

FAMILY MATTERS

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a kind of peace because of it—the peace that comes from the naive assumption that if I had an appointment next week, if I was scheduled for a presentation next year, I'd be there. Time wouldn't mess with me; it wouldn't cut me short! I was safe because I was An Important Person Doing Important Things, and had a growing CV to think of.

I'm now in my third year of retirement, and sometimes I can't remember what day it is. That's not to say that I don't have a calendar or commitments, but time is a different thing when the clock is no longer in charge. Gianna is 4 now. We don't play "more more time" any longer. Yet I still wrestle with wanting more more time myself, because—though I often wish it were otherwise—nothing can change the fact that there are far fewer grains of sand in my hourglass than before, and that the total will dwindle further with each passing moment, hour, day.

When I was Gianna's age, I didn't know there was such a thing as time. In my teens, I often felt that time stretched out before me like an endless red carpet I could walk down forever. Marriage entered the picture in my early 20s, and a career. Then came children—and growth, change, pain, celebration, thankfulness, accomplishment, failure, reassessment, and leave-taking, then aches and pains that don't go away, fathers who die, mothers who age, and grandchildren . . . beautiful grandchildren. With age and experience, I realize that time is a delicate construct at best, something more fragile than I ever allowed myself to believe all those mornings, all those years when I dutifully rose to meet each day.

"Hi, Dad, this is an emergency. . . ." Our eldest daughter was eight months pregnant when I got this call. I drove through a snowstorm, my wife following from work, and found our daughter sitting in their car, my son-in-law standing outside waiting for me. We exchanged barely a word as

they sped off to the hospital. My wife and I found the frightening evidence of our daughter's abruption inside the house, and—not knowing what else to do—dutifully and silently cleaned it up while Gianna slept in her room, unaware.

Makayla weighed barely four pounds when she was born, 12 minutes after her mommy and daddy had reached the hospital's emergency room. The next morning, the doctor told our son-in-law that had they arrived 15 minutes later, both our daughter and granddaughter would have died. The next day, my wife announced that she was going to retire. As she put it simply, "Life's too short."

She's right. Our time here is fleeting at best, a shooting star across the night sky. In recent months, I've been reminded of this over and over again: a 23-year-old acquaintance awaiting bone-marrow transplantation; a brother-in-law in surgery for 11 hours; a former coworker committing suicide at the end of a long work day; a best friend's father dying slowly in a hospice, at peace, his only complaint being "I didn't think it would take so long."

Gianna and I are sitting in the garden in the far corner of the backyard. It's early spring. The sun shines bright and warm through the budding oaks and ashes that surround us, but the air is cool, hanging onto the memory of winter. We're digging in the dirt in search of bugs and, hopefully, squishy worms. My wife is walking across the lawn toward the swings, holding Makayla's hand. Now 2 years old and a delightful red-haired imp, Makayla is talking and gesturing with her tiny arms as my wife laughs. Gianna jumps with delight as I pick up a worm for her inspection. I look at her face and see her mother at the same age.

I lean back on my hands and take in the whole scene. I feel like I've dropped through a trapdoor in time and entered a vast banquet hall, in which I float, feasting on every sensation, grateful for every molecule of experience. I think, *This is it*—and as soon as I do, *it is gone*, unwilling to be

captured by any words, any definitions I might apply.

Of course, somewhere inside, I knew it all along. "More more time" isn't about more anything. It isn't about duration. It's about the fullness of time, the expansiveness of an unprotected moment, when everything that time has to offer is awakened in the endless present. *It is* no more available now that I'm retired than it ever was. *It* has always been here, calling to me through every single moment of every single day that I've lived. The only advantage I have in retirement is that, from time to time, I wait and watch and listen. ■

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