

Coping with ENS

By Gina Cariño



The empty nest syndrome. That's what you get when your children start to go away. Watch out! It can hit you harder than you ever thought possible.

Even if you don't want to be like the mother in "Como agua para chocolate" who wanted her daughter at her beck and call forever. Even if the child who's going or gone is "one score and seven years" old and it's about time she left. Even if you still have another, still single-digit-aged child to dote on and mother (or father). Even if you probably still can have a third baby (ugh!). Even if to The Elder, not much your junior, you were never all that much the classical nurturing, caregiving, self-sacrificing mother (or father?) that Gail Sheehy talked about in her long best-selling, but now a wee bit outdated, *PASSAGES: PREDICTABLE CRISES OF ADULT LIFE*, a book that was given me when I turned 18...long before the hysterias of adulthood had any relevance to me.

However predictable, the empty nest syndrome hits hard because it's bound to coincide with the proverbial midlife crisis. And, if you're a woman, with the long-dreaded mood swings, and perhaps

even the sudden hot flushes, of... ssshhh... pre-menopause.

Empty nest syndrome. It's truly more real and tangible than you ever imagined, especially if the kid not only moves out, but goes abroad. Even if by so doing she, or he, is just following family tradition, your own footsteps. Even if long ago you did the exact same thing, and never gave a thought to the feelings of your own parents. Even if we now have Air Berlin and Ryanair.

So what to do about it. A common advice is to find activities, distractions, and causes to fill up freed time, the erroneous premise being that you never had any hobbies and interests to fill up your life. The nest emptied, your hands no longer full, says Sheehy, suddenly you're supposed to unleash a new kind of creativity. Suddenly you're to get your nose into "local political reform, national movements, international congresses, protection of the species."

My tips are less sublime.

Think of the extra den, guest room, or junk room you will now, finally, have. Or the wall you will knock down, finally, in order to have a larger library and living room. Think of your enriched library, all those books you bought her over the years that are yours for keeps until she comes back for or sends for them. Think of your suddenly expanded wardrobe and the nice fact that you fit into her clothes (when the normal thing is not to). Think of the bank account she fattened while living with you rent-free and that she's left behind for the time being, and that you are co-holder of! Yes, think of the things you get to inherit, the hand-me-downs turned hand-me-ups. You may even inherit her blue swivel chair! For these and more reasons, it ain't true that "ain't no sunshine when she's gone."

Through *The Prophet*, Kahlil Gibran said that your children are not your children, that they are the sons and daughters of Life's longing for itself, that they do not belong to you, that they have their own thoughts, that life goes not backward nor tarries with yesterday.