

Moments to cherish often unexpected

ONE afternoon in October, as we were in the car admiring the vibrant color of the leaves, my 10-year-old daughter told me about her walk to school through our back woods that morning. "The trees were SO red, Mom, that I thought they were on fire! And then the mist around them looked kind of like smoke. I was really scared." Her green eyes were big and bright as she told me this, and I just wanted to bottle up the beauty of the moment.

Something about the fall colors being at their height always causes me to be more aware of the inexorable flow of time. Maybe, in addition to the breathtaking show of leaves making way for the starkness and darkness that must follow, it's because my own father died during this season, just a few months after my first child was born. I remember feeling untethered then, wondering where I could find him. Then, in a moment looking up at the trees, I realized that he would be everywhere — Walt Whitman-like — for me, just in a new way. He had been such a powerful influence that he was in the very way I saw the world.

It's funny, this shift we go through: from being a child of a parent to becoming a parent ourselves. These



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Parent to Parent

days, with my children doing more and more, sometimes it's easy to feel just like someone who's taken for granted. The sports practices, the music lessons, the plans with friends — the driving, the driving, the driving.

We have probably all heard irritated parents occasionally say to their kids, "Do you have ANY idea how much time I spend doing things for you?" As if our kids should know to thank us each time they get out of the car from a soccer game. Did we? Of course not.

The difference now is that most of us are responsible for all — or at least most — of the kid-centered scheduling that crowds the family calendars. We say that we wish they would just go out and play in the neighborhood and yet we, feeling our own kind of peer pressure perhaps, sign our kids up for everything and then wonder why we have no time to ourselves. In his "free" time, my father worked outdoors (inviting us along if we wanted) and helped

others more than he took us to special events, and yet my brothers and I felt a very strong bond with him.

Sometimes the feeling of being unappreciated can be pretty sharp. My son, a passionate basketball player who just started middle school, recently asked me to rebound for him in our driveway. When I made the mistake of trying to talk with him a little between shots, he said something like, "Mom, please be quiet!"

Not a complete stranger to the value of concentration, I still felt insulted and said, "You'd probably prefer to have a robot out here doing this instead." He couldn't help but nod his agreement at that, prompting me to head for the house. Of course he tried to retract, and I have to acknowledge that — at certain moments — mothers must seem very much beside the point.

We spend so many thousands of hours focused on filling our children's every need (and perhaps imagining some that aren't there) and then they get older and move on out — regarding us how? Of course what we're aiming for is creating people who are healthy in mind and body, people who will be strong and independent enough to be able to give unto others.

And give unto their own relatives, too. I recently went back home to Long Island to visit my 85-year-old mother. She is physically and spiritually robust, but her short-term memory is failing. She is determined to stay right where she is; that is fine with us, but it has become more clear that she needs someone checking in on her.

That someone, it has turned out, is my oldest brother, who has moved back after many years in the West. The fact that his marriage ended and that his grown daughters live in New York City made the move reasonable; the rest of us were somewhat skeptical, though, that he could actually resume life with Mom in our old house after about 40 years.

But resume they have, and they get along wonderfully. "It's because we don't interfere with each other," Mom told me. They chat over *The Times* at breakfast, watch the news together in the evening, and — as far as I can tell — laugh constantly about the old days, about Dad, and about the many old friends that have stayed with Mom through years of raising five children.

My brother accepts her completely as she is now, and she is glad to

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have him back.

So maybe the beautiful moments do not all need to be bottled up when the kids are young, because different ones can come later on, too. It's not that I'm hoping for my own son to return to me 40 years

from now, but I might just keep rebounding for him awhile longer. And, for now, we'll just concentrate on the beauty of the ball going in that hoop.

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