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**FAMILY FORUM:**

**Pressure for Grades**

By Margie Ryerson

In Lamorinda, where as Garrison Keillor might phrase it, “all the children are above average,” expectations of ourselves and our children can be quite high. There are many successful high-achievers in our community and naturally the hope is that our children will follow suit. Expectations can be a two-edged sword. They motivate us to aim high, but they can also create too much pressure.

A frequent scenario involves worried parents with an underachieving child. It is very frustrating to know your child is extremely capable, but that he is not utilizing his potential. Janet and Larry came to see me, accompanied reluctantly by their 14 year-old son, Sean. Sean was in ninth grade and getting low B’s and C’s, despite having qualified for the gifted program when he was in elementary school.

Janet and Larry lectured Sean often about the importance of good grades for his future, and became frustrated and then angry when they saw how little effort he put into his studies. Sean interpreted his parents’ concern as nagging and controlling. This family was locked in a power struggle with no end in sight.

In their sessions, each family member was able to express what lay beneath their behavior. Sean learned that what he experienced as pressure was really a reflection of his parents’ worry and love. Janet and Larry saw how their words and actions came across as strong-willed and angry. Sean admitted that he was actually concerned about his grades and getting into college. Once the family felt more united, they were able to formulate a plan for Sean to get additional help. And they agreed on a different approach, with Sean taking charge of school and grades, and requesting advice from his

parents when needed.

For a positive approach to grades, start in the early elementary school years by asking your child what he would like to achieve. Most children at this age want to do well in school. If your child has a learning disability or medical diagnosis that may impede him from doing as well as he would like, help him set realistic goals that he can attain.

If your child succeeds in meeting his goals, celebrate with him in a small way – with praise and a special meal, or doing a special activity together. Giving your child money makes grades more parent-centered, as if they are so important to you that you will pay for them. Help him learn to work for his own intrinsic satisfaction, and not just for external praise and rewards.

If your child does not accomplish his goal, share his disappointment with him and provide encouragement. He may need to adjust his own expectations and get some assistance. Some children work cooperatively with their parents, but others will benefit from an outside tutor or program.

If your child resists getting help, try to stay neutral and encouraging. Timing is important, and some children are not ready to succeed until later. Let him know that your love and respect for him are not contingent upon his academic record. As we all know, there are many definitions of success in our society, and having a loving, supportive family is one of them.

**Margie Ryerson, MFT,** is a marriage and family therapist with offices in Orinda and Walnut Creek. Contact her at 925-376-9323 or [margierye@yahoo.com](mailto:margierye@yahoo.com).

**Empty Nesters Unite**

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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 foot-

ball 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 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.

**Letters to the Editor**



Share your thoughts with our community! Opinions in Letters to the Editor are the express views of the writers and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly. All published letters will include the writer’s name and town (please give us your phone number for verification purposes only), and should be 350 words or less. Letters may be edited for length or legal considerations.

email: [letters@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:letters@lamorindaweekly.com);  
Regular mail: Lamorinda Weekly, P.O.Box 6133, Moraga, CA 94570

Dear Editor:

One reads and hears complaints about government much of the time, but rarely do we hear about it working properly and efficiently. I would like to tell you of an instance when local Town government services responded quickly and efficiently to resolve a problem.

Dan Bernie, Supervisor of Moraga’s Public Works Department and his staff acted promptly after I noticed them of two potholes in two areas of Moraga. Dan got back to me within a couple of hours of my call to assure me the situation would be addressed immediately and corrective action would be taken. The very next day as I passed the two intersections where the potholes had been located and they had been repaired.

My thanks and a “Hats off” to Dan Bernie and his Public Works staff for responding to the problem with lightning speed. Moraga’s Small town government really does work.  
Gordon Nathan  
Moraga

Dear Editor:

The Lamorinda Weekly describes Moraga as divided over the bumps on Camino Pablo. This is not surprising since few facts have been given to the citizens on this issue. Bump advocates see a speeding vehicle taking the life of a pedestrian youngster justifiably as tragic and avoidable. A loved one dying because EMS arrived too late can be viewed as tragic, but death from natural causes. The

irony is that a death from reduced response time could be a child suffering from injury or shock.

The Orinda-Moraga Fire Department’s strong position against the “bumps” is based on their response time study. This is consistent with other studies across the country indicating that calming programs that reduce response times cost more lives than they save. There are 325,000 deaths a year from sudden cardiac arrest alone, compared with 5,000 pedestrian deaths. Because survival rates drop by 7 to 10% for each minute of delay, speed bumps on the wrong roads become killers. A detailed Austin Texas study estimated 37 lives would be lost from speed bumps for every pedestrian saved.

Other towns have faced this conflict and decided either 1) speed bumps are prohibited on arterials used by emergency responders or 2) extensive study involving impacted people is required before installation, AND a super majority of citizens must approve bumps. Neighboring Orinda and Lafayette have adopted such policies. None of this was done in Moraga prior to bump installation. When properly presented to the citizenry, a decision should be made to remove bumps and find less dangerous but equally effective calming devices. This will serve the priorities of both pro and anti bump groups, and Moraga will no longer be divided.  
Joe Mahoney  
Moraga

**Mayor Gives**

**“State of the Town” Address**

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Moragans will soon be able to view meetings of the Town Council from the comfort of their living rooms, as that illustrious body will be moving to La Sala and its’ meetings will be televised. The date for the Council’s cable television debut has not been determined.

Metcalf concluded with a detailed budget presentation. The three major sources of revenue for the town of Moraga are property tax, sales tax and fees. Movements such as “Shop Moraga First” are attempting to address the issue of sales tax “leakage” and keep more tax dollars in town. The Town has generated a slight surplus over the past years and projections indicate that the budget will stay

balanced until 2013. After that time, the Town could be facing a structural deficit. \$3,750,000 of the \$17M in fees from the developers of the Palos Colorados housing project has been received, with the remainder to be paid over the next seven years. The Council has spent a small amount of these funds on the library, but has agreed not to undertake any major spending until a comprehensive program is adopted. The Council plans to take up this issue at its meeting on November 28.

To view the Town of Moraga General Plan or the Mayor’s State of the Town Powerpoint presentation, go to <http://www.ci.moraga.ca.us>

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