

## God, Life, and Everything "Last Call"

I beg your indulgence.

This morning (Monday), at 5:00 AM, my son's alarm went off. We can hear it throughout the house. It's just his cell phone set to vibrate, but for some reason, the frequency is just right to travel through the entire building. We've been listening to this vibration all year ever since he decided he needed to be more diligent in his morning preparations.

Then it hit me.

This was the last Monday we will hear this alarm. Tuesday was the last Tuesday we'll hear it. By the time you read this, it will have been then last Wednesday. And so on. This week, then, is the last week of our son's high school career. And since he is our youngest child, this is the last week of our career with the Hyde Park Central School District.

So pardon me if I get a bit reflective (not to say weepy).

Many people love to denigrate the public school system. They complain about overpaid teachers and underperforming students.

They did this when I was in high school, too, more than thirty-five years ago, so I don't pay them that much attention. Yet, when I studied in Europe as an exchange student and later at the university, I discovered that the education I received stood me in good stead even over against the high-achieving countries.

Thus, I take these complaints with the same grain of salt that I take those about "kids these days." Human tendency is to always think we are better, that people were harder working, smarter, and more righteous.

It is, of course, hogwash, and I am quite satisfied with the education my kids have received in Hyde Park. I've lived all over this country - we don't know how good we have it here compared to much of the country.

I've watched my children grow, thrive and be inspired here. Not by every teacher, of course, and not every class went well. But our youngest, like his older brother, is ready to go out into the world, ready to learn, thrive and make a positive difference in the world. Who could ask for more?

This morning, when our son came down for breakfast, we looked at each other and said, "Last Monday." After graduation, he'll never be at home full time again (cross fingers), and we will never be the full-time presence in his life again.

Bitter sweet is that thought. It makes me think back to his first grade teacher who helped them make videos of their science projects so that they not only wrote but then produced a pretty darn good script.

Makes me think of the third grade teacher who inspired our older son to go into teaching and made our younger son a Mets fan. Or the fifth grade teacher who taught them to love reading while connecting them with community leaders. Or the principal who knew every single student by name and wasn't afraid to do something outrageous (like doing a rap on moving up day), to inspire them.

It reminds me of the eighth grade social studies (or whatever they call it) who got him to love history and also coached track - the guy who got my kid into that strange discipline of running the hurdles. He ran his last high school track meet just two weeks ago. Still hurdling.

It reminds me of the day he came back from a college visit, inspired by the school he had visited because now he knew exactly what he wanted to do. And now, he was going to buckle down and study much harder - which he did to great effect.

I love the fact that throughout these past thirteen years - the times we were called to the school because he had gotten hurt or was sick, the teacher conferences, the concerts, the dreaded science fairs, the countless sporting events - throughout all of this, there were teachers who knew us, who talked to us and who let us know how much they cared about our kids.

Not only is our son's public school career coming to an end, but so is our career as public school parents. But as surely as the schools here in Hyde Park have shaped and formed our kids, so have they shaped and formed us as parents.

Two more days, and our son's high school career will be all over except for the celebrating. I, for one, intend to celebrate with a wistful, but thankful heart.