



We're standing in the garage of the house where she has lived since she was two-and-a-half years old. Her red Kia is parked in my wife's spot; my wife's Honda is outside. We're surrounded by boxes, random piles of stuff and half-filled grocery bags. She's packing to leave in the morning, drive to Eugene and move in with her boyfriend.

I'm trying to help my daughter pack, trying to talk, trying not to get in the way – all at the same time.

Snow is falling outside. Actually, more of the slushy rain-snow mix that's common in Seattle after the first of January. Neighbors are spending the weekend taking down Christmas lights and putting away their yard inflatables for another year.

Craig, across the street, already removed the two virgin-white wireframe deer from his front lawn. I'll miss their motorized heads bobbing up and down each night, looking like they're grazing on the grass. His seven-foot-long inflatable bobsled (crewed by a team of three – a plastic penguin, a vibrating air-blown snowman in a bright red vest, and a polar bear looking quite dashing in a green polyurethane coat) made the short journey from the front yard to his garage about half an hour ago before the first trace of snow. All the air went out of the three-man crew before they had a chance to perform in the type of weather bobsleds are designed for.

Stephanie and I sort through boxes; trying to decide what will make the two hundred ninety-seven-mile trip to Eugene, what should be thrown out, and what should be stored in the loft above our cars.

She definitely intends to take the Mikasa sixteen-piece place settings of everyday dishes Catherine and I received as a wedding gift twenty-six years ago. She had them with her in college the past two years, and it'll make the one-bedroom apartment in Eugene seem

a bit more like home. Yet Stephanie declares that the wine glasses Cath's grandmother gave her back in the mid-1980s are "stupid." Having failed once or twice to drink a vintage Côtes-du-Rhône from them, I know exactly what she means. The slim crystal goblets are too small to allow the wine to properly aerate, too narrow to comfortably fit your mouth, and much too ornate if you want to have a good time.

Clearly, the wine glasses are heading to the loft. So, too, are her college textbooks on international relations, her term papers analyzing the Arab spring, her Arabic flashcards, her 2014 Kitten calendar, the souvenir Dalmatia calendar from our trip to Croatia several summers ago, as well as every edition of *Rolling Stone* published during the past three years.

The Franco Sarto boots remain in the undecided pile.

Like any good father, I convince her to take a set of screw drivers, a few pliers and a small hammer in case they need to fix something in their apartment, all the while hoping that her boyfriend knows how to use his hands. (Given that he's a first-year law student, hand tools probably won't play a prominent role in his future. They haven't for me.)

The one item that gives me pause is a box of newspaper clippings: Copies of *The Western Front*, the campus newspaper that she wrote for – and edited – in college.

"We want to wrap these up," I say. "I'll go to the store tomorrow and buy a plastic tote box to keep these in. You don't want them exposed to moisture."

Stephanie smiles and shakes her head affirmatively, her way of thanking me for taking care of what's truly important. She knows I'll store the newspapers safely next to the Build-A-Bears and Bratz dolls we transferred from her bedroom to the loft when she graduated from junior high to high school; near the precious adolescent items entombed in plastic boxes that we moved to the garage loft when she left for college.

"The good thing is that your portfolio is all online," I tell her. "If something happens to these, you can still access them. All my news clippings are up there in cardboard boxes."

She smiles. It's the smile of a twenty-something definitely letting you know that you're a dinosaur. It's also signifies a special connection.

Stephanie's reaction makes me recall all the times our lives seemed to echo each other's. Countless softball games and soccer matches where her lack of athletic prowess mirrored my own inability on the football field and basketball court. The time we traveled to Greece as she turned thirteen, visiting the same archeological sites I toured with my parents when I was her age. Going back to New York to meet relatives, knocking on the door of the Long Island home where I was born, and climbing to the 102<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Empire State Building – just like I did with my father shortly before we moved to the West Coast. As these memories play out, the emotions catch me off guard.

Her internship starts in three days. She'll be working at the ABC television affiliate in Eugene – shadowing the producer of the five o'clock news, writing scripts and banter for the anchors to breathlessly read on air, working with cameramen and editors.

I want to tell her about the day I left for my newspaper internship in suburban Portland thirty-six years ago. Packed my old yellow Dodge Dart – a few ill-fitting suits, a

complete collection of James Joyce, and a desire to make my living as a writer – and moved in with my girlfriend who was studying physics in Oregon.

Like Stephanie, I had just completed a term editing my college newspaper. Unlike Stephanie, it took me more than seven years to graduate – she did the same in just over three.

I want to tell her about the awkward discussion with my overly pious Catholic mother just before I backed out of our driveway. How it made me cry, and still makes me cry to think about it today.

I want to tell her about the nine months I spent in Portland, the challenges of trying to act grownup and make a living as a reporter while being engaged in the first adult relationship of my life.

I want to tell her about the novel I never finished. It still occupies most of the space in my bottom desk drawer. At least I think it does, it has been a long time since I looked.

I want to tell her about getting pregnant, trying to do what I thought was the right thing at the time and having my dutiful proposal immediately rebuffed with a curt, one-line retort: *“Get married at twenty – I’d rather fuck a dog.”* (To this day, that’s still the most honest thing anyone has ever said to me).

I want to tell her about going through an abortion as a couple and then, shortly later, no longer being a couple.

I want to tell her a lot of things but I can’t find the words. So what I say is, “What are you going to do after your internship?”

Stephanie doesn’t answer. She turns and goes back in the house.

I continue to pack boxes the best I can.

A few minutes later, Stephanie comes back trying not to cry. “You keep pressuring me,” she says standing at the top of the three rough-framed wooden steps leading from our house down to the garage; her back perfectly rigid; her right hand firmly on her hip, bunching her black-and-white plaid shirt at the waist.

“I haven’t even started my internship. I don’t know what’s going to happen after that.”

Tears form on her face; mascara scars her cheek. I hug her. “You can always come back home,” I tell her.

“I know,” she says.

That make me feel good.

Thirty-six years ago, I didn’t feel like I could come back home. I also didn’t know what I was going to do after my internship. Things turned out OK.