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Garage goodbyes, ocean highs and a father's aching heart

Life's most precious moments often pass unnoticed, their significance realized only in hindsight. For years, my son Noah's daily ritual of darting to the garage for a farewell hug was a comforting prelude to my workday. This small act of love, repeated countless times, was a constant—until it wasn't.

The instant it stopped eludes me, lost in the blur of ordinary mornings. Its absence is a poignant reminder that childhood is fleeting.

As such cherished routines gradually evolve or fade, we're left with a bittersweet longing for occurrences we wish we had enjoyed more acutely as they transpired.

Lately, I've been reflecting on the essence of childhood, spurred by Noah's nascent teenage years and the recent addition of our fourth child.

This new dynamic has changed our family's equilibrium, challenging each child to adapt to more divided parental attention.

They're learning the art of self-reliance, discovering ways to occupy themselves rather than depending on parental engagement.

This complex but joyous transition requires everyone to adjust to different roles and expectations as we meet each

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other's needs while fostering independence.

Today Noah competes in the U.S. Kids Golf World Championship in Pinehurst, North Carolina. Meanwhile, I'm at a hotel desk in California, the Pacific Ocean sprawling before me in a panorama almost too grand to be real.

I'm here for a work conference that offers significant intellectual stimulation and invaluable networking opportunities, allowing me to build lasting professional connections. Despite this, I can't shake a nagging sense of divided priorities and question whether this conference is worth missing irreplaceable memories with Noah.

Often, I reminisce about young Noah's enthusiastic garage hugs. I'm grateful to have

captured one such instance on my iPhone, a digital keepsake of an irretrievable past. Yet this recording also brings a tinge of melancholy because it merely represents a lived reality, lacking the spontaneity of the present and the promise of the future.

Irish author John Connolly provides a profound insight in this month's "Word to the Wise": "For in every adult, there dwells the child that was, and in every child, there lies the adult that will be." This sentiment suggests our identity is not confined to a single stage in development but is a continuous, evolving blend of all our experiences.

Sitting here, miles away from Noah's golf rounds this week, I'm struck by this tightrope between our career obligations and the pull of our heartstrings. I can't help but wonder if this perpetual balancing isn't the real coming-of-age story, not just for our kids but for us dads, too.

Gone are the days when that little whirlwind would race to me each morning, all eager smiles and warm hugs. Now, he stands on faraway fairways, golf club in hand, charting his course with each swing. Though I may not be there

to witness every shot, I can conjure up the warmth of those garage embraces if I close my eyes and let my imagination wander.

Therein lies the struggle of fatherhood: We're tasked with the seemingly impossible—letting go while holding on for dear life. We must create space and allow for a bit of separation to truly appreciate our bond and ensure our kids cultivate their unique selfhood. But tread carefully because too much distance can leave scars on both sides.

We can't shirk our duties as providers, climbing the occupational ladder to keep food on the table and a roof overhead. Nor can we neglect our role as present, engaged fathers, being there for the big and small occasions alike. It's about releasing our children to their own adventures while desperately clinging to the affection that transcends time and space.

But here's the kicker—and I'll be damned honest about it—while this growing-up business is wonderful, amazing, and inevitable for us both, boy, my dear boy, does it hurt.

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