



CASE STUDY#3: CRYSTAL (Step Daughter)

Crystal was the beautiful daughter of an equally attractive young (34 year old) mother. Her step-father was an elderly gentleman from another culture whose background was well founded in strictness/discipline and work ethic. Her mother was much different, filling her days with horseback riding, tennis and interior decorating. Their home was a mansion of good taste and a monument to the father's hard work.

Mom came to the parent support group looking for help with Crystal's smart mouth, a boyfriend who was having sex in Crystal's bedroom, failing grades and truancy. (Having sex in a beautiful bedroom trumps Geometry every time!) Mom couldn't convince Dad that the parent support group would help any more than the thousands already spent on private therapists. He wanted to send his wife's offspring off to an expensive residential boarding school. Mom would have no part of this "shirking my parental responsibility" concept.

Crystal was equally resistant spending nights at her boyfriend's house in protest. After four days and nights away, skipping school, she returned for some clothes announcing that she was moving 25 miles away to live with her true love". Mom fell apart at the news and brought the problem to her support group at the next meeting. Suggestions from other parents centered around the general positive benefits of this decision for Mom and step-dad. A little time alone could do wonders for their relationship. Mom's response was "I've always given Crystal everything and now that I've married money I can give her the best of everything!". The group members fell back on the time-tested axiom: "If you let your child choose its own path...it will always lead back to you".

Crystal moved out against her Mother's wishes. Three weeks later a still defiant, but somewhat subdued daughter showed up at Mom's doorstep. At the advice of parent support group people Mom was somewhat cool, at least on the outside, towards her extra mural offspring.

Mom: "What brings you down this way...Are you slumming?"

Crystal: "Not really, I was hoping you wouldn't be here".

Mom: "So you don't need me, just the house?" "What can I give you?"

Crystal: "The only thing that you have that I need is..."

Mom: "Money?"

Crystal: "Na--We've got the cash." (Mom started to imagine the means of it's procurement but then wisely let it go.) Mom: "What do you need?"

Crystal: (As sincere as she had been in months) "Cleaning supplies-you know, Comet, Lysol, PineSol, sponges, rags and towels... oh and Windex. The place is filthy...I just can't stand it anymore."

This event marked a major turning point for both Mother and daughter. Mom realized that many of the values she instilled in her daughter were still there and probably always would be.

Crystal, having lived for a while with her slovenly boyfriend, gained new appreciation for her Mom's strengths and realized, via separation and contrast, that these were also hers.

Updating this story...Eight years later Crystal is happily married to a man she met at work. She is a paralegal for a large firm.

They have decided to forgo raising a family for the time being so he can develop a private law practice that they can work together. Her old boyfriend was killed two years ago in a motorcycle accident. It's not hard to imagine what would have happened to Crystal if they were still together!

ANALYSIS: What can we learn from the pain?

Crystal was caught in the step-parent syndrome. She was five when her biological father exited and "Daddy Warbucks" entered. The corresponding "correction and accommodation" made by Mom could be considered a contributing factor to Crystal's entitlement attitude, but wait, what could have been done differently?

Probably nothing. One of the biggest mistakes parents make is to second guess themselves and thereby give their kids excuses. When the future boss does the hiring she/he doesn't give a rat's rump about any past history or former family dynamics or anything else in the way of pedigree but these attributes are huge:

- (1) Can you be here every day I need you on time?
- (2) Can you get along with your fellow workers?
- (3) Can you make me look good?

People do get divorced...this is not a perfect world. It is better to raise a child in an atmosphere of love than in the midst of a war-zone. The better parents take care of themselves the better they can care for their children. (Now, don't we all feel better after that little exercise in stating the obvious?) But seriously folks...Guilt gets in the way of raising kids. Every time I start to feel sorry for some kid I remember one of the most driven and committed students I ever met. He was student body president, champion caliber track athlete, honor-roll student and gave many hours per week in service to school and community.

One Friday late afternoon, after helping me with clerical tasks, I asked this young man if maybe he might need a ride home since it was approaching the dinner hour. "Naw...I don't go home till about 8:00 at night he said. By then my parents are passed out and I can fix myself something to eat and study in peace". A vice principal who lived on their block confirmed the story. The police are called so often by the neighbors for the drunken brawls between parents that they routinely patrol the street nightly!

This young man had one of the roughest home environments around but yet he succeeded in making school his family and becoming a star in every school-related way.