

The Evolution of a Pro-Feminist

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1. Quickening

Grandma sat in the dark of her house, a pressed pink nurse's uniform adorning her. Motionless, she stared into the silence, fingers caressing the worn armrests of her recliner.

I lay, eight years old, on the fold-out couch, close enough to hear the rhythm of her breathing. Pretending to sleep, I stared at Grandma, studying her.

Just eight years old, but already I had been conditioned by family lore. Grandma's husband—my Grandfather—was the family hero. Grandfather, the WWII Prisoner of War. Grandfather, the career military officer. Grandfather, the abusive father and husband. Grandfather, the philanderer. Grandfather, from whom Grandma spent thirty years protecting my Mom and her siblings.

Grandfather was the hero and Grandma was Grandma. Grandma, who volunteered at hospitals for two decades. Grandma, who, against Grandfather's wishes, started nursing school the year she turned 50. Grandma, who, refusing financial support from Grandfather, paid tuition by working at a bait shop. Grandma, the matriarch of a vast extended family.

So there I was, eight years old, watching Grandma. I watched and wondered why my mother's mother, just two years into her first "career," chose the midnight shift.

And in that moment Grandma eclipsed family lore, becoming herself before me. The wrinkles in her face: sweet signs of overcoming. The slight distance in her eyes: a celebration of persevering. Her stillness: a calm confidence, a meditation before bursting out.

If she spoke just then she'd have said *This is the me I always intended to be. This is the me...* Then Grandma lifted herself from her recliner, gently smoothing the front of her uniform.

“Time to go,” she whispered. *Time to go*, my conscience echoed. And as Grandma stepped out of the dark of her house I felt as though my pulse assumed the rhythm of her footsteps.

Grandma chose the midnight shift.

Grandma *CHOSE* the midnight shift.

And who shouldn't choose?

And who shouldn't choose?

And who shouldn't—

Time to go.

2. *Pro-feminism*

I refer to myself as “pro-feminist” rather than “feminist.” Feminism is a movement founded by and fomented through the labor of women to secure their liberation from male dominance (or “patriarchy”) and sexism. One of the ways I witness patriarchy, even among men who identify with the feminist movement, is in our willingness to battle sex and gender oppression so long as we control the process for doing so. So, as a pro-feminist, I *act* in support of feminism and *work* to eliminate the injustices women experience. But I also acknowledge that, despite these efforts, I benefit from patriarchy, at least in the economic sense. I acknowledge, as well, that it is one thing to fight oppression, but it is something else altogether to fight oppression *while I am experiencing the oppression I'm attempting to fight*. Failure on my part to make this distinction is, in essence, a symptom of patriarchy, an example of male privilege. So by identifying as pro-feminist, I remind myself that among the most fundamental human rights is the right for oppressed people to decide for themselves how to win their liberation. It is my role, then, to *serve* rather than *lead* toward these ends.

3. *Why I Am Pro-Feminist*

- i. I believe that violence against women in all its forms—sexual harassment, rape, domestic violence—is a form of terrorism. And I, as a citizen, never can be spiritually whole if I know this violence exists and choose to do nothing about it.

- ii. I believe that the hyper-masculinity of the Western world contributes to other forms of violence, such as unjust military intervention. And I, as a human being, never can be spiritually whole if I comply with such devastating social conditions.
- iii. I believe that patriarchal sex and gender roles limit my ability to live and contribute to society fully. This is an important distinction: I do not believe that I am *oppressed* due to my sex or gender identity. Rather, I believe that I have been socialized to *repress* the parts of me that do not fit snugly into the masculine “box.” And I, as a teacher and activist, never can be spiritually whole without climbing out of that box.
- iv. As a working class man in a capitalist society, I believe that the male privilege—dangling perpetually like a carrot before me—that grants me greater economic access than women (higher pay, more opportunity for job advancement) is also meant to entice me into seeing women, regardless of socioeconomic status, as my competition. I am socialized to perpetuate a system that provides me with some economic advantage, even though this advantage is miniscule compared with the economic advantage wealthy elite (white) men secure for themselves by using me as a protective buffer for patriarchy. Doing so requires me to alienate myself from women (as well as people of color) within my own socioeconomic stratus while diverting my attention from the systems and structures that hurt all working class and low-income people. And I, as a brother and son, never can be spiritually whole if I am willing to oppress anyone—including those, such as working class women, within my own community—out of economic greed.
- v. Grandma.