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The bright blue eyes that alight with unfettered curiosity on the burgeoning bulletin board are not only my own. Nor are the ears that listen raptly to the hum of student life and the gentle sing-song of our tour guide’s voice. Almost in tandem, my companion and I tear ourselves from the vivid vignette of college life and return with unmatched strides to the vast expanses of the campus. As the tour continues, I am neither surprised by the eager questions my companion poses - “Where’s the baseball field?” - nor by the heightened interest painted so clearly across his face. Wandering amongst the tall stone buildings, I appreciate for the first time how much this visit means to my constant companion, my father.

Growing up in a home overflowing with seven children and two working parents, my father spilled out into the “real world” at age eighteen. He took with him his younger brother, an impossibly solid work ethic, and a Chevy Caprice. Neither of my grandparents were fazed by their son’s moving out of the house so abruptly; their expectation had always been clear: go to school, learn the basics, then work. The notion of higher education never crossed my father’s strong mind until years after his high school graduation. To hear him describe his adolescence is almost like hearing a fable told from the perspective of the Prodigal Son.

With the outspoken and unyielding influence of my mother, my father decided that none of his children would make the same foolish mistakes that he had made. Learning for learning’s sake was always the focus in our home. From our nightly story *The Hobbit*, to endless explorations in the woods, to gardening, to building, my brothers and I were never bored. While it was from my mother that I first learned to question and explore, it was my father who was able to capture my inquisitive spirit and help ground me in the practical.

Perhaps because he was a self-sufficient teen, my father exudes a quiet self-assuredness that can result only from years of independence and a deep understanding of the nature of the world. My father never once isolated me from the “real world.” Instead, he found a unique way of protecting that left me both completely aware and largely unscathed. By leaving me free to make mistakes and chase wild dreams, my father was always able to help ground me back in reality. Personal responsibilities, priorities and commitments are all values that are etched into my mind, just as they are within my father’s.

In a few short months, I will reach the same benchmark that my father did on his eighteenth birthday. However I will not go forth into a cruel, cold world without a guiding star. I have always known that my path in life will be paradoxically different from, but also much the same as, my father’s. Education has always been my focus, but the joy I find in nature and hard work could only be traits taught by the man who now walks beside me. I will, with luck, never buckle under the same burdens he has borne nor will I forget the values he has instilled in me.

On this sunny September afternoon, as I envision my own future, I cannot help but wonder what my father sees as we gaze across campus.