

Parents Provide Compass for Children's Lives

When I hold my daughter, I sometimes find myself quickly thinking about what she'll be like when she's 8. Or 25. Or 74. I don't want her to grow up overnight, but I'm a curious guy, easily wondering what kind of job she'll have, music she'll like or idiosyncrasies she'll hate.

This is the beauty of parenthood: you can look forward into oblivion, long past even your own lifetime on earth. The curse of childhood, even when you're old enough to have your own tangible dreams, is that you really can only look back at where you've been. Of course, it's always easier to plan someone else's future.

As I plan the rest of my daughter's life, I also think about the things beyond her control: her skin color, her gender, where she may live and, of course, who her parents are.

Try as hard as we might, none of us got to pick our parents. Some of us were big winners, and others of us were horrific losers. We can pick our friends, our co-workers, our spouses and our neighbors, but no one auditioned to be our parents.

And this is the circumstance of family. Some of us don't get the family we want. Some of us don't get the family we deserve. But we all get the family we have. When we end up where we're going, we'll be able to speak of them using the phrases "because of," "in spite of," "despite" or "against the best wishes and plans of." As our journeys unfold, the role of our families materializes again nearly beyond our control.

The role of parents, then, isn't so much to look ahead and draw a map for our children. Rather, it's to give them a compass. By allowing them to chart their own course and giving them the necessary travel tools and tips to get where they're headed, we'll get to play a part far deeper and more meaningful than the one

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assigned us. Then they can one day talk about us with the phrase, “without whom none of this would be possible” as they discuss where they’ve been.

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