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## When You Have A Postcard For A Father

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ELC Honors Project

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When You Have A Postcard For A Father

*But when he heard the sound  
Of the kids laughing in the background  
He had to wipe away a tear from his eye  
A little voice came on the phone  
Said, "Daddy when you coming home?"  
He said the first thing that came to his mind  
I'm already there  
Take a look around  
I'm the sunshine in your hair  
I'm the shadow on the ground  
I'm the whisper in the wind  
I'm your imaginary friend  
And I know I'm in your prayers  
Oh, I'm already there*

-“I’m Already There” by Lonestar

His truck pulled into our driveway, and my brother and I ran out screaming. We had gone a month, four whole weeks, without seeing my dad, and I was over it. We reached his car door before it opened and realized that he had locked it. Confused, tugging at the handle and whining, while trying to maneuver past our barking dogs, my little brother and I realized too late that he had fooled us. Daddy had already slipped out the passenger door and had wrapped my mom in a giant hug.

“Daddy!” my brother and I whined, feeling put out by the fact that he wanted to hug her first.

“Sorry, guys, your mama needs the first one this time,” he said after he stuck his tongue out while Mom couldn’t see him. He had beaten us at our own game this time. After finally letting her go with one last little squeeze and a big kiss right on the lips, he scooped me and my brother up at the same time, one in each arm.

“Hi, guys. Did you miss me this time?” He winked.

“Duh, Dad,” my brother said as he slid down my dad onto the pavement.

I got set down next. “We always miss you, you know that.”

“Yeah, I know. I missed you too. Let’s go see what Mom made for dinner,” he said as he grabbed our hands and led us into the house.

But his trick, as funny as it was in the moment, couldn’t distract me from the fact that he was leaving again the next week. Before I’d even made it into the house, I started tearing up knowing he only had a few days to be Daddy until he had to go back to being Chief Master Sergeant Scott Nibblett.

My dad has traveled all over the world for both the USAF Reserves and his security company. He was activated on several different occasions when I was little and I knew his work was important, that he had to leave, but knowing this didn’t take away from the fact that he was gone. Despite his absences, he did his best to make sure I knew how much he loved me by bringing me back souvenirs from overseas. Those souvenirs are what comforted me while he was away, because with them came the promise that he would return with a new one for the collection.

I wouldn’t say that my dad’s gifts make up for him being gone. We both know that they don’t. A beautifully decorated coin purse or box of cheddar flavored crickets can’t make up for a missed dance recital, a missed bedtime story, or a missed chance to play in the yard. But those

souvenirs stood in for him when he couldn't be with me. Gift-giving is one of my dad's love languages. It isn't necessarily mine, but I speak his by appreciating the things he brings me.

I don't love my dad *because* he brings me gifts. I love my dad because even when he's hundreds of miles away, I know he's thinking about me. My six-foot four teddy bear father is my hero. I know all little girls are supposed to say that about their dads, but my dad really is mine. He's my own personal problem-solver. He's the guy who accidentally stands with his butt blocking the video camera on Christmas morning. He's the guy who makes tiny dots with pancake batter and squiggle pancakes to this day, because I liked them when I was little. Sometimes he gets really fancy and will spell my name in pancakes or make them Mickey Mouse shaped. He's the guy who would do anything for anybody but do him wrong and he'll never look at you the same. He admires hard work and honesty. He's the guy who will always have my best interest at heart, who will help me talk through every possible option in every situation, who will help me find jobs and who takes care of my car. He's the guy that loves relaxing on the water. He's the guy that loves unconditionally, the guy who hates to be by himself, the guy who loves his Redskins games and using his electric smoker. He's the guy who can do anything he sets his mind to, the self-made superman.

I love my dad because I understand him. We have the same temperament: my dad and I are quiet people, introspective. But when we have something to say, we want it to be heard. And when we finally make that declaration, we'll probably repeat the same exact point over and over again, but in different ways. I love my dad because we have the same toe shape, a huge laughing matter in my family. I love my dad because he raised me to be responsible, and even though he couldn't always be home, he made sure that his presence was felt in my life. He may have been gone, but he was by no means absent.

**Peach Cookies (United States, 9 years old)**

He's been to Georgia several times, but once he had to go for a month. That was a really, really long time in little girl years. But when he came back, along with peach-shaped erasers and other little trinkets, he brought me a little bag of gourmet peach cookies. I loved to bake, even when I was that young, and I had never seen anything like these. I jumped up and down with excitement. They were crescent shaped and covered in powdered sugar, and I thought they were absolutely heavenly. I enjoyed a couple before our family went out to dinner to celebrate another of Daddy's safe returns and successful trips.

When we got back, the cookies were gone. Convinced Daddy had hidden them as a joke, I searched the whole house.

"Come on, Daddy, where are they!" I laughed, knowing this was another one of his tricks.

"I'm telling you, I didn't touch them. I thought you left them on the counter," he responded. Maybe that was a clue that he had hidden them somewhere in the kitchen. After a good twenty minutes of rummaging through Mom's nicely organized cabinets, I accepted defeat.

"Okay, you got me good this time. Can I have them now?" I made my really good pout face, the one that always convinced Daddy.

"I'm sorry, sweetie, I really don't have them." When I spotted the corner of the sunroom where the bag was ripped to shreds, drenched in dog slobber, and realized that Molly the bulldog was in the corner making the guilty face with the great big I'm-so-sorry eyes, I cried. I was devastated, because I held everything Daddy brought me in such high regard.

“Hey, now, don’t be upset about it. They’re just cookies and you know how much Molly likes her snacks. She didn’t know they were special,” he said while he rubbed my back and handed me a tissue. “I promise I’ll bring you some more the next time I go.”

*I’m already there*

### **Sea Glass Necklace (United States, 10 years old)**

The first time Dad went to Hawaii, he took Mom. They were only gone for two weeks, but it felt like a lifetime and I think he knew it.

“Abs, I brought you something special this time,” he said with a smile.

“Oh yeah?”

“Mhm.” He handed me a navy velvet box. When I opened it, Dad smiled. He brought me back a very special, one-of-a-kind gift, a necklace made of sea glass in the shape of a turtle.

“You’ve really been into that sea glass stuff lately. And after we found some together in Cape Charles, I thought you’d really appreciate this.” It was true, he had been helping me collect it down in Cape Charles during the summer weekends when we’d go down there and stay on our boat. He knew I’d appreciate its unique beauty.

I loved that necklace. It came with an entire paper about the person who made it and the meaning of the sea turtle, something about wisdom and patience, and that was what Daddy said he wanted for me. The necklace was made of turquoise glass and a sterling silver base.

I wore it everywhere until the chain broke. It actually broke when he was away on another trip, and I cried. I don’t know if I would’ve cried if he had been home, because he would’ve been with me and that would’ve been enough. But when he’s gone, these things he brings me replace him, and it was like he had broken, not the necklace. So, I cried, and I tried to

fix it, and only made it worse. And then I got frustrated and ended up shoving it in my drawer and flipping through my postcard book, pretending that they were filling the dad-shaped hole.

*Take a look around*

### **Kinder Eggs (Germany, 8-15 years old)**

A favorite German gift of Daddy's is Kinder eggs. You know, the kind that's banned in the U.S.? Yeah, those. I've had a lot of those, illegally I suppose. They really are good, definitely as good as they're cracked up to be. Dad claims that he never knew they were banned, but who knows? I think he did.

Daddy hasn't brought us Kinder eggs in a long time. But he has brought us Ritter Sport chocolates, which used to be rare around here but now you can find them everywhere: in airports, gourmet food shops, and sometimes even the regular grocery store, which I think is kind of a bummer. I liked them better when I thought you could only get them in Germany, it added to the mystique.

He's brought back all kinds of the square bars of chocolates, including some weird flavors like chocolate with raisins. There's strawberry chocolate, butter biscuit chocolate, hazelnut chocolate, yogurt chocolate, cornflake chocolate, coconut chocolate, the list goes on. I've probably tried them all. I'm a fan of some of them, but the best part about Dad bringing them back is we get to try them together and make the "yuck" face when we try one that's a little too different for our tastes.

*I'm the sunshine in your hair*

### **T-Shirts (Numerous Countries, All Ages)**

One of the gifts Dad brings back the most is t-shirts. I used to swear that he'd pick out the most obnoxious ones and pretend like he thought they were cute, which in turn means I'd have to

pretend they were cute. I truly think it was all a game and he was laughing at us behind our backs, knowing full well how dumb we looked and very proud of himself for pulling it off.

I have t-shirts from all over the world in every possible color, shape, and size. Bedazzled, not bedazzled, pictures and words on them or just plain. Sometimes he'd bring more than one, if he could get them cheap. I wore them to bed, to dance, for doing homework in, to walk the dogs in, to go to the grocery store in: name it, and I've probably worn one of his t-shirts for it. I kind of outgrew this as I got older and his less-than-attractive t-shirts weren't as cool anymore. But that doesn't mean that I don't still wear them to bed when he's gone.

Sometimes he'd get us matching ones and we'd wear them to the beach or while he grilled dinner on the deck in the summer, my brother and I racing each other in the yard and the dogs nipping at our heels. More often than not, Dad will get barbeque sauce or something on them and he'll dub it his new work shirt. He still wears his shirts to this day when he's doing yard work, washing his truck, or helping Mom with household projects. He has an attachment with t-shirts and he has a really hard time letting them go. I wonder if they remind him to treasure being home.

### **Airport Souvenirs (Numerous Places, All Ages)**

If Dad is in a pinch or hasn't found anything to bring home, airport souvenirs have often sufficed. I can't count how many mini snow globes, keychains with "Abigail" on them, bags of airplane pretzels, pencils, and other gadgets I've gotten from airports all over the world.

When he'd come home with one of these instead of something exotic and fascinating, he'll hand it to me and say, "It's the thought that counts."

These average gifts definitely count, they count as much as the jewelry and the dolls and the paper fans and other trinkets he's brought me, because all that matters is that he thought of

me while he was away. He has no idea how comforting it is to be reminded that he didn't forget me while he was off seeing fancy places and doing fancy things and eating fancy food. He could bring me a worn-out pencil, or even a napkin from his flight, it doesn't matter. It's the reassurance that he's thinking about me that matters.

### **Postcards (Numerous Places, All Ages)**

One gift I almost always receive is postcards. He started bringing me postcards when I was really little, and I've collected them in a scrapbook ever since. He has given me ones of various German castles, but most notably postcards of Neuschwanstein, the castle that inspired Cinderella's castle. For a little girl who was a huge fan of Disney princesses, to the extent that I refused to watch *Jungle Book* or any other movies that didn't have fluffy dresses and tiaras, a picture of the real-life Cinderella castle was a huge deal.

I have postcards from Kitzbuhel, Selville, Hawaii, France, and Denmark, to name a few. I also have one from Salzburg, which was where Mozart was born and as a fan of both classical music and Mozart himself, this was also a huge deal. You can probably tell by now that I was not the coolest child. I have postcards from European attractions, too, like Anne Frank's house.

This doesn't even begin to include the postcards I have from places within the United States, such as Las Vegas, the San Antonio River Walk, Alaska, and the Hoover Dam. I still have that scrapbook full of postcards of all the places my daddy has been; I don't think I'll ever have the heart to get rid of it.

When he brought back a postcard, I felt like I had gone with him. I felt that I had seen all these things in real life. I imagined myself perched in one of the windows at Neuschwanstein, waiting for my prince to come. I pictured myself listening to Mozart play in his home and pretended I had skied in the Alps.

He let me in on his adventures by bringing me these postcards. Sometimes he'd mail them to me from wherever he was, but more often than not, he'd wait until he got home to give them to me. I think he like seeing my face when I saw them. He'd explain them all to me and tell me what they all were and what they were like. I think he loved sharing his stories with me. He'd bring back ones that had maps on them and he would point out where he had been on the map, or shown the specific mountain that he skied down.

Once, I was walking down to our mailbox, it was one of my afternoon chores as a child to get the mail, and I pulled out a brightly colored postcard from Salzburg. On the back Daddy had written "To my favorite little stink, I love love love you and can't wait to come home to you. Give your mother a huge and kiss from me and be good in school." That was one of the few times my dad has been so directly sentimental. Perhaps it was because he had been in Germany for three weeks by the time I got the postcard, and he had missed parent watch week at my dance studio and one of my brother's soccer games. Perhaps it was because my mom had been feeling down, missing her husband, and was stressed at work. He's not a huge communicator of feelings, rather he chooses to show it through his gifts, so he chose to show it that time because he knew we needed some strength. That postcard meant the world.

*I'm the shadow on the ground*

### **Jerseys (Spain, 18 years old)**

When I was in high school, Dad had to go to Seville, Spain for a month. As he put it, to help me better understand the mission, he was going "to swap out the old damaged helicopters from Afghanistan and replace them with new ones." This is the simplified version of what he was doing. I didn't really understand the rest. He said he'd be putting the old ones on giant

planes to send back to the States, and it was his job to make that transition go smoothly. I knew he was under a lot of pressure.

I thought a month was long in little girl years, but it turns out that it can feel even longer when you're older and your dad is halfway across the world and the time difference makes communication difficult.

At this point in my life, I had been dating a guy for a couple years and I was head-over-heels. When Dad came back from Spain, he had brought with him matching couples jerseys for FC Barcelona, my boyfriend's all-time favorite soccer team. I was ecstatic, I was trying to be all hip and cool and know about all the soccer things to impress this guy, and I really felt special having a jersey. It made me more official, somehow.

I hope Dad knew that those jerseys somehow gave me a confidence in myself. They were also his way of giving his blessing, of letting go of his little girl just a little bit. And when I think back on that now, it makes me want to cry.

I don't think my dad will ever know how much that meant to me, to pick out something so carefully for someone I loved. I sometimes wonder if it was a sacrifice for him, to let my boyfriend in on our tradition. But I think it was his way of letting me know just how much I was loved, and that anyone else I loved would be loved, too.

*I'm the whisper in the wind*

### **Nutcracker (Germany, 14 years old)**

On one trip to Germany and Austria, when Daddy got back he had a giant box wrapped up and sitting on our coffee table, waiting for me, when he finished unpacking. We had finished up Mom's usual welcome-home-dad dinner of crab cakes, Caesar salad, and roasted asparagus, finished off with Dad's favorite oatmeal raisin cookies.

After dinner, he led us all to the living room. My brother opened his fancy something-or-other. To be honest, I was completely disinterested in what he picked out for my brother. This was our thing, and I was too wrapped up in my own excitement. My mom opened her set of really nice German kitchen knives, which she still uses to this day. They have lifetime warranty. Finally, it was my turn. Dad handed me the box, beautifully wrapped, which means I knew he got it wrapped at the store. Dad is terrible at giftwrapping. I opened the box to find a hand carved, beautifully crafted, genuine wooden nutcracker. As a ballerina who has performed in *The Nutcracker* for several years, this was a big deal.

“Daddy...it’s beautiful. I love it!” Squealing, I threw my arms around his neck and gave him a big kiss on the cheek. The theme of the nutcracker was the frog prince, he had a gold crown and a green wooden frog sat on his hand. That was the first *real* nutcracker in my collection, therefore I took it the most seriously.

He brought me another one my senior year of high school and last year of performing in *The Nutcracker*. This one held all the characters from the production in its hands. That one was a big deal too, but not as exciting as my first one ever. I didn’t even think about the fact that nutcrackers originated in Germany. He completely surprised me with this one.

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My dad has missed a lot of dance recitals over the years. He was sad about it, I was sad about it, but we both knew there was nothing we could do to change it. My sophomore year of high school, my company was performing *Coppelia*, and I had been cast in a solo. I was so excited, and Dad knew it. He also knew that he’d be in Germany that weekend. It always seemed to work out that way. When I was little, I was convinced that the military was trying to sabotage us on purpose.

My solo went well, I loved every minute of it. I felt beautiful, elegant, free. I took my bow, packed up my things backstage, and headed out to take some pictures with my mom and grandma. But when I got out to the auditorium, they weren't the only ones waiting for me.

"DAD!" I yelled as I ran and jumped on him. "How are you here?!" I was floored. Had he made it in time for my solo?

"I got to come back a day early, peanut. Surprise," he said with a smile that lit up his whole face and crept into his eyes. He'd just made it, according to my mom, in time to watch my solo. He had reached his seat just as I came out on stage. Talk about divine intervention. He brought me the most beautiful orange roses, which matched my costume, and he couldn't stop hugging me. I think he might've been happier than I was.

*I'm your imaginary friend*

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My mom always makes my dad promise to talk to the pilot of his plane and inform him that he is carrying very precious cargo. My dad always goes along with it and makes up entire conversations that he had with the pilot for my mom's benefit. This is another reason why I love my dad. He makes us feel safe, confident that he'll always return home, even though the threat of deployment always loomed.

Once when I was in middle school, Dad dropped me off at our church for youth group. He had been pretty quiet on the ride over, and I know that something was on his mind, but I didn't push it at the moment. But when he came back to pick me up, I could tell he was really bothered. I could see the wheels turning in his head. I babbled on and on about the life-sized game of Clue we had played in youth group and about how much I liked the new pastor, hoping to get the conversation going, to no avail. Eventually I asked him what was going on.

He sighed deeply. “Well, there’s really no easy way to say this. But there’s about an 80% chance I’ll be shipped to Iraq.”

“What? For how long?”

“About a year.” He couldn’t meet my eyes.

“What for? You’re in the Reserves, they can’t just send you.”

“They can if they mobilize my unit. And it seems that’s what’s happening. I was told to get prepared.” He released his breath, and his shoulders relaxed.

There it was, out in the open just like that. No wonder he had been silent. I know it was 80% that he said, because when I went home and cried and prayed to God not to send my Daddy over there, I wrote it down in my diary because it was such a proficient number in my young mind. I don’t think he had even told my mom yet. We rode home together, silent, my small hand curled up in his huge one. I think God heard my prayers, because he never ended up getting shipped to Iraq.

*And I know I’m in your prayers*

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### **Gold Locket (Germany, 8 years old)**

Germany has been Daddy’s most frequent destination. Usually he only has to go for two weeks at a time, but sometimes it can be up to eight weeks. I have received all kinds of German gifts, but one of my favorites was a gold locket, artfully engraved with flowers and vines. When I opened the wooden box that it came in, I was in awe; I was at that stage where anything sparkly immediately captured by interest. He knew how much I had wanted a locket, just like my American Girl Doll had. He even helped me cut out tiny heart-shaped pictures to put in it.

“Stink,” as he likes to call me, “if you always wear this, I will rush home to you as fast as I possibly can.” I always did, and he always does.

*Oh, I'm already there*

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As I've gotten older, I've noticed a change in Daddy's gifts. He tries to make them more mature, more suited to my changing taste. Sometimes he really goes all out, like the time he brought me a nice pair of sunglasses from St. Maarten. But he always brings back something that reminds him of little me, as well, and those things are what I find to be the most touching. Those are the things that make me want to cry, remembering my happy childhood, and wishing I could do it all over again.

When he brought me those sunglasses, he also brought me a bedazzled tank top that I would've loved when I was little. It's not something I would wear now, and he definitely knows that. But I think he handles me growing up in little doses. Sure, a pair of sunglasses for his teenager is a great gift. But you know what an even better gift is? A tank top that his six-year-old would've loved. It helps him cope, I think. He must've especially been thinking about little me on that trip, since he got a shirt that was two sizes too small.

There are times that I've noticed that the coolness of his gifts deteriorates somewhat, but that was mostly when I was middle school, and nothing was considered cool. His souvenirs definitely aren't as big of a deal now as they were when I was little, an unfortunate side effect of growing up. I didn't always love what he brought me, sometimes the jewelry or the mementos were not my taste at all. But that didn't mean I didn't love them. As I've gotten older, it's not the gift I appreciate, but the thought he put into it. He has the biggest heart of anyone I know.

“Dad, what’s this?” I asked, eyeing the tissue paper wrapped package sitting on top of his almost-unpacked suitcase.

“Oh, that’s your souvenir. Go ahead, open it.” While he bustled around sorting dirty clothes from clean ones, I gently unwrapped the paper to find a little doll. A scary looking little doll.

“What is it?” I asked cautiously, hoping it was a joke or that I’d missed the point.

“It’s a voodoo doll,” he smiled, standing with his arms full of laundry.

“Ooh, thanks. That’s so neat!” I did my best to look excited, but let’s be honest, this thing was creepy and I didn’t want it anywhere near me. My mom giggled when she saw my face, she can read me like a book. I quickly wrapped the doll up tight in its paper and hurried upstairs to my room, where I shoved it far in the back of my closet and did my best to forget about it. He tried, that’s what matters.

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I have always wanted to and always tried to repay my dad’s kindnesses. I feel like he deserves it. He knew what a sacrifice it was for us to be at home without him, but he did his best to make it as easy as possible on us and he attempted to make up for it with unique souvenirs. I think it was his way of bringing us on the trip with him.

It’s actually really hard to find ways to try to repay him, because I know that whatever I manage to do will never hold a candle to all that he has done for me. I’ll send him notes in the mail or leave doodles on his desk, FaceTime him when I know he’s bored or call him when I know he’s free. I’ve done my best to learn his language and make him as happy as I possibly can. I ask him for advice on things I don’t really need advice for, because he loves to be depended on. I’ll call him over Bluetooth when I’m driving home to visit and ask him where the

best place to stop for gas is or ask what he thinks I should make for dinner this week. His answer is one of three things: chicken ring, this thing my mom makes that is essentially cheese, chicken, bacon, and seasonings wrapped up in crescent dough and baked, or dinner in a dish, this other thing my mom makes, it's a recipe that's been in our family for years and is really delicious, but the description doesn't sound so great, or chicken, brown rice, and vegetables, a joke because he knows this is literally what I eat every single week. I'll ask him about what plans he's made for the boat for the coming weekend and what I should do when a light comes on my dash.

Since I've worked for his security company for a couple years now and know the ins and outs and I know his customers and procedures and some terminology, we've been able to bond over the business. He can vent to me about it and explain things to me, because he knows I will listen, just like he'll listen to me when I need to get things off my chest or I need relationship advice. He's really good at the relationship advice.

We'll make plans for the next time I come home or they come to visit, even if it's a month away. It's comforting to both of us to know that even though it's me who is away now, we are both just as excited to see each other as we were when he'd come home when I was little. It's funny how things change as you get older. My dad doesn't have to travel as much anymore, but when he does I'm not sitting at home missing him. I'm the one that's permanently gone now. His trips start and end when I'm still away at school, and sometimes I don't even know he's been travelling. He still sends his daily good morning texts, and nothing about his presence in my life changes, so sometimes I don't even notice.

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Now that I'm away at school, I bring my dad souvenirs. If it's weird or different, I've probably gotten it for him. White chocolate caramel nut butter from a funky gourmet PB&J

place, a FXBG sticker, an odd looking multi-purpose tool/pocket knife. I send him and my mom and brother little gifts for Valentine's Day and Halloween, I send them cards in the mail to let them know I'm thinking of them, just as Dad did for us when he was away. Since I'm the one who's absent now, I can only hope that they feel as loved by me as I did by my dad when he travelled.

When he comes to visit me at school, we always go to his favorite hole-in-the-wall German restaurant and he reminisces about all the time he spent in Germany and the things he picked out for me. He shares stories I've heard a million times, remembers what the ski slopes were like, and vividly describes the roasted pork knuckles he loves. He said the knuckle at this place is pretty close, but not quite as good. He loves that I get to have a literal taste of the country he was always in. To me it tastes like buttery spätzle and sauerkraut. I think he likes that I'm not only spending time with him, but I get to "experience" Germany. He even has me try his disgusting German beers when we go, just to get me acclimated to his German tastes. Maybe this means he'll take me with him the next time he goes.

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I love my dad because he lets me know as soon as he gets to wherever he's going. And he always checks in on me. Me personally. He doesn't just call my mom and have her relay the message, but he'll contact me to catch up. He'll give me full details about the peanuts he ate during the flight, this cool guy who is somehow slightly famous in some random country that he met in the airport, what he's having for dinner, and what channels he can get on his hotel TV. Once, during a trip to Spain, he got to visit Gibraltar on his day off and he had one heck of a day playing with the monkeys. He texted me pictures of this one parent monkey holding its baby

monkey on its back and said “Look, it’s you and me.” That one made me laugh. I really enjoyed picturing my dad playing with the monkeys. He brought me back a cool-looking rock from there.

Once, after finishing up school for the day and eating, I found out that I got my first ever 100% on a test. I was so excited, jumping up and down with my mom and brother, beyond excited by learning what I was capable of. And I ran into the living room, headed to Daddy’s chair to tell him the good news. “Daddy guess wh...” I stopped mid-sentence, only to remember that he’d had to leave unexpectedly earlier that day. He wouldn’t be home tonight. I sat in his chair, tears wetting my cheeks, and told his chair about my test. “You see, Dad, this is a big deal. This is the highest grade you can possibly get and Mom says that that means that I’m smart. Do you think I’m smart?” The chair didn’t answer back.

It is the small moments, the seemingly insignificant ones, where you feel the absence the most. It’s the moments when you think of funny joke that you know he’d laugh at, or you are just dying to watch another war movie with him since your mom hates them, or when you have a small personal victory that you want to share. It’s those moments. Those are the ones that can’t be fixed by a small treasure or toy. It’s knowing he can’t congratulate you, or hug you, or tell you how proud he is of you in the moment. He can tell you those things later, but they don’t mean as much then.

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My dad will always be my dad, that he’s always going to want me to be his little girl who depends on him and I’m always going to want to be. I’ll always look forward to seeing what he brought back for me from overseas, and I’ll always enjoy knowing that he saw something that made him think of me while he was away. Even though his presence in my childhood was mostly defined by his absences, he was still there and he is still an incredible dad. Over time, his gifts

have been a constant, but now that I'm getting older my ability to give back increases. I guess over the months I've discovered that the only gift I can give him that could ever compare is the gift of my time. Perhaps now that I'm older, that time will be spent together. Maybe his absences will no longer be absences, but presences because I'll get to go with him. Maybe we can all go with him. Maybe we can make up for lost time together during my childhood by filling scrapbooks with pictures from the trips we take together, by experiencing together, by finding souvenirs together. Maybe he won't have to buy me souvenirs at all, because I won't need something to remember him by, since I'll be right there with him. Perhaps this is the beginning of the end.

*I'm already there  
Take a look around  
I'm the sunshine in your hair  
I'm the shadow on the ground  
I'm the whisper in the wind  
And I'll be there until the end  
Can you feel the love that we share?  
Oh, I'm already there*

I hereby declare upon my word of honor that I have neither given nor received unauthorized help on this work. Signed, Abigail Nibblett