Life Lessons

by Bethany Lynn Dobson

Feminism has taught me many valuable lessons. First, I must say that I am mortified to admit that I used to think that feminism was a bad thing. The history that I (along with many others, I'm sure) learned in school, portrayed feminists as bra-burning, man-hating women. They were "out of control" and angry. In fact, upon entering college, the first thing that I thought about when I was informed that I had to take a Women's and Gender Studies class was the vivid photographs of women igniting their bras and throwing them into trash cans. I was so uncomfortable with the thought of taking one of these courses. I thought that we were going to learn about women running rampant and shouting about how much they despised men.

Luckily, I eventually opened my eyes and realized that what I was learning was not about hateful women, but rather it was about passionate, intelligent women whom stood up for what they believed in: equality. The more that I learned about feminism, the more excited I became over women's triumphs in their fight for equality. Even today, I cannot read a piece of feminist literature without feeling empowered by the authors' arguments.

Do you want to know what feminism taught me? Here is a list of some of the many things:

1. Standing up for myself does not make me a shrew. If I am being mistreated, I will not hesitate to assert myself. I am not a doormat. I deserve to be treated like a human being.

2. I do not need to learn how to cook to keep my husband's belly full. He can do it himself, as he now knows that women are not born possessing the

ability to cook. I really do not care for cooking, and I was fortunate to find out that he is WONDERFUL at it. That's a good thing, too, because I don't have the patience for it. I'd rather have a bowl of cereal anyway, because cereal is delicious.

3. I'm allowed to have my own opinions. I'm allowed to disagree with whomever I want to disagree with, so long as I disagree respectfully.

4. Speaking of respect, did I mention that I am deserving of respect, just as any other human being?

5. My gender does not dictate which family roles I perform. My husband and I have a child (whom, by the way, we both agree is the most wonderful person in the entire world). Typically, society would assume that I would be in charge of all child-rearing. But not in my specific situation. My husband and I are both held to the same expectations of a parent. We have both done our share of changing diapers (poo-poos and all), feeding, bathing, cuddling, and any other parenting responsibility that you can think of.

6. My gender also does not make me responsible for all of the cleaning that needs to be done in my home.

7. I don't have to shave my legs if I don't want to. My husband still loves me, even if I have furry legs. Furry legs don't make me less of a person, just a prickly person, and that's okay.

8. I am an equal, and deserve to be one. I am as capable of achieving my goals as anyone else, including men.

I could go on for days about this. The items on my list probably sound silly to some, but I honestly never realized how important these things were until I noticed that not everyone feels that they are worthy of them. Many women

today still feel as though they have to sit down and be quiet because other people have far more important things to say. There have been times when I have even felt that way. "Just smile and nod." Fortunately for me, my mom was never a "smile and nod" type of person. People learned very quickly not to interrupt her while she was talking, and not to be disrespectful to her. It was because of her that, after I began learning about feminism, standing up for myself became so easy for me. It is not too much to ask for respect, and for people to acknowledge and accept that I can have an intelligent conversation. I'm not going to sit down and be quiet, unless I don't know what I'm talking about. Then I would just ask A LOT of questions, something for which I have always been notorious.

Many women also still feel that they are the ones who are responsible for child-rearing and chores at home. Feminism taught me that people like my dad, who raised my brother by himself for the first part of his life, are not abnormal at all. He was, and still is, a parent that loved his son unconditionally, and ignored society's proscriptions for fathers and child-rearing. His child needed to be taken care of, and that's exactly what my dad did. He can cook, clean, and all children LOVE him. My husband has been held to the same expectations, with the exception that he is not raising our daughter by himself. My husband is better with other people's children than I am, and we're both fine with it.

Looking back on everything, I never thought that I would be thankful for feminism. As someone who now proudly embraces the identity of a feminist, I don't know where I would be without it. Some people say that women who believe in egalitarian family roles are generally happier. I couldn't agree more. I am a person, and I want to be treated like one. I could never be satisfied with being treated like a possession or someone who is inferior. These examples are just the "tip of the iceberg" of feminism, but are still meaningful. My parents taught me to be myself, and feminism has helped me find the voice to do exactly that.