Being Your Own Man Doesn't Have To Mean Rejecting a Legacy

People leave the family farm. Sons go to college instead of going to work into the plumbing business. It has a thousand faces, but there's this American idea that inheriting a vocation is "settling," so you'd better go off and find a new one.

I know I feel it. It's why I probably couldn't have been satisfied just taking over the reins of my father's successful landscaping business – and why indeed that wasn't even something he tried much to encourage.

This same idea has killed many multi-generational businesses – and seems to have killed much hope for this one kind of intergenerational wealth transfer possible to most people. The result? Each new generation of men are poor and alone, and therefore at the mercy of the lenders and the mercy of the state.

Ironically, the mythos of dreaming-big and independence may be contributing to the destruction of both.

But "being your own man" doesn't have to mean rejecting the legacies people try to leave you – including the legacy of training, capital, and vocation. Indeed, accepting a good legacy in these things can help to ensure that you remain as much your own as possible.

I'd look at the character of Aragorn from *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy of movies* as my model. He comes from a long line of kings yet struggles with his legacy – particularly with the less than wonderful parts (like when Isildur keeps the Ring of Power for himself). So he wanders the north alone, fighting bad guys. Yet he only comes fully into his own when he accepts his legacy – but also transforms it through rejecting the evil of the Ring and Sauron for himself.

Aragorn becomes "his own man," yet not from traveling footloose and fancy-free and deciding he doesn't want to be king. His individuality established, he comes back and accepts and redeems his legacy.

We live in a mythos right now of "leave and never come back" – from a lot of things – family, life, work. This may be better than the ethos of "never leave" – certainly for some people it is. But the right ethos is "leave and then come back different."

*It's worth noting that (to my knowledge) this is not a conflict or at least not a major conflict for Aragorn.

Originally published at JamesWalpole.com.