

Becoming

My favorite 9th grader and oldest granddaughter used to count her age on her fingertips when she was a wee lass. We seemed a lot closer when she was three years old, before she went off and did the unthinkable. She grew to be a lovely young woman. She did it with a lot of help from Mom and Dad, of course, but also with encouragement from her younger sister, teachers and mentors. I pretty much stayed in the background, a cheerleader probably too often silent. I seldom claim to have been much of an influence, but I'm sure the two of us share the same quirky sense of humor.

However, if you believe I haven't mattered greatly in the person she is today, you really don't know what a grandfather is. It isn't about what I might teach or preach, even if I were allowed to. It's about who I am.

A grandfather is a presence, whether he's local or lives out of state. His life is witnessed in the personalities of his children and flows to his grandchildren. How he lived, where he lived, how he thought, who he loved are all passed down in ways not easy to see but nonetheless definite and measurable.

I built a life with a woman and into it we brought children, followed by grandchildren. There are entire worlds of biological history, emotions and soul that somehow come down to my granddaughters from their grandparents and ancestors on both sides of the family. In a sense, I began my gift to my granddaughters on the day I was conceived, when I became the recipient of all that went before me. Their grandmother continued the mixing with elements from her heritage.

But the girls will never be only a grey amalgam of inherited characteristics. Since birth each has been fighting hard to carve out her own place in the universe. I saw it on their faces in the hospital's newborn nursery. I heard it in their cries from the back yard as one tried to drown the other in the pool, or as they scrambled off to school, intent on getting more A's than her sister, and as they practiced their musical instruments over and over in the evening. Over and over.

Some great force in the universe will encourage the girls to become the women they are destined to be when they accomplish the purposes set before them. One purpose will be to become grandmothers. To little boys like me.

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