

The words I never heard my father speak have become the guiding principles that have led my young life. His quiet confidence that I barely witnessed has become my *modus operandi*. His work ethic that I was too young to understand has become my way of life. His values that I hardly knew have become the compass I most heavily depend on. How could this be?

We are a September 11th family. What was meant to scare us as a nation somehow made us stronger as a family. I was only 3 years old when my father called that morning to tell us there was an explosion in his building; my sister was 2 years old and my mother was two months pregnant. It is undeniable that all of our lives as Americans changed in that very moment, yet for my family, it was in a most unexpected way. My mother found the courage to live up to the dream that she and my father had envisioned since they first met when they were 18 years old. She was a woman on a mission; a mission on how to raise her children, a mission far stronger than what hatred could shake. Part of that mission now included keeping my father's memory alive, teaching us to be grateful for our many blessings and encouraging us to make decisions that would have made him proud. My mother has accomplished this and far more.

Because I was so young at the time, I do not remember much. What I do remember is my mom's never ending strength and smile. She turned even the most ordinary event into a positive experience, sure to point out little signs from Daddy. The first sighting of a hummingbird in our lives occurred on the morning of my 1st Holy Communion after we spent years trying to attract these beautiful birds to our backyard feeder. Ever since, hummingbirds have made special appearances at the most ironic moments, like on Father's Day when it happened to fall on my sister's birthday and again more recently as we took a college road trip to the West Coast. Rainbows seem to magically appear on his birthday and we find X's in the sky created by airplanes' trails, kisses from Daddy, right when we need them. One of the most wonderful signs from Daddy arrived just seven months after 9/11 - the birth of my brother, Matthew. From the moment he was born, Matthew looked just like our father, and of course Mom would tell us, this is a constant, living sign that Daddy is with us always.

As I have gained my own experiences and grown over the years, my father's core beliefs serve as a constant reminder of his presence, emerging as the map I most often rely upon to help navigate my way. His favorite sayings and optimistic spirit are engrained within me, simply automatic without conscious thought. *"The harder you work, the luckier you get."* Whenever I am in the classroom or on the golf course, I summon this expression. It challenges me to take the most advanced classes that stretch my thinking. It inspires me to get involved with Student Government and be the difference I want to see in my world. It commits me to improve my golf game, dedicating hours of practice on the range during the off-season to become the best player and teammate I can be. The crystal pyramid that sits upon a shelf at home engraved with "Outstanding Young Gun" encourages me that my hard work in life will empower me to reach my goals, as it did for my father and his resulting young success. *"Surround yourself with good people."* Whenever I am meeting new people or building relationships, I consider this advice revealing the importance of investing in others. It underpins the value that friendships play in the happiness we experience. It reinforces the significance of being a good friend. Honesty, loyalty and trustworthiness are the qualities that bind my friendships. I am guided towards those who are kind, hardworking and optimistic like my father. I know that a certain synergy can exist among such special groups of people, which can unlock a greater potential. I have seen this first hand among my father's friends. His colleagues have organized an annual golf outing in his memory at my parents' alma mater resulting in proceeds that have become one of the largest endowed funds at Eckerd College. Last year, they even purchased a golf team van for the college and inscribed

"Matthew T. McDermott
Captain's Chair"

on the seat behind the driver. My father was a man of his word, one who would make things happen, just like his friends have done for him. I feel so proud to share in this tangible legacy that gives back to a place special to our family. *"Enjoy your challenges, because challenges build endurance, endurance builds character, and character builds hope."* Whenever I am faced with an obstacle, I turn to this inspiration. It provides courage to seek the truth. It offers strength to stay the course. I love being hopeful – I have to be. I choose to be. Like my father, I am a New York Mets fan. Every year since 2001, my family chooses to celebrate Daddy's Birthday in Heaven by going to a Mets game rather than dreading the day with feelings of sorrow. I am motivated by this quest to find the positive in life,

particularly during the most trying times because those provide the greatest opportunities to learn and grow.

Although my father may not be by my side physically, I know he is with me every step of the way. His favorite quotes inspire me. His quiet confidence runs through me. His dedicated work ethic beckons me. His values guide me. I am very grateful that I have my father who proved to me there will be times in my life when I will have to dig down deep, but I also know that I can handle all that life has in store for me. Like my mother, I have always tried to make decisions that would make my father proud. I know what my father would want for me, not just to cope and hope, but survive and thrive. Now it is my responsibility to make it happen. There is no doubt my father would love my decision to apply Early Decision to Wake Forest, as he was a huge Arnold Palmer fan!