

It Wasn't Easy For My Kid Either

I had fifteen years experience teaching here at NPMS before my first child, Kate, arrived here as a sixth grader. I had looked forward to the day she and I would drive to school together. I wouldn't have her in any of my classes but I would be able to see her in the halls, cafeteria and at assemblies. I thought it would be neat to be a fly on the wall and see her experience life at NPMS. I was confident that I would be able to help her avoid trouble because I was aware of all the cracks a kid can fall into.

It never occurred to me that there might be trouble.

Kindergarten through fifth was a breeze. Kate had only minor trouble remembering to do or hand in assignments. The friends she played with were all pretty nice kids. Kate loved school and school seemed to love Kate.

Sixth grade began well. The first quarter report card looked good. Work was in and quality was fine. Kate missed being with her closest friends but did get to see them at lunch and in PE class. Things were going according to my expectations.

Then the phone began to ring more than it used to. A lot more, and it wasn't calls for me! Homework was getting done at school.... or so it was claimed. Teachers let me know that not all work was getting handed in or was being handed in late. How was this possible when we had seen her getting it done on time? The day planner was frequently left in the

locker instead of coming home. I even spotted her at the other end of the hall wearing clothes that I am pretty sure she wasn't wearing when we left the house that morning. I began to wonder why her elementary friends weren't the people she was hanging with in the cafeteria, and why of all people was she choosing to hang out with..... those kids?

And so I realized it was inescapable. The middle school years often aren't much fun for either kids or their parents. Parental good intentions, participation and supervision are all important things, but they don't make these years of astounding physical and mental growth any easier for the kid.

Groundings, loss of privileges, insistence upon daily examination of the day runner, tears and three years of occasional frustration finally brought us to high school.

The conventional wisdom is that parents have two options. You can either have three years of moderate aggravation or one year of holy terror from your middle schooler. Unfortunately, you don't get to choose.

Kate has turned out to be a great high schooler and we have discovered something to fear far more than her middle years. She is a NPH senior this year and her graduation will come far sooner than we want it too!

Post script:

This column was first written in the 04-05 school year. My Katie is off now costing an arm and leg attending college in Colorado. Now in her senior year, she is working away at the course work for pre-veterinary studies. It has been so interesting to see her actually applying all the independent study skills and skills for responsible living that we once feared she would never grasp! I am so glad now that during her middle years we kept to our task of parenting and never let up no matter how hard she resisted at times. Our efforts then are certainly paying off in her success now. What is also neat I think, is that Kate has even grown enough to recognize and thank some teachers for their efforts on her behalf during her middle years here at NPMS.

So, to all you first time parents of middle schoolers, trust me..... the middle years aren't pretty, but the return on your investment is wonderful!