

The following monthly message has been contributed by David Autovino, friend of the Tompkins County Youth Services Department. While slightly different than our usual tips to support youth, this message takes a look at self-care and parents as it serves as a reminder that as the first week of school hits, it's not just the kids experiencing big changes.

One of the most important relationships in my life ended today. Well, was forever altered. For the best, of course, I know that. But if you don't mind, I'd like to eulogize it here.

For five years, I had a sidekick. A constant companion, a little buddy who went with me everywhere, by necessity. And there was nothing I didn't know about her, or any part of her life, because we were almost always together. And when everything is new, that joy of discovery, and the love we had for each other, I know it sounds cliché but, it was so pure. Unadulterated by nuanced concerns. Innocent, in the most literal meaning of the word. When it was just the two of us, it was like we were living our own private little Garden of Eden.

That level of intimacy is often both wonderful and infuriating. There have been just as many screams as there have been snuggles, believe me. There was, and is, nothing I wouldn't do for her, but the large presence she occupied in my life meant that my career, my life's passion, had to change shape in order to fit around her. Occasionally I resented her for that, if I'm being completely honest.

But she also changed the shape of ME, as a person, and that I wouldn't trade for anything. The difference between the love you have for your spouse and the love you have for your child is that you are responsible TO your spouse, but you are responsible FOR your child. And being responsible for every aspect of someone else's life also serves to inform the most important aspects of your own. If I am to be her constant guide through this new world, what do I have to become in order to deserve that honor? And if I'm not happy with the world I'll be showing her, what can I do to change it?

She taught me how to be a parent, with every unbidden giggle and with every shriek of frustration. She made me a feminist. She made me more patient with other people's struggles, and less patient with those who would seek to do harm to this beautiful world she'll inherit. She reminded me that fart noises are funny, and that sometimes it's entertainment enough just to be outside.

And she doesn't even need me anymore. At least, not 24/7. She's a self-confident, fully-formed person, and she's ready to interact with the world without me holding her hand.

If you're an experienced stay-at-home parent, it's okay if you're rolling your eyes a little at my naïveté, as I experience this early parental heartbreak. I know. It's okay. And I'm okay. I have a new little buddy with me at home now, and she's every bit as amazing as her sister. But if you've been where I am now, do me a solid and think kindly of us new-Kindergarten-parents who feel like they've lost their best friend this week.

Monthly Messages are brought to you by the Tompkins County Youth Services Department, a proud partner of The Community Coalition for Healthy Youth.

If you have further questions or comments about this message or would like information on how to become involved with the Community Coalition for Healthy Youth, please email ahendrix@tompkins-co.org

Thank you in advance for forwarding this monthly message to all of your networks.

