



An N of 1

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Today my son is 21, and for reasons that are obscure to me, this, in my culture, is some sort of turning point, a bridge to another place, and I am emboldened to think — yet again — about his future. As any parent, I am, of course, anxious that it go well for him. But as we become adults together I also understand, more strongly with each passing day, how much his future is in his own hands, how much less I have to say about his choices.

If this is a fit topic for an Editorial in this Journal it is because we make much of the fact that rural youth tend to leave their rural roots, but in the same breath we hold that the best hope for rural services is to recruit (in medicine, at least) from this pool. This one rural youth is then an “N of 1” (though there is a second son close on his heels), who, though he does not know it, is himself a perfect and unique experiment, for which there will be no repeating. And I watch him go, hoping to learn something.

Other than six months, which I suspect he has forgotten, he has lived his whole life in the same house, in a very small town. He has moved seamlessly from this to a big city university. Will he be an ambassador who remembers rural life as it was lived? Will he be more drawn to new experiences on offer elsewhere? Will he judge his past, or embrace it?

What trace will be left in his character, whose lineage can be followed back to the gullies and scrapes of his past? I hardly remember my own, though it too was in part rural, yet in another coun-

try. Will he remember his chums, some of whom will not aspire to “outside” things, but will remain in the county where their fathers and grandfathers lived and died? Strangely, for all the rhetoric that surrounds the commitment to live and work in rural Canada, he may be more truly rural than I — it being “bred in his bones” so to speak.

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For its part, will society evolve so that he will not feel that he is “swimming against the current” if he establishes a base somewhere other than in a major city?

He is 21, and must find his own way, as have all such young men before him, and he will be equally uncertain of his choices (as I was), foolhardy at times, adventurous when it suits, hopefully kind, hopefully paying attention.

To my mind at least, rural Canada can be proud, as I am, of the youth it has nurtured.

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