

upfront

In September of 2003, when I launched this magazine, my daughters were 7 and 8. Fatherhood was still relatively new to me. The girls were growing and so was I. I wrote about them often in this column, maybe to say to them – indirectly – the things that I couldn't effectively communicate in real time. Sometimes, they scolded me for sharing them with the world.

Arguably, the girls' paths have been more linearly ascendant than mine. But we – all three of us – are much more complete people than we were 23ish years ago. Life's roads are winding, treacherous with complex, unpredictable curves. Euclidean geometry is the one you learned in high school. With it, things are relatively predictable. Parallel lines never meet. Lines that aren't parallel eventually intersect. Non-Euclidean geometry transcends such basic restrictions. In a non-Euclidean context, parallel lines can cross one another...don't ask me how or why...but I think it's tied to the notion that space, and the universe, is multi-dimensional and infinitely transforming. And so is life.

Yet sometimes a circle is a circle. A precise, closed system. Symmetry and gravity in a simple shape. My younger daughter, now 29, is moving back here next week. The plan – although I'm hesitant to jinx it – is to make this her young family's permanent home. Her husband grew up here, too, and his parents remain in the area...which is great. Gabby and Andrew bought a house that is currently under renovation. It's a five-minute walk from ours. This scenario didn't seem even a remote possibility until about six months ago, give or take. Then, it coalesced quickly. Now, it's like it was never not the obvious and logical thing.

For those of you who haven't read me regularly for more than two decades, let me refresh you. The daughter who is returning is the feistier one. She's arguably the more flamboyant of the two, in a very endearing way. She was physically rougher than her sister as a little girl – she sort-of-sometimes bullied her little “big” sister, yet they both pursued ballet. The junior one was, and is, a natural athlete, though she was a tad lazy about it as a teen. She would describe herself as a not-top student in high school; but she has consistently undersold herself in this regard. She sings like an angel, with a huge, wide-ranging natural vibrato. She's funny. She's dramatic. She's prone to exaggerating narratives, both in her own mind and when she retells them. And she has developed a work ethic that is second to nobody I have ever observed. I'm flummoxed that she'll turn 30 this fall.

As a high school student, she lost her mother. Such things can yield wildly divergent outcomes for the survivors. In Gabby's case, her life since has served as a continuous pursuit to honor the legacy of the hopes her mom had for her. (Same for her sister. We have been blessed with amazing kids.)

Gabby went away to college in Dallas and enjoyed academic and

social success. She moved to New York and lived in a section of a undersized living room in an overpriced two-bedroom apartment with two other girls. She was “furloughed” during the pandemic – short-hand for no pay, no benefits, and no indication the job would resume – so she moved home for a few months and started building an idea – amorphous, rather than fully formed – and a following that would one day morph into a fast-growing, impressively-scaled business with global reach. She met her now-husband, who was then in medical school.

Eventually, the world went back to work – more or less – and Gabby returned to New York to resume her PR career. Andrew accepted a residency spot in New Orleans, and the young couple headed to the Crescent City for what would total nearly four years. During that time, Gabby earned a master's degree from Tulane, various certifications in nutrition and fitness, and honed a wide array of skills. She launched a company that is an online, subscription-based platform with customers – passionate devotees – in 48 countries. She has appeared on national TV. Meanwhile, Andrew earned board certification, treated thousands of patients with sincere compassion and earnest care, built Gabby's in-apartment production studio and, ultimately, secured a physician job in the couple's childhood hometown. Gabby and Andrew got a dog. Now, they're coming home.

Circles are circles; expanding arcs until they rejoin themselves. Gabby's older sister, Sofia, is the more outwardly reserved one. She is classically elegant, a bit guarded, and savagely smart. She was a college sophomore when she lost her mother. She didn't waver in her pursuit of academic excellence. She landed the exact job she targeted and has progressed with top-of-class consistency through three A-list companies. Along the way, I lost her a bit for a little while – circumstance of my struggles more than hers – but it feels like we have both unconsciously reinforced the indescribably powerful bond that made “Butterfly Kisses” our shared song when she was a sweet, wispy white ponytail and a pair of enormous rosy cheeks.

Next week, Jenna and I are going to New York and, among other things, we're heading uptown with Sofia and her boyfriend to Yankee Stadium for a Friday night game. My eldest daughter currently lives less than 10 Manhattan blocks from where she did during her preschool years, but I bask in silent, private joy when she instinctively – and often – refers to Savannah as “home.”

In a non-Euclidean way, when I found Jenna, my grown girls embraced their stepmom, and she – completely and enthusiastically – them. Jenna has become a true partner in the life into which mine has – surprisingly, unexpectedly, organically...thankfully – evolved. In fact, Jenna is integral to this magazine's stubborn resilience, among many other things that are good in my world.

While Andrew and Gabby are packing boxes, Jenna and I are checking on the progress of their home renovations. The project might not be 100-percent finished in time for their return, but this special circle will be complete, nonetheless.

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