

## What Your Parents Want

I was on campus last week when Eunice (not her real name) saw me from afar. Since she knew I retired last year, she was surprised to see me. Eunice was in my biology course for first year students several years ago and as we warmly greeted each other, I asked if this was the year she graduates. She grinned and said “Yes.”

“What are your plans after graduation?” I inquired.

“I don’t have any plans. I guess I’ll move back home with Mom,” she said.

I shifted to advisor mode. “What do your parents want for you?” is a question I often posed to my students in one-on-one meetings. Many of them get part of it correct on their first attempt: “They want me to be happy.” That’s exactly what Eunice said.

“You are right!” I confirmed. “There are any number of ways to be happy. Since they’ve known you for a long time, your folks probably have some strong opinions about what they think will bring you happiness, but you must figure that out for yourself.”

“What else do they want?” I prodded.

There’s often a long, thoughtful pause at this point. I usually end the awkwardness by saying, “I’ll tell you another thing they want. They want you to be self-sufficient. That’s why they’re supporting you during your education. They want you to earn enough money to provide for yourself, so they don’t have to be financially responsible for you forever. They want you to earn enough to have everything you need, and lots of what you want.”

This often generates a facial expression that indicates, “I know they love me, and I’ll know they’ll be glad when I can live independently.” And so it was with Eunice.

“There may be a third thing they want for you. Maybe your parents hope you’ll live a life of purpose. Will you do something that really matters beyond yourself? Will you contribute to the happiness of others?”

These two or three universal parental desires were not apparent to me until my own children were approaching adulthood. I suppose my parents wondered for nearly three decades whether I’d ever get my dream job as a college professor, when

they'd no longer have to worry about me financially, and if I would actually make a positive difference in the lives of the people I encounter, including my students.

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Am I happy? Yes! Am I self-sufficient? Yes! Am I living a life of purpose? I hope so.

G.R. Davis Jr.

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