

Expansion of a Family

Ever since I could remember, I have been a part of a split household, living with my mom during the week and my dad during the weekend. I have always seen this as being normal but once seeing how other households were organized I figured my situation was not as common as most. Both sides of the family were Mexican, with my mom's family being from Chihuahua and my dad's family being from Guadalajara, meaning that for most of my young life I was mainly exposed to Mexican culture and traditions.

Around the time I was about four or five years old, my mom started to date my now stepdad who is Armenian. Because of his different cultural background, this led me to think at the time that due to him not having the same exposure to the customs and traditions that I was exposed to, we would most likely have nothing in common. However, to my surprise, we had a number of similarities such as our liking of video games, movies, food, soccer teams, and many other things. In addition, we were able to expose one another to things that one of us never would have known we liked without the other person.

An example of this would be my stepdad introducing me to a band called System of a Down, a band that he had grown up listening to and had even gone to some of their concerts. This introduction to the band made me infatuated with almost every one of their albums, so much so that even to this day I listen to them and think of how my stepdad introduced me to them. Besides music and other similar likings, my stepdad had also introduced me to a culture different from my own, with its own customs and traditions. This happened when I first met my stepdad's family at one of his cousin's birthday parties. Even though I was still young and didn't really understand the significance of meeting my stepdad's family for the first time I was still somewhat nervous.

I was nervous that they wouldn't be like my own family and as warm and accepting as they are. I was worried that they wouldn't like me or my mom because of our different cultural upbringings. However, it was quite the opposite of that; they were very welcoming and open-armed, as though I had always been a part of their family. My stepdad's father was almost like a mountain; he was one of the tallest ones there and his handshake was so firm that I couldn't tell the difference between his hand and a rock. But besides his masculine figure, he was still very kind and heartfelt which was evident when I saw the smile on his face when I had just met him. My stepdad's mom was the most sincere and welcoming person that I had met that day; instead of just saying hi and introducing herself she immediately came in to give me a hug, trying her best not to squeeze all the air out of my lungs. In addition, I also met my stepdad's sister who was just like my other tías, very warm and caring and just trying to figure out everything about me and what I like. After my stepdad's family had finished saying their hellos they introduced me to everyone there and even they were all very polite and friendly.

Being at that party was my first real experience of being truly exposed to Armenian culture/traditions, and even though there were some differences to my own culture, I was surprised to see the similarities between our cultures. One such similarity is our food, where Mexicans use tortillas to eat with most food, Armenians use lavash to eat with some foods. Another similarity is how many of my stepdad's family members were soccer fans, reminding me of all the soccer fans in my own family.

Yet besides food, sports, and the other similarities between our cultures, one thing that was for sure was how much my stepdad's family cared for one another, something I had always seen in my own family. This was evident when one of the kids at the party hurt themselves, leading everyone surrounding the kid to get up from their seats to check if the kid was ok. This

warmth and compassion for one another led me to believe that even though my stepdad had a different upbringing and was exposed to a different culture, he and his family had the same virtues and goodness that my family possessed, and it was then that I knew that the addition of my stepdad's family to my own family was meant to be.

Even today I look back and try to imagine what my life would have been If my mom would have never met or married my stepdad and every time I do so I come to the same conclusion, I can't. I can't because my stepdad and his family have been a part of my life for the majority of the years I have been alive, and I cannot fathom what my life would be like without them. In fact, they often say the same thing, how they could not perceive any other life without me or my family. My stepdad's family also mention how even they were nervous to meet me for the first time, scared to think that if they do anything wrong that I would end up not liking them. But considering the amazing and remarkable people they are, I find that now and even then impossible. I am so glad to have my stepdad and his family a part of my life, even though we have had our ups and downs I could never have it any other way. I owe part of the reason I am the man I am today to them because they have had such an impact on my life that I have no idea who I would be without them. Because of my stepdad I now have two wonderful siblings who may annoy and torture me from time to time, but am glad to be a part of my life and to be a part of their lives. Even though I have much to teach them I can't wait to show them the culture and traditions that I had grown up with. Both Mexican and Armenian.