

Preparation and Proximation
by Gianna Patchett

The first thing anyone notices about my father are his eyes. Eyes that don't sit quite centered, that will never make eye contact; that will never see his children's faces clearly. Eyes whose disorder hides the intelligence behind them. The first thing anyone worries about with my father is if he will notice that small step into their living room or the almost see-through crystal bowl on the edge of the table by his elbow. Such concerns occupy their thoughts more pressingly than the words that come from his mouth. Often ignored are the references to obscure classics or deep philosophies. Bachelor's degrees in Political Science and Liberal Arts, minors in Russian Language and Philosophy, a certificate in International Studies, and master's degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling and Public Administration go almost unnoticed. As his daughter, I hardly note his blindness, but sometimes it seems that is all the world sees.

I remember vividly the summer I decided to become a lawyer. Injustices toward my father in his place of work had left my family with an uncertain future. My parents were considering legal action, but everything seemed overwhelming. There were countless moments where I felt as though I knew exactly what needed to be done—the injustices were so tangible—but I couldn't find the words to express my thoughts and, even if I could, I lacked the authority to change anything. I felt powerless. Over the course of some of the most difficult months of my life, the hardest part was feeling incapable of doing anything to help. It was then that I realized studying the law could give me the tools I needed to help my family.

The difficulties of that summer have slowly drifted away. Now my family is happily settled in a new place. Though I will not be using my law degree to fight for my father's case, I

will, however, be prepared for whatever else may come in the lives of my family members or those in my community. For me, getting proximate means getting prepared.

So now I am in the preparing phase. I have only been a law student for five weeks, but I can already tell that BYU Law is exactly where I need to be. Beyond the quality of education offered, I've found that it is a place where every cause matters. Growing up with a disabled father, I have often felt that his minority difficulties go unnoticed. Disability is a reality that spans all groups and does so indiscriminately. Yet, in an age of social justice, disability sometimes gets overshadowed by the louder calls for racial and gender equality. Imagine then the feeling I had when, in my first week at BYU Law, I discovered that there was a Disability Alliance Law Student Association. In an instant I felt noticed, I felt that my father was noticed. It was a feeling of validation and strength I didn't know I was missing.

Now, as I look forward to my time at BYU, I can see a place for the causes that matter to me, a place that will help me prepare to be a force for good in the unexpected situations that come my way. As my studies at BYU Law prepare me for the future, they get me proximate to the capable citizen I know I need to be, vested with the knowledge to truly make a difference.