

Essay – 960 words

### WHERE'S PETER PAN?

Most of us know the story of Peter Pan. He's been a character in our literature for over a hundred years, a character many of us identify with, especially on those days when being a grown-up is anything but fun. I used to imagine flying out my bedroom window and having conversations with my shadow.

I've been thinking of Peter these past days, longing for my own *Neverland*, that place where things never change, where those we love stay as we best remember them. I know a lot of my melancholy comes from my youngest leaving home this fall, leaving me with an empty nest. I've never lived alone, despite my hermit-like tendencies. Someone's needs have always come ahead of my own and I'm not sure about this change. When my other daughters headed off on their life's adventure someone always remained behind who needed me. I feel a bit like a balloon without a string. I'm adrift on the wind and can't be sure where I'll end up.

I remember thinking that I would be changing, soaking, rinsing, washing diapers forever. I spread four daughters over thirteen years and, though in hindsight not the wisest of decisions, there are no do-overs. I remember picking up shoes: barn shoes, play shoes, dress shoes, school shoes, endless shoes and silently wishing for fewer shoes. I remember lunches and homework and last minute science projects and collecting leaves with a flashlight and typing up essays in the wee hours of the morning while correcting

grammar and spelling and trying not to sound too much like a mother. And I remember wondering if motherhood would be the end of me, my demise, my Achilles heel so to speak.

Daughter number one leaving was shocking, but she and I had an adventure driving across Canada for her to attend university in British Columbia. She slept the majority of the drive and we laugh about that now, but I think she was delaying the sense of loss we were both feeling. I had to hurry home to care for the three remaining.

Daughter number two left with slightly less fanfare and drifted in and out with the seasons and resisted severing those last ties until just lately. Last September I delivered daughter number three to college in Thunder Bay. She packed while suffering from mono and put on a brave face, trying to look excited about her adventure. And I felt unbelievable grief. When I put myself in any of their shoes I felt like rubbing my hands together with excitement, imagining all the possibilities for her, this fresh start, this discovering who she really is and who she wants to be. But daughter number three was the soft place in my life where I went to lick my wounds, to look into the most sensitive eyes that exist anywhere on earth.

And now here I am needing to do it again so soon, perhaps too soon. I've had a headache for four days and nothing helps. The headache is being a mother, not wanting to let go when I know I must, not wanting to cry when I know I can't help it, not wanting to beg for more days when I don't have any left in the bank, no more chances to do a better job, no more opportunities to make sure I've taught my girls everything they need to know.

For thirty-one years I have fussed and worried and paced and dreamed and hoped that it would all turn out the way it should, that I've raised kind decent caring people who will make the world a little better just by them being in it. Should I have done more: taught them better money management, how to give their best every day not just some days, how to forgive, how to laugh when the going gets tough, how to make a bed (because it seems they don't know how). There's no time now.

It went by so quickly and it's as if I dozed off and they went from being babies to young women in the blink of an eye. I want to wrap them up in a blanket and tuck them into my arms in a rocking chair and savour each positive moment that motherhood brought me. I want to tuck my favourite memories into a little parcel that I can give them as a parting gift, one they can open on the days when they wish they were children again.

I loved best the times when they crawled into my bed, the four of them kicking and squirming and laughing. I thought that part of my life would somehow go on forever. I feel like I've been tricked. I signed on for sleepless nights and chicken pox and messy bedrooms and testing the rules and tantrums and all of those things because I thought there was no real end to the best parts, that there wouldn't be a day somewhere in the mix when they would all be on my bed telling me their stories.

My stomach hurts. I try to remember the television commercial with the dad seeing the child off and explaining that mom was just too upset to come down. Meanwhile mom was upstairs measuring the room for some new purpose, her excitement uncontainable. I suppose there's a bit of that in me somewhere, just too far below the surface to feel it.

It's not good-bye though; isn't it just see you later? It won't be the same though. It was never supposed to be. It's called ... growing up: me growing up, my girls have already done that. It had to happen eventually. It seems I am in fact not the Peter Pan I thought I was.

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