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Family Relationships In *The Best We Could Do*

There are lots of people who cannot have strong relationships with their parents. Some would call others lucky to be able to have the opportunity to connect with their parents. Thi Bui gives information in order for us to recognize that not every relationship with a family will always be pure. My family constantly talks about their childhood memories up until their life now. Although I wasn't around for a majority of what they went through, the repetition of the stories is something I can relate to. As my family brings up old events, I'm able to follow along to things they talk about, and I can connect with them over something so small. Bui journeys through her life allowing her readers to discover how other people from different backgrounds get along with their parents. Sometimes the words and images in *The Best We Could Do* work together to give a visual and understanding. The author, Thi Bui, goes back in the past throughout her life and relates everything to her parents and their struggles, which expresses the theme of relationships between parents and children. These relationships are a mixture of love, curiosity, sadness, etc.

The author's life was never perfect nor was the bond she had with her parents. Thi and her mother would bicker back and forth like any other child would with their parent. She explained that her mother never really expressed any form of emotion to her. Thi wanted to talk

about more important things, but her mother didn't look like that type of person. Thi says, "I suppose for my mother, 'I love you' sticks in the throat" (Bui 38). Her mother seems to be prideful and does not want to show her daughter too much affection because it may make her look weak to the family, but she uses other ways of showing her love which can also lead to her children becoming annoyed. Some of the author's actions and words are similar to her mother's, "I suppose I don't say 'I love you' either" (Bui 38). In this image there's some sarcastic words



from Thi when she asks about the rice. The author and her mother look as if they become annoyed with one another when something doesn't go their way (Bui 38). A child should never have to struggle to love a parent because all of that should come naturally between the two at birth and when they grow older as long as everybody is doing the right thing towards one another. That wasn't something Bui was able to do growing up making her feel

disconnected from them. "Have our parents ever looked at us and felt slightly disappointed?" (Bui 58). No matter what, every child wants to make their parents proud of them in all that they do. If someone hears another person say they're disappointed in the specific individual especially coming from your parents, that will most likely hurt them mentally and physically. That person will think they were not able to please the other and can bring them down drastically. As much as a child doesn't connect with their parent, they are not aware of past events in the parents lives that will not allow them to get close to their children and have a hard time expressing those experiences with them. As young as Thi was she knew that her connections with her parents should've been different to what they actually were.

Parents do their best to not let any bad memories from the past get in the way of their life. Although they may have witnessed some traumatic experiences, it's still hard to just open up and tell somebody what exactly happened. Thi wanted to know more about her father and what turned him into the person he is today. It took her time to come up with the proper things to ask him so she would be able to gather all the information she could. A parent always wants their child to have a better life than they did when they were growing up. Bui describes that certain parts of her father's life were rough and each part somehow tied everything together, "Each of Bô's stories about childhood has a different shape but the same ending" (Bui 100). Looking at a parent's relationship with their own parent can give an individual an idea of how they treat their own kids. Bô didn't have the world's greatest relationship with his father. His mother, on the other hand showed a sense of compassion to her son. Children should not have to witness any type of abuse in their household growing up. Bô showed more sympathy for his mother because she would go the extra mile to do anything for him. His father would lash out towards his mother



and Bô, " One night Bô watched as his father beat his mother badly and threw her out" (Bui 110). All of the horrifying conditions Thi's father was put through is what made him become the "heartless" person he is. The tears in Bô's eyes show a look of sadness and heartache because due to the actions from his father Bô never seen his mother anymore (Bui 110). Those small events can lead to why Bô's connections with his children aren't so great. Thi noticed when Bô opened up about his life stories he was

just as weak and scared as she was in some parts of her life, “I had no idea that the terror I felt



was only the long shadow of his own” (Bui 129). Even if her father showed no type of remorse there were parts of his life that made him grow his tough skin. The darkness of her father's shadow paints a picture that there's always going to be a dark past behind some people and Thi wasn't really aware of what real terror felt like (Bui 129).

Parents can bump heads with their child every single day, but there will always be a time in someone's life where they decide to open up and just talk which can improve relationships. Although Thi and her parents didn't communicate that well, she was able to get a few words out of them and carry small talk for the time they spent together.

Thi would sit and talk to Má about what her life used to be like back then when she was growing up to help her figure out missing pieces to her curiosity. There is only so much a parent could discuss with their children before they begin to ask too many questions. Thi wanted to be serious with her mother, but her mother wanted to discuss other matters, “Má, always the



practical one, would rather we laughed more or went shopping together” (Bui 37). As Thi talks to her mother, the picture of the boat in the ocean shows that there was a journey they went on to get somewhere (Bui 37). Sometimes repeating stories over and over again may tire a person out due to how many times it's been said. Thi grew anxious in wanting to learn more about her Má's past life but had trouble getting certain parts out, “Maybe Má felt judgement coming

from me, or maybe she felt uncomfortable taking to our family about her former life” (Bui 136).

Thi’s mother opens up more to her son-in-law, Travis, because she may have a sense of knowledge that she won’t be criticized for specific things she said or did.

By observing Thi’s actions and facial expression she seems to be uninvolved in the conversation with her mom and husband (Bui 136). That can make a child feel

distant from their parent making them think there’s no trust between the relationship they have together. Parents tend to unload a lot of components of their

life to others rather than their own family and children.

A parent should never be ashamed to answer any questions their own children have because if those events would not have occurred everyone’s lives could be better or worse. For example, Má’s focus was on her education when she was younger, but things changed up and she got married (Bui 150-151). In comfortable topics and situations, parents should actually take the time to sit down with their children and open up to create a sturdy foundation of communication.

The way the author interviews her parents gives her the ability to see them think about things

that stand out to them. Thi reflects on her life and what her and her family went through to earn the lives they have, “I keep looking through

the past... tracing our journey in reverse... over the ocean through the war seeking an origin story that will set everything right” (Bui 39-41).

Thi stands out in this image due to the darker shades. There’s more

attention on her and how she pounds off into the distance in a deep

thought (Bui 41). As Thi collects bits and pieces of her parents and their history she comes to see that they lived opposite lives yet they ended up in the same place, “Their worlds were so



different. How did they even meet?” (Bui 151). Comparing who they were then to who they are now makes Thi wonder what made them come together. With that she can connect to each of her parents. All of the communicating and listening shows her parents she really cares about them. It makes it less stressful to get her parents to speak up and talk about good eventful stories. Each segment of the events had various parts of the world during separate time periods that tied it all together.

Every family in the world is different. It can be based off of backgrounds, religion, etc., but in the end your parents or guardian will always be there for you no matter how far you stray away. The love between a parent and child will continue to grow if there's effort put in no matter how hard it is to get across the parent. A child can understand the actions and emotions of their parent through all of the challenges and sacrifices they make to keep them happy even if they aren't considered “perfect”. There is no such thing as a perfect relationship, but there are many ways to be able to build a strong bond so nobody will feel alone. Thi tried to connect with her parents through storytelling of past experiences. Everyone should always have someone to turn to in times of need, and it doesn't always have to be a family member. Being able to hear stories about your parents lives are just simple steps to connect better with them. Every parent wants what's best for their own children. A parent wants to have the chance to give their kids a better life compared to what they had. Thi was able to learn new things which made her feel sympathy for her parents. The lessons learned in *The Best We Could Do* are that there will always be struggles no matter who you are or where you came from. Thi's relationship with her parents wasn't always the best. As she got older her knowledge and wisdom expanded, which made her want to get a better understanding on who her family really is. Keeping stories in a family is a

good thing whether it is good or bad. They can be passed down from generation to generation to keep their spirit alive. Memories are things we should share amongst others to keep the history going, whereas Thi had to dig for information that she wanted to know. The story is a good example of what happens when a family opens up about what steps they had to take to live the life they are living.

Works Cited

Bui, Thi. *The Best We Could Do*. Abrams Books, 2018.