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Camp texts are not what Mom had in mind

By Nancy Shohet West AUGUST 11, 2013



The author's son, Tim West, in action at a baseball camp.

For months, I had looked forward to that particular week as a beacon of tranquility in the midst of a long hot summer, a unique interlude of calm and rest.

Having my 14-year-old son, Tim, away at baseball camp would mean significantly less cooking, less cleaning, less grocery shopping, less laundry — and no evening baseball games to attend.

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I envisioned a stretch of five consecutive days when I had nothing to think about except my own tasks.

Instead, I found myself spending most of the time fretting about whether Tim was OK.

It wasn't impossible to be in touch. Though cellphone use isn't allowed during the day, the camp allows the kids to text-message their parents for a few minutes before bed every night.

But the texts we received from Tim were not exactly what I would consider updates on his well-being; in fact, they required translation from my husband, Rick.

"What did he say?" I asked Rick excitedly when I heard his text-message notification buzz at 9:03 p.m. after the first full day of camp.

Rick handed over his phone so that I could read the message for myself. "At SS, started off a 6-4-3," Tim wrote. "1st at-bat grounded to second off 80+ mph pitch; 2nd time walked."

“
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"Why is he writing in code?" I asked Rick.

"More importantly, how is he? Has he made friends? How's the food? Has he been sleeping well? Does he miss us very much?"

"He initiated a double-play from shortstop," Rick replied. "And he hit a grounder to second."

"But how is he?" I demanded again.

"He broke out of a season-long hitting slump and led a double play!" Rick answered. "So he's doing great!"

I wasn't sure whether to believe him. "Doing great," to my mind, would include phrases like "Camp has been fantastic!" and "I'm having a wonderful time!" and "The counselors are fun and the other kids are nice to me!"

That's what a mother yearns to hear the first time her son goes to overnight camp. After all, he waited almost 15 years to reach this point; now that we all made it, I wanted a little information.

But very little more was forthcoming.

The campers were allotted five minutes per evening for texting, and Tim apparently wished to use those five minutes to keep his father up to speed on his fielding and hitting stats, rather than allaying his mother's primal anxieties about his general condition.

Going to camp for the first time was a milestone for him, but I had to concede that it was one for me as well.

As a kid, and well into my teen years — OK, pretty much until my second attempt at college — I had a terrible time leaving home. And my separation anxiety was, hands-down, the flaw I least wanted to see my children inherit.

Tim may not have had much to say when it came to communicating all week, but this much I could deduce: he was doing OK. And that made me recognize that I was doing OK, too. He was learning to get by while away from home; I was learning that he is his own person and may not choose to communicate his thoughts, feelings, and experiences exactly as I might wish.

I came to realize that this rite of passage for me as a mother meant accepting that I simply wouldn't know what he was doing and how he was feeling every moment of the day.

So I had to be content with the news that he executed a 6-4-3 from SS.

It wasn't exactly the information I would have wished for, given that it told me nothing about whether he was eating or sleeping well, or even remembering to take regular showers, but it was what he has chosen to impart.

I would have to trust him to eat, sleep, wash, and be reasonably happy.

And I would have to trust my husband that a 6-4-3, whatever that might mean, was evidence enough of his well-being.

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