

## CLOSE TO THE HEART(H)

4/2008

I'm one of those mothers that cry on her child's first day of school, every year. I make no apologies. I've been doing it for years and now feel that it should be a condition acknowledged in the medical field. I think the label of 'cry-baby' is unfitting of someone that has spent over 20 years investing in their children. When the boys were in junior high they jointly informed me that I could no longer walk them to school on the first day. I embarrassed them too much. So I stayed behind waving on the porch...and cried. It's my right. I also cried when they got their driver's licenses, for many reasons, when they began dating, graduated from high school and when they moved out. You should have seen me when our oldest enlisted in the Air Force. Not a pretty picture.

I did not start out my mothering career even imagining that I would become a big cry-baby when it came to my children. Never. I have friends who throw parties when their kids move out. I throw a wake. I gaze through family photos remembering each important stage. Please don't misunderstand, our sons do very well being on their own, they're extremely well adjusted. They cook, clean, pay bills and are learning to handle life's challenges. Even our 12 year old daughter is quite independent and trustworthy. The matter of mom being a crybaby, though, is the point of many discussions when we are together or talking over the phone. My only answer is, "Just wait, your time is coming." I believe I come from a long line of closet crybabies. No one has openly admitted to this condition, only made vague references here and there between muffled whimpers.

Kids go through a stage where they don't want you to touch them, look at them or stand anywhere in the proximity of say, the State of Kansas. We embarrass them. This usually happens sometime between, still thinking there is a money tree growing in the front yard, and realizing what, "Go get a job" really means. There were times when my boys would say, "Mom, stop it." Stop what? As hard as I tried to be discreet around their friends it never seemed to be quite what they had in mind. Does the word 'lamppost' draw some sort of picture in your imagination? Those were the days when I paid them 25 cents just for a hug. Brings tears to your eyes, doesn't it?

Last night I took our 24 year-old son 'school shopping'. (It's July 3. I'm writing this now to make the deadline for the August back to school issue). Over the past 6 months Andrew has had an epiphany that going to college could be in his best interest. We haven't shopped together in I can't tell you how long. So he has quit his job, given notice to his roommate, and is now sorting and boxing up his belongs in preparation. He leaves in two days for Pasadena to a two-year college where he will pursue his passion for football and (I hope) a business degree. In the meantime, I am sitting here with a bottle of water, a box of Kleenex and gnawing on celery sticks that I wish would turn into Dagoba's finest trying not to cry and trying to somehow share this experience with you. Not a pretty picture. I miss him already. And he knows what is coming. Andrew experienced the whole goodbye scene 8 years ago as we drove to Portland to see his older brother Mike inducted. Not a pretty picture.

Through the years I have watched my children grow, mature, come to grips with many difficulties. We have scads of memories that we share and many more to create. Someone once said that memories sustain us through our difficulties. I truly believe that. When Mike was in boot camp, oh, the letters I received were enough to break your heart. Suddenly I became the best mom and the smartest (finally!). That was Mike's epiphany. His heart grew towards us when he left which is typically the case. He later told me that it was his own memories that sustained him and gave him the strength and courage to push himself beyond where he ever thought he could go.

Our family memories are much like yours and yet uniquely ours. Our family has had its share of joys and challenges just like you; floods, welcoming a new baby, learning to in-line skate, moving, losing a child, visiting grandma and grandpa, graduations, employment challenges, running through the sprinkler, etc. As these events weave themselves in and out of our lives our children are there with us. They look to us for the security that tells them that, in spite of challenges, life is still worth living and joy is not that far away. They become us. Wisdom comes to them when they are away from us and they get to 'do life' for themselves. To my knowledge there is really no other way for our children to grow wise.

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I held my son and he held me. We said our very teary goodbyes and let go, me to continue my journey towards wisdom and he to journey towards his own wisdom. My summer is just barely beginning. We leave on a family vacation in the next few days. Mike will meet us in Michigan to visit with family members that we have not seen in 4-5 years. Andrew will not be able to go. It's been over a year since I have seen my oldest son and at least 7 years since he has visited his grandparents. I look forward to seeing my dad now in his mid-80's and my brothers. While there we will visit the gravesite of my stepson who died 13 years ago. We will hold each other and we will cry. It has been a long time since I paused, reflected, and grieved about Ricky deeply, although he is always close to my heart. Why do I share this with you?

Well, the other day I noticed 'Back to School' sale signs in some storefronts (remember at this writing it's still early July). I know that in some states school begins as early as August 4 (Arizona) because their summer begins in mid-May. I understand that stores need to get a jump on things but frankly I don't want to think about that right now. I want to have the freedom NOT to think about back to school and take pleasure in this precious and short time with my family. By mid-August my daughter will have grown out of everything she owns and will be tutoring me on next year's styles soon enough. But for now, I want to push away the thought of the first day of school, when I dutifully relinquish my child to her own experiences and life lessons. To all you crybaby moms, and dads, and I know you're out there; take all the liberty you need and hold on to your kids just a bit longer. The memories will sustain you ...and them. Even if it costs you an extra 25 cents, it's worth it.