

Dear XXXX,

I've waited for you to complete your first quarter, so I can write you a letter at a time when the newness of MBA is wearing off, and some of the Harding memories have begun to fade. You have made so many great choices about family communication, working hard in school, playing lots of different sports, and being a good friend to others. Your Mom and I could not be more hopeful for your future happiness, and to imagine the contributions you will be making to the happiness of your future family, some day.

One of the big differences about starting high school is that the decisions you make in the next 2 years, will be affecting the options you have for the next 6-10 years. So this is a great time to share with you some thoughts about becoming a good man, a more able man than many, capable of preparing his family for happiness, success, and full of love.

Like all babies, you are born into a world where the family's strengths and weaknesses have been handed forward to children, generation after generation. So "who you are" needs to be understood in the context of your great-grand parents on my side of the family, which is as far back as I can go. Your mother's side of the family is equally important to you, and you can address XXXX, XXXX, and Mom for those valuable insights.

What you need to know is that in the 1920's, Europe and Hungary were all recovering from World War 1, and the living conditions were agrarian, food and luxuries were not plentiful. Because there was so little value to trade economically after the war, many families would sell their children off into a life of servitude to bring in needed extra money, and this happened to Grandpa XXXX's father, XXXX. He was sold into a xxx business at age 12, worked 6 days per week, slept on a cot next to his xxxxx machine, and eventually, "he ran for his freedom" at age 18. XXXX then immigrated to America, alone, and with very little money, he was processed at Ellis Island in New York Harbor. To his credit, he was eventually able to set up his own xxx shop in Spanish Harlem on the upper eastside of New York City, had a virtually arranged marriage to my grandmother XXXX, and had 3 boys, one of whom was my father, XXXX. Variations on this story happened to 3 of my 4 grandparents who immigrated from Hungary.

While there are many more details about your great-grandparents, I want you to understand their basic circumstances...they were under-privileged, they worked hard, they found a way to own their own modestly successful businesses, they educated their children...all in a country where the language, culture and society were completely foreign. Grandpa XXXX once told me that the first time he ever ate in a restaurant was when he was 17, and he regretted that no parent or family member ever explained anything about the USA...but how could they? At an early age, maybe 8, he knew more English, more History, more about the USA than his parents did...all they knew was that we work, even when we're sick, because a day without pay is a day without food for their family of five.

What Grandpa XXX got was an excellent, free education, because of the public school system, and the GI Bill which subsidized the higher education of army veterans. Your Grandpa and Grandmother XXXX were both exceptionally well-educated people...XXXX got to xxx Business School but was pulled out when his father XXXX died and he had to run the family business, and XXXX got her Masters in xxx, at a time when very few women had Masters.

These are parts of your roots, their experiences are reflected in my values, and I share my values with you, XXXX, and your Mother in clear ways about education, hard work, risk taking, business building, family building, love of family, kindness, community etc. I also have tried hard to make your life better

by reducing some of the volatility that I faced growing up, that I attribute to the consequences of an immigrants harder life, than the one I had. For me, this has taken significant adjustments to my perspective about the limitations of my parents, based on their life experiences. Had I not matured and changed my thoughts to one's focused on good health, positive aspirations, and a healthy compassion for how hard someone's life can be...I could easily have become a bitter father, a husband, and a businessman...because I would be failing to "Own my personal happiness" through the choices I've made.

I had no choice but to be a part of my family, to account for the good and the bad, and to chart my own course for my life. And this is the key hand-off from me to you. I always wanted a family, I always wanted healthy babies, and I wanted us to live a better life than the one I grew up in...but with respect for the efforts made by my parents...because their opportunities were very different because of the world they were born into, and the circumstances that defined them.

I believe that you were born into a family filled with love. We value family, education, integrity, hard work...and that in very little time, we will be setting you free to chart your course forward, to build the life of your dreams. No one ever feels ready for these moments, but knowing who you are, that we love you, and chasing bigger dreams, are the elements that you'll need to make better choices.

Before we get to the future, let's highlight your nature, and the young man that is taking shape before our eyes. When you came out of your Mom, you were straight as an arrow, strong, and sweet. I of course had been whispering to you through your Moma's belly, and I believed you knew my voice from the start! You were filled with smiles and cuteness, but boy could you cry loudly. You hated to go to bed, and Mom always pointed out how much you loved to be in the middle of the action, which I thought was really dear of her! The truth was, neither of us minded your shrieks, but we were glad when that phase had passed.

You can see from pictures and videos that you were an incredibly cute, high energy boy. You've always had this fascination with fun things like balloons and whistles, but I remember you channeling that fun-loving spirit into your brief, in-line hockey experience. With your hockey shirt (more like a dress because you were barely a 3-footer at 4) hanging to the ground...you were so motivated to play well and to score, against much bigger boys. XXXX loved the game as well, and he gave you the cover of a big brother, being kind...which you seemed happy to accept, during that season. You both are blessed to have each other today, and tomorrow your brotherhood will grow in value, in a way XXXX speaks about his brotherhood today.

When I think about your first days at St. George's with your pacifier, bunny and speechless for most of the 3's...I take some fatherly literary license and compare you to 11 years later as you stepped onto the rink with all those skilled and large MBA hockey players. For me, your nature really showed. You were differential as you surveyed the scene, but confident enough to play well. You are a "Doer" by nature, and you are smart about it! I have great respect and admiration for the Doers in this world...everyone wants better and more...but few have the willingness to take risks, do the work, and accept failure if it occurs...all in the pursuit of Doing something.

In a way, you have been very fortunate through to this point in your life. You have instinctively known what to do, if you have been off-track, you've been self-correcting, which is an awesome skill. But remember, adversity comes to everyone, and it can knock you off-track and test your decision making.

In these hard moments, your poise, your sense of your goals and your dreams will help you make your way forward, even when you're not feeling 100%.

I think you know how much I love your XXXX and XXXX. I have learned many things from them, and XXXX taught me to embrace my problems, to work through them...and that is just wise advice, because unsolved problems get worse not better! Another aspect to life, is to seek the advice and wisdom of people older than you...don't be afraid to ask, or to think that they wouldn't be interested, because they probably have already faced a similar problem...so remember, some older folks can help develop a better solution, then some of your less experienced peers.

Now, onto your future. As I've always told you, God smiled upon you, he graced you with many strengths, because he wants you to be an effective leader in this world. God wants you to be someone who can find the strength in choices or problems, and someone who can use his abilities to convince people to follow you towards his positive light. As you get older, you will be staking your claim to your ideas about what a good life can be. Here are some things I want you to think about from ages 14 to 24 when you are fully into your career:

1. Know what your **"Do Not Do"** list looks like, and you will avoid embarrassment, or missed opportunities, or in some cases, a bad choice that could lead to a catastrophic event...you are a young, high energy man, and that raises your odds for risks, so manage those risks ahead of time. Some of your friends will make mistakes that change their lives...and while accidents happen, we want you to do your very best to avoid them!
2. **Dream Big!** You have the power of choice, and I encourage you to begin writing down your biggest dreams possible...because writing down your dreams is your first adult steps towards accomplishing something worthwhile. When you think you've got a few life dreams together...start working on them! Big Dreams take a while...so get going!
3. **Do A lot, but Be Humble.** You are a Doer, but without empathy and compassion for those around you, you will have fewer of life's real friendships. Friendships are to be coveted, enjoyed, cultivated, and protected...some day, your better friends may save you from a dented spirit, a poorly reasoned choice...or better yet, encourage you to do the unexpected, that makes your life and your heart more full.
4. The most important decision you will ever make in your life...**is who you will marry.** All future goodness will be multiplied by your choice of her inner and outer beauty. Miss-judgments in character, motivation, values, integrity, kindness and more...will take your dreams and fractionalize them. You are a great judge of character because you have a lot...so get to know a lot of young ladies...and always treat each of them with the respect they deserve. Before you make the choice of who you will marry, have criteria that will be important to your future happiness, and make sure you understand her criteria. It sounds like a clinical word, criteria...but trust me, you'll appreciate vetting this decision!
5. **I believe there are 3-25's in a life,** that you need to respect. Your first 25 years are about YOU. Your education, your friends, your preparation for life, and your career. The next 25 years are

about HER & THEM. Can you find the right woman and make her fall in love with you? Can you provide for her, and for your kiddo's? Have you built a foundation for you and your wife to build your life upon? This is hard, 50%+ of the population get divorced, so choose wisely...which means plan and adjust accordingly. The years 50 to 75 are different years from the first 2-25's. Your wife as a friend, your career and its fruits, your relationships must all be brought into balance for there to be PEACE.

6. The truth about life is that most people get lost, and many never get found. They just wander through it. They might be happy, but that would either be lucky, or a sign of low standards. Your choices, your purpose, your network of friends, will all help you to avoid getting lost. The main point is that if you suspect you are lost, embrace it and engage your spirit to get found!!

7. At 14, XXXX XXXX, you have great opportunities, and Mom and I cannot wait to see how you approach your dreams! Go for the GUSTO, and just know that no matter the twists and turns, we will always love you as we did on your first day in this world...as our gift from God! We are forever linked, and we will always love you without conditions. So remember that you are always welcome to share ANY problem you face, and should expect our 100%, ears and love.

With this letter, you have something important from your biggest fan! It has been thrilling beyond my wildest dreams to raise you till this very moment. Since tomorrow is not a promise, always know that this note represents ideas on generations that have come before you and why they are important, the many natural talents we see in you, and our thoughts about making better decisions to lead a better life.

We are so thankful for you!
Love, Pops