

What Happens to the Family When Junior Goes to College?

By Cathy Tyson

Its that time of year again, when Lamorinda High School seniors are checking their mailboxes, looking for long-anticipated letters from college, hopefully with a, "You're in!" on the cover and not "after careful consideration..." inside a much smaller envelope. These notices obviously signify a huge change not only for the student, but for the families as well. Depending on whether it's the eldest child leaving the nest, a subsequent sibling, or the baby, family life for those who remain is definitely not ever going to be the same. Concerns and fears are as different as every family and student; the following are five Lamorinda family's experiences, from firstborn to empty nester.

The Oldest –

Big City worries

Everything with this child is a first, from potty training, to the ins and outs of shopping and applying to colleges. Parents are shocked and take a while to process the fact that the infant they held and rocked to sleep, helped with homework, carpoled to sports is or will be in the very near future a functioning adult, capable of registering for classes, eating the occasional vegetable, and sadly vacating the homestead for months at a time. While every parent knows that this chapter in their lives is coming, still the reality can hit like a ton of bricks.

It's not surprising that these parents have different expectations and concerns about their firstborn heading to college. Kathryn Badalich and Sam Choi are the proud parents of Christina Choi, who has already received acceptance letters from prestigious schools, one in St. Paul, and the other in the suburbs of Philadelphia. They're still awaiting word from another school in New York. "Growing up in such a small, safe environment," notes Kathryn, "I worry that she's not very street smart, especially with these urban schools." How to get around a big city, young and alone is a concern for the family. Because they have such a close relationship, she anticipates a definite void in the house. Video web cams, allowing her to see daughter Christina and hear her voice, will be helpful for both Mom and Dad with the transition. Another big change will be life for little brother Andrew, they all joke that he will be living in a fish bowl with both parents watching over him.

Little Brother Lonely

Stacey Nittler, mother of Scott, a senior this year at Campolindo, and Peter a sophomore, feels that Scott is ready for the next step in his life. Her main concern is that because the boys have such a close relationship, little brother Peter will be quite lonely. Scott has been accepted at a number of schools, all out of state. Stacey wishes now that he would have applied someplace closer to home, to make visiting easier. It's hard to know if your teenager really thought through all the consequences of his selection process. Especially when he's lived his entire life in a small semi-rural town.

Right now, the family house is usually filled with activity from Scott and his friends but all that noise and commotion will be gone in the fall.

Already Gone –

Worried Sick

"It's incredibly painful to walk by his room, which was usually a mess, there's a real empty feel to it." Says Margaret Field of son Alex, who is a freshman at a well-known school in New Jersey. Family dinners are much more somber, the kids are more animated at the table when everyone's home.

As a professor at St. Mary's College, she is well aware of the goofy things freshman students can do. But as a Mom, her real concern was him getting sick 3,000 miles away, and not being there to take care of him, like she would at home. She has seen her own students not using common sense in getting to the campus health center or even the emergency room because of lack of transportation and prioritizing a class over getting a broken bone set.

In addition, the twins left at home really miss him. When she took him back to the airport after his last holiday visit home, seeing her eldest son walk through the glass doors into the terminal, her stomach just turned. "It's incredibly difficult."

The Baby Heading Out

Doug and Jane Johnson of Orinda have three children. Both older

girls went away to UCLA 8 and 11 years ago, Jane cried when they were dropped off. Before Jennifer the oldest left for college, the whole family made a habit of going to all of her sporting events. When she left, it was a big change, not having that time together. When the oldest left the house, middle daughter Melanie, "just blossomed" says Jane. Both girls still call almost every day, Doug and Jane love to hear from them.

Now the youngest, Daniel, is a senior at Miramonte and looking forward to heading off to college in Arizona in the fall. It will be strange, their whole lives have revolved around the kids, and now they're anticipating an empty nest. Still close, the girls come home all the time; the Johnson's have no plans to remodel their old bedrooms.

Empty nest - Kelly Irving

It only took 24 years but Kelly and Brad Irving officially have an empty nest. "You add them one at a time and you lose them one at a time," notes Kelly. With their oldest, Kyle, everything was brand new and they were stumbling around. Kelly didn't want to be a smothering Mom; so being able to text or e-mail was very comforting. They became closer, when five became four. When middle son, Sean, left to go out of state, the distance was a factor, frankly easier on the parents, not being so close. When the baby, Greg, left they were excited for him, but also more worried about how he would handle the transition than his brothers. At the end of this long arduous road of raising three athletic boys, Kelly reviews her relationship with husband Brad. "I hoped to say I remember you and I still like you." She did. So they are living happily ever after in a house that stays much cleaner without the kids.



Sam Choi, Christina Choi, and Kathryn Badalich in their backyard



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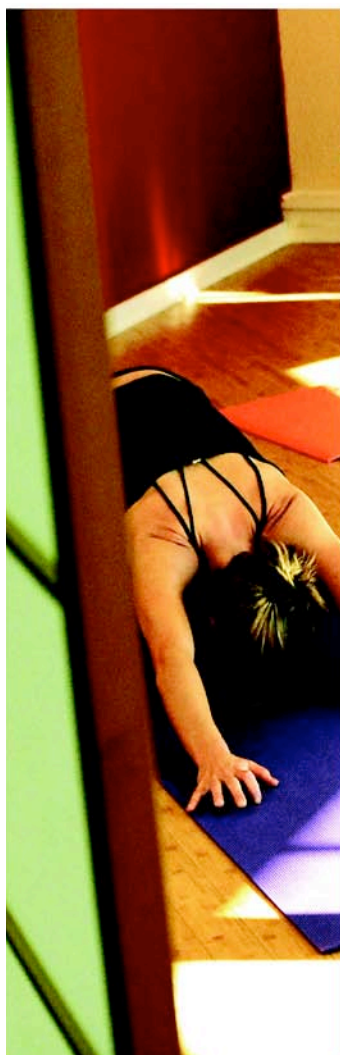
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