

**Theme:** Worries  
**Question:** What do you worry about more than anything else?

Teens and parents in conversation

# HomeWord



Volume 7, Number 2



## Teen Talk

by Leann Barden

It was Monday. After a hectic week-end of composing three reports, I was ready to start the week. I rose early to catch the city bus for my usual hour-long trip to school. Once there, I moved from class to class, collecting homework in each one. I sighed to myself, wishing I had opted for a study hall instead of Debate.

When the last bell rang, I walked down the hallway for a *Scope* (my school's newspaper) meeting. Afterward I took the bus to my bassoon lesson, where my instructor informed me of my many bad music habits. Arriving home that evening, I was welcomed by a cold dinner waiting to be reheated. I sighed again, wishing I saw more of my family. We were all running on separate, hectic schedules.

Later that night my Mom took me to Driver's Ed. On arrival I rushed over to one of my friends in an attempt to relieve some stress and worry. But she gave me the cold shoulder! In my time of need, another petty girl-fight had silently broken out between us, adding to my worries rather than relieving them. When I got behind the

wheel, my instructor told me to relax. He said, "A tense driver is not a safe driver." Forget about driving! I felt like my whole life was crashing.

Until recently I thought I knew what my priorities were. Society had drilled into me that education was paramount, so I sacrificed most of my "down time" to take maximum advantage of "schoolwork time."

The hard work has paid off, as I am ranked number one in my class. Yet the price I've paid is as great as the reward. Last year the stress and anxiety mounted until I was getting only a couple hours of sleep at night. Schoolwork forced its way into my weekends. I rarely had time to do the things I found relaxing, like making a scrapbook. Needless to say, my social life waned considerably. I did not know how to slow down anymore! I was trapped in my own worries about school. Even my parents told me to loosen up, but I could not do that because I needed to "reach my full potential."


As the school year drew to a close, I found myself with a little ▼

**Even my parents told me to loosen up.**




## Parent Talk

by Barbara Poole



My nineteen-year-old daughter and I have survived one of life's little crises: She has moved out.

Since my baby bird left the nest (significant in itself because we live in Tennessee and she lives in Indiana), she has taken on a course of study at a branch of Indiana University, plus three part-time jobs.



In the six months that she's been on her own, she has had more than her share of life's little lessons: her car wouldn't start one summer evening and left her stranded in a parking lot; her roommate moved back home after suffering a dearth of funds, leaving her with all the expenses to pay; an early cold snap forced her to sleep in nearly all the clothing she owns when the heat failed; she was knocked off her feet by a vicious bout of mono; and she was involved in a minor traffic accident. Not to mention a cupboard more bare than Mother Hubbard's, and a deep craving for pizza not readily assuaged by Kraft Macaroni and Cheese.

She works long hours and studies hard; no one can say this girl

doesn't try. Her determination to succeed borders on pure stubbornness, but there are times when I can hear the plaintive catch of homesickness in her soft voice on the phone. She says, "No, Mom, I don't need money," but my mother's ear hears, "Please." She's become accustomed to hearing my agonized wails when she tells me that yes, she ate yesterday but can't remember what.

I will admit to my own mother that the hardest thing I have ever done is sit and watch my only child struggle to be independent.

If I follow my maternal instinct and rush to her aid (from which I had to be physically restrained recently by my also-wise husband), all the stumbling blocks placed in her path by a loving, teaching God would be of no value to her learning process. If I ignore the muffled trace of tears in her voice and fail to hear the unspoken misery she tries so hard to conceal, then what kind of mother am I? Granted, her worries run the gamut from "How will I pay this bill?" to "Why didn't that guy ever call me ▼

**"No, Mom, I don't need money," but my mother's ear hears, "Please."**

## Teen Talk *continued*

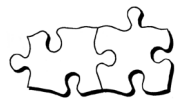
less homework and a little more time to reflect. One day while signing yearbooks with friends, I discovered that I wanted something more from life than just education. As I signed my friends' yearbooks, I began to wonder what my name would mean to them ten years from now. Would they remember me as someone they could take their problems to, as someone who was an uplifting person? While I don't doubt the importance of an education, I realized that my main spiritual worry was about making a difference in life.

So I became involved in campus ministry. This is an organization where kids can talk about whatever is bothering them, about ways to change their community, and about how to

image Christ in the world. The group also performs service projects. Even though I was now involved in even more activities, I felt happier and less worried. My self-esteem rose with each service activity. I started to rediscover prayer, and how refreshing meditation can be. Actively placing God in my life helped to dispel worries about school, family, and time. I was discovering the real me!

Walking around the block, listening to music, talking with a friend or my hamster, and praying are all ways I ease my burden, help myself slow down, and put life's expectations in better balance.

*Leann Barden is a sophomore at Pius X High School in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.*



## Teen Worry Prayer

Bottled up inside,  
are the words I've never said, God,  
the feelings I deeply hide,  
inside my wondering head.  
I know you can read me inside and out, God,  
I know that without a simple doubt in my mind.  
You can see it in my eyes,  
read it on my face.  
Trapped inside are the conscious torturing lies of the past  
that I cannot replace.  
No more wishing for the past; it wasn't meant to be.  
It didn't seem to nearly last.  
So I have to set myself free, God.  
Teenage thoughts rip me apart inside and out.  
Please, God, help me through these teenage years.  
Amen.

(Jaclyn, Saint Benedict School, Holmdel, NJ. This prayer first appeared in *Life Can Be a Wild Ride: More Prayers by Young Teens*, Saint Mary's Press, 2001.)

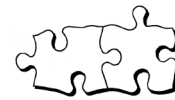
## Parent Talk *continued*

back?" but worries they are, for her, nonetheless. I can't keep life from happening to her, just as I can't make it happen for her.

Is worry constructive? Yes, when it spurs my daughter to budget her money wisely and to put aside a little something for the emergencies that always come. Yes, when she knows that the sixteen calls a week from her mother stem from a deep and constant love and give us both a measure of comfort when she's lonesome. No, if my unreasonable fear for her well-being results in unwanted "smothering." No, if my rescue attempts keep her from learning responsibility and from growing emotionally as she should.

What kind of mother am I? I hope I'm a mother who will always worry about what she's eating (or not eating) for dinner and whether she's paid her electric bill, but who also will leave the bigger worries in God's abundantly capable hands. And, in the process, I just might set an example for a nineteen-year-old woman-child who is feeling the weight of life in the fast lane: worry about what you can solve yourself, and offer the rest up in prayer.

*Barbara Poole writes and works at home in rural Tennessee, where she lives with her husband, Steve, and a beloved cat.*



## Parenting Is a Terminal Illness

It begins with the conception of the first child and lasts until death. We may send them off to nursery school, to camp, to college and careers, to spouses and homes of their own, but we never stop being their parents. We worry as much about the first day on a new job as we worried about the first day of kindergarten. No matter how psychologically astute we may be, no matter how much we recognize that we rear them in order to let them go, with each of their successes comes a secret sense of satisfaction, with each of their failures the nagging question, "Where did we go wrong?" This parental illness is not something we admit readily, not to our friends, to our spouse, or even to ourselves. But it surfaces unbidden during the sleepless nights that can still haunt us long after childhood fevers have been replaced by broken relationships and damaged dreams. In our most excruciatingly honest moments, we admit that there is no escape.

(Kathleen Chesto, author of *Exploring the New Family: Parents and Young Adults in Transition*, Saint Mary's Press, 2001)

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