

Ahearn Family Dynamics

"Honor your father and your mother."

– Exodus 20:12

To understand someone better, get to know their family dynamics. Our family of origin is one of the most impactful factors that shapes who we are as human beings. The behavioral patterns that repeated themselves in the Ahearn family through the years helped me relate this story in writing. More importantly, the patterns and habits of our family helped me understand and empathize with my dad much more.

Dad was born on April 22, 1941, in the Bronx, NY, the second of what would eventually be seven children, to Cornelius and Helene Ahearn. My grandfather Cornelius was a first-generation Irish Catholic. My grandmother Helene's maiden name was Seiz. She was of German descent. Their first child was Cornelius, known to everyone as Corny. Then it was my father Brian followed by Kevin, Barry, Denis, and Rory. Last, but by no means least, they had a little girl they named Eileen.



My grandparents, Helene and Cornelius Ahearn.

As a kid I loved being around my uncles! They were quintessential Irish Catholics. In their case, the Hollywood stereotype was true. They drank too much, swore a lot, fought like cats and dogs, and told raunchy jokes. They all had major issues with their father. They loved and adored their mother but had no problem setting her hair on fire with worry. They added anxiety to her life any way they could. If sainthood can be earned, then my grandmother is a saint thanks to her boys.

I remember being at family gatherings, listening intently to Dad and his brothers telling jokes so I could retell them to all of my friends at school. In second grade my mother had to come to school to meet with the principal because of a joke I'd overheard then retold. The joke was immature and crude. I still remember the punchline, but I'll spare you the details. I had no idea what the joke meant. All I knew was Dad and his brothers thought it was hilarious, and that was good enough for me. The point is, I looked

up to my dad and uncles. I wanted to be like them, even if I got into trouble sometimes following their example. -



Kevin, Denis, Dad, Barry, and Rory in the early 80s. Corny, the oldest brother, is not pictured. Kevin and Rory were still alive as of the writing of this book.

When I was in second grade, I had to write an essay about my parents. I wrote about one of our frequent beach trips. They took my sister Carey and me to Lee's Bar, where we played pool and slot machines (nickel and penny). If the essay were written today, child protection services would be knocking on my parents' door. For California in the early 1970s, it was no big deal.

My grandmother was a devout Catholic woman. She hoped and prayed at least one of her boys would become a priest. That didn't happen despite their Catholic upbringing and attending Catholic schools. In spite of all the hell they raised, I do believe those early years instilled a deep sense of right and wrong in each of them, and their mother (my grandmother) had a profound impact on them. My father wrote this about his mother,

"What was most positive in our lives was Mom. She was absolutely the best person who ever lived. Think of it. She coped with him (Dad) and kept us on the straight and narrow and out of his way. When he wasn't there, she was the rock. It would have been easy for her to complain but it wasn't in her to do that. She was always loving and accepted as part of the family anyone we brought into it. She was what was happy and great about our family. Her goodness outshined all the bad times with Dad."

My grandfather was wicked smart. He was a college professor at Columbia, Fordham, NYU, and Baruch College. He also worked for various businesses during his career. Accounting was his thing. There was a high premium on education in the Ahearn family and that was apparent by the professions many chose. Corny was an attorney. Dad taught at a few colleges in Florida after he retired from business. Barry and Denis both taught high school. Kevin had a short stint teaching at the high school level and eventually started his own real estate training business. My sister Carey is an elementary school librarian in Arizona. I was involved in corporate training for more than 20 years, headed up a corporate university, and now run my own training and consulting business. Some of my cousins are in learning related fields too. Education is a high priority in the Ahearn family, and it started with my grandfather.