Have you ever had people act as if you're not there?

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Have you ever had people act as if you're not there? I can remember a couple of times. Once, in my raging teens, I wrote a comment in an essay for my English teacher that I thought was quite funny and satirical. "I have listened to your linguistic pimple-poppings for long enough", or something to that effect. I thought 'linguistic pimple-poppings' was quite a cute turn of phrase.

My English teacher thought otherwise. My father got a call from the school, summoning him to a meeting with the principal and my English teacher, whose name escapes me, such was is impact on my life.

I was abruptly pulled out of class, which had never happened to me before, and brought into the principal's office where my father, indignant at having to take a train back to Hudson from his university to answer this summons, sat with my stony-faced principal and my English teacher.

After some ceremonial opening words, my English teacher read aloud what I'd written. I still thought it was hilarious, but hearing it read in courtroom tones told me to keep quiet.

The principal said something like, this is quite serious, and we feel that Sam should apologize to the teacher. My father added something like, yes, he should apologize to you as well, unconditionally. They were discussing what I should do as if I wasn't there at all. At no time was I even acknowledged personally. I was there as the accused, someone who'd done something terrible, and without my input they were going to decide what I should do.

It seemed a dance they both knew, my father and the administrator of the school. Once they had decided what kind of apology I was to do, then they turned their faces expectantly towards me. My cue to deliver the apology they'd decided on. I was hurt and indignant. Now, obviously what I had done was wrong, but no one had asked me what I was trying to do or attempted to understand me in any way. Even my father hadn't told me he was coming to my school today, and I was being treated coldly, like some specimen that was defective.

I didn't apologize. What came out of my mouth was "I'm sorry if you feel offended by what I wrote. I meant it as satire." I'm not sure if I said 'I hoped you would understand it the way I meant it', but I don't think I did.

What I do remember were the faces of the principal, teacher and my father as they realized I was not delivering the apology they had decided on. My father was especially angry, I think, that I was disobeying him after he'd negotiated this neat packet with the principal. He was quite upset to be losing face in such a public way.

My lingering memory of that event was that I was sitting there, ambushed, not knowing first why they'd summoned my dad, or called me into the office. This was a small high school, maybe 300 students, and everybody gossiped, so rumors were already going around about why Sam Harley was called to the office. And before lunchtime, several versions of it would be all over town. My dad knew that.

I was just stunned that I could be sitting in a room with 3 adults, discussing me as if I wasn't there. "I feel that Sam should apologize to his teacher." "I think that he should apologize to the principal as well" Unspoken, perhaps was the idea that I should also apologize to my father for having to leave work and make a one and a half hour round trip to the school, no doubt causing loss of reputation at his university in some way.

"Why don't you talk to me????" I wanted to ask. "You're all mad about what I wrote, but not one of you asked me why I wrote it. You're not trying to understand me at all."

When my family first arrived in California in 1997, I signed up as a substitute teacher in four different school districts. In most lunch rooms, someone would ask me 'who I was' today, and include me in so me way. I'm pretty introverted, so I appreciated it when someone included me in a new situation. But there were a couple of places where that didn't happen. Oxnard is a city with a troubled past, where white and Mexican students went to different schools, and where children were punished for speaking Spanish even

on the playground. In a couple of schools, I sat in the lunchroom while everyone else talked and laughed, but no one even looked at me. It was as if I was invisible. I was not part of their culture, I was not acknowledged. It felt strange at the time, but I knew many people in minority groups feel this way in mainstream society. The message, unspoken but clear, that you are not one of us.

Now, as an adult and a father, I can see another side of this.

Much later in my life, my wife and I moved to California with our two small children to move in with their one living grandparent. At one point, members of his musical group came over and he said "This is my daughter, Miyuki. And these are my grandchildren, Brandon and Siana. Say hello." I was standing there, but he said nothing about me. Finally, one of his bandmates asked "And who is this?" "Oh, that's my son-in-law Sam."

This wasn't the only time. A reporter did a story about my father-in-law, who'd been in show business. The newspaper story read "Here's Ron H, who lives with his daughter and his grandchildren in Ventura." Even reading this now, twenty-five years later, I still remember the indignation and hurt. Here's my family, who are acting as if I'm not worth mentioning.

Now, am I consumed with this today? No, because I've learned something about God. Excuse me if that sounds trite, let me explain. God is our Heavenly Parent, who is here with us all the time. But many think He's up on a cloud somewhere, full of joy while we're down here suffering. Or not caring at all, not even present. Aware of us, maybe, but distant. Or maybe doesn't even exist.

But what if God is right here with us, and always has been, even when we talked about Him as if He wasn't there? How would God feel to be ignored that way? I know I don't like it. Have you ever sat at a table without anyone acknowledging you? Did people you know and love get together and not even think of inviting you? That happened to me a couple of years ago when a group of teachers posted pictures of the wonderful get together they'd had recently, that I didn't even know about. Oof. Why didn't you invite me? Did you even think about it? That hurts.

But how many times have I had a dinner with friends, or my children and didn't invite Heavenly Parents to join us? How many times have talked about God as if He's not right there? Have I ever prayed "I pray that God can bless this country, this house, this meal", talking about God as if He's not right there?

It's like saying "I hope Sam shows up today" or "I hope Sam can do something about this" or "Nobody knows what Sam is thinking" while I'm standing right next to you. Or only speaking your name when they stub their toe "Sam damnit!", or someone cuts them off in traffic "Samuel f***ing Harley!!! What a dumb move!" In this age when we know we should be inclusive to everyone, making everyone feel welcome, do we still talk about God as if He's not there? Or worse, do we talk about how God feels or doesn't feel, cares or doesn't care, hates or loves but never actually ask our Heavenly Parent who's standing right there?

Ignoring someone is considered hurtful, an insult or a way to show you're angry with them. Act as if they're not even there. Not worth your attention.

Yet we've treated God this way. Even to the point that, until recently, we weren't even aware that God is Father and Mother. How would you feel if people only spoke to you and acted as if your other half, who you love dearly, wasn't there? If you visited a couple but only ever spoke to one of them?

Women have been treated this way for centuries.

Knowing this, my desire to obliterate people who treat me badly evaporates, knowing that God has been treated this way, and worse. Misunderstood and maltreated. And though grieving, still loves.