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THE BLOG

How My Son's Sleepaway Camp Helped Me Grow Up

Didn't I want my little boy to become a young man? I was so busy raising him that I never stopped to think about the day he was grown up and leaving for college.

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Parenting is about loving and nurturing your child and helping them grow up to become a responsible, contributing member of society. When my two boys were young, I couldn't imagine them as adults. I was too busy trying to get them to stop whining in the grocery store, stop bugging me whenever I was on the phone and to basically stop acting like babies when I wanted them to be more mature. The problem is that before I could turn around, my boys were 14 and 16 and more mature and now they're not that far from leaving the nest. All of the sudden, they're growing up and I'm feeling torn. Maybe having a child holding on to my pants as I walked away after they were begging me to buy candy doesn't seem so bad anymore. Although, if I was dragging one of my teenage boys like that, I'd be getting a lot more stares.

This week, my 14-year-old left for his first week at sleepaway camp. This camp is on a large college campus, so when my husband and I took him, we had to help him find his dorm room, meet his roommate and get settled in. We then had to turn around and leave without him, and even though I knew he'd be home in a week, as he waved happily goodbye to us, I flashed forward to what will come in only four short years. We would have an empty nest. I left my youngest feeling sad, lost, proud and scared. This child that I spend half my days telling to stop acting so silly, to stop cracking up at every sexual innuendo he hears, and to be more responsible about picking up after himself, was on his own. Isn't this what I wanted for him?

Didn't I want my little boy to become a young man? I was so busy raising him that I never stopped to think about the day he was grown up and leaving for college. And then it dawned on me, in four years, my job will basically be over. The job I willingly gave up a lot for. Fourteen years ago, when my second son was born, I decided to leave my job as a television writer and stay home with my kids. It wasn't an easy decision, because I loved my job, but I loved my kids more and wanted to be there every moment to watch them grow up. But now, I'm seeing the future and I'm not so comfortable with what I see. I'll always be there for my boys, to help them through whatever they need, but it's as if they're getting promoted and I'm getting demoted. I won't be making sure they have done their homework, or have a packed lunch or bought all the supplies for the latest school project. So, what will my job description be? President of a company, where the whole company has been transferred, but I'm still here? What will I do every day? And who will need me anymore?

It's left me feeling lonely and unsure of what life will be like. Will it be lonely with only my husband and me home? Will I figure out something rewarding to do with my time? I would be at an in-between time in my life. Too old to get hired, but too young to retire. I took the week to get in

touch with these feelings. Maybe I'd have more time to write that book I've always talked about writing. Or maybe I'd have more time to go hiking or walking. I knew some of my time would be just thinking about my sons and hoping they were happy, but it was time for me to start making plans.

Yesterday, I went to pick up my son from camp. I was so excited to see him, and he was smiling and happy when I got there. He ran up to me, gave me a hug and said, "I lost my flash drive, I ate mostly croutons for lunch and dinner and my new friend is from Hong Kong, and I'm going to call him this weekend." He smiled up at me with his big brown eyes, and I knew, thank goodness, he still had some growing up to do and I would cherish every minute of it.

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