

## God, Life, and Everything "Distance Parenting"

When I first started writing a religion column, I spent a lot more time writing about my family than I do now. Lately, I find myself concentrating on the issues - guns, abortion, gays, immigration, poverty, racism... You name it.

You would think, now that our kids have fled the coop and are off doing their thing in college, I would have even less family stuff to write about.

But last night, my wife and I found ourselves waiting up late to hear from the boys. Both are in college, and both play on their university's ultimate frisbee team.

(For those who don't know, ultimate frisbee is a cross between soccer and football played with frisbees. No tackling, but lots and lots of running. It's the fastest growing sport in the world. Nearly every university and college has a team, and the International Olympic Committee has just declared it eligible for consideration for the Olympics).

I digress. Both boys are on the team, and this weekend, they played in a tournament in Maine. That's six hours away from their campus. There's no team bus, so players have to drive themselves. My son was one of the drivers, and that gave us a little anxiety since he'd never driven so far.

Anyway, we asked them to text when they got to Maine, when they left Maine, and when they got back to Syracuse. They complied. But while we were waiting, I kept thinking to myself, "I thought our days of waiting up till they got home were over. What happened?"

Clearly, texting has made much more regular communication possible and, I dare say, inevitable. It is neither good nor bad - it just is.

But that night, I wished I could just not know what my boys were doing and get some sleep.

Then, this morning, I got another text from one of those boys. "Test went well. Thx for the help." You see, he's taking German class, and I used to be a high school German teacher.

Last week, we had texted back and forth about some homework questions. One of the highest notes of praise I ever got from him was, "The professor spent three days on this, and I didn't understand. You made it clear in one text." Later, we spent an hour and a half on the phone going over modal verbs and conjugations as well as vocabulary words. I have to admit, we may have spoken more in the last week or two than in the last year. Our other son is much more outgoing and chatty, so it was never an issue getting him to talk, but this one is the quiet sort.

But what's more important, is that our conversations were not just about grammar and vocabulary. We laughed about friends and talked about the sorts of things fathers and sons talk about in an idealized world. It was, for me, a great time. And the fact that he actually needed my help - and that I could deliver - felt pretty great.

I suppose my point here is that my mother was right when, about ten years ago, she said, "The moment you have your first child, you never sleep again. You always think about them, just like I always think about you."

So, even though my wife and I are far too busy to miss our kids, we do always think about them. We do work at being there for them in whatever reasonable ways we can. Mind you, I am working very hard to make sure this does not include having them

live in our basement! In fact, if this column suddenly disappears from the paper some day, it's probably because we have gone into hiding to prevent the boomerang effect.

But short of that, I love the fact that my kids still see me as someone to be depended on, someone to be confided in, someone who still loves them unconditionally, who they can talk to about pretty much anything.

I love that.

When my oldest son was born, I told people I finally understood the concept of God as father. The love you hold for your child pretty much blows everything else out of the water. I figured, if God loves me even a little like I loved my kids, then that was all I needed to know.

By the way, the boys got home safe and sound from their tournament. They didn't win many games, apparently (that's something they didn't want to talk about), but they had a good time and said they met some nice folks. For us, so far away but still so connected, that was enough.