

The Monkey Dance

Tabbie Eichler

Tabbie Eichler's "The Monkey Dance" stood out due to its strong voice, raw emotion, and unapologetic vulnerability. The story deftly spans several years, and the author is able to speak through the voices of both her childhood and adult selves. With its clear cadence and circular style, it effectively conveys the uncertainty that often envelopes children in unstable environments. What makes the story even more powerful, however, is its endearing and poignant imagery. From sadness and confusion, an appreciation for family and family values emerges. It is safe to say that "The Monkey Dance" will leave you smiling.

The monkey dance. I'd dance in circles while hooting and howling like a monkey. At a young age it was my go-to dance to try to cheer up my crying mother. She would lie there motionless with sunken in eyes and tears streaming down her face, and I couldn't understand why she was so sad. All I knew then was that my father was not how a father should be. All I know now is that my stepfather is more of a father than my biological father ever was, and it shows in my mother's happiness.

I didn't spend a lot of time with my dad growing up. He would either not be home, or I'd be sent to my room to be away from his yelling and abuse of my mom. I would sit in my room while plugging my ears to drown out the yelling. No matter how tightly I held my ears, I'd always jump when I heard something being thrown against the wall. I knew better than to go see what was

+ The Monkey Dance

thrown, but I was always the one to run to my crying, shaking mom to hug her as soon as he left. To me, the normal was a father with a short temper who drank a lot. The normal was yelling at night. The normal was being afraid. The normal was dancing in circles like a monkey trying to comfort my trembling mom.

I'll never forget the day my parents sat my sister and me down on the couch to give us a talk. I was excited, thinking maybe I was going to have a baby brother to play with. I sat there with anticipation of what would be said as the words, "We are going to get a divorce" came out of my father's mouth. I instantly became sad. Although I knew he wasn't a nice man, it's confusing having a dad who is okay with leaving you. It was hard for me to understand abuse, and how the man who's supposed to be a protector could be an abuser. It was hard to grasp the fact that I have a bad dad. However, the change for the better I saw in my mother after my father was out of our lives explained a lot.

Slowly, my mother's fragile body gained healthy weight. I started noticing fewer tears streaming down her face and more smiles. I no longer saw bruises on her. God sent a walking angel into our lives to save my mother and my family. His name is Joel. Joel and my mom were married less than a year after meeting.

I wasn't used to quality time with a dad. I wasn't used to family nights that ended in hugs, "goodnight, I love you more", and smiles. Once Joel was in my life, I had the dad every little girl imagined she'd grow up with. He taught me how to play baseball. He came to every sports game. He taught me the value in character versus materialistic things, and how a husband should treat me one day. He showed me true patience and how to communicate without anger and yelling. He taught me that sitting in my room, anticipating something being thrown against the wall shouldn't be the normal.

Although my biological dad may not be in my life anymore, Joel is more of a dad than he ever was. Blood has nothing to do with it. Joel

The Monkey Dance +

stepped up, saved my family, and has loved me like his own since the first day. Joel will always be my real dad. Because of him, my mom is now dancing with me.

