

Be The Noodle:
50 Ways to Be a Compassionate, Courageous, Crazy-Good Caregiver

CHAPTER 32

Don't forget your kids

I'm home for the weekend, cleaning my house. My husband is at work, My 14 year-old son Ian is at a friend's.

This morning I asked Ian how he is, trying to catch up on what's happening at school, how he's feeling about his grandmother, and just how he is.

"I'm good, Mum. School is fine. Don't worry about me. You do know you worry and nag too much, don't you?"

I give him a hug that he half reciprocates, stepping closer to me and putting his arms around me, but not letting his hands touch my back for more than a millisecond.

"Mum, no more public displays of affection. I'm a teenager."

"Public displays? We're in our own kitchen."

" You know what I mean, Mum."

"Are you sure you're OK about Nanie? You're not talking much about it."

"Mum, I'm fine. Stop worrying so much."

The house is quiet and I walk from room to room, spying what's been happening while I'm at my mother's during the week. I sort the bills, Fold two baskets of laundry. Check what's in the refrigerator, and find big Tupperware containers of spaghetti and meatballs. Gosh, their diet while I'm away during the week is pretty boring.

I walk into the mess that is a 14-year-old's room and find school papers strewn over what allegedly is a desk. It looks more like a trash heap. There are candy wrappers from the stash of Halloween candy that I know Ian keeps somewhere in this room. Magazines. Last year's class yearbook. Three-ring binders that have never been used. Pencils that need to be sharpened. Scraps of paper with passwords and email addresses scribbled on them.

I look through the papers piled on the desk and find poems, written for English class. I pull them out, read them, and then sit on the floor.

"Oh God. This is not good. Please tell me he's OK."

The poems are dark, all about death. Did I read somewhere that if a teenager obsesses about death you should get immediate psychiatric attention? Is Ian in trouble? He seems so sweet and positive and funny. But this stash of poems is alarming.

I read the last one, and realize that he has been paying attention when we've talked at dinner about the stages of death. Though I'm calmly panicked, I realize that this teenager, so reluctant to display affection, is torn up about his grandmother.

I wish boys would talk more.

Forget to Remember

Every morning,
Not knowing if she will wake up.
Day by day she's getting pulled away.
Farther and farther into darkness.
Denial is the only thing
That can comfort her.
Right after anger, acceptance,
And Death.
If only there was a way

To forget to remember

This is not happening.

- *Ian Matta, April 2009*

Caregiver lesson #32

Though consumed with care giving, find time
for the quiet bystanders who may need you too.

