

Preparing to Let Go

Transitions: The gifts of change
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Wed September 23, 2009
The Tri-Town Transcript—Topsfield, MA

“There are things that we never want to let go of, people we never want to leave behind. But keep in mind that letting go isn’t the end of the world, it’s the beginning of a new life.”--Author Unknown



A dear friend, who just became an empty nester after sending her last child off to college and another one to the West Coast, was buried in grief for four days and couldn't leave her house.

My own daughter tells me that she refuses to let me take her to college next year. While dropping her off last summer to be a camp counselor (in nearby Georgetown, mind you), I cried as I helped unload her belongings into her cabin. She was mortified when I suddenly burst into tears, as was I. Wanting to be the strong mother encouraging my daughter's independence, I did not plan on her departure being so emotional.

Upon reflection, in tenderness and compassion for myself, I see that event last summer as the beginning of the letting go of my daughter into adulthood.

Now, I stare differently at the framed quote that has hung by my fireplace for years. It reads: "There are two things you give your children: One is roots, the other is wings."

Building the nest for children is sometimes easier than watching them soar, even when you know they are ready.

Two weeks ago, at Masconomet High School's parents' nights for seniors, my daughter's guidance counselor warned us we are currently fully emerged in the letting go process. With wisdom and humor, she told us we can expect our seniors this year to show us every one of the developmental stages of childhood, from the terrible twos to the newly fragile 14-year-old teenagers we once observed.

In return, I expect our seniors also will see us model some of the stresses of early parenting when we didn't know exactly what we were doing. Now, learning to change a diaper and function with two hours sleep seems easy in comparison to envisioning my daughter walking out the door next September into a new life, full of possibilities she creates.

Looking back to a few months ago, when she drove out the driveway solo for the first time as a newly licensed driver, I see that was a defining moment of realizing my role as a mother is changing, rapidly.

As she counts down the final days of her senior year, I am trying to share in every ounce of her “free” time and also step to the plate in major ways, being a consistent sounding board for every decision she contemplates.

Parenting a college-bound teenager requires a different type of listening than raising younger children. I am viewing the world and all its opportunities through her eyes, not mine which I once thought were “all-knowing.” In fact, I need to keep in check my needs and concerns (like how I pay for these exorbitant college tuitions of \$40,000 and \$50,000 per year; it was \$4,000 a year when I attended college and I earned most of my own way through).

Instead of my earlier priority of rushing home to be physically available to her after school, I now see being there for her emotionally and instantly, in any moment, is important as the myriad of choices and tasks (college tours, taking SATS, applying to college, a part-time job) before her seems overwhelming.

Just now, as I am writing this sentence, she calls me from school, in-between classes, breathlessly excited about being invited by her former high school math teacher to participate in an internship to Africa next spring, working in an orphanage. Again, I put my thoughts on hold (like, after my emotional good-bye in Georgetown a year ago, how will I handle standing at Logan Airport as she boards a plane to another country?).

Yet, it’s becoming increasingly clear that putting my self aside is part of this new stage of parenting. As I make room for and encourage my daughter to expand, I see that my life will be broadened as well. And, I am deeply grateful that as I reared my children, I also created a life of my own. Her wings are demanding that I continue to claim my own.

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