

The Gift of Symmetry

By

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Our oldest son carried the last of his boxes to his car, hugged us goodbye and drove off to greet his future. He was moving across town, not across the country, but I was not fooled into thinking it was a minor move. He was launched and not likely to live with us again.

I retreated to our bedroom to make sense of the milestone. My husband, knowing I needed time alone, chose to sort out his strong feelings by reorganizing closets in our much emptier nest.

Sitting on our bed, I blotted tears because this phase of mothering was ending. Then pride, like a puff of wind, lifted off the loss. He'd finished college and gotten his own place. He knew everything he needed to know to live on his own.

Calmer, I rejoined my husband. All that remained of his project were several cardboard boxes that required my input. After I tossed out the contents of the first two, my husband handed me the last box. He had no idea of its significance.

Inside were fabric remnants from the baby quilt I had sewed to welcome our 22-year-old son, along with the pattern I had devised, and the calculations I had made before cutting out the pieces. My design was simple. Periwinkle blue triangles aligned with white ones to make rectangles. Dark red grosgrain ribbon ran diagonally along the seams where the triangles joined. The rectangles were set in a butter yellow border.

I'd never made a quilt before, and I didn't know what I was doing. Two days before he was born, I was still sewing. My back ached that dark winter morning. Every time I stretched over the dining room table to pin a piece, my water leaked a little, but I didn't recognize the signs of impending labor. I pressed on, determined to finish. In my hurry, I didn't see that with each row I'd

added, the bottom of the quilt had gradually grown wider than the top. I was disappointed, but—as with so much of mothering—I had learned as I went along and done the best I could.

I'd like to think that he felt the love I'd stitched into the quilt as I tucked it around him. It never became his beloved blanket, though—the quilt meant more to me than it had to him. What mattered was the love and hope embodied in the gift I had made to welcome him. When he outgrew the crib, I washed the quilt and put it away. Maybe someday a grandchild will use it.

I refolded the yellow, blue, and white remnants and put them back in the box—keepsakes now. In our son's arrival were also the seeds of his departure. The initial phase of motherhood has passed, but our relationship is ongoing. I'm inventing the pattern needed for that, too.

The symmetry of the moment reverberates in me.