

**"Facts and Arguments," *Globe and Mail*, Aug. 13, 2008**

I dialled his cellphone.

"I just read a great review of a play you and Anna would like," I said. "Want to go?"

"Sure," was his response. "Why don't you both come here for dinner first? Wednesday?"

Next Wednesday, I have a date that has taken me almost three decades to arrange. For the first time, two adults, my daughter Anna, 27, and I, will leave our separate homes and meet at the small bachelor apartment where 23-year old Sam, my adult son, now lives. Although so far the place only boasts a frying pan with no handle and two chairs, Sam will make us dinner. And then both of these grown-ups will accompany me to the theatre. They will go willingly. Hard as it is to believe, they aren't averse, any more, to being seen in public with their mother, or to attending the theatre even when it's my (read: uncool highbrow boring) choice of play.

"We've come through," I exclaimed aloud, as I hung up.

When my offspring were babies, I wanted geniuses, musical prodigies, Nobel prizes. By middle school, I would have settled for children who could find their homework and didn't try, regularly, to strangle each other. And by their mid-adolescence, my only goal was to keep the two of them alive until their brains kicked in.

That decade has blurred, in the memory of this single mother, into a nightmarish parade of challenges, battles and mistakes - struggling with the relentless slog of daily discipline, inventing new rules and forgetting them, making snap decisions about curfew, piercings, money, parties, driving, drugs, sex. My ordinary day-to-day terrors were interspersed with more spectacular ones: the time Anna called at midnight after a rock concert hours to the north, saying that her ride had passed out, could I come and get her? The time Sam, already too tall in Grade 11, leapt to do a slamdunk in basketball practice and knocked himself unconscious.

Then there were all the friends, like Ratboy the graffiti artist who lived in our basement for four months. The tedious giggling gossip of the pack of girls, the incessant ringing of the telephone. The simple but expensive needs of the gang of boys: towers of messy carbohydrates. The spicy smell wafting in from the garden at odd hours. The sound of puking in the bathroom at 4 a.m., indicating that someone else had come here after a party to sleep on the sofa and recover.

Much of the time, I was overwrought - furious, exhausted, frantic with anxiety, guilt and self-doubt. "Chill," my daughter would advise breezily. Easy for you to say, I'd fume. You pay the bills, fix the broken dryer (too many jeans), talk to the frazzled teachers and then chill.

Living in the eye of a hormonal hurricane, I lost my sense of humour.

But the girl graduated from high school and went away to university. Not long after she came back (without finishing) and found a job, we both knew, amicably, that our days of living together were over. She rented a place with a friend.

The boy finished high school and set out on adventures, working, travelling, living in the United States with his dad. When he returned home and went back to work, we knew our days of living together were limited. The time came when I simply could not stand the empty fridge, the litter of beer caps and the smell of socks, and he could not stand the nagging. Last month, he moved out. I immediately rented his scoured-out room to a quiet student from Beijing.

My children are now living their own lives, near but not here. Brother and sister take care of each other. I adore them, I'm proud of them, and I like them, too. I'd like them even if they weren't mine.

For those parents still in the dark tunnel of adolescence, from a parent who has made it through, here are a few things I learned:

The girl was way harder to raise than the boy. We have thrown open the doors to young female power, and girls will take awhile before they learn to use it properly.

Anna once told me about the moment I lost her. She was 15, testing me constantly. One night she wanted to go out, I said no, and we argued. Finally, she threw a vile curse word at me and walked out the door. I didn't know what to do. Nothing in my own mild teenage years had prepared me for this kind of confrontation. So when she returned, I said nothing and did nothing. At that point, she realised she could do whatever she wanted, and that is what she did.

She also told me how I could have commanded her. "You know how you love to dance?" she said. "If you had told me that the next time I misbehaved, you would dance in front of my friends, I would have done anything you wanted."

So simple. If only I had known, she might be on her way to a Nobel Prize. Instead, she is merely responsible, funny and kind. And by the same miracle, her brother is too.

Yesterday, Anna called to tell me that after a lifetime of making gagging noises every time she saw a tomato, now she likes tomatoes. Then Sam dropped by the house unexpectedly. I was making dinner, but he didn't want food. He had no laundry with him.

"Just dropped by to see how you are," he said.