

Theme: Rites of Passage

Question: How does your family honor and deal with change?

Teens and parents in conversation

HomeWord



Teen Talk *by an anonymous student*

About six years ago, a major change occurred in my life. . . . When I was nine years old, my parents got divorced. I loved both of them, but I also hated them because they were doing this to me. My mother moved out. I then lived with my dad whom I had hardly ever talked to before the divorce.

At the end of the school year, my father and I moved to another city. Life was very hard for me. I had only one parent, and I had lost the other one that I cared for so deeply. And to make things even worse, we moved to a new city where I literally had no friends. My life seemed horrible. I can remember asking God why this was happening to me.

My father remarried. This made me extremely unhappy. First, I did not like the woman he was marrying and, second, I felt that she was trying to take my mother's place. I cried and yelled at my father for doing this, and again I asked God why. Until recently, I never found the answer to that question.

I felt there was no one I could really trust to always be on my side. Because of this, I withdrew from my parents and my friends. Instead, I concentrated on school and sports. Before my father got divorced, I had C's in school and played no sports. After my father got remarried, I

became a straight A student and an all-star soccer player. Yet this did not make up for the

parents I had lost. At twelve years old, I never talked to my parents, except when I went into the kitchen to get something to eat. I thought everything was fine, but later I realized it wasn't. Because of all the things that had happened to me, I had isolated myself.

A day after I realized this, I called my dad at work, something I had never done before, and asked him if he could come home and talk. So he left work early and took me out to dinner. I told him how I felt and what made me feel that way. He just sat and listened. To me, that was one of the best nights of my life. ▼



Parent Talk *by Tina Brennan*

I could feel the electricity in the air around me as my eyes popped open, way too early, on that Saturday morning. "There's a disturbance in the force," I said to my husband.

"What in the world are you talking about?" he mumbled sleepily.

"They're on the move, all of them," I said as

I rolled out of bed and into my robe.

Sure enough, I looked over the railing and there was a ten-year-old

sitting on the steps, baseball hat on his head, surrounded by his pillow, pictures, and collection of Matchbox cars. Muffled bumping and thumping came from behind another closed bedroom door. Even the dogs were sitting at the bottom of the stairs, their eyes alive with anticipation and their tails wagging like mad. A door opened a crack as I walked past and headed down the stairs. Fourteen-year-old eyes that hadn't seen a six o'clock Saturday wake-up for a few years peeked out. I didn't have to ask why he was up. I knew.

Today their brother was leaving for college, and in our large family,

that meant that the next guy down got to have his own room. Much bargaining had taken place, and everybody was relocating. I sighed: "Mornin' guys. It'll be a while before you can get started. Let's get a little breakfast."

The previous night we had finalized the process of disconnecting our third child so he could leave for college. In our house, all our significant happen-

ings, our beginnings and endings, take place around the dinner table with benediction and bread. Throughout the years, anointing and table fellowship have become the great mediums through which the tide of our family ebbs and flows.

Out of all these blessed events, I have found the leave-taking for college to cause the most unsettling rent in our family structure. The night before, I had seen the leaver's hesitation as he lowered himself into his usual place at the table, and I imagined what might be passing through his mind: When would he do this again? Would this chair still be his? ▼

Celebration and blessing are the thresholds of passage that we so desperately need to be on our way.



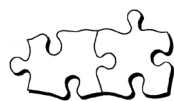
Teen Talk *continued*

After my father and I had this talk, we started doing a lot of things together. We became father and son and developed an extremely close relationship. Three years later, we were best friends. I learned to tell my dad anything, and he always helped me with my problems. He even helped me make peace with my new stepmother. I don't think any of this would have happened, however, if I had not asked him to talk that one night long ago.

I am now fifteen years old and no longer the devastated child I once was. The divorce helped me pull my

life together and form a great relationship with my father. Sometimes I think about what would have happened if my parents had never gotten divorced. I think of how I would still be lazy at school, come home, and lay on the couch. I think of how I would never have met the man I love the most, my father. Now I no longer need to ask God why. I am a much stronger person now.

This article is taken from I Know Things Now: Stories by Teenagers 1, edited by Carl Koch (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1996), pages 94–95.



Dear God, change is a big part of life.

Many things are rapidly changing in our lives right now and we struggle to adapt.

So we pray to you, dear Lord,

to help us to overcome the abrupt, oncoming obstacles in life.

We pray that you will enable us,

with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit,

to make the best decisions in life,

regardless of how big or small they may be.

We want to reach out and help others;

yet at the same time, we yearn to be helped as well.

Help us to be fully aware of what's happening in our lives.

We thank you, Lord, for the gift of life

and the strength and support you give us to face each day.

By Grace Krupa, from Listen for a Whisper: Prayers, Poems, and Reflections by Girls, edited by Janet Claussen and Marilyn Kielbasa (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2001), page 163.

Parent Talk *continued*

Would the other guys around the table take his place, his conversation, his jokes, his food?!

The rhythm of the family was about to be shaken and redistributed.

Those who were all jazzed up over the big move didn't realize that there was more than the physical move involved here. Our roles and reactions were about to change. The quiet one might have to learn how to carry on a conversation. The family jokester might have to be a bit more sensitive. Even the dish rotation would move a notch. There were gaps to fill and new areas to venture into.

I knew from experience that the young man who walked out the door would not be the one who walked back in a few weeks or months later. People and circumstances out of our family control would touch him, influence him, and give him a different frame of reference that we, the family that loved him, had no part in.



Savor questions and thrill to the quest. See your life as a journey that quickens your faith and deepens your soul.

Welcome the positive changes that are taking place in your life. Open up the windows and let in some fresh air. Wholeness and healing are waiting in the wings.

How do we handle this painful joy, this going forth? How do we make it happen happily? We feast and anoint, we fill our bodies and our spirits—we make it a big deal. Big deals create permanent passages. Celebration and blessing are the thresholds of passage that we so desperately need to be on our way.

So, last night he was fed his favorite foods, was blessed by each family member, ate his cake, iced in the appropriate college colors, and put the decal of his new "home away from home" on the family van. He was packed, fed, blessed, and stickered. There was no going back. The rite had eased the passage, and we all moved on.

*Tina Brennan lives in Yakima, Washington, where she raised her seven children. She is the author of the forthcoming book **Sacred Gifts: Extraordinary Lessons from My Ordinary Teens**, available from Saint Mary's Press in spring 2003.*

—Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat,
Spiritual Literacy: Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life
(New York: Scribner, 1996), pages 23 and 24.