

A Liminal Space

My dad always told me that I should learn to pause in life long enough to watch the grass grow, but for most of my life, a pause entailed something much shorter—a week, maybe two, for a vacation. In a sense, I have always lived in the fast lane. I flew through high school in three years and graduated Cum Laude. I then proceeded to turn right around and finish my undergraduate in three years with a Summa Cum Laude distinction and the highest GPA of the graduating political science department—all before I could legally drink. But shortly after college, I would enter into a liminal space in which I would come to learn the true meaning of the word pause and what it means to serve others.

As I stood at the law school threshold, I hesitated— an uncharacteristic move for me—and instead, I chose to pause when my dad received his official diagnosis of Alzheimer's in 2019. This same disease took my aunt in 2017, so I already understood that my mom would need significant support to care for my dad. Thus, combining my previous experience with the disease and being at a point in my life where I could devote my time wholeheartedly, I decided to put my parents' needs above myself.

During this time, my identity as a daughter became overshadowed by my new identity as a caretaker. With this shift in identity came two significant hurdles: keeping my dad happy with losing his independence and getting the house ready to sell so my mom could downsize into a home that would allow her to afford assisted living for my dad.

The first hurdle dealt with one of my dad's essential facets: his independence. So during this time, I had to learn how to offer freedom to a man whose condition demanded an ever-increasing amount of dependence on others. My dad refused to accept his situation, which led to frustration, especially when my mom took away his car keys and firearms. This, in turn, led to

his many attempts to run away and regularly resulted in verbal abuse. To make him happier, I decided to start taking him to run the usual weekly errands. Occasionally, I would take him on drives in the country, one of his favorite activities; something about the wheels turning under him made him feel independent and free, I think.

The second hurdle was getting the house ready to sell. Usually, moving is a monumental task, but after discovering how extensive my dad's hoarding had become (a common occurrence with Alzheimer's), the job became Herculean. It took an entire year to get the house show-ready. But I set aside efficiency and adapted my tasks to include my dad to feel a sense of usefulness. As we worked fixing up the house, I began to understand what he meant to watch the grass grow because our slow pace allowed me to enjoy the moments I had with him. Who knew that despite my dad's condition, he was still teaching me life lessons.

Truthfully, this time has not been easy for me and has proved difficult on many fronts. To start, picking up a caretaker's role is not one I expected to pick up so early in life. My friends cannot comprehend my experiences, which brings feelings of loneliness that I still process. I had learned to stop comparing myself to my former classmates, which took understanding that life has different obstacles for us all. I also had to learn to refine my focus on my goals because what I thought would be a couple of months between school turned into years. During that time, I learned how to derive motivation from reflection by looking back on my time as an intern for Melvin Thathiah, my mentor attorney. I will never forget how deeply I fell into researching a child custody dispute for Melvin. I spent nearly two hours before taking a break but instantly feeling the need to get back to it for the client's sake. The urgency I felt to continue working gave me confidence that I am on the right career path. The time spent with him on an array of

civil and criminal cases became my constant reminders of how much I thoroughly enjoyed what he did, which motivated me to stay focused on my goal of law school.

Nevertheless, if given a chance at a do-over, I would enter the liminal space again because my growth has become invaluable. I realized that the time I invested in caring for my dad and helping my mom taught me the importance of one of the fundamentals of practicing attorneys—it is a service-based industry. I had to learn how to adapt my routine to amplify my dad's desires the best I could, the same way I hope to do for clients one day. This foundational lesson, combined with the experience I have garnered from my time under Amy Collins, PC, who advises and consults on medical multidistrict litigations, has significantly shaped my understanding of what it means to advocate for others. It means to serve wholeheartedly, and most importantly, ensuring that your client's interests are filled to the best of your abilities, all of which I hope to embody in my career as an attorney.

Looking back, watching the grass grow is a gift. It is the chance to notice the small details that go overlooked or be present to the person sitting right across from you. I know the liminal space has served me well and that these lessons will remain with me throughout law school and my career. Now that my mom has settled in her new home and my dad has excellent care in his assisted living, I know that it is time for me to step over the threshold dividing the liminal space and law school as a better person and student for the time that I took to pause.