

Empty Nesters Unite

By Cathy Tyson

One Lafayette mom, although sad that her youngest child has left the family nest, is doing something about it with a support group of acquaintances. Their group of eight empty nester moms got together recently to put together Halloween-themed care packages for their respective kids. "It's very comforting to be with other women in the same situation," says Elizabeth Kirkpatrick. They hope to get together again for a Christmas-themed care package party. Everyone brought eight of the same item for each of the college kid's packages, for example, Chapstick, granola bars, Halloween candy, Febreze.

Although there's plenty to do at work, she owns and manages the Hen House, right across from Starbucks, Kirkpatrick says, "I hate it, its very sad." Life without her two boys around the house meant big changes at the grocery store. "One of the hardest moments was at Safeway. I spent just \$62 for a week's worth of food. I just cracked up."

Even tackling the clean-out of her pantry was painful. After putting it off for

more than a year, she recently got around to it. "I found some plastic farm animals stashed in the back, the kind to put on cupcakes." Kirkpatrick notes that while it felt good to finish the project, she realized that these little farm animals were meant for little boys' birthday cupcakes. Now that they were strapping young men, it just wasn't appropriate anymore. The cute cupcake window had closed.

"There is a different dynamic in the house," said Yoni Mayeri regarding the older of her two sons going off to college. That abrupt separation some parents go through was a little different for her. Son Max is at Sonoma State, along with a dozen other Miramonte graduates, and as a member of the baseball team, he and his teammates work the Cal Bear football games to earn money to support their team. Mayeri said it's not unusual to see him home for dinner or at a Cal game. "There was never a dull moment when he was home." Her youngest son is still at home along with her

husband." Life goes on, "but there is a lot less laundry."

Many parents, particularly mothers, have feelings of sadness and



Elizabeth Kirkpatrick at the Hen House in Lafayette
Photo Cathy Tyson

loss when their youngest child heads off to college. There's even a name for this, Empty Nester Syndrome. Ellen Lev, a psychologist who focuses on mid-life transition issues and practices in Lafayette, notes that her approach is two-fold with Empty Nest clients. "First, helping them go through the natural stages of grieving the loss, that will end in a healthy acceptance. Second, helping the person redefine the Self."

On the opposite end of the spectrum, some feel that this is a new beginning; that their child is exactly where he or she is supposed to be. For an empty nester mom that could translate to a perfect time to explore new hobbies, volunteer, travel, get a job, go back to school, or even rekindle some romance.

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