

July 9th, 2013

Dear Mom and Dad,

I don't really know exactly how to say this, but I'm going to try. I would like to establish some clear boundaries between us so we can address problems instead of just avoiding them and pretending they aren't there.

I love you both very, very much.

I have the impression that you guys believe that by me moving out, I wanted to disown my family in some way, which is not at all what I wanted.

You presented me with two options a year ago--move out or transfer to Bob Jones University. You prayed over me and said you wanted to entrust me to God to make the right decision. I honestly sought God's will for my life, and sensed Him leading me to stay here at UCCS and become more independent. You had released me to God--but didn't trust me to actually follow Him without your input or the pastors'. You didn't seem to believe that God would actually speak to me--you acted as if God could only tell Dad what to do with me instead of telling me directly.

The constant barrage of text messages and visits and emails and phone calls I received from you and spiritual leaders, telling me I had chosen the wrong path and pushing me to reconsider, overwhelmed me last fall. I wanted so badly for you both to believe in me, to be proud of my new independence and willingness to support myself, for you to see how I was trying to follow God.

I don't think you will ever understand how much it crushed me to be at this crisis of faith where the will of my parents and God's will seemed to diverge and I had to choose whom I would please. This is why I finally cut off communication between us for two weeks last December. But not talking to you hurt more than letting your barrage of disapproval wear away at me.

More than anything, I'd like to be able to hang out with you all--to laugh with you and joke with you. I was telling Kat the other day how Dad used to call me silly nicknames growing up. She was asking me why my blog is EloDeNorjeles, and I explained how Dad used to call me that and BeBuggyWuggy and Leondra. Remember when you used to call me your sunshine? When I drove to the Thorn this Easter with Cynthia Barram and Elraen and we passed by the office, I told them about Dad telling Mel the UPS guy about singing "You're so vain" at Dr. Albert and they laughed a lot. But we don't joke that much as a family anymore, and haven't for the last several years, well before I moved out. I really miss that. I miss Dad when he was happier, making up treasure hunts for us and painting gold X's on the ground with spray paint.

Before his car accident, you were both still really cautious and protective of me. But afterward, I watched Dad's fear of losing control spiral and become so much worse. I remember watching our little family almost fall apart when we lived on Log Hill. How Dad blamed Mom for all the problems we'd had moving to Western Colorado and he forgot he'd wanted to move there, too, when we first visited when I was five. I remember how angry and depressed Dad got after we moved to Dallas, and how I'd hoped so much that his working there in a clinic would solve things. I remember how Dad stormed out and drove away just before our vacation to Santa Fe in October 2004, and how I wondered if he'd come back or leave us. Over time, I feel like you have squashed Mom's spirit and playfulness, Dad, with your anger and wanting to orchestrate the world around you. I feel like I've watched Mom's little girl heart die inside just to try to please you. Remember when I was a little kid and you would both take me to the park together and tease and tickle me? It didn't always used to be like it is now.

By moving out, I only wanted to follow God and to get space from the dysfunctional cycle our family has been spiraling into for years. It doesn't mean I don't care or that I won't help in an emergency. No matter what, you are still my family.

So I moved out to follow God and to separate myself from the cycle--because I didn't want to be crushed--because I wanted to learn what it means to be free in Christ. Free from legalism and free from my own bondage to sin and free from depression and free from self-injury and wanting to pretend to crucify myself. Free from the darkness that had bound me and our family for so long. I had hoped that maybe by freeing myself, eventually I might be able to help you all, also.

I suppose everyone evaluates their childhood when they get to be in their twenties and thinks about what they would do differently with their kids. I have as well. Just like you, Mom, wanted to discipline your children differently than your parents did, I probably will, also. After a lot of thought and research, I think there were several unhealthy tendencies in family discipline in our house. But all parents make mistakes, and I don't think anyone escapes childhood without some traumatic experiences (like the Passion Plays bothering me as a small child). So I don't blame you both necessarily--I know you were both trying to do better for me than either of your parents had done. Dad tried to provide more structure that he felt he lacked growing up, and Mom tried to make discipline make more sense than her parents did.

I know I wasn't a perfect child, either. There were times you must have wondered what on earth you did to get some creature like me. (hee-hee) A lot of my pent-up anger and hatred was part of my spiritual struggles with things I have only more fully dealt with recently. Mom, I am still very, very sorry for that time I told you I hated you when I was nine. I was intensely frustrated with myself and with you at the time, and you know I didn't mean it. Looking back, I wish I could have told you what was going on in my heart and mind then that I couldn't put into words.

To come back to our present discussion, though, I really want to have a healthier relationship with you. But I DO want it to be a relationship--I don't want to cut you out of my life. So I'm going to try to mutually establish a few boundaries with you both so that we can hopefully clear up some of the misunderstandings and issues.

1.) We need to discuss when you guys visit me. You kind of drop by whenever--at campus, at work, at my apartment--often with little or no warning.

Just saying, it's kind of weird for Dad to park at a stop sign near my work and jump out in the middle of the road in front of my car. I appreciated him changing the air filter in my car, but at the same time, he was preventing me running an errand for my boss.

Also, it's a little odd for you guys to drive by my apartment complex and check and see if my car is there to determine if I slept there last night. I appreciate your concern, but to me that demonstrates a lack of trust. I see that you and Pastor Jeff (from my last conversation with him) seem to think I've lost my morals and started sleeping around with random people, which is not the case. If you're that curious, I'm still very much a virgin.

I want you both to feel confident in how you have raised me--that I will make wise choices as best I can. Sure, I'll mess up sometimes, everyone does. But I need you to believe that you have made me a responsible, independent adult who can take care of herself.

On a similar note: if anyone else who I wasn't related to followed me around the way you guys do (leaving me random sermon CDs in my bicycle sidebags when I'm in class, etc), it would be considered really creepy and stalking. Think about it.

In the future, I'd much prefer that you let me know ahead of time if you're going to stop by my workplace and allow me to be able to tell you if it's a good time or not for a visit, or that we plan a family outing together like dinner or a movie or the zoo. This way, we can spend time together instead of random visits where it feels like you're checking up on me.

2.) We need to make all financial transactions very clear. Finances between us have been muddled ever since you emptied the money market account I had been using for college expenses. I'm still unclear about how the account got emptied last fall after I bought my car--the accounting didn't make sense to me. It would be very helpful for all of us in the future if we separated out my money from your money and gifts from debts.

When you told me what I owe you the other week, I was surprised to find several items on the list that I had thought were gifts, not something to pay you back for later. For budgeting purposes, I really need to know ahead of time if I need to pay you back for something before accepting it, not months later. For the same reason, I want to pay you a reasonable price for the wooden dresser you wanted to bring me, so that it's settled and you won't feel like I used you later.

The financial aid I am going to receive for this next school year should be enough to cover my credit card debts and other personal debts and debt to you completely, and I want to be on good standing for budgeting this next year, so please help me in establishing this. If you honestly want to bring me random groceries or send me books in the mail, that's great and I appreciate it, but I need to know very clearly if it's something you are expecting to be repaid for so I can determine if I have the money to accept it.

For instance, when Dad paid for the other half of my CV boot to be fixed at the repair shop without telling me about it until it was done, that was very nice and helpful, but it added to the debt I will have to pay later anyway, even though it put me ahead on car repairs. I need to be able to plan these things out well in advance.

For this reason, I am not comfortable with accepting a plane ticket to Dallas from you for when I go to the church conference end of July, because although you seem to indicate this is a gift now, I would rather not feel like I owe you for it later. I really want to make my own way and support myself, and I want you to be proud of me for being self-reliant.

3.) I'd really rather not discuss Bob Jones University or attending Grace Bible Church every time I see you. It becomes exhausting to rehash the same things over and over. I am interested in having a relationship with Mom, Dad, Olivia, and Will, not a university or even a church. We may always disagree on these issues, but I would appreciate it so much if you would respect the choices I have made about them, as I believe them to be the right choices for me. I would love it if you could be proud that you have an independent daughter who thinks for herself, takes care of herself, and follows what she truly believes Jesus is leading her to do. I would much rather just sit and joke with you and enjoy life with you all rather than discuss points of disagreement.

Please help me in establishing these boundaries as I really want to heal our relationship and make it a healthier one. I want to try to fix these things now so that we don't need to cut off contact to make our relationship healthier.

I really want to include you in my life and let you know what I'm doing, like where I'm going or when I'll be out of town, but I can't continue to do that if you try to control every little step I make and don't let me make decisions as an independent adult. I value your wisdom and experience and would love your advice, but I need you to trust me to ultimately make my own decisions and how you have raised me as I follow what God has for me.

Your daughter,

Eleanor