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Essay – 726 words

### The Glory of Road Trips

I recently did a road trip with Laurie (daughter number three) from Owen Sound to Wolfville, Nova Scotia. We covered the 2000+ kilometers in two days. Though the marathon of driving was a bit tedious, sitting in that small space with my daughter took my heart and gave it a complete overhaul. I kept looking over at her and wondered if I was dreaming. I see the whole world at Laurie's feet, ready for her to discover. She is intelligent and talented, has finished her education in a tough male-dominated field. She survived when she wasn't sure she would, but I knew it would be so. I wanted to throw my hands up over my head and shout, "You did it" just like when she learned to walk and ride a two-wheeler and grow new front teeth.

I have been suffering from "girlie-withdrawal" for almost a year now. With four daughters (aka my girlies) gone from my nest, there has been an ache, a jabbing in my heart with the sad realization that motherhood passed too quickly. I was a hands-on mother, running interference and trying desperately to keep life from "getting at" my children. I wanted to shield them from grief and disappointment and failure and loss. In hindsight, how foolish. Falling down teaches us we can get up, perhaps the best of life's lessons hurled at us.

The good news is I have changed, even if only slightly. Laurie drove most of the way, even through the madness of Montreal that took us over two hours. I was comfortable and relaxed, confident in her driving skill. Aimee, daughter number one, who is every bit as good a driver, saw little time behind the wheel when she and I drove west to Kelowna for her to attend university. I was far more annoying then. I would apologize to Aimee, but what's the point. It was my best mothering at the time, my

inability to hand over the reins. I have since been forced to face the obvious: my children can manage quite nicely without me.

There's nothing like a road trip for wonderful conversation, to imagine dreams and how to get to them, to discuss aches and pains and how to heal from them, to laugh and remember the best bits of childhood. I love recounting my favourite stories to my girls, stories they love to hear. I have all the pieces, the colour, the texture of those moments that I willingly share with any hint of encouragement. I am transported back to those days of perfection, when they looked at me with their wide eyes filled with trust and adoration, when they could climb up on my knee and I could save them from bruised knees, from a nightmare, from a broken heart, when it was all so easy, before teen-age years built up the necessary resistance to parenting so they could learn to walk on their own.

I remember diapers and sleepless nights and croup and chicken pox and first days of school. I remember wondering if I would survive the fatigue that washed in, when I wasn't sure I could pick up one more shoe or search for any more lost homework or remind them one more time to brush their teeth. But those were just moments, specks on the whole picture. It has been glorious. My children are amazing human beings with a great capacity to care and wonder. They want to leave the world a little better than when they arrived.

Many of us don't live where our children live. With four, it would have been impossible, they have scattered like dandelion fluff to discover where they might best grow. I think I may have thought they would always be within my reach, that I could stretch out my arms and gather them in and breathe in all that they are. But alas, that isn't so. For now, I shall jump at the chance to do road trips, to pitch in where and when they need help, to replenish my stores of hugs and laughter to see me through to the next visit.

We all know children don't belong to us; they are merely on loan, until they jump from the nest and learn to fly. I suppose it is all rather cliché, but my heart would tell me otherwise.

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