

That's Why We Raise Them

I remember a few years back, Nancy and I were taking our firstborn off to college and getting her set up in her dorm. We piled her belongings into two vehicles and started the long drive to Harding University. Harding is located in the town of Searcy, Arkansas -- a solid six hour drive from where we live.

I recall describing to someone what driving from our house to Searcy is like: "You drive and drive and drive -- until you feel like you are about to die and your rear-end is about to fall off of your body. At that point you are almost halfway there!" It was the middle of August, and it was a steaming hot day. It seemed like the drive would take forever. Maybe it just seemed that way because I was just dreading what I knew we were about to do.

Finally we arrived at Harding, and we started the process of unloading the cars and installing our daughter into her dorm room. The installation process required an obligatory trip to Wal-Mart to pick up a few things we had forgotten. After assembling some things and sorting through some things, it was late afternoon -- almost time for us to leave. There were some activities scheduled that evening to help the new students get acclimated, and also we had a long return drive ahead of us -- so we decided it was time to go.

We all made our way slowly from the dorm room out to our car in the parking lot. It was hot, but none of us seemed to notice too much. We kept finding things to say to extend the parting. We all knew what we were about to do. Finally we huddled as a family and said a prayer together. This huddling in prayer would become a "family tradition" over the next several years at such partings as we repeated this process with two other children a few years later. It was our way of leaving each other in God's hands as we parted ways for a while.

One last hug and we got into the car. With many waves and blown kisses, we pulled out of the parking lot and drove into a new phase of our lives as parents. We didn't have much to say for a while. I felt a strange wetness in my eyes and an unfamiliar lump in my throat as I turned our car toward home.

Life would not be the same at our house, and we knew it. It was good, but it was awful. It was sweet, but it was bitter. It was the rich fulfillment of years of child-raising, and it was sacrificing our child on the altar of adulthood. So many mixed emotions. The story wasn't over, but we had certainly turned the page to a new chapter.

It was hard to breathe for a while -- the air felt thick. I wanted to blame the thickness on the sultry Arkansas air -- but I knew it was just the heaviness of the emotion of the moment. As painful as it was, we knew it was for the best -- and that our daughter was in a good place to prepare for her future.

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It is natural and right that our children grow up and leave the nest. We spend years teaching them to become independent -- so that they can stand on their own when we are no longer around. But that doesn't mean as we see them flying away from the nest that it is easy.

Not easy. But we raise them to see them fly.

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