

FROM MOM... AND DAD

Kim: Early Teens



Why is it that taking things as they come is so darn difficult? Each year when summer approaches, I mentally plot summer activities like a camp director, allocating one day a week to please my son, one day a week to please my daughter, one or two days a week for the three of us to bond. In my head, it always looks so good. Funny thing is it never comes to fruition. Thoughts of things we would've/should've/could've done bounce around my brain like a rubber bullet. I feel like I am responsible for everybody's happiness, and that tends to make us all unhappy. Each year I seem to do less and less with my children "together". And so, I successfully set myself up to approach the fall season with a sense of disappointment, ruminating over one more summer that I didn't "plan" well enough.

My son used to require my undivided attention, and he got it without question. Now, he is a full-blown teenager. We still spend a lot of quality time together, and I treasure each moment- but I am not dense. As much as he loves me, I know it is neither fun nor socially acceptable for him to hang out with his mommy all the time. He wants to hang out with his friends. The reasonable side of me understands this, having been a teenager myself. The overbearing motherly side of me despises this, because he is getting older- closer and closer to college, closer and closer to the freedom that comes with age- further and further from me. And I don't like it one bit.

My daughter would be pleased if I could spend every waking minute with her, frolicking around and doing girly things. I must say, getting full-service spa treatments, fancy lunches and unlimited shopping sprees does sound mighty appealing- especially when someone else foots the bill. But it's not all extravagance. The simplicity of uninterrupted conversation over a cup of chamomile and a warm vanilla scone will always be at the top of our to-do list.

My father always says that there's a surge in seismographic activity on the first day of school because all the mothers in the world are jumping up and down in excitement! Every first day of school, I feel a void. Yet there's a certain calm that sets in once the school year commences; a back-to-business, structured schedule. My children have that down pat: school, snack, homework, dinner, down time, bed. Of course, my son rarely gets adequate downtime. And neither child gets adequate sleep.

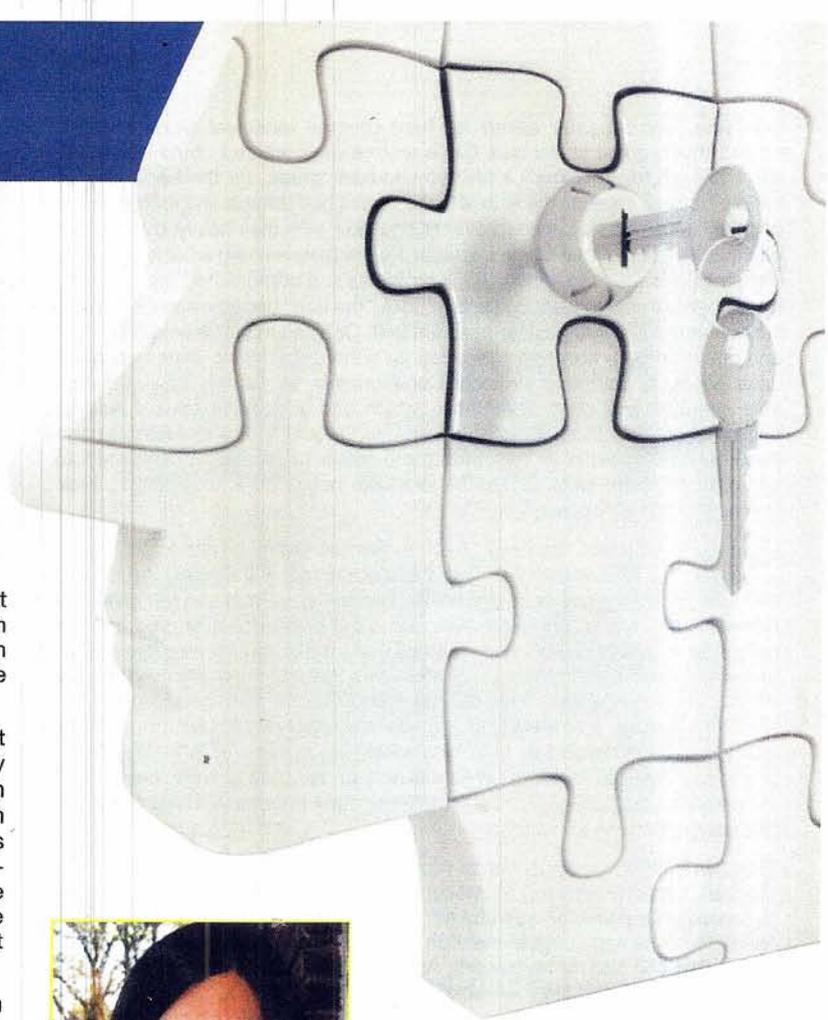
My son is honored to be enrolled in an International Baccalaureate program. I am so proud of all he has accomplished. I am also concerned that he will allow the pressure to drain him. There will be a lot more stress on him than he has ever encountered as a student thus far. He is a hard worker; a smart kid. He puts his all into every assignment. Part of me maintains that it is better to forsake his already dwindling free time for the welfare of his future. The other part of me wants him to enjoy being a teenager. He's just a kid. But he's a kid that will be going to college in 3 years. In that respect, his future is now.

My daughter will now be in the upper echelon of her school ranking- the all-knowing "big kid" on the bus, the "senior" to whom all the little people can look up to. She has prematurely transformed herself into a teenager. She's not concerned with the learning aspect of school because she knows she'll do well. It's more of a social thing at this point. It's good to be 10 and gorgeous and have the world at your feet! She has no idea how lucky she is. Her biggest concern for the fall season is what backpack will best accessorize her extensive wardrobe, and who/what she will magically transform into by the light of the Halloween moon!

We allow our lives to become so complicated by things both monumental and mundane that we forget how to sit back and enjoy the ride. Each season brings change- and, yes, some changes are better than others. The way we choose to perceive these changes is up to us! I vow to make an attempt to heed my own advice and take it as it comes.

Besides, the onset of the new season allows me 10 months to concoct next summer's game plan!

By Kim Dinardo



Risa: Older Teens

My children were in High School and I was so happy to finally be free from the stampede at Staples and the parents with dueling lists. The back to school buying frenzy always reached its height in late August, as parents exited their minivans in stifling parking lots and entered their local school

supply superstore. Each teacher wanted different items: a special utility box, certain notebooks, pencils (mechanical or No. 2), pens (black, blue, erasable), and looseleaf paper (never "college-ruled"). And, there always seemed to be a run on that special utility box, which had to be a specific height, length and depth. After helplessly watching another mother lift the coveted box from the otherwise empty display, I was often forced to race desperately across town to the next nearest Staples Superstore, praying that I wasn't too late.

For that reason, I was so happy to be done with that stage of my life. My daughter would accept an offering of five or six soft looseleaf binders, dividers and paper, and insist that no supplies were specifically required. After all, it is High School. Then, suddenly, two weeks into the semester she would text me and tell me that a particular teacher required very specific supplies for his class, which she absolutely had to have by the next day. Upon further inquiry, I would find that the teacher first requested these supplies on the first day of class and I, as the parent, was only getting the good news now, the day before said teacher threatened to lower the grades of the students who appear in class without the requisitioned items. And, I would rush to Staples at lightning speed. But, this time, the most crucial item on the list would not be a plastic utility box: instead, it would be the one hundred and thirty dollar calculator. The teacher would accept no substitute. "Back in the day," I was thrilled if my calculator has the basic functions and a square root key. Panting as I'd arrive at Staples, I would pray that the staff would know which calculator our school used for Math A, Math 1, or whatever they are calling it this week. As I approached the display, I realized that there were no less than eight different models with names like "TI84 Plus," "TI83," "TI89 Titanium," and "FX-9750GII," all of which all reminded me of the 240Z, 280ZX, and GT500 designations for 1970s sports cars. After much deliberation, it was a miracle that I came home with the right calculator.

Back to Sch



COME & S



1185 Sunri
631-608

Hours: Mon-F
Sat & Su

Last year, my daughter asked for hard-covered looseleaf binders, but I nipped that request in the bud. Gone are the days where I could insist that she use a sturdy backpack with two shoulder straps. By the beginning of Middle School, most all the kids refused to use both straps and looked like a pack of Quasimodos, hunched over to one side, with their heavy, overstuffed backpacks slung over a single shoulder. I knew how wearing a backpack with one strap could lead to serious back problems and admonished my daughter to use both straps, in vain. By High School, "the bag" became somewhat of a fashion statement. I almost understood that. Considering all the clothing, hair and make-up prep seemingly required for school, the hiking-style backpack does not really complete the look. Consequently, we search for an acceptable shoulder bag each September, which can accommodate six bulging soft-covered looseleafs. Even when emptied regularly, the looseleafs' rings become misaligned after two months: a result of planned obsolescence. Ironically, the bags only outlive the looseleaf books by a few months, their strained straps giving way.

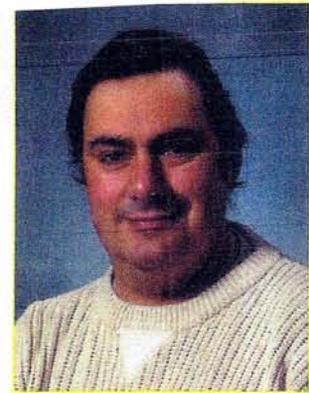
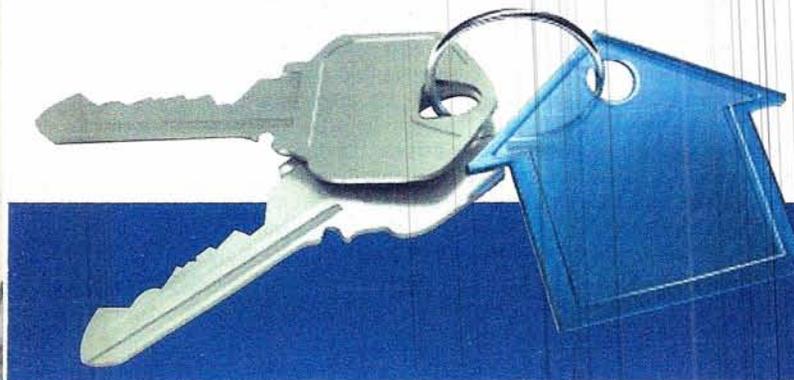
In our school district, we have "Back to School Night" for the High School in September. That is the night that the parents follow the students' schedule, running around the building, from class to class. Each teacher gives the parents an outline of the curriculum and a full break-down of their grading policy. Sitting there, I wonder why I feel like I am somehow responsible for remembering this information, as if to ensure that my child does well on the midterm, which is fifty per cent of the second quarter. The complex formulas used to calculate a student's final grade are beyond me, but the teachers go over them in detail, just in case a parent is double checking their math. Moreover, I feel like I am back in school and am tempted to write down all the important curriculum requirements, like the other parents who are scribbling furiously, not to miss a word.

Then, when the bell rings, we all repair to the hallway, and call or text our children, who are watching television or on Facebook. I implore my daughter to immediately cease all wasteful activities and start studying for tomorrow's test, which she neglected to mention to me when she told me just two hours earlier that she had no homework. And, I make the call as surreptitiously as possible, since I feel like I am cheating, somehow. I don't understand why, since the teacher told us all about the test and the students already knew. I think I just want the teacher to actually believe my child was on the ball.

The freshman classrooms are SRO (Standing Room Only) and the classes frequented by the seniors' parents have a poor showing. As a result, as a senior parent, the teacher is so very thrilled to see me. Of course, it is also interesting to watch the new freshman parents try to negotiate the building. The school thoughtfully posts students and faculty guides throughout the building to assist parents as they roam from room to room. But, why are all these doctors, lawyers, and CEOs so lost? They are lost because many of the Long Island school districts responded to the growth in student population over the years by adding wings to their buildings, without any symmetry, rhythm or reason, hence making their school buildings impossible to navigate without a map and a team of experts.

On Long Island, "Back to School" means class photos, unlike in the NYC schools, where class pictures were taken in the spring, the way G-d intended. Here, they are taken before the heat of summer leaves us, so hair frizzes and the students look tan and dress like they are on a tropical island. A neighboring district even has the audacity to take senior pictures in June of the junior year! Still, it is the "senior picture" and my child's last formal school portrait. I know that each time I will fish for it in my wallet to proudly show a friend or acquaintance, I will need to say "this is her senior picture: of course it was taken almost a year earlier, so she looked much different by graduation." Maybe I will need to keep a photo from the actual graduation day in my wallet to supplement it, so the other people on line in the supermarket with me will have a more accurate sense of how my daughter looked as a senior.

By Risa C. Doherty



Johr

This ha
spent t
was te
home
off to
wife's
ogy co
been ta
mer. St
Costa F
played
did lunc
ferent r
ish. In C

different foods on the Expo floor (orange
cream), walked the Magnificent Mile which
fany's, brought all my wife's graduate stud
watched Transformers 3 being shot and end
at Wrigley Field. All in all it was tiring but fun

Since my son was born in Costa Rica but I
our first family trip when he was a month
ever since. Part of the mental dilemma for m
by these trips from over the years I kind of f
sized teenager and doesn't need me const
are some of the things I found myself saying

"Look both ways before crossing the street."
"The shower is hot so be careful."
"How is your tummy?" Yes I actually said tur
"Watch your step getting off the bus."
"Did you remember clean underwear?"
"Now did you wash your hands good? And d

I'm sure I said many more overprotective state
to encode. I'm equally sure that if I asked n
five more things I said that really didn't need t
once a dad always a dad. Heck, growing u
child is growing up, now that's hard. Perhaps
do in a long time is to let my son go to the be
I was so tempted to say, "Hey, I need a pit stc
the chord. I'll admit it, I sweated a bit while h
a humid night.) I worried a bit more. He made
that after 16 years he can handle himself in the
to buy some food at the concession without r
through my thick head that there are many thin
he doesn't now.

Here's the catch though. Even though he is a
hold his hand as we cross the street; he still r
while I no longer have to worry about him stic
socket or getting into the cupboards, there a
problems sixteen year olds can get into. Obvieu
has to work his way out of. We've given him th
the years, it's up to him to use them. Still there
old, no matter how smart, doesn't have the exp
life's problems. That's when it's up to the parent
and at least offer some advice or help. Or at leas
wish to talk. The biggest trick to master of cours
I'm still working on figuring that out. In the mean
on the side of offering help rather he asks for it c

One other thing hit me as my son and I were si
Omni hotel looking at Chicago pass by. The re
of North Western Memorial Hospital. Suddenly
my son could be studying at a medical school o
North Western. Big city, lots of people, lots of c
Will he want that? Will he be ready? What can I
prepare? What can I do to prepare myself for w
on that next column.