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# Psychology and Family Law

## Lessons I Learned from My Parents

### Part IV of a Series

By Mark Baer, Esq.



As I mentioned in my last article from this series, my father “divorced” me after I refused to completely and permanently sever all ties with my mother. The lesson I learned on that occasion was that parents are ready, willing and able to use their adult children as pawns, just as they do with minor children.

The next lesson I learned was that the concept of the “evil stepmother” developed for good reason. Unfortunately, there is an inherent conflict of interest between a new spouse and children from a prior marriage or relationship. It is not uncommon for a new spouse to resent the fact that some of their spouse’s income and/or assets are being used to support children from prior marriages or relationships, especially once they reach the age of majority. After all, a parent is not legally obligated to provide financial support for their adult children, and doing so depletes funds that would otherwise have been available to them and their family. In California, where income earned from work is considered community property, the new spouse may well object to “their” money being used to support the other spouse’s children with another partner.

As I mentioned before, my father married our mother’s childhood friend. What I did not mention was that she had already been married several times, and already had a child, a daughter, from her first marriage. When she subsequently remarried, and prior to her marrying my father, her husband du jour adopted her daughter. Unfortunately, this also tended to coincide with her husband’s relationship with his children from prior marriages coming to an end. We knew this information because she was our mother’s long-time friend and our respective families used to take trips together. In fact, in or about 1985, her most recent ex-husband had told me that he was desperately trying to re-establish the relationship with his children that had been destroyed during his marriage to my now-stepmother. Unfortunately, this man was also dying of cancer at that time and did not

live long enough to see any reunion with his children.

This established pattern is relevant because the same dynamics played out after our father had married this woman. I was not only financially cut off by the spring of my first year in college, but I was cut off in every which way. Once I refused to sever ties with my mother, my father stopped taking my calls. Since my stepmother was then also working as his secretary, I wasn’t even sure if she was telling him when I called. Unfortunately, whether I called my father at home or work, she would answer the call. She would always tell me that he did not want to talk to me.

When I returned “home” after my freshman year, I decided that I should go to his medical office and communicate with him in person. That turned out to be a very bad decision because it became clear that he really did not want to have anything to do with me. In fact, while his patients were waiting in the lobby, he physically threw me out and told me never to return. The next thing I knew, they had filed a restraining order against me. The “facts” set forth in that restraining order were completely fabricated, including the allegation that I had had a baseball bat and threatened them with it. The only true allegation was the fact that I had entered my father’s office on that particular day and time. I am the least violent person I know and most certainly did not bring a baseball bat into his office or otherwise threaten anyone.

Sadly, the next lesson my father taught me was that people are willing to perjure themselves in court documents in order to obtain their desired results. My mother and her fiancé had told me that it made no sense to oppose their effort to obtain the restraining order because my father clearly didn’t want to see me. They said that if someone wants a restraining order, they can easily obtain one, and that as long as I kept my distance from them, I wouldn’t violate any such order. After having practiced law for over 23 years, I completely disagree with that advice. If people are willing to perjure themselves in an effort to obtain the order, what makes anyone think they wouldn’t perjure themselves to later claim that it had been violated?

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