

“If You Love Something, Set It Free” and Other Pish-Posh

Diary of a Premature Empty-Nester

By Lisa Jey Davis

The last time my 12-year-old son lived with me in Aspen was back in July. That’s just wrong, isn’t it? It was a bittersweet time, because Graden, who had worked all year to prove he was mature enough to move to New Mexico and live with his dad, couldn’t wait to begin his new life.

In fact, Graden was so excited to get to New Mexico that, no matter what cool perks I dangled in front of him, he was undeterred. The beach, Universal Studios, time with his older brother in Los Angeles, frolicking in the land of fun and entertainment—all held zero appeal for him. He just couldn’t wait to make his move. I had to admire his determination, and I also thought it would be good for him to experience everyday life with his dad.

In hindsight, I should have known this day would come. From birth, Graden has had a special connection with his dad. In fact, his dad was the one person who could quiet his unexplained crying. After the divorce, my son was never the same. Everything was just sad for him.

The morning of the move, Graden’s dad woke me with a phone call. He had predicted he would drive into town around 10 a.m. to load things up. I had planned to wake up early and finish typing the personal agreement we were scheduled to sign and have notarized. It was only 7 a.m., and my ex-husband was already in town. I was frantic and furious.

I am a planner. I really like it when someone gives

me a time and a place and actually shows up as scheduled. When I got that call, I just wasn’t ready. I’d planned on taking Graden to breakfast and snuggling him (both physically and emotionally) before he left. The early arrival put a kink into my plans.

Somehow, I managed to hold my own pretty well on moving day. The fact that THIS was the actual hour and day of my initiation into Graden’s absence impacted me more than anything else—except perhaps relinquishing control over my son’s schedule, lifestyle, and every day-in and day-out decision. As my son’s things were taken, one by one, out of my home, I had to remind myself this was a one-year trial.

In the weeks and months after Graden left, I found myself wrestling with some über-hefty emotions as thoughts and fears flooded in:

Graden is now living with a man whose unpredictable behavior is predictable.

How could I have let this happen?

It’s done. What can I do about it now?

During this time, people tried to encourage me with the old adage “If you love something, set it free.” I’m sorry, but isn’t that just stupid? And that whole thing about it coming back to you if it’s yours? It’s just pish-posh, as my mom would say. My son didn’t leave me to be free. And there’s no doubt in my mind that he loves me enough to come back.

Graden is still my son. I love him, and he loves me. But letting go of the details of his daily life—now,

that’s a challenge. That and trying to wrap my brain around the fact that I am now an empty-nester, and far too prematurely!

Earlier this fall, as the leaves began to turn, I woke up early one morning to go out for some coffee. As I walked to my car, I saw the schoolchildren decked out in their new clothes and backpacks, waiting for the bus. Pulling out, I saw that same old yellow school bus coming around the bend. It stopped in front of me and let out a sigh when the driver hit the brakes. I sighed as the children filed in.

I had every right to cry, because Graden should’ve been on that bus. But I didn’t. I smiled. Well, okay, it was a trembly smile after several deep breaths. My son is very happy right now. His teachers are thrilled with him, and he has made some great friends. This makes me happy, hopeful, and at peace.

So, all that stuff about setting free what you love? Well, I don’t know about that. I do know that I feel free. Free to love and nurture my son no matter where he lives. Free to look forward to our holidays and summer vacations together with great anticipation. At which time, my nest will be anything but empty.

Lisa Jey Davis, a.k.a. “Glitter,” is a mother, professional freelance writer, marketing and public relations consultant, and motivational speaker. She has also worked in television production with networks such as MTV and CBS.



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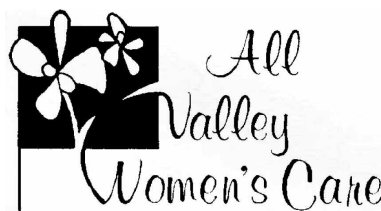
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