

Across the Miles
By Gail Kauranen Jones

Transitions: The Gifts of Change
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"Once the realization is accepted that even between the closest human beings infinite distances continue, a wonderful living side by side can grow, if they succeed in loving the distance between them which makes it possible for each to see the other whole against the sky."

--Rainer Maria Rilke

Unconditionally loving people is sometimes easier from a distance than it is when someone is constantly in our physical space where their quirks, daily irritations and mood swings can test the best of us.

Many happy couples I know, for example, appreciate when their significant other leaves for work so they can have some time alone to regroup and center in their individual selves. Those with spouses who work from home often see that type of arrangement as a blessing and a curse. The extra child care support or help around the house is valued but sometimes at the cost of a loss of privacy.

Like the space between the notes needed to create music, time apart in relationship often helps us gain new perspectives and grow individually and together.

As a mother, I am now in one of those growth spurts, with my daughter in Spain for nearly three weeks as part of the high school's student exchange program. Delighting in her excitement of experiencing foreign travel, I also have relished some additional time of my own away from the college and financial aid application process which has been all-consuming these past few months.

Our phone calls, text messages and emails have been exceptionally loving and focused mostly on the fun she is having, with some gentle motherly concern about her well-being also thrown into our communications. Another level of sweetness and respect has been added to our bond. We are learning together, through our miles apart, to increasingly expand the space between us. In our hearts, we both know this trip is just the beginning of our ongoing separation. She leaves to attend college in North Carolina in six months. I literally feel a huge lump in my throat as I write these words.

Yet, this test run of our time apart is showing me the depth of our love that distance cannot diminish or alter. The foundation of our relationship that we spent building these past 17 years is strong.

Just as my daughter has expanded her freedom, I am strengthening a mothering skill that I am using with increasing frequency: detached loving. By again becoming a learner with my daughter as the teacher, I am observing this trip through her eyes and listening to what she is absorbing. (My teaching moments as a parent will come later when she returns home and we review how to better budget for a trip with poor foreign exchange rates!).

Intrigued by her adventures—particularly since I have never traveled abroad—I spent this morning online. In viewing via Google.com photo excursions of her trips to Madrid, Granada and Seville, I was capturing a sense of the descriptions she has offered of the winding streets and the beauty of cathedrals and other local architecture. I also was trying to gain insight into the active late night life, with people mulling about out on the streets at hours we would never consider venturing forth in downtown Topsfield. My worldview has been enhanced, and will continue to be, through my daughter’s adventures as well as my own.

When we reunite in a few days, I am aware that the words “welcome home” have a new meaning. The house may be familiar, but my daughter will be returning to it with a broadened view of life.

Our relationship prospered through its first major separation of long distance. I know now that our hearts are deeply connected wherever either of us goes. As mother and daughter, woman to woman, we will continue to grow.

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