**Then they do.**

Some of my most popular articles are those that come straight from my personal experiences. Here’s what happened the last week.

I took my baby to college! This officially gives me an empty nest and I’m OK with it! Yes, believe it or not, I cried a little on the final good-bye hug as I left him in his new dorm room but then sniffed it off and did a little snoopy-dance-wiggle of happiness as we got to the truck to drive home.

I’m very proud of our accomplishment of getting him to school and even more proud of seeing him as a grown-up, well adjusted, happy, smart kid who is more than ready for his next chapter in life.

I truly believe that this journey of life is awesome. If you think about it. So much development and growth and life are learned and taught during those early years, under the direction and care of parents. Then comes that time right about 16, 17 and 18 years of age when it’s time for more; more responsibilities, more independence, more opportunities. It’s also around this same age when the parents become ready for them to move on so they can experience those things.

There’s not a lot we as parents can do for our kids after they’ve graduated from high school. We can always physically take care of them if we had to. However, the primary lessons of life, living, growth, responsibility and independence should already be in place, if we’ve done our parenting well.

So, after I let my last child go, I found myself vacuuming one afternoon listening to my favorite country artist, Trace Adkins’ song entitled, “Then they do” and then came the tears of feeling my empty nest.

“In the early morning rush, trying to get the kids to school…
I’m yelling up the stairs, let’s go…
They’re fighting in the back seat…
Everyone is late and I swear I can’t wait ‘til they grow up…
Then they do.
And that’s how it is,
It’s just quiet in the morning
You can’t believe how much you miss all they do
And all they did
You want all the dreams they’ve dreamed to come true, then they do.” (T. Adkins)

Empty nest syndrome isn’t a true clinical diagnosis, it’s a phenomenon in which parents experience feeling of sadness and loss when the last child leaves home, according to the Mayo Clinic web page.

“Letting go can be painful. You might find it difficult to suddenly have no children at home who need your care, you will miss their daily lives and companionship. You might also worry intensely about their safety and care of themselves on their own. You might also struggle if you strongly identify with your role as a parent and have a more difficult time adjusting to an empty nest.” (MayoClinic Webpage)

Past research suggests that parents dealing with empty nest syndrome experience a profound sense of loss that might make them vulnerable to depression, alcoholism, identity crisis and marital conflicts. Other research says the opposite; empty nesting can result in reduced work and family conflicts and can provide parents with other benefits, like a new opportunity to reconnect with each other.

Ways to cope with empty nest syndrome include being prepared and accepting the timing of your child’s departure. Avoid comparing your child’s timetable to your own experience or expectations. Instead, focus on what you can do to help them succeed.

Keep in touch with them. You can continue to be close to your child even when you live apart. Make an effort to maintain regular contact through visits, phone calls, texts or video chats.

Seek support if you are having a hard time with your empty nest. Lean on loved ones and others close to you for support. Share your feelings. If you feel depressed, then seek appropriate medical help.

Stay positive. Think about all the benefits to having back your own time and energy. Devote those things to your personal interests.

Can you prevent empty nest syndrome? Yes, because it really isn’t a clinical diagnosis. It’s simply your next stage in the journey of life. Embrace it, enjoy it and congratulations!