

6-14-1983

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Recommended Citation

Andrade, Glenna M. 1983. Last Day of School is Mothers' Day of Mourning." In: Fresno Bee.

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Last day of school is mothers' day of mourning

By GLENNA ANDRADE
Special to The Bee

"The last day of school" sends quivers through the children's voices, tremors through mother's. On June first, the countdown begins; youngsters calculate only actual class days; mother counts the weekends too, forestalling the inevitable. She circles the date on the calendar in funeral black.

The children view the long summer days as a roadway to new adventures. To mother, the summer stretches ahead like a highway near Barstow where sky and land fuse in blue heat. She knows the children will soon succumb to the dread malady of terminal boredom.

Boredom has a brief incubation period. At the longest, the symptoms appear after only five days. (If officials were wise and wanted maximum enrollment, they'd open summer session one week after regular school closed instead of running it consecutively.) The symptoms themselves appear rapidly. In the children, the eyes become glazed, the joints are as malleable as water, and the fingernails solidify into claws. In the mother, the eyes become glazed, the joints become stiff, and her palms become beet-red and sweaty. Somehow the children's degree of tan correlates to their activity level and temper. As each child gets tanner, he or she gets lazier and more quarrelsome. Could it be that the sun draws Vitamin D from their internal organs and deposits in on the skin, thus leaving the body and mind sapped?

Then again, the cause may be a reaction of the body to water. Water, so abhorrent in the winter, is enjoyable in the summer, as long as it is partaken out-of-doors, attended by parents or peers, and accompanied by a minimum of six beach towels for each dip. I've often thought that doughboy pools were appropriately named, for each time my child swims in one, his intellectual level regresses to that of yeast.

On the last day of school each year, I spend my morning hours mourning in a solitary stupor. Listening for the last time to the peaceful rhythm of the dryer and dishwasher, I wander around noting the orderliness of the bedrooms, the abundance of clean towels in the bath, and the absence of the television monologue in the family room.

By 11:30, I feel the need for consolation and companionship of the adult variety, so I arrange to have lunch with my fellow sufferer, Ellen. This is sort of a bon voyage party in reverse. Instead of celebrating the children's freedom,



Fresno Bee/Perry Huffman

It's already Tuesday, and summer boredom will probably hit in about three days.

we mourn the loss of our own. We do compile an itinerary, though. We each contribute ideas on what to do and where to go. We each bring summer school, arts and crafts, camp and museum schedules — some beneficently sent home by the understanding school secretary.

I've always loved having a pina colada lunch with my friend, Ellen, because she has even more ideas than I. One time, however, she brought along a guest who upset our maudlin bereavement. "School's out today," the guest said with unchecked glee. "Isn't it wonderful?"

Incredulous, I glared at her, wishing her the torment of Tantalus. "You must not have any children," I cried.

"But I do!" she laughed. "Twenty-nine, as a matter of fact."

Slowly, her meaning penetrated my gloom. "Don't tell me you're a teacher."

She nodded happily. She was the only woman in the entire restaurant with a smile.

After lunch with Ellen, I spent my last free hour at home in panic, drafting rules and regulations to be followed during vacation. These are attached to the refrigerator door and will be explained later to the children with the solemnity of Moses displaying the Ten Commandments.

When the cloud passes over the sun on Friday at 3:00 p.m., I know it is time to pick up the children. Actually, though, they walk home because the vehicle is always over-stuffed with their valuables. Had I not seen their desks previously, I would have gauged their size to be that of commercial garbage bins. For example, this is what Keith brought home at the end of fourth grade:

- Six model airplanes in various stages of either completion or demolition
- A permission slip to visit the zoo with the third grade class

• A p and j sandwich, granite hard, showing the dentition of a sixth grade "fox" who'd shared his lunch

• A purple and red striped sock — the mate of which I threw away last Monday

• Three library books — one from CSUF, one from the downtown library special collections section, and one from the Contra Costa County Bookmobile

• One encyclopedia volume "F-G-H" — owner unknown

• An unfinished art project — a paper mache stegosaurus

• A parting gift from his teacher — a thriving ant colony in a twenty-four gallon fish tank

When I pick up the year-end accumulations of all three children, a large vehicle is mandatory.

"Are you going to get us at school today?" Keith asked, probably expecting that I was leaving town.

"Certainly," I replied. "You can't miss me. I'll not be driving the station wagon though. Look for a big truck with a lion on the side."

I get my revenge about the beginning of September when a different countdown begins. "Only 10 more days until the first day of school," I exult.

"Actually, it's 14 days," my eldest son quarelled. "The sun must have done something to your brain. You can't even count anymore."

Knowing full well that my math skills have not been weakened by either water or sunshine and that my calculations while impatient are correct, I circle the date on the calendar with a large red heart and return a very wicked smile.

Glenna Andrade is a mother of three and an English teacher at Fresno State University.

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