

Cradled in Memory: Family Dynamics and the Making of the Self in *Three Weeks with My Brother*

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Article Info.

E-ISSN: 2583-6528

Impact Factor (SJIF): 6.876

Peer Reviewed Journal

Available online:

www.alladvancejournal.com

Received: 28/April/2025

Accepted: 02/May/2025

Abstract

Family is a garden through which an individual grows and blooms. Various elements in family like parenting and parental attitudes enhance the psychological and personal growth of children in the family. The interaction between children and parents regulates interpersonal interactions of the children in the family. Human beings have the tendency to often imitate and are easily influenced by the environment in which he/she grows. The familial relations are of greater importance as a child tends to show the qualities and values imbibed from the parents. There is a shift from a joint family system to a nuclear family, where children grew up only seeing their parents and thus craving more attention and care from parents. In the present day, there is a change in behavior of children, where their ability to adjust and tolerate situations has become low compared to the earlier generation. There is an increase in the number of children taking refuge in various addictions like drugs, alcoholism etc. These addictions are found to be an escapism for children from the situations which they are unable to cope up with. This paper attempts to examine how family plays an important role in shaping the psychological and personal growth of children with reference to the work '*Three Weeks with My Brother*' by Nicholas Sparks and Micah Sparks. The paper also analyzes how memory plays a prominent role in the personal growth of an individual.

Keywords: Parenting, Memory, Psychological, Personality.

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Introduction

The personality of an individual is shaped by the experience one undergoes from childhood. Family systems theory (Kerr and Bowen, 1988) is a theory of human behavior that defines the family unit as a complex social system, in which members interact to influence each other's behavior. Family members interconnect, allowing to view the system as a whole rather than as individual elements. In literary narratives too memory and parenting play prominent roles in the development of individuals. In the first-person memoir, the narrative is structured as a travelogue where the brothers undertake a journey around the world, and in between the travel narrations, they recollect their childhood. Throughout the memoir, the importance of parenting and how familial relations play an important role in psychological growth of an individual. In the initial chapters of the memoir, the narrator says how their parents showed toughness and love hand in hand towards them. This is evident when Nicholas says "My

mom was a big believer in toughness." (24) He also narrates how their mother tried to eradicate certain traits, by pruning and grafting them from childhood. He says "She hated whining, she hated moping, she hated excuses, and she was intent on eradicating these traits in her children."(Sparks,24) This tough training has helped these characters to go forward in life regardless of any adversity that happened in their life. Nicholas Sparks also recollects how his bond with his brother and sister grew stronger through various incidents in his childhood. Nicholas Sparks also recollects of he aspired to become like his brother and for him his brother was a superhero. He says "I came to believe that Micah, unlike me, could do anything. And as I struggled to keep up with him, I wanted more than anything to be just like him." (Sparks,28) This stipulates how the sense of protection family creates in the mind of a child.

Sparks narrates how at times one forgets to spend time with family, he says "Between work and family, time was the one

thing that I hadn't had enough of in what seemed like ages. If my home life was chaotic, my career was even busier..". (Sparks, 29) At the same time, his parents earned little, they effectively managed both career and family life. As the memoir moves Sparks, narrates about an incident in their childhood when an earthquake took place and how he and his siblings were afraid. Even after the incident, the children were afraid, and he narrates how their parents took a lot of effort in protecting them and making them comfortable.

In the following chapter, they recollect how they used to play as knights and princess, where his sister Dana was the princess and they were the knights who protected her, when she says "I'll always be safe with my knights.". (Sparks,53) The sense of protection and belonging children feel in turn creates a confidence in them. This sense of security for children is inculcated by their parents as his mother says "You three will always have each other, so you'd better be nice now. Friends come and go, but brothers and sisters always stick together."(Sparks,69) There are many life lessons that Micah and Nicholas learnt from their parents. These lessons have always helped them to tackle real life situations, at the same time this held them close together as siblings.

The narrative also foregrounds how spirituality can become a powerful force that enhances the life of an individual, and how it can become a guiding light in one's life. The character of Dana in the narrative is a reflection on how spiritual guidance can create balance in life. As the narrative moves on, Sparks shares his thoughts on marital relationship at the same time reflecting on various challenges in marriage. Sparks also reminds the readers that it is these challenges and commitment that makes marriage a beautiful relationship. He says "Both people have to be committed. I think if two people are committed to the marriage, if they really want to make it work, then they'll find a way to do it. No matter what happens in life."(Sparks,113).

As the narrative proceeds, Sparks also gives prominence to the notion of communication and how communication plays an important role in marital relationships. He says that the secret behind his successful married life is "I think it's communication."(Sparks,113) This very idea also in a way throws light on the idea of how communication is important for maintaining any relation. At times lack of communication becomes the reason for breaking off a relationship.

In the second half of the narrative, the reader witnesses how positive and tough parenting nurtures children, inculcating mental strength in children. In the memoir, Nicholas Sparks recalls his mother, how her attitude made it hard for people not to like her. He remembers many incidents during his childhood, where he found his mother was always upbeat, no matter how difficult things were. This spirit is a valuable lesson that children have learnt from their mother. This always made them hopeful. No matter how hard things are, at the end they teach you and make you grow. According to psychology there are 4 types of parenting styles, of which in the memoir on close analysis one can find the style adopted by parents is authoritative. In authoritative parenting style, the parent does not impose anything on children, at the same time growth happens with the mutual understanding between the parent and child. In authoritative parenting style, according to psychological theories, the parent solves problems with the child and there is open communication between children and parents. Memory becomes a thread in the narrative as it connects the chapters. Micah Sparks even mentioned how strange memories work and how two people who undergo similar situations in life remember different things, especially

scarred memories. This in turn connects to the psychological aspect of flashbulb memories, where one remembers certain incidents in life in a detailed way.

As the narrative proceeds Nicholas Sparks narrates about many incidents that happened in his life that he later on recollects as valuable lessons. After mentioning some childhood memories, he recollects about his father as "He did teach us to appreciate the important things in life" (Sparks,154). The memoir in the end narrates on how family as a system has influenced the growth of Nicholas Sparks and Micah Sparks as individuals and has made them capable of facing life with confidence. This can be glimpsed when Sparks says "The lessons my parents taught are still with me." (Sparks,352).

Conclusion

In the present world, where people lead a hectic life and families are now nuclear ones, children crave for attention. Sometimes children even become ignorant to an extent that their life revolves around social media. They are often victims of addiction. Only efficient parenting styles can prevent children from falling prey to these social evils. With reference to the memoir, it can be clearly inferred that parenting plays an important role in the psychological growth of an individual. In the memoir, Nicholas and Micah Sparks have grown as mature individuals as the result of the values imbibed to them by their parents. The memoir also reflects on how the relationship between siblings showered them with a sense of belongingness and protection.

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