A Life Split Down the Middle

Had the events of March, 2005 not happened, I would not be where I am today. Throughout the entire divorce process, my parents attempted to keep my childhood as "normal" as possible, and, in my opinion, they accomplished this. At this point in my life, what was more important than eating macaroni and cheese while watching *SpongeBob SquarePants*? To be frank, as a 7-year-old, I thought I knew what was going on but I really did not. I knew that "divorce" meant my parents not being married anymore. What I did not know was that it would the splitting apart of a family and having to function between two homes every week. If I had been older, I would have been able to make the choice as to which parent I would legally live with, but being at such a young age, I was just told that from now on I would now being seeing my dad on Mondays, Thursdays, and every other weekend. Along with now seeing my father less often, being at such a young age I felt like an outcast. Friends going through this same issue were few and far between. Now, in 2015, marriages have had their trial, families have grown apart, and the media has made it far easier to connect with others. As an 18-year-old, I am now able to answer my 10-year-long question "What are the effects of divorce on children?" I am attempting to answer this question not only to solidify how I felt but also to assess how others feel.

When we were to find a topic to research, I did not choose this one at first. My original research question was not thought-provoking enough to elaborate on in 1,500-2,000 words. I
then chose to find something else that was relevant in my life and that I could, in a way, find too much to expand upon. That is how I thought of the effects of divorce on children. It is something that has always and will always effect me. As instructed by my professor, I wanted to turn to scholarly articles or sources that could be trusted; something from psychologists or those who have went through the same thing. Of course, on the first day of research in class found several relevant sources and one that is scholarly and peer-reviewed. And what I did not do? Save it or e-mail it to myself for further review. What else was I not able to do? Find them again later that night. At this point, I had to completely start over from step one and remember to save everything I found. A few days later, I embarked on this research journey and was ecstatic at what I had found.

With this newfound confidence in my research question, I clicked away on my laptop and stumbled into the ProQuest database. Tired and groggy as it was 11:08 p.m., I typed in "effects of divorce on children." An annoyed feeling began to come over me as I scrolled through each source that came up. Nothing captured my attention and all of the sources began to look the same. This could also be due to the heaviness my eyes felt. I began to scroll up and down on the browser really fast just to stay awake and because boredom was now upon me. Nearing the bottom of the page I saw in all capital letters "PDF" and for some reason this stood out to me. Not knowing what else to do at this point, I clicked on it. What was I to lose? As I read through, I was delighted at the information I found. Trumpets began to go off in my head. I found a worthy source. A doctor and child development specialist wrote "Focus on Kids: The Effects of Divorce on Children." This source provided me facts from the child development specialist, Karen DeBord, Ph.D. DeBord took into account every age group strayed away from summing up infants through pre-teens into one. I skimmed through the section that focused on children in
their early elementary years and I read "begins to understand what a divorce is. Understands that her or his parents won’t live together anymore and that they may not love each other as before" (DeBord). No other words could sum up what I had felt at that age. I then read the preteen and adolescent category because that was the age my brother was at the time too. I really read into detail with this because my brother seemed to deal with this situation harder than I did. As I read through, a few sentences really hit me hard. "Tries to take control over family. Shows extreme behavior (good and bad) (DeBord). If there was any way to describe the way my brother reacted, it was this. When he was happy, he was overwhelming. And when he felt angry, he had a way of really overreacting and trying to control what we all did. This was all I needed to read in order know that this source would be one of the best that I could find.

The next few days, as I researched, I struggled to find information that was not new to me and often just gave up on research each time. Four days after finding my first source I decided not to give up this time. Just to double-check, I went to the course blog site to find just what types of sources my professor wanted us to have so I could ensure I was not missing anything. I read that I needed a popular source so I thought that possibly a psychology news website would work because I had read through one for a project in high school. I know that I should have turned to Wayne State's library website for this but I thought I would just try Google. So in the search bar I typed in "effects of divorce on children psychology." The first option that popped up on the screen was from "Psychology Today". BAM! I found my popular source right away. It makes sense that after all the struggling I had done with this project that something finally went right. I happily clicked on the website and got bored with what I was reading until the end of the article. The author, Carl E. Pickhardt, Ph.D., explained that "where the child may have tried to get parents back, the adolescent may try to get back at parents. Where the child felt grief, the
adolescence has a grievance. "If they can't be trusted to stay together and take care of the family, then I need to start relying more on myself." "If they can break their marriage and put themselves first, then I can put myself first too." "If they don't mind hurting me, then I can I don't mind hurting them" (Pickhardt). Growing up in this situation, I felt I had to mature faster than others. Although I fell into the child age group and not so much the adolescent group, I had the same feelings an adolescent would. I relied on myself more and now being an eight-year-old, I was now somehow a support system for my mom when it probably should have been the other way around and I could have cared less about what she was going through. As I read through this article I actually felt very emotional because I felt as though I was finally understood. My parents and brother were all dealing with something emotionally and I kept all of my feelings to myself.

I knew that lastly I needed to come up with something from a book. Through my research with my previous sources I kept on getting ads on the side of my browser and one of them advertised a book called Young People, Divorce, and Youth Ministry which is quite a coincidence that this could have popped up on the browser. Coming from a religious background, making a life-long commitment to someone before God and those closest to you and then getting a divorce do not mix well. Since the divorce, as a family I was now attending two different churches and was split between two different religions; Lutheran and Catholic. When it came to God and my religion, I was now a mess. I decided to research Young People, Divorce, and Youth Ministry on my own and a PDF came up for it so I examined it. Although in reality not much was actually said about religion, I found something the author, Andrew Root, said that I really connected to with my religion. "At first, my mother would arrange not to be home when Dad picked us up and dropped us off, and I was glad. It was uncomfortable for me to be around
them at the same time. I was a different person with each of them; each knew things about me the other didn't... It was obvious that they would not have seen each other if they hadn't had to because of me" (Root, 20). This is how I felt when I went to church with each parent. I was a different person at each church and I connected with God in different ways with my mom and with my dad. As I sat in silence of the third floor of the Undergraduate library, no words could describe what went through in my mind. I wanted to walk around the library and show everyone "look what I just found for my English paper! Read it! Read it!" Obviously I could not do that so I silently had a party in my head because I had just found three sources that successfully helped me answer my research question.

In all honesty, I cannot say my research question will ever be answered because every child goes through something different and no child really every fits to the guidelines and the stages of feeling when their parents divorce. Through my sources I learned more about what can be expected and how to cope with the situation with the help of the powerful minds of the psychologists that constructed these ideas for me. I could not and will not ever be able to fit myself into what each age group feels in each stage of divorce but I now know that I was not alone in this pursuit with my family and that there is no such thing as a "normal" childhood.
Works Cited

