



Empty nest syndrome



A recent holiday to Dartmoor confronted me starkly with the fact that I am entering the 'empty nest' phase of life. Over the last twenty-three years my time has been taken up fully with being a mum to four children. I ploughed my heart and soul into motherhood with the ambition of being the best mum I could be. The years have been busy as I involved myself with all that it takes to nurture four young children. At times it's been exhausting, frustrating and anxiety provoking. At other times, I have reaped the rewards of my dedication and consistency. My eldest child is now 23 years old and my youngest is 14 years.

On the holiday to Dartmoor we took the two youngest children (16 and 14 years). I usually plan the day's activities and I try hard to choose activities which will suit everyone. All my children are good walkers and enjoy being outdoors; we therefore do quite a lot of walking when we go on holiday. The children love a challenging walk with good views. However, we weren't blessed with good weather and on the first day we did a 5-mile circular walk of Hound Tor in drizzling rain with limited visibility. Although neither child complained I got the feeling both were relieved when we arrived back at the holiday cottage to dry off! It was my husband who seemed to enjoy the walk most and scrambled eagerly to the top of Hound Tor, only to be reminded by his rather anxious wife that the rocks were slippery with the rain and that he was in his fifties now not his twenties!

By the third day of the holiday the sole had departed from my son's second-hand walking boots. We ventured into the South Hams in search of an outdoor leisure shop I had googled in order to buy him a new pair. By chance we ended up at the tiny seaside village of 'Torcross'. We had our picnic on the beach there and my daughter loved it. She eagerly watched the people body-boarding and Kayaking and skimmed stones with her brother. My daughter is very much into sports at school and the realisation dawned on me that a cottage by the sea might have been a better choice for her than one in the middle of Dartmoor.

Another wet day and I decided that a steam train ride might be more appropriate than a walk. This is the day which really hit home to me that I was yearning for past holidays with the children and even trying to recreate some of the things we had participated in on previous breaks. A wonderful, memorable holiday was one to Yorkshire with some friends and their children. There were seven children between us and I remember sitting on Goathland Station with seven very excited little children waiting for the steam train to arrive. The boys wanted to see the engine and the train drivers were fantastic with them showing them how everything worked and even blowing the whistle for them. You've never seen such enthusiastic children! In contrast, my son described this steam train ride as 'nice' and 'relaxing' while turning most of his attention during the journey to his mobile phone. My daughter did likewise.

Sadly, I realised that those early years had come to an end and that my children were preparing for adulthood and to leave the nest. I couldn't recreate those early years however hard I tried. I had to move on. It's tough, really tough, much harder than I'd ever anticipated. I thought those early years were going to last forever, I even looked forward to each new stage with each child and I thought I would enjoy the day when I could have my 'freedom' back again. Rather than giving me my freedom



back it has instead left me needing to deepen my sense of identity and redefine my role. I feel at a crossroads but I know that the Lord will guide me. My future is in His hands and perhaps my biggest challenge is yet to be realised; to trust The Lord with all my life and my future.

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