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TEEN SCENE

Family Boats

By Morgan Hunter

People sometimes ask me what it's like having a divorce happen to your family.

I simply tell them this. Divorce is like owning a boat. Not just any boat. This is no dinky rowboat or clunky rental houseboat. Our boat is a sleek, fifty-foot yacht. It is a beautiful piece of art, with state-of-the-art navigation systems and the most powerful engine to date. It boasts all the best bells and whistles.

We love it. It's reliable. It can weather any storm. It has steered us clear of more hurricanes than we can remember. We always reach the harbor safely. We have total confidence that when problems arise, we are protected.

Lately there have been odd hiccups in the system. The engine just doesn't sound right, and sometimes we have to wrestle with the controls. Thinking that everything will right itself, we don't look closely at the engine. We don't dig deeper. Why should we? We've always been fine. There have never been any mishaps in the past.

We go out power sailing. It's a perfect calm. Then, silence. The engine stopped.

We shrug. It's probably nothing. We click off the controls, reset, and push the buttons to turn the engine back on again. Nothing happens. Engine is dead. Controls are unresponsive.

We climb down to the engine room, and throw open the hatch. A stinking cloud of black smoke greets us. *What?* We want to scream. *When did this happen?*

The gentle currents that rocked our boat become terrifying riptides, waiting eagerly to drown us. The formerly protective walls trap us in a rotting prison. The sea we sailed so many times is foreign and frightening. In the space of a heartbeat, we realize three things:

One, we passed out of sight of land hours ago, and are a far-cry from help.

Two, our boat is taking on water at a terrifying rate.

Three, despite all the warning signs, *we didn't check the engine.*

In our defense, we had no reason to inspect the engine room. We are just kids and everything up until this point has led us to believe that nothing was amiss.

Before we know it, our family boat has sunk and we're floating among the wreckage of our beautiful craft. Somehow we manage to crawl onto a broken piece of wood from the floating deck. The yacht is lost and we can't stop mourning. Panic stricken, we hover on a chunk of the former family stronghold as we attempt to remember a few important items:

1. None of this was our fault. Even if we had suspected the decomposition of our boat, there was nothing we could have done to stop it.

2. These were forces outside our control. Nothing we did contributed to the loss of our craft.

We have two choices.

1. We can stay lost in this sea of grief forever.

2. Or we can buck up, dry our tears, and start paddling.

The strangest thing happens as we choose survival with option two. We look around us to notice hundreds of other stragglers struggling to stay afloat on their pieces of flotsam. It dawns on us that together we could build a raft and paddle to safety. Who knows, with all the experience we have accumulated in the sailing world, we can be the captains of our own ships. This time not only will we tie the knots and hoist the sails, we'll check the engines. We will not be shipwrecked. We will pilot the family boat to forever.

We will survive.

Morgan Hunter is a junior at Campolindo High School. She enjoys writing, drawing, red pandas, not doing things in a conventional manner, being helpful, and watermelon.

The opinions expressed in Teen Scene are those of the writer and not necessarily those of the Lamorinda Weekly.

College Application Blunders to Avoid

By Elizabeth LaScala, PhD

The fall college application cycle always is accompanied by an abundance of advice from college counselors about common application 'red flags.' In fact there are common mistakes that cause red flags and this article strives to provide an organizational framework for the most frequent culprits. Colleges review application differently, however, there are some basic mistakes that high school students should take pains to avoid.

1. Honesty and Integrity First:

Warning signals about character can be extremely damaging. Present your application honestly and authentically, taking care to not exaggerate accomplishments or let someone write or over polish your essay. Did you know that the University of California has a "truth in application" program, which randomly samples a number of applications for verification of extracurricular activities? And regarding essays, if the quality of the essay far exceeds what might be realistically expected from an applicant, the UC can choose to review an applicant's SAT or ACT essay (which is readily available on line) as a crosscheck.

2. Read and Follow Directions:

Include all required documents, and stay within the specified word or character count for essays and short responses. Last year, one student told me she wrote six 1500 word essays for a university supplement. The instructions stated that each response should be less than or equal to 1500 characters. The student was wait-listed at a university she was well-qualified to attend. Could that have been the reason? Not surprisingly, the student was far more upset by the time she wasted writing those long essays than by the waitlist offer she received!

3. Shallow and Broad Responses to Supplements:

Most admission officers read upwards of 40 applications per day—sometimes more. Many colleges add a unique supplement (a set of unique questions) for the student to answer. The college supplement is your opportunity to prove you can communicate substantive ideas effectively and intelligibly. The more selective the college, the more important it is to seize this chance to convince the col-

lege that you are prepared for college-level work. Think about your responses as an interview and give them your best effort. The largest mistake to avoid is the 'one size fits all' approach; this happens when a student comes up with a single response to "Why do you want to attend University X?" and uses the response on each college application. This is especially problematic when the student forgets to change the name of the university as he or she cuts and pastes the response into different applications!

4. Grammar and Punctuation:

Spelling and grammatical errors show carelessness and and/or poor time management skills. Read your application aloud and proofread it at least twice. This is the right time to ask someone knowledgeable to review your application before you hit the send key.

5. Preparation for Selected Major:

Discrepancies between lower grades and higher test scores can be explained (for example, you understand the material you just didn't like doing homework), however, one discrepancy that is hard to rationalize is your selection of major compared against a background that does nothing to confirm interest. You should think about high school as incremental preparation toward higher education. Every course selection and extracurricular activity is chosen to help you learn more about what

you do (and don't) want to study in college. If you claim on your application that you have yearned to be a doctor since 1st grade, there should be ample evidence over the intervening years to support your claim.

Colleges are trying to build a balanced community of incoming freshmen and they are actually seeking out evidence of your good qualities on your application. They want reasons to admit you. Take your application seriously and the colleges will take you seriously too.



Elizabeth LaScala Ph.D. guides college, transfer and graduate school applicants through the complex world of admissions. She develops best match college lists, offers personalized interview and essay coaching, and tools and strategies to help students tackle each step of the admissions process with confidence and success. Elizabeth helps students from all backgrounds, including visual and performing arts students and athletes, to maximize financial aid awards. Contact her @ (925) 891-4491 or elizabeth@doingcollege.com.

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Advertising

How Six Figure Income Families Get Thousands of Dollars in Free Money For College

Local man teaches free workshops to help parents save thousands in process

Moraga---East Bay parents that are planning on sending a child to college in the next few years, but aren't quite sure how to pay for it can now rest a little easier. Gerna Benz of Bay Area College Planners has been educating families in the community for over 15 years.

'It's really sad, but most parents that we talk to have done real well financially, but never found the time to save for college, and now they're facing a bill of \$18,000-\$45,000 a year, and they don't know who to turn to,' he says. 'Further, most of the time, all they hear is to not even bother applying for any aid because they make too much money. However, most of the time, that is simply not true even if they make a six-figure income.'

Gerna would know, because his group has worked with over 1400 families in the last 10 years ranging from single moms to corporate CEO's, and they say they can help anyone get through the process and save a bundle.... no matter how good of a student they have or how much money they make.

'I got started in this because I was a very good student, but no one told us anything about how to access money for college, or even how to pick a career...so I didn't go right away. But, I vowed that I would learn the process and devote my time to helping families not fall into the same trap that we did. 'Simply put, we show parents the truth that they aren't hearing anywhere else about how the college process really works and save thousands of dollars in the process.'

Lamorinda parents will have an opportunity

to hear Gerna speak. He is teaching his class 'How to Give Your Kid a 4-Year College Education Without Going Broke!' on Saturday October 22nd at the Moraga Library located at 1500 St. Mary's Road, Moraga, CA 94556 from 11:00am-12:30pm.

'We'll discuss everything from the greatest myths about the college process, to how to send your student to a fancy private school for less than the cost of a junior college...it'll be like learning how to get a brand new Lexus for the price of a used pick up truck,' he grins.

Topics will also include why private scholarships and 529 plans are a waste of time, how to double or even triple the amount of free money you receive from each school, and how to avoid the one mistake that will kill your chances of getting any money at all that almost every other parent will make this coming January, and much, much more.

'They will learn a ton, and I do my best to make the class fun,' he says. 'It's like I'm giving them a super bright flash light to navigate a pitch black cave, while all the other parents continue to stumble around blindly! 'Don't forget: the class is totally free, but seats are limited. Also, we are not sure when we will be teaching these classes in the East Bay again since my October and November calendars are already filling up, so come on out and see me.' You can reserve a seat online at www.baycollegeplanners.com or by calling our 24 hour reservation line at (877) 924-3726.

Students Recognized for Academic Excellence

Submitted by Jacqueline Nerney Welch



Photo Barbara Elliott

Front row, from left: Aislinn Welch, Hunter Welch, Carissa Zhu, and Jeffrey Zhu, all students from Moraga, were recently honored as some of the brightest young students in the nation at a statewide awards ceremony for gifted children sponsored by The Johns Hopkins

University Center for Talented Youth (CTY). The students are pictured with CTY Master of Ceremonies Valerie Patten, M.C. and Lawrence Bliss, Director of Academic Advising and Career Education at Cal State Hayward. For more information on CTY go to www.cty.jhu.edu.