

Boomers' nests drop in density

A lot of baby boomers have succumbed to the one inexorable consequence of time's passage that no gym regimen, Botox therapy or Wonder Bra can overcome: the depopulation of our homes.

Since going to work at 18 is somehow off the radar, our spawn slouch off to college or opt for a "gap year" — a year away before college that can cost as much as college.

The clichés and aphorisms describing this traumatic shift abound and nauseate. "Turning the page" is really putting a whole book on the bookcase shelf and bringing down a new one for our reading pleasure, seemingly in a foreign tongue. We are told "It's just a natural passage," which to me feels far more like the passing of a kidney stone than a life transition.

My generation's obsession with control was initially expressed as independence from our parents, involving rejection of many customs, affects, attitudes and manners that were viewed to be grotesquely un-hip and perhaps even heinous. That transitioned into control over our careers, usually with a sense of self-entitled aggression that preempted children until the biological parts that would enable us to create them were almost on the verge of collapse.

The transition of our generational obsessive-compulsive disorder was then made to focus on our children, who were often seen as a direct mirror of our worth as human beings. It was suspiciously similar to how many of us viewed our careers. The downside of all this hyper-focus is that our children's growth was often limited to being our fifth limb.



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Many of us pre-geezers are fairly overwhelmed by their absence. A friend of mine wrote that the day after she dropped her son off, she spent the afternoon listening to Mozart's "Requiem." Another simply sat in the house and heard the silence. I had a single malt scotch in the airport, neat.

Truth be told, parents are the ones who are finally growing up. The "gotta get it done or it won't get done" basis of our lives as applied to our children has inevitably come to an end. And, yes, when they get inserted into their post-high school venue, we are factually taking our children away, but in the final analysis they are "going" more than we are "taking."

After telling them with great moral authority to clean their closet or join a community service group, we can now do those things ourselves. We face the open hours once filled with schlepping them, conferencing with their teachers/coaches/counselors or attending their games/concerts/performances and can now find the space to see the dysfunctional nooks and crannies of our own lives — the pantry containing 1987 vintage tomato paste, the closet with pants that fit before their birth but somehow became unwearable since they drew their first breath, the bushes that have become house-consuming monsters.

Most of our children had already left childhood on one level before they left our homes, but we were so easily distracted by their physical presence that many of us didn't see the forest of ritualized parent/child communication for the trees of growing adulthood that inevitably blossomed in our children.

It's easy to say that the greatest mark of success as a parent is when our children no longer need us. Unfortunately, in many ways that's the last thing any of us want. We want to be needed, we want to be necessary, we want to be a vital part of our child's core simply because the reverse is true. We need them; they are absolutely a part of our core, and now a part of our core lives somewhere else.

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