UP front

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Pig. Pig. Pony.

When my daughters were little, their mother was a traveling investment banker. Mornings when she was on the road, the kids and I did an ill-choregraphed, chaotic dance. We snatched outfits from drawers and threw them to the ground when they were rejected. We tried to eat something. We brushed teeth. Then, it was time for hair.

As a coiffeur, I was mostly inept. My younger daughter's locks were texturally fine. Also, short-ish. And straight. Few interesting or practical styling options presented themselves to me, but I stumbled upon one by accident when I tried to draw her uncooperative mane into a neat ponytail. Strands on both sides of her head's vertical axis liberated themselves defiantly from the rubber band with which I fought to secure them. A subset, maybe half, remained in a single desperate sprig of bundled hope. The rest retreated to either side. Instead of a proper ponytail, we were left with a knotted nub reminiscent of an old, mostly bald hippie trying haplessly to cling to his faded youth.

What to do with the rogue, unharnessed mess to the left and right of center? We had plenty of rubberbands, so a pair of pigtails, obviously. And so it was: The Pig, Pig, Pony was born.

I wish I had a photo handy. Several exist, I'm certain, but we stuff them in boxes filed and stacked LIFO-style (last-in, first-out). The precious stuff sinks to the bottom, where retrieving a sought-after image becomes an overwhelming pursuit best left undone. If a mind's eye could squint, mine is scrunched narrowly to sharpen the stored image of my second-born and the signature toddler style I cursed or blessed her with, depending on one's perspective and the passage of time.

She turns 30 today. Her hair is fuller. It has body and shape. Professionals tend to it, not her fat-thumbed dad. She is all grown up, and she is striking, but I'm reminded of her as a little girl when I see her every day. The devilish smile that suits her natural comedic genius is the same one she wore when she was three. Today, her consistent physical presence in our lives, just a five-minute walk away, is among the greatest of a lifetime's worth of generous gifts God has given me.



The 20 months we had with her sister before she came along taught us that we could keep a delicate human alive, despite our trepidation. You're less obsessive with the second one. You don't strain to verify every breath each night. So the second ones develop a big, unrestrained personality…at least ours did. And relentless competitiveness and a spirit of self-determination. And a giant, vulnerable heart.

In the days of the pig, pig, pony, something formed and remained that enabled her, as a high school student, to survive saying goodbye forever to her mother much too soon for any girl to have to do. She honors that memory as a businesswoman who self-funded her dream and toiled relentlessly in isolation to build an enterprise with customers in 101 countries today.

I am proud of my little girl. I admire her. She has done and achieved things beyond my reach. Her story – it's early chapters of an epic novel for the ages, to my mind.

I've both avoided and struggled with the question of what to get her, what to do for and with her to celebrate this milestone. I could say it's because nothing I can afford or access or offer equals the achingly profound love I feel for her. But that's a cop-out and not a valid excuse for inertia. So, with Jenna's great help, we've got a few things and a plan.

My little baby is 30 today. The person she is now is arguably my favorite selection from a dense catalogue of greatest hits three decades in the making. But I keep three rubber bands in my desk and the idea of the pig, pig, pony…a metaphor for the process of learning to be a dad…a thing I'm still trying to figure out today…as a simple reminder of how incredibly fortunate I am.



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