

# Not So Great Gatsby: Thanks, Mom

Dear Nick,

I opened the door and dropped my gym bag in the front hall as always. We had a late basketball practice so I had been at the high school 12 hours before returning home. Although practice was exhausting, I was a sophomore playing varsity and I was excited to be a part of the team. I just wanted to find something to eat and plop myself in front of a TV for a couple of hours before bed. The bag dropped and my thoughts were drowned out by the screams in the family room. My father and mom were shouting at each other and my brothers were right there crying and begging them to stop. My mother called him a bastard and then brushed past me to move upstairs. My dad stood silent for a moment and then, like a bolt, went after my mother and grabbed her ankles, causing her to fall forward up the stairs. Still standing in the doorway, I didn't think, but just reacted. I pulled my father off my mother and pinned him against the wall in the dining room. "Get the hell out of here. If you touch her again, I'll kill you."

"You ungrateful kids will be sorry when I am gone. Maybe I'll just kill myself."

"You won't. You're too much of a coward," I said taunting him, but knowing he would never harm the only thing he cared about: himself. He left. Shortly after that he went to prison for a white-collar crime he committed at his white-collar job. Nothing was the same after that. My father wasn't a violent man, and I have never been in a real fight, but in my mind, that was the day everything changed.

Life was pretty cushy for young Gatsby. We had more than enough, and I got to experience many things most children don't, and for that I am grateful. When the FBI came for him, my father went into self-preservation mode. He surrendered all our assets, leaving my mother completely broke with my brothers and me to care for and no resources to do so. My mother was (and still is) old school. She never finished college and when my folks married, she took to running the house and raising the kids. People in her family didn't get divorced. It just wasn't done.

So, there we were: broke with a home being foreclosed on and no real prospects to earn steady pay. My mother tried to apply for assistance and received terrible treatment from folks who knew her, but didn't know her circumstances. When given the chance to show her compassion, they met her with ridicule instead. My mom got a full-time job with benefits so we'd be okay, but she knew it wasn't enough. So she also went back to school full time to finish her degree, all while dealing with the social and financial fallout from my father's actions of which she was not only noncomplicit, but completely unaware. She finished her teaching degree and worked in the inner city.

She recently retired, and it still makes my head spin to think about everything she accomplished under incredible pressure. She woke up in a terrible Lifetime Channel movie and then had to fight every day to get back to only a fraction of the lifestyle she lived as a housewife. But we are all happy. We all love each other. And we owe it all to our mother.

Mother's Day is a Hallmark holiday created to sell flowers and greeting cards, but as you eat your \$8 eggs at brunch, know that your mother sacrificed quite a bit for you to become the person you are. You may know the story, like I do, but many of you have moms who toiled quietly just so you can have a better life. Be sure to take a moment this weekend to say "I love you, Mom."

Sincerely,

Gatsby