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Published September 15th, 2010

## After the Dorm Drop - Mom Moves Forward

*Submitted by Jamie Anderson*

I was driving home after running a few errands and was caught off guard by a young mother, kneeling to comfort her daughter. They had stopped amidst all the activity of a busy intersection so that mom could give her daughter a hug. I watched her bend on one knee to administer her own particular brand of first aid and my heart swelled, followed quickly by my eyes, as I remembered 18 years of giving kisses that could make scrapes feel better. Or how the long way home seemed to provide just enough time to get to the nitty-gritty of the day. Or how eating cookie dough together really could make a broken heart feel just a little bit better.

I had to pull over and find a place to park and cry. Four days earlier, I moved my daughter into the dorms for her first year of college. I had shed a few tears already, but I didn't see this one coming. The scene was so sweet and so familiar; the surge of my own bittersweet feelings was sure to make for unsafe driving conditions.

One of the obvious goals a parent would like to check off her list at this 18-year milestone is to proudly send one's child off to college. We parents have the unimaginably big job of keeping our young people safe, well nourished and educated, respectful of others, engaged in the world around them - if we did a really good job, they are nice, too. We have listened to our toddlers cry until 4:00 a.m. in the room next door, because they are supposed to sleep alone by that age. We have dragged ourselves out of bed at six to get ready for another day, exhausted and delirious. We have pretended we're not heart broken when we race home from work to pick up the 4th grader and he tearfully begs to be picked up after school, instead of from after-care, like his friends. We put on the smiling face to mask our own hurt, and cheerfully reminded him of how much he loves all the projects he gets to make - because not going to work is not an option. And, once they were old enough to drive, we paced the hallway, checked the curb from the living room window for the twelfth time in eight minutes, willed the cell phone in hand to ring with the good news explaining a missed curfew.

With one last hug goodbye at the entrance to Rosecrans Hall, all of my work is supposed to be done and I'm supposed to go home, satisfied I met my objective.

The advice I have been receiving about how to best handle the intensity of this transition is the classic American strategy: buck up. I only listen half-heartedly because I'm going with a strategy that has served me, and my parenting, very well: break down. I'm going to let myself have this moment full of all its tenderness and loss. I'm going to pull over for these feelings because I know that attending to my own heavy heart helps me cheer more genuinely for my daughter's independence and have faith that she will learn valuable life lessons through her struggles. My daughter will never know just how hard this is for me. She will never know that part of me traveled with her to Los Angeles. But my friends who know how to listen and trust that nothing needs to be fixed, changed or avoided, will know I've done the work that helps me parent her with a confident "You can do this." Because underneath all of my fear and sadness, I know that she can. As hard as it is to watch her leave this nest, I'm finding I can do this, too.

Jamie Anderson is a communication consultant and educator. She is Vice President and program developer/facilitator of parent programs for the Institute for Collaborative Communication. Jamie believes that her most valuable credential is being the mother of two teenagers who are thriving. They give her ample opportunity to practice what she teaches while enjoying the benefit of warm and loving relationships.

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