

Everyone knows what it is to be a parent of a senior at El Cerrito High.

Being the parent of an EC senior is neither for the fearful nor the faint of heart. It is tantamount to being on a super roller coaster with its ups and down, its valleys and peaks.

It is the last year of back-to-school meetings and progress report pick-ups. It is hormones out of control. It is the thought that you are that old. It is being lenient on chores. It is being able to retire from your job as chauffeur. It is feeling like a senior 4-H member who has just brought her prize steer to the auction block, hoping for the highest bidder.

It is knowing when to back off and when to stay vigilant. It is knowing that my son is almost out of the house, knowing that the house will never be the same without him. It is knowing that Pygmalion's task is nearing completion. It is knowing you're not considered part of the team, not even a coach, but expected to be more than a fan. It is knowing that supportive is not necessarily a two-way street.

It is wondering how to parent a 17-year old who knows everything there is to know in a world I'm unfamiliar with. It's wondering why first year logic is saved until college. It is wondering if my child will ever have an answer to the question "What colleges are you applying to?" It is wondering if he is ready for college and if I am ready for him to go.

It is realizing that who he is becoming is just right for him. It is realizing that this time next year he will no longer be living at home and you don't know how the family dynamics will be without his gentle humor and extraordinary intellect. It is realizing that she has listened, at least in part, to advice that we have given.

Being a parent of a senior is stressful and demanding. It is supporting him to do positive things. It is offering support when needed and yet not nagging so she can become independent. It is giving him advice when he has uncertainty. It is reminding him to keep working. It is wanting to be sensitive to how much pressure I apply to my child so that this pressure will not become an obstacle to her success but a challenge to strive for the best in her senior year. It is understanding that the pressure of competitive AP classes could cause the senior to resent the parent's intention and think that the only things a parent cares about are good grades, scholarships, and a prestigious college. It is trying to provide a stress-free environment. It means eight hours at work each day and then coming home to review homework assignments.

It is pride that your child has been educated in public schools. It is being pleased that my daughter has gained so much from school: ECHS has given her the opportunity to be challenged, acknowledged, and make wonderful friends. It is being happy that my dealing on his behalf with the school system is almost over. It is being frustrated at the district's ridiculous budget cuts. It is a feeling of gratitude and appreciation for the hard work, dedication, and tireless efforts the teachers, administrators, and ancillary staff have generously given to the class of 2003.

It is a reminder of the fact that from 1972-1976, in N.J., I was bussed from an all white town to a mostly black high school in New Brunswick. It is remembering how grown up I felt as a senior and reflecting on that often as I look into my daughter's eyes. As Bob Dylan once said, "Ah, but I was so much older then, I'm younger than that now."

It is helping her fill out college applications. It is empathizing with the fear and self doubts that the college application process engenders. It means spending hours surfing the net in search of scholarships, grants, and universities.

Maybe, just maybe, its not so bad being the parent of an EC senior.

It is sharing the joy and excitement of senior year activities. It is being excited to hear of the events that lie ahead: final exams, senior photos, yearbook signing, senior ball, and graduation. It is participating in the senior activities: shopping for ball gowns, working on grad night, attending senior awards, and finally graduation. It is all I hear is money, money, money, and I need money. Money for the boat cruise, prom, senior picnic, and senior trip. I feel like I have an ATM sign taped to my head. Because of the added expenses, I, who have never even considered buying a lottery ticket, am now making plans for Las Vegas. It is realizing your wallet is neither half full nor half empty—it is just a place to carry your drivers license and pictures. It is eventually writing all my paychecks to the university of her choice.

Being the parent of a senior is happy, expensive, fun, suspenseful, worrisome, nerve wracking, bittersweet, intricate but challenging, exciting but scary. Being the parent of a senior is both terrifying and exhilarating. It is terrifying because in a little more than a year's time, my elder child will leave home and go away to college. It is exhilarating because in a little more than a year's time, my elder child will leave home and go away to college.

It is worry, worry, and worry. It is staying up later than normal waiting, worrying, and then breathing a sign of relief when she calls to say she will be home shortly. It is constantly telling him to go to sleep. It is making sure he is in good health. It is keeping him organized. It is worrying that she may attend a college far away from home. It is watching over my son to make sure he is on track. It is worrying when there is nothing to worry about. It is the wish to see your child succeed in every aspect of life. It is the hope to see your child choose the right path in life.

I have many questions in my mind. Is she receiving enough food? Is she able to make the right choices? Does anyone have a crystal ball?

It is unbelievable our "little baby" has grown up to be a young man about to graduate. It is the realization that my little girl has grown up. It is seeing that little seed that was so carefully planted so many years ago that was tended and nurtured has now begun to open. What does it reveal? A beautiful, competent, independent person. It is gratifying to know that our daughter is maturing and has learned the lessons that we taught her. It is realizing that our baby is no longer a baby. I miss the little princess I bounded on my knee, I love

the woman she has become, and I look forward to the ever-growing person of the future. It is being proud of her accomplishments. It is enjoying seeing her grow and become her own person. It is regretting that none of her grandparents lived long enough to watch her grow into the young woman that she has become and that they will miss her life yet to come; they would be very proud. It is the confidence in our daughter that makes us know we must have done something right. It is trying to keep pace as tougher and firmer strides are taken by your child into adulthood. It is a year of having to gradually let go and hating every moment of it. It is learning to let go and to treat my “child” as an adult. It is learning from my child. It is harder on us because she is the last of our children to leave home.

It is feeling a sense of pending loss knowing that our relationship will change over the next few years as she begins that trek to find herself as we all did. It is the end of one chapter and the beginning of a new one—for both of us! It is the beginning of a new relationship.

It is a sense of accomplishment that I have provided him with a foundation; that I have made an impact on his life through guidance, direction, and lots of prayer. It is a time of anticipation and preparation—like Advent—when your child is getting ready to assume the ultimate responsibility: to be born to the world.