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Great Books

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Born at 50

From the moment I was born, I was one of three. Not one of three children, one of three people. My mother, my father, and me. As an only child, my familial relationships have always been ones that I've held close to my heart. Being in a family as close-knit as mine, everything that happened to one of us, happened to all.

Growing up as an only child is precisely how it seems and I can confirm that "only child syndrome" is very much a real thing. While I don't think that I am bossy or self-absorbed, I do think that I am more mature and have grown up differently than most. My parents have always treated me as an equal, not a child that they needed to raise. When I was five, I was told by my next-door neighbor that I was "born at fifty." I laughed and smiled when he told me that, obviously not understanding what that meant. To me, I had felt like the youngest, oldest, and middle child all the time.

But in the split second it took my family to go from three to two, I grew up. I was no longer the youngest, oldest, or middle child. I wasn't a child at all. Not only did I lose my father, my best friend, but I also lost my innocence and my childhood all at the same time. I aged at the speed of light, learning things about the terrible sides of life that no child should ever have to learn. I learned to deal with the tricky grown-up things that come with

life as a fifteen-year-old... a freshman in high school. And though I was always more “grown-up” than my peers all throughout elementary and middle school, I was now truly grown-up in the worst ways possible.

In a matter of weeks, I learned the ins and outs of the legalities of losing a loved one, the procedures that the hospital must follow after a death, and much more. How many other kids my age can say that they’ve learned that? I’m willing to bet very few. But weaved in with all of the misfortune, were silver linings- positive sides to my circumstances. Now, more than ever, I am able to discern the differences and values of positive, nurturing relationships. I can clearly depict those that are going to be there for me and those that are going to fall short. I’ve realized the *true* meaning of responsibility and that having a set of chores to complete each week isn’t it. I’ve come to understand that responsibility is a commitment to those around you- putting others first even when you are in the midst of something that might seem worse. I have comprehended, beyond any of my counterparts, the authentic connotation of the feelings of love and loss. It has become apparent to me that you cannot have one without the other; a package deal of sorts. Lastly, and certainly, most significantly, I have come to terms with the realization that life is short. Life is too short to give someone the silent treatment. Life is too short not to tell someone that you love them. Life is too short to take any of it for granted.

As the dust settles, six months into this new life of mine, I am coming to realize that what I thought was going to be a phase, isn’t really a phase at all. It is a new way of life. I used to hope that the feeling of loss would ultimately blow over, that one day I would wake up and the hole in my heart would be repaired. I constituted all of that as a phase. But as I walk through life now, I’m coming to understand that my life isn’t going to go

back to normal. I am, time and time again, hit with the reality of the situation- I have to create a new normal. One in which I learn to live with grief and loss. But in that new normal, alongside the pain, comes a newfound appreciation for the small beauties of life, a sense of grace and forgiveness in showing emotions, and a stronger drive to live in the present and enjoy every possible moment of it. Life moves fast, almost always *too* fast. Our time here on Earth is filled with a collection of phases, eras, and moments. What I have learned from this phase of mine is that every single juncture of life is meaningful. Before you know it, time is up. So it is crucial that your time is spent relishing every minute of it.