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## **Family Configuration**

Within Jeff's family, there is his father, mother, a brother and sister. The birth order of this family is his father who is 62, his mother who is 63, himself at 39, his sister who is 38 and his brother who is 37. He noted that there are 27 months between himself and his brother with his sister in the middle. His father is a retired pastor and his mother is also retired. His sister is a stay at home mom who enjoys crafts and Mary Kay and has her BS degree in business administration. Jeff is a draftsman who works for S&ME in Chattanooga and his brother "Does nothing" according to Jeff. Jeff's parents live in Ohio and Jeff's brother lives with them while Jeff lives in Cleveland TN and his sister in Chattanooga TN.

When asking why his family members left the family, he answered that he went to academy, college, and then married and it was the same for his sister. When he described why his brother left, he was a bit more hesitant. He described that his brother went to academy but then came back home and hasn't really left since.

Some family members that were important to the family was his mom's mom who had cancer and died and his dad's dad who was murdered. His mom's mom was always around. Each summer every kid got a week to go to grandma's house where it was just them and nobody else. She was very handy and made clothes and other things to send to them. She would read books and record them on cassette tape and then send the book and recording to Jeff and his family for them to enjoy. His mom's brother lived with them in Ohio when he went back to school after being a doctor to get a business degree. He lived with them for 2-3 years. He never got married but looked on Jeff and his siblings as his kids since he was their uncle. He would visit Jeff and his siblings when they were at academy and take them to dinner. Jeff noted that he always had a joke and could lighten the mood but was also aware of the professionalism aspect and

appearance. Jeff described that he did not have to prove himself but if he came down to it then he would make it known. One other person that Jeff mentioned was his dad's mom. They did not see her a lot, but she had a presence even if she was not around. She spoke 4 languages and could get by with an additional 2. Although they did not see her a lot, they heard from her quite often. He did mention that it took effort to see her since they lived in Ohio and she lived in Florida. It was interesting to note that that side of the family was the first generation to be born in America.

Jeff said there were no other non-family members that were important to the family so that question does not apply as well as the question of their role.

### **Individual Development**

Jeff mentioned many developmental milestones in his life which included simple ones like crawling, walking, speaking, riding a bike, driving, and buying a car. However, he also mentioned many more that had more significant meaning to him. One of them was reading. He loved reading but read himself nearsighted by 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Before he could read he would flip through the encyclopedia looking at the pictures and obtained a college level reading by the time he was in high school.

The longest Jeff lived anywhere was 3 years so was very cultured and well rounded. He mentioned that "we are the sum of our experiences" and that we "can only process events based on our filter based on our experiences. Although this time moving around was not one specific instance of a milestone for him, he contributes his well balanced and well cultured nature to those years of moving.

Jeff noted that milestones for him are more things that happened with people that he loved or knew. He then talked about how both uncles had major heart surgeries in their 40s. This

really stuck out to him that he had to watch his diet and exercise because it was a real possibility that he can have a heart attack at an early age. His mom's mom had cancer and died the day after he graduated high school. This was another milestone in his life because of the process of grieving. Jeff noted that all of his experiences created a balanced outlook.

Jeff's dad always told Jeff that he was the protector and had to protect the siblings since he was the oldest. He considered that another milestone because it developed in him a degree of protection. Jeff's dad's parents had a rocky relationship and got divorced but then moved back in together when they were older for convenience reason. Then in the fall of 2001, Jeff's grandfather murdered his grandma. This made Jeff's protective nature grow from small to huge. Possibly because of some of these experiences in life, Jeff's strong willed nature and stinker turned to loudness and then anger later in life and Jeff had to learn how to manage it.

When talking through different events in life that related to Erickson's theory of social functioning, I was able to get many examples. For stage one he has trust. When he was young his mom was a stay at home mom. He has a great relationship with both parents and knows if they say something they mean it, so he developed trust. For stage 2 he developed autonomy. He learned that it was okay to just be who he was which was very strong willed. He would be sitting in his highchair with spaghetti playing around when he was supposed to be eating it and his dad would say don't do that and Jeff would look him in the eyes and do it anyways. Of course, he would get disciplined for this, but it shows that he was okay being himself. For stage 3 Jeff developed imitative. His parents encouraged lots of outside time in a structured and safe environment. They wanted them to safely explore and figure out what they want to do and be who they were and be creative and use imagination. His parents got him is first beginners drafting set when he was 7 that was made for kids but didn't realize he would end up becoming a

draftsman. They would always tell him, “be content but not complacent”. For stage 4 Jeff developed inferiority because he questioned a lot. When he was 9-10, he was homeschooled. He knew he had to get work done and then was free the rest of the day. There were lots of kids to play with on the street after he got his school done. However, then they moved to Ohio and went to a one room church school. The school really struggled and almost closed. Jeff mentioned a time at one point it was just him and his siblings in the school. His mom became the teacher of the school and the kids went from free exploring time to traditional set up that homeschool didn't provide. There weren't very many kids in the neighborhood so Jeff spent a lot of time hanging out in the woods with just himself or with one other boy. He became very introverted because of changes and lack of friends and he began to question a lot of things in life. He also had a false perception of academy and remembers thinking, “how can you be lonely at academy with that many people around”. However, then he went to academy and realized that it was very possible. He had lots of questioning and doubt whether he could make it in the world or not because of all the changes and the severity of the changes. For stage 5, Jeff developed identity. He finally found what he wanted to do in life. In high school he wanted to do the social sciences because he could fudge and pass easily. However, in his third or fourth year of college had switched from slacking on everything to more motivated concrete subjects like math and architecture and drafting and ended up hating the social sciences because they could not give him concrete answers. He was able to find who he was meant to be. He says that he likes the concrete subjects because anyone can defend  $2+2=4$  but you can't defend something that is different for everyone such as in social sciences. For stage 6 Jeff developed intimacy. He had many girlfriends and eventually married and had kids. Jeff has not reached stage seven or eight or Erikson's eight stages of development.

As Jeff has grown, he has gone through all the stages of Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Starting with sensorimotor, moving through preoperational into concrete operational and finally to formal operations. Jeff is definitely in the formal operations stage now because he is very theoretical and hypothetical in his thinking but also able to strategize and plan. He is very perceptive and able to view many different opinions.

When assessing Jeff and talking through moral development I found that he is in multiple levels of Kohlberg's Theory. He expressed that he feels differently about different situations and things that come up. For instance, in the family he grew up in, he had to wear slacks to church. Once he tried to wear black jeans that looked nicer than his slacks but got told to change because wearing slacks was expected within the family. So, in this situation he would be in the preconventional stage. However, other situations such as going to church he would be placed in the conventional stage because a large part of why he goes to church is because of social expectations. Lastly, with the postconventional stage, Jeff has set up rules and principles for his own children based on what he feels is right and ethical. This would place him in the last stage because he is decided on his moral decisions and what he is going to enforce in this aspect.

### **Family Organization**

Jeff said he would describe the bond between him and his parents as a good bond. He has always been blessed by them. He mentioned that they were both very helpful. His mom made it a point to help whenever they could. An example of this is when his mom drove 2.5hr to academy every Sunday to sit with Jeff and make him do his back assignments. Another example was when his dad was on school board and would come to academy on the days of board meetings and spend any extra time hanging out with them. He would stay for supper, rec, and would spend the night in Jeff's room. He would sit and play games or talk with Jeff and his friends. His siblings,

however, have a stressed relationship with both parents. He did not want to go into detail about the specific differences, but he did say their relationship was stressed.

From my time getting to know Jeff and how he was raised, I would say his parents had an authoritative parenting style. They made sure their kids had outdoor time but also made sure they were responsible and well balanced. Kids knew they had to pay attention and listen to instruction or else they would get in trouble. A story that illustrated this was when Jeff was describing to me how their days were when he was homeschooled. His mom would be very supportive of making sure the homework got done but also wasn't afraid to tell him or his friends that he could not play because his homework was not done yet.

The parenting techniques of this family, as it relates to the Learning Theory, were very positive and included making sure the kids were well balanced and well exposed to many different cultures and societies. The children learned to be very observant of assessing a situation and knowing what to do to keep the situation calm. This family mostly used operant conditioning within their parenting style as well as positive reinforcement, however negative reinforcement was used at times. Punishment was to be expected if the rules were not followed, but there was no evidence of any child abuse. The kids knew that if they did not do as their parents asked or what they knew was expected from them such as cleaning their room, doing chores around the house, or lying, not only would the parents be disappointed with the kids, but there was sure to a punishment that could be more chores, less play time, a spanking, or time out.

When it relates to power within the family and who held the most and the least, the kids knew they could not play one parent against the other. If one parent said no, they were not to go to the other and try and get a difference response. If this happened, there was sure punishment for that. As far as power within the family, decisions were always made together as a family, but

the kids had the least power. Their parents would tell them, “this is not a democracy this is a dictatorship. Mom is dictators 1 and dad is dictator 2”. The parents would say this when there was discussion of going somewhere and, since there were three kids, they would vote three against two. Although the children were included within the decision-making process, the parents had the last say and could not be out voted.

### **Marital Relationship**

Jeff’s parent’s marital relationship was good. They were always there for each other no matter what. There was no divorce, infidelity, alcoholism, conflict, physical or psychological abuse within the relationship. They were always there to help each other out in whatever way they needed to and were very supportive of each other. Jeff never really thought about how his parents expressed love to each other and didn’t pay attention to it. After thinking for a while, he said that they were very helpful towards each other. They showed appropriate affection in front of the kids and out in public. Words of affirmation were used quite often to boost one another. They would get each other intentional gifts or acts of service like washing the dishes, helping to cook, and other things like that. One last thing that was mentioned was spending quality time with each other. They were often found playing games after the kids went to bed or just talking with each other.

When asked how and why his parents argued and how they were able to get over it, Jeff thought for a minute. He then said that he was sure his parents had disagreements and challenges, but they were never done in front of the kids. They would always discuss something and figure out how to get on the same page before talking to the kids about it so that they could support each other.



After the kids went to bed the parents could be heard playing games with each other or just talking and spending time with each other. They genuinely loved each other and wanted to be there for each other. When Jeff's mom's mom had cancer, his dad was always there for her supporting her and making sure she had everything she needed to get through this hard time and when she passed away, he was there to physically hold her up and support her. Likewise, when Jeff's dad's mom was murdered, this was a very hard time as well. When they went up to clean out her house, Jeff's dad physically could not go into the room where she was murdered. So Jeff's mom was supportive and held him up and offered to clean out that room and bring stuff out so he could sort through it but not in that room. It was a very loving and nurturing attitude towards each other

Some lessons that Jeff learned from being a kid in his family was that the parents wanted the kids need to be independent so that if something happens to parents they could survive and thrive. Some positive things that were learned is to support each other and always have someone there to share and get support from because life is what you make out of it. Some of the negative things that Jeff noticed was that it wasn't really what he expected marriage to be. Jeff placed high in objective services like a police officer but never pursued those careers because he knew the stress and everything that those careers put on a family. He knew he wanted a family. Having grown up in the environment he did, his perception of what it was going to be like didn't match what it actually was. His parents made it look so easy and smooth. Jeff mentioned that, "if I can be half the parent I saw them being, I would take that as a huge complement". He really admired his parents.

### **Family Communication Processes**

The parents were intentional about discussing things between them before talking to kids about it so the kids couldn't say oh, but he said, or she said. Overall there was very good communication growing up within the family. Jeff talks to his parents the most out of all the kids. He mentioned that his sister and brother chose to be left out of communication with the family later on in life, especially with dad. However, even with the falling out of his siblings, Jeff has really good communication with his parents.

Every situation depended on who or what was involved. Nobody in his family tries to hide from discussing feelings and in hard times they grieve together. The parents made sure there was an environment of no shunning for any feelings. There were not any subjects or emotions that were not allowed within conversations and discussions. Crying is acceptable and encouraged because it is a release. Jeff had to be careful with anger because he had a temper when he was younger. Family members were allowed to not be happy with the situation and they had the right to be upset with any situation. However, how you take that anger or frustration out on someone else especially if they aren't involved in the situation was seen as unacceptable. Acting out because of rage is not accepted either. Jeff disclosed that he had horrible temper when he was a kid and he had to learn to manage anger and temper. His parents were accepting of everyone but made sure in their family that guidelines were put up for discussions and situations. Jeff and his mom are very perceptive about everything and can walk into a situation and feel the situation out which helped them judge what needed to be done to deescalate or improve the situation. When discussion things if the family wanted someone's opinion they would share it, if not, that is okay, and they would just listen. There was no condemnation either way.

### **The Family Context**

The way that Jeff's family earned their income was that his dad was a pastor. His mom was a stay at home mom but also stepped into the teacher role to provide an education for the kid. They never struggled with money severely but had to be wise about how it was spent.

Jeff's parents intentionally didn't raise the family in an Adventist neighborhood because they wanted the family to be well balanced. They were as good of friends with non-Adventist as those who were Adventist. They accepted everyone and didn't hold strong biases about anyone. Since Jeff's family moved quite a bit, they were very accustomed to many different cultures and racial and ethnic groups and were accepting of everyone. The only place that was mentioned that Jeff's parents held in the community, church, or business was that Jeff's dad was a church pastor at several churches.

There have been many deaths within his family, both of Jeff's grandparents are not alive as well as some special aunts and uncles. However, one of the hardest losses that Jeff mentioned was the death of grandmother by murder. He was hesitant to share what happened but wanted me to understand how hard it was for him. His grandparents were divorced but living together and one night, Jeff's grandpa slit his grandmas throat in bed. Jeff's grandpa got put in jail but this left the family hurting and questioning many things. When they went to clean out her house, he described her bedroom as being a pool of blood. Jeff and his mom had to physically scrape a pool of blood off the floor to get the room clean. While he was more focused on sharing how his parents dealt with the situation, I noticed that this was difficult for Jeff to share.

There are no major family stories, myths, heroes, or heroines except for the story of the murder which was already explained in a previous section. There is no significant emotional cut-off from either the maternal or paternal side. There are no serious unresolved intergenerational family issues. And there were no outside events or influences that were draining the resources of

this family. When asked how the family made use of the community resources, Jeff said that this question also did not apply because they did not use community resources.

### **Family Strengths**

When asking what holds the family together and helps the family thrive and go on, Jeff thought for a moment and then answered cautiously but confidently. Holding on to Jesus, willingness to work together and love were the main things that helped the family thrive and go on. Jeff also said that there were no significant environmental advantages accessible to the family. Some psychological strengths that were demonstrated within the family was emotional strength, cognitive strength, helping each other through hard times, lifting each other up or toning each other down, and motivating each other.

### **Conclusions**

Throughout my time talking with Jeff, I learned many things about him that I had not previously known. His family was overall a very stable family that was able to always get back to homeostasis. When they have had deaths in the family, they grieve together and are able to work through it together to get back to “normal”. Within the family there are the parental subsystem and the sibling subsystem. I would also consider the grandparents a subsystem and together they made up a system. A boundary that was put in place was that the parents would discuss situations and decisions before talking to the kids about it so that the parents were already on the same page. I found that there was a lot of output to support the church and other people but the only input I found was from each other and friends around them. There was use of positive feedback especially when Jeff’s mom would travel to his academy and help him focus on making up back work so that he could pass and graduate. Every day there was new experiences and each place they moved to provide another culture to get use to. Because of this,

the family had much differentiation. At the same time, the family does realize that equifinality exists and is okay. While certain individuals in the family had a tendency towards entropy, this was more because of age and health problems rather than a family system failing. Moreover, the family as a whole had negative entropy and became stronger as a family and they have learned many valuable lessons along the way.