

The Role of Money

“Cami, your father is trying to buy your love.” My mother said this to my 2nd grade self shortly after she left the family home, moving my brother and me to Greenbelt. How was he buying my love? With a monopoly board game.

Money was tight; my mother made my clothes. I remember going to a store like Kohls with my friend Terrie, in 7th grade, to buy my first store-bought dress. I was shamed for spending the money and criticized for buying a flashy dress: navy blue, conservative with military-like buttons. It was the shiny buttons that were flashy.

Money was a weapon to manipulate family members. A power struggle put the sear of money deep in my soul in December of ninth grade. Brother and I spent every weekend at my Dad’s. By ninth grade, my mother had remarried and brought home another daughter. You know what comes next ... I was the built in babysitter. She wanted me to babysit on Friday night and I had to tell my Dad he’d have to come get me on Saturday. “No,” I said, tired of being put between the two of my parents. The argument escalated quickly and my mother asked me to leave and I did.

Dad picked me up. As we drove away, I asked him with tears in my eyes, “am I such a bad person?” He went directly to my Catholic high school which had a small boarding area and dropped me off. A house filled with people I didn’t know; not one friend was there. My new bedroom was a single bed and desk shared with another about 10” x 8. There were partitions every two girls, grouping the 6 high school boarders. Out our door were about 20 elementary school girls sleeping on mini beds in a large room. We all shared an open shower. I was scared yet grateful to have a place that let me keep the same school, where Terrie and I were best friends.

Recently I visited an assisted living facility, shopping for myself. I had a rush of PTSD as I looked at the private spaces, aka apartments, as it reminded me of that night seeing the cold and careless way of housing humans.

Over the last couple weeks, since that encounter, I've connected some feelings about abandonment, being poor, and parenting. I never wanted to be unable to support myself. A misplaced fear of being left uncared for caused all sorts of trauma. I married at 19 because I was unprepared for adulthood. I wonder who was buying love in this relationship.

Having a serious illness, makes one worry about so many things: care giving, financial support, widowhood, and death. It makes me serious about wanting control over the rest of my life.

Money can buy care, but it cannot buy the love of a partner. When my husband and I found each other nearly 40 years ago, we realized that we came from similar economic backgrounds, quite different emotionally, of course. He's always been the normal one. Building off our similar socioeconomic status, has normalized our perspective. It has been a bond that held us close.