

## THE BITTERSWEET OF LIFE'S PASSAGE

*It's time for school again and I want to write something about that. Thing is, for the first time ever, I have no child to send off to her first day back. My youngest daughter will be a junior in college this year and she did not spend this summer at home. That truly is a milestone.*

*So I went back and read through some of the columns I've written over the years and I've picked one that I particularly like that I wrote two years ago. I hope you like it, too.*

Labor Day has come and gone, and the children are going off to school. When I think about it, I've been sending children off to their first day of school for the past 21 years. That's a very long time. Gone by in a flash. Some of those old clichés that we all shudder to hear are indeed true.

My youngest daughter is going back to school once again, but this time she's off to college. This is my last chicken to fly the coop. And all my professional knowledge notwithstanding, there isn't much consolation in the "empty nest" syndrome being a normal stage of development in the life cycle of the family. I feel sad.

I've spent the past 26 years listening for scared little voices calling "Mommy" in the middle of the night. I've tuned into countless footsteps, recognizing which daughter was coming down the hall by the way she walked. I've listened with one ear while I slept for them to come home and know that they were safe. And when they were all gone, sleeping at friends or whatever, I've listened to the sounds of silence.

I have been doing this for many years and so it's alright with me for my daughter to leave. For were she to stay, it would mean that in some way she had let herself down and was not ready (developmentally) to go on to the next stage of her life.

The commencement ceremonies at Newport Harbor High School were about celebrating the memories and looking forward to the goodness that awaits these young lives. There was a basket full of beautiful white doves which were released to fly high and away as a metaphor for freedom and

possibility. One of the doves accidentally flew into the light pole and broke its wing. It fell to the ground.  
I do not want that for my daughter.

And so my heart hurts for me at the same time as it is filled with joy mixed with anticipation and hope for her, knowing full well from having lived just what life can hold.

The telephone rings. I answer it. A voice on the line says, "You sound like death."

"I'm writing a column about you leaving home," I reply.

"I love you, too," says my daughter.