

Since learning Alicia was pregnant, I've spent a lot of time contemplating the things I'll tell our new child about what matters in life. Alicia and I have always been honest with the girls, shielding them when they need shielding (such as when I was injured) but also letting them see the world as it is, the good and the bad. We've both imparted lessons whenever we could—about decency, fairness, family, responsibility— and we've emphasized the importance of self-sufficiency and integrity, in terms they could understand. But since we had Hero, our youngest child, our lives have drastically changed. And I've wondered how what we teach our new child will change because of that.

How, then, will I explain the world to him or her? (As of this writing I don't know if we're having a boy or girl— we never find out ahead of time, we like being surprised— so for now I will refer to our future son or daughter as A.)

Well, when they are old enough, I will tell them this:

*A, you were born into a beautiful world but a world that is divided. Everywhere, people see things differently, and they break apart into teams, and they begin to view each other as rivals and enemies, and sometimes it seems like there's nothing that can ever bring everyone together.*

*But, A, I need you to know there is something that unites us all, something bigger and more powerful than any issue that divides us. And that is what I call our common moral backbone as human beings. I've traveled all over the world and been in places where the divisions are so deep, they destroy any sense of normal life. I've been to the most dangerous areas on the planet, and I've seen the very bad things that happen when people no longer trust or believe in each other. It's something I hope you never have to see, but it's important that you know it exists.*

*But it's even more important that you understand these divisions are not the whole story. Because when I've gone to these broken, seemingly doomed places, and witnessed the worst of human nature, I've also seen the very best of humanity. I've seen people risking their lives to help complete strangers. Families saving other families from danger and destruction. Villagers relying on each other to get through horrible catastrophes. And I've seen how reaching out to others and building communities and forging bonds through faith and love are the true defining traits of human beings, and not the hatred and divisions and despair that can derail us.*

*We are all bound by a common moral backbone and a shared will to do what's right and good. That's what your grandfather Roderick taught me when I was your age— that we all instinctively know the right thing to do, and that we must try as hard as we can to always do that thing. Of course, we are human, and humans are fallible, and sometimes people lose their way, and sometimes whole groups of people turn their backs on our shared humanity. But in the end, this common moral backbone is unbreakable. It will always be there. I know this is true, because I've seen how it endures in the most hate-ravaged places on earth. There will never be anything more powerful anywhere than two people talking to each other, finding their commonality, helping each other in hard times and building communities in which they can thrive.*

*We can rely on this. Our backbone holds up under enormous pressure. It is our true nature as human beings. So, A, don't ever be cynical about the world, and don't ever despair that we can't mend what's broken. Be hopeful, be positive, believe in what we can do when we come together. I need you to know this as you grow up and go out into society, because I want you to be a force for good and an agent for positive change. I need you to be strong and determined, and I need you to use that unbreakable backbone to fix the world.*

*A, one day I will tell you the full story of what happened to me in Ukraine. You've seen my so-called robot leg, and in your innocence, you thought nothing of it. Maybe you thought everyone eventually grows a robot leg. But as you get older, you'll have more questions, and I'll answer them as best I can. I'll tell you why I went to Ukraine, and what the people of that country were going through, and why I put myself in risky situations. Some of it will make sense; some might not. Believe me, I don't have all the answers. But when you get older and we talk about what happened, I hope I can convey to you how beautiful life is, and how it's worth fighting for— but also how terribly fragile it can be...*

...

*The hard times will come, A. I wish I could protect you from them, but I can't. All I can do is what I'm doing— telling you what I've learned about resilience, and the ways to activate it, and the need to trust it, and all the steps you can take to empower yourself in times of crisis.*

*You have it in you. We all do. It's just who we are.*