From an early age he showed that he was much more prone to fiddling on the computer and spending time in the library. Somehow the family seemed to settle into a certain expectation. Ike would brag about Harry's trophies and Becky would always remind anyone who would listen about Jake's grades and the scholarship offers that were starting to come in from important schools across the land.

And so it came as no surprise when Harry was named "Colorado's 5-A Athlete of the Year" and Jake became a National Merit Finalist.

For whatever reason it seemed that everyone in the family was comfortable with their role. Ike even knew how it would work on the stationary. He would remain as President and founder, Harry would be the "Field Executive" (out there "mingling with the men in the rough and tumble business world of heavy machinery"), and Jake would be groomed to become the Office Manager of the family business. Curiously, this system actually worked for a while. Jake kept an immaculate control over inventory, labor costs, and economic projections while Harry made the customers feel good as they used the company's season tickets to the NFL Broncos or to Colorado Avalanche games.

Eventually, the contrast in personalities and responsibilities guaranteed that there would be a confrontation. Harry enjoyed the games and the schmoozing but as time went by he became increasingly unpredictable and sporadic in his efforts for the business. After a period of time it was evident that he was spending more time and resources on his buddies and lady friends and less time with customers. Taking his pals to Mile High for the Broncos or to Coors Field to see the Rockies or off to extended weekends in Aspen or Park City didn't bring in one penny for the business.

One day, as Harry was off on a trip that he wanted to call "business" a crisis brought the situation to a head. Jake found Ike laying on the floor beside his desk. The old man was moaning softly and trembled but the son couldn't understand a word his father was saying. "A fairly debilitating stroke" is what the doctors called it at the hospital. "We don't know if he will ever fully recover, even with extensive physical therapy."

Late that night, in the darkness of the room off of the side of Ike's private suite, Becky looked at her responsible son and said, "Jake, you're going to have to take over the family business. I don't think your father will ever be able to run it again and your brother's going to run us all into the ground with his undisciplined lifestyle."

"Mom, let's not talk about this now," Jake replied. "We can just hope and pray that Dad recovers and then we'll get this thing straightened around."

"No!", she retorted firmly. "I don't think that your father's ever going to be back to normal and your brother is off again to who knows where. I've already contacted John

Lawrence, our lawyer, and he's going to assist you in taking over the power of attorney for both your father and I. This has to be done for I can't deal with any of it at this time. Your father needs me and we both need you to do the right thing. If you don't take over the family finances and business we are going to lose everything."

Jake knew it was true. They didn't even know for sure where Harry was. They thought he was in Dallas at one of the trade shows but they couldn't be sure.

And so it was that Jake Abramson witnessed his mother place her hand over her nearly invalid husband's hand as they signed over full control and power of attorney to their youngest son in the Intensive Care Unit above 9th Avenue in the University Medical of Denver.

Six days later the phone rang and when Jake picked up the receiver he heard Harry's voice flippantly ask, "Hey, boss, how's everybody?"

"Harry, where have you been?", Jake asked abruptly.

"What's it to you, little brother? Are you taking care of me now?", the older brother retorted.

"Well", Jake responded in frustration, "somebody certainly should! After all, if you'd have been here like you were supposed to be instead of trotting around creation you would have known how everybody is."

"Hey, it's my life," Harry shot back in irritation. "I can travel if I choose. And for your information, Mr. Office Manager, I found that the Dallas trade show was a waste of time so a couple of the guys and I have spent the last few days down here in the Florida keys fishing and you won't believe what we caught."

"I can't imagine."

"I may have landed us a big account for the construction that's going on in the new tunnel under the river in Detroit. What do you think about that, Mr. Ledger?"

Jake finally exploded, "You and your schemes! You don't even really care about what's been going on here. Don't you even care that Pop's in the Hospital and they don't think he's ever going to recover?"

The phone on the other end got incredibly silent and then the older brother finally spoke, "What happened? Was it his heart?"

"No, he had a stroke and it looks like he's going to carry some permanent paralysis from now on. There isn't much hope of anything better for him at all."

"Wow," Harry sighed, "I always thought Pop was indestructible. I guess I'd better hurry home and start taking care of things."

Ike suddenly froze. He realized that there would be hell to pay when Harry found out about the papers that had been signed in the ICU. His mind raced and then he finally blurted out, "Hey, there's no need for you to hurry. Mom and I have taken care of everything."

"Yeah, I suppose you think you have, but since I'm the eldest brother and all of our clients know me better than you I'd better make sure that you haven't fouled anything up. I'll catch the first flight out of Miami. Tell Pop I'll see him soon..."

The line went dead and Ike began to dread meeting with his brother. Suddenly the plan that he would take over all decisions for the family no longer seemed an attractive or viable alternative. He honestly didn't know what to do.

Meanwhile Harry was racing up the coast highway to get to Miami International. When he caught the United flight he sat quietly through the whole trip, contemplating his life and the role that he felt would now be thrust upon him. Somewhere over Oklahoma Harry decided it was time to grow up, the only problem was that when he landed at Denver he found that he was not the man of the family. He was, at best, an employee of his kid brother. When Harry discovered that reality from his mother he stomped out of the house.

The family rift lasted for 20 years. For a period of time Harry considered suing Ike for control of the business but he figured that it would kill his father. On top of that consideration he realized that he could either work for his little brother in some menial

capacity or he could invest his energies into building a life of his own. That was exactly what he determined to do for Harry Abramson was not going to take scraps from his little brother's table.

The old father, Ike, never fully recovered from the stroke. Becky watched as the civil war in the family took its terrible toll on the old man. He was helpless to intervene but fully aware of the damage that had been done and the wife observed the results of her decision as it destroyed her home. The strain of her guilt and pain eventually killed her.

You'd like to think that two middle-aged men could come to the graveside of their mother and find reconciliation as they comforted their grieving old father but it was not to be. The chasm had become too wide and Harry's anger and bitterness was as deep as Ike's pride and determination. The split remained open as the three men left Becky's grave.

As the years rolled on Jake observed Harry's life from a distance. Harry began working for a friend in a gun shop and with hard work and some questionable loans the older brother eventually opened his own firearms retail outlet. The business grew and so did Harry's reputation for he came to be known around the state capital as one of the most effective voices in opposition to any form of gun control.

Eventually Harry became the president of the Colorado chapter of the NRA and a leading advocate for victim's rights. He was an inflammatory character that the media found as their darling. Harry Abramson was always good for an inflammatory quote on a slow news day. "We've got to stop coddling criminals," he would say. "I tell you that fear of retribution goes a lot farther than all the liberal programs that government can conjure up. I want every crook in this country to wonder what I've got inside my coat if he decides he's going to challenge me, my home, or my business."

Harry's reputation became so widespread and his views so broadly known that there were times when he would be called to be part of a fiery debate on *Nightline* or *Larry King Live*. Ike Abramson's oldest boy could always be counted on to be intense and volatile.

There were many throughout the inter mountain west who questioned some of Harry's associations. Rumor had it that he was the conduit of shady money to the campaigns of

a number of big name politicians who desperately needed the backing of the angry conservatives in their constituency. On two different occasions there was even a grand jury probe into the business dealings and political contributions of one, Harry Abramson, but nothing concrete could ever be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt and so the U.S. Attorney's office always had to retreat and hope that someday he would slip up.

Finally, it was December 11 and Jake was preparing to leave his office to head toward the company Christmas party. He locked his office door and said good-bye to old Clarence, the security guard who had been a fixture at Abramson's company for as long as Jake could remember.

"I'm sorry that you have to stay by yourself here, Clarence," Jake said as he pulled on his overcoat. "I really wish you could have come to the Christmas party this year."

"Oh no sir," the old man replied. "I volunteered to work tonight so some of the younger ones could go party. An old man like me can do without those things. Lucille promised me that she'd have a hot cup of cider waiting for me in the morning and that's all the partying these old bones need!"

They chuckled together as Jake bid the old man good-night and stepped out into the parking garage. The first serious promise of winter was coming down off of the Rockies and Jake shivered a bit as he fumbled for the keys of his Lexus while he walked.

Then, suddenly, just as he looked up he saw a figure standing by the driver's door of his car. It was a large man, a man he didn't recognize. For a moment Jake froze in his tracks considering his options when the man spoke, "Are you Jake Abramson?"

"Yes, and who are you?"

"That's not your concern. I have my orders, you'll come with me."

For a moment Jake's eyes darted around the vacant parking spaces and then he heard the sound of tires coming up the ramp. He thought of calling out to Clarence but didn't want to put the old man in danger. Perhaps he could talk his way out of the situation. "And why should I go with you? I don't even know you and if you force me to go with you the law will consider it kidnapping." The man by the car door didn't flinch at all.

"You'll never get away with it, they're all expecting me at the company Christmas party in just a matter of minutes."

"Well, I guess they'll be disappointed now, won't they?" , the man said as a large black Lincoln Towncar pulled up beside him. "Quit your whimpering and get in the car!"

"I won't do it! My company won't pay a penny of ransom..."

"I've heard enough of your stalling. Either you get in that car or we will make sure that you do because your brother says he's had enough!"

So that was it. It was all Harry's plan. Jake knew that someday he was probably going to pay for the manner in which he'd taken over the rights and privileges of his brother. For a moment he thought of running but realized that would be futile so he finally decided that going along with the plan, at least temporarily, was probably his wisest course of action. Jake Abramson slid into the open door into the huge back seat.

As the car came down from the ramp to the street level Jake asked the men sitting on either side of him, "Where are we going? Where are you taking me?", but they remained silent in the darkness. For 45 minutes the drove through the darkened streets and out toward the west of town, up into the desolate foothills. Eventually they turned off of the main road and went up a smaller lane that appeared to be a long, winding driveway. At the end of the drive there was a large house sitting very much by itself against the tall trees, looking back over the valley where the city of Denver shimmered in the crisp December air.

The Towncar pulled up through the heavy gate and up to the front door. At the circle in front of the house the driver stopped the vehicle and one of the men gruffly said, "Get out of the car." Jake decided he was not going to argue with any of the four of them and slid out of the seat into the night air.

Another man simply said, "Let's go in," and they mounted the brick steps up to the large double doors. They stepped in to a large, bright entryway that opened to a darkened great room on the right. A high, vaulted ceiling extended far above them as they stepped in. Jake could see a huge Christmas tree lit in the center of the room and there was a man standing a bit behind the branches.

There, by the tree, stood Harry, imposing, graying. The older brother broke the silence as he finally spoke. "Jake, 20 years ago you cheated me out of all that was rightfully mine. For years I looked forward to the day when I could rip you apart limb from limb," he said as he slowly stepped toward his younger brother. "You can thank your lucky stars that we didn't have this meeting years ago." Harry saw that there was a small, shiny, dark object in his brother's right hand.

"I was a young man, wild, and out of control. I guess God just kept us distant 'cause I'd surely have torn you apart with my bare hands. But," he continued, "I'm older now. I have a family and I don't have enough years left to let my hatred eat me up anymore. I've got to end this thing once and for all."

The older brother stepped forward and extended the metallic object in his hand, "Jake, I've got a present for you."

It was a small package, neatly wrapped in a foil paper with a dark aluminum bow on the one end. "I hope you'll accept it and I'd like to introduce you to my kids. I've also got some gifts for your wife and kids and I'd hope I could give them to them myself.

"I hope you don't mind, but I've taken the liberty to tell Dad that we're all going to have Christmas here together, o.k?"

*And Esau ran to meet him,
and embraced him,
and fell on his neck,
and kissed him,
and they wept.*

- Genesis 33:4