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## AROUND HOME

### One small goodbye, for starters

*by Nancy Shobet West*

I dropped Tim off at school at 6:30 one morning earlier this month. He was wide awake, alert and eager to get going, even though it was an hour earlier than normal middle school drop-off time. In his backpack, in place of the usual pencils, notebooks and calculators, were toiletries, T-shirts, clean socks and underwear. Also two one-pound bags of his favorite candy, Sour Patch Kids, and a deck of cards.

In half an hour, after checking in at his homeroom and having his backpack searched for contraband substances, Tim, along with his 96 classmates, would be boarding the bus for the eighth-grade class trip: two full days in the wilds of the Berkshires, one overnight at the Comfort Inn.

I'd gone to the parent meeting the previous week and had a pretty good idea of what the itinerary was for the trip. They'd spend the first day at a camp doing ropes courses and other team-building activities. Even though they weren't spending the night there, they'd get to do the same nighttime activities that make nights at summer camp so memorable: dinner, campfires, reflecting upon the day's activities. They'd spend the night at a hotel, three or four kids to a room, with chaperones keeping an ever-watchful eye (and ear) on the hallways. The kids were allowed to stay up as late as they wanted with their roommates, but no fraternizing between rooms. The second day would be spent at the Shakespeare & Company campus in Lenox, watching and taking part in Shakespearean scenes. They'd be home by evening.

"Which part are you looking forward to most?" I asked Tim as we drove to school. Despite the early hour, we hadn't had to rush; Tim had been up in plenty of time to shower and dress and brush his teeth. He was refreshed, cheerful and energetic. "The camp visit? The play?"

"The hotel overnight," said Tim. "Me and Austin and Will are going to stay up all night playing poker and using Sour Patch Kids in place of poker chips."

This wasn't on the itinerary that the eighth-grade teachers distributed at our meeting last week. But I appreciated his honesty, and I was just glad that he was prepared to have a good time, whatever the means. He hasn't gone away much. Unlike many of his peers, he's never been to summer camp. One-night sleepovers with close friends are really the extent of his time away from home, at this point.

So I was a little bit apprehensive about his departure. But only a very little bit, because he was going to be with kids he's known for nearly a decade and teachers he's known all year.

It was a precursor to later this summer, when he'll finally have his first summer camp experience. That's for only a week, and he assures me he's not anxious in the least. He's probably telling the truth. I'm anxious, though. It's always hard to separate from your children, whether it's at the infant daycare center your first day back at work or on the first day of kindergarten or leaving them at the soccer field for their first practice.

And this is only the beginning. But he's ready, and I need to be also. Saying goodbye for a two-day trip didn't seem like a big deal, until I thought of all the goodbyes that this one presaged: college, eventually; maybe studying abroad; maybe military service. This one is easy; but it's only a lead-in to more complicated separations.

Nonetheless, it's a start. We'll drop him off at summer camp in a couple of months and hope again that it will be a good experience. I'll say goodbye and then worry a little, just as I was now. But one step at a time. I knew he has good emotional coping skills and was happy and confident about this trip.

Besides, he had two pounds of Sour Patch Kids. He'd be fine. Δ



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