

He Said, She Said



A Father-Daughter Perspective

Ken Klarfeld
Jasmyn Klarfeld

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Preface

Relationships between parents and their teen-agers are notoriously difficult and often painful. My relationship with my daughter defined the stereotype in many ways; we shouted, we cried, we punished each other, and we loved each other. We survived the misunderstanding and the pain.

As we looked back over the past 20 years and tried to figure out what went wrong, what went right, and what we could have done differently, it became apparent that the stories remembered were different depending on who was telling them. We decided to tell the stories from both points of view. First, the following stories are told as remembered by me, the father, and then by Jasmyn, my daughter.

We hope this book will enlighten teens and parents about the perceptions of both groups, so that they will gain valuable insights leading to the understanding of each other's point of view.

Runaway

Father's Story

While I was on the road for a job, my wife called me at my hotel. Someone had broken into our house and taken our most precious belongings. Lynn was at work when the burglary occurred, and the thieves must have spent quite some time ransacking every corner of the house. Understandably, Lynn was distraught and did not want to spend any time in the house alone, so I returned immediately and started the cleanup. We were fully insured, but the insurance company could do nothing to alleviate the loss of security we felt in our own home. We decided to move once again.

Not wanting to relocate the children to yet another school, we looked only in the local area. We found a huge home across town. The house was large enough for everyone, including Monique, to have his or her own room, But Monique and Jasmyn pleaded to stay together. Not seeing any harm in the arrangement, we agreed. We moved into our new residence, which was only a block from Jasmyn's school.

Jasmyn's grades continued to worsen. Before long she was failing all her subjects and cutting most of her classes. The high school had a self-paced program for troubled teens, and the guidance counselor suggested Jasmyn give it a try. Actually, it was more than a suggestion; it was the only way they would allow Jasmyn to stay in school.

Jasmyn did quite well. The self-paced nature of the program suited her intellect; she was able to go as fast as she liked and was proud of her accomplishments. It seemed things were starting to turn around. She was still smoking and hanging out with the wrong crowd, but we adopted a "one thing at a time" attitude with her. We hoped the worst was behind us. Jasmyn and Lynn continued to get into arguments. It seemed they couldn't be together for more than 15 minutes without a screaming match that ended with Jasmyn being sent to her room. After one such episode, we woke the next morning to find Jasmyn gone.

I called the police and reported her missing. They asked if she had any disciplinary problems, and of course, we had to say yes. They said she was probably a runaway, but they would put her description out to the patrol cars. We were pretty sure she had run away, but there was a lingering doubt. We changed her access code for the alarm system. If she did return when we were out, we would know. Later that day, she tried to get into the house to get some of her clothes. Now we knew for sure.

We talked to her friend Greg in Sacramento. He was a really nice kid and cared about Jasmyn a lot. He did well in school and was pretty responsible. He agreed to meet us with his mom and take us to Jasmyn's boyfriend's house to show us where she was staying. I went to the door and asked the guy who opened the door if she was there. "No way," he said. "I haven't seen her for a long time."

We were pretty sure she was there but not positive. As we were leaving, the boyfriend's mother came home and angrily told us, "Jasmyn isn't here; I would have known."

What a joke. The house was a mess; she was obviously never there. The children had the run of the house. But we didn't press the issue with her. We talked to a counselor who advised us that since we knew where she was and she was safe, we should take this time as a respite, try to enjoy the harmony in our home, and wait for Jasmyn to come back. The counselor felt sure she would return on her own; after all, she couldn't stay there forever. She would have to come back for clothes, putting us in the driver's seat. We would have more negotiating power if she asked to come back, and we could then set some rules for her to agree. It was the old tough-love scenario, but it sounded good.

We tried to take her advice. A full week went by, and finally we had had enough. "Let's go get her; this is crazy." We assembled a "posse." We stationed a good friend at one corner with her two Great Dane dogs, another friend down at the other end of the street and Lynn in the middle. We all had our cell phones. I then went to the house where she was staying. I knocked on the door and a teenage boy opened the inner door to talk to me through the ragged screen. I told him who I was and asked if my daughter was there. He said he didn't know my daughter. I told him I was coming in to see for myself. He didn't have much choice; I was six feet tall and a very lean 210 pounds. All that was standing between me and confirming my daughter was alive and well was the resemblance of an old screen door and a teenage kid half my size.

I pushed my way in; the house made a pigpen look homey. There was trash everywhere. The sheetrock had large holes from a runaway fist. I could smell urine everywhere. I looked through the house and didn't see Jasmyn. The older kid said, "See asshole, I told ya she ain't here!"

I got close up to his face. Without resorting to any additional dramatics, I said, "I know that you know where my daughter is, and I'll stop at nothing to find her. When I leave here, I'm going to the police and tell them you are hiding her. I'm going to watch you like a hawk." As I talked, his expression changed from cocky to bored to terrified; I convinced him that I wasn't an enemy he wanted to have.

He told me to wait a minute. He went into the back of the house and a minute later came back with Jasmyn in tow. She had been hiding under one

of the endless stacks of laundry. When he saw me he started pleading, "She made me promise not to tell you she was here." He repeatedly apologized. I took my daughter and left.

Daughter's story (Age 14)

Mom-Lynn and I were constantly fighting. I hated being around her and she obviously hated me. I was anxious whenever she was home and tried to stay in my room as much as possible. No matter how hard I tried, she always found something wrong with my chores, my actions, or even my tone of voice. I always felt like I was walking on thin ice and could fall through, without warning or notice, at any moment.

I had a new boyfriend now, a boy named Alan whom I'd met while ditching school. He was sixteen, and his house was really cool. He had two little brothers, ages 14 and 13, and since their mom was gone for days at a time, the boys could do whatever they wanted. I talked to Alan about my problems at home, and after a particularly huge fight with my step-mom, I called to tell him I was running away. I asked if I could stay at his house. He agreed. His house was about fifteen minutes away from mine by car, which neither of us had, and not wanting me to walk the whole way by myself, he agreed to meet me halfway. I waited until my parents were asleep, got dressed, grabbed my steel toed combat boots and a knife, and left. The first half of the walk took about 45 minutes, and when I saw Alan, he looked like he was going to cry.

"I was so worried about you," he said.

Uh-Oh, I thought. I hope he's not gonna get all weak on me now. "Chill," I told him. "I can take care of myself."

We walked to his house and went inside. There were holes all over the walls, and the house was a mess. But there were no adults. I could go a whole day without being screamed at or confronted; I never wanted to go home. One day there was a knock on the door. Adults never came over, and the kids didn't bother to knock. Alan looked at me, scared, and I told him to answer the door while I went to hide in his room. "I'm not here," I reminded him.

From his room, I heard my dad's voice and the sound of arguing. I felt bad for my dad, but knew that things would be even worse between Mom-Lynn and me if I went home now. Then I heard a women's voice that I didn't recognize, and the arguing stopped. I heard the sound of the TV and waited for Alan. After about an hour, he came in. I was still hiding. "What happened?" I asked.

"My mom told your dad that you weren't here. I had to spend some time with her before I came in here so she wouldn't think you were here."

“Your mom’s here? Should I leave?”

“Naw,” he assured me, “she’s leaving tomorrow. Just stay in here and be really quiet.”

Alan’s mom left the next day, and everything was cool for a while. Alan was getting pretty attached to me. “I love you,” he told me one day. “Uh, love you, too,” I said, not wanting to hurt his feelings and knowing he expected that response. A couple of days later, my dad was back. I went to go hide, and this time my dad demanded Alan let him come in and look for me himself. I had hidden in the laundry hamper beside Alan’s dresser and pulled a bunch of clothes on top of me so that it looked like the basket was overflowing. I heard my dad come in and heard him opening and closing the dresser drawers as he searched for me. *Why was he looking in the dresser?* I wondered. *I wasn’t that skinny.* I held my breath. Finally he left the room, I let my breath out but stayed hidden. I heard muffled voices outside the room and a couple of minutes later someone coming back into the room.

“Jasmyn,” Alan called, not knowing where I was hiding. I shook the clothes off and looked at him. My dad was right behind him. I glared at Alan and walked out of the room. “I’m sorry,” he lipped to me, right before he started apologizing to my dad.

We got into my dad’s car, and I expected him to lecture me and tell me how mad he was. He didn’t. He just sighed and told me I was going to live with my mom. Although I’d wanted to live with her for years, I had friends here now, and I would miss Monique. I was happy to go live with my mom, but sad to leave my friends.