

# There go the kids

## Two alumnae parents cope with the fall student drop-off

BY LINDA RAPOZA PATCH '79

Thank heavens that Professor Sam Coale's "American Literature" courses instilled in me an appreciation of things ironic.

When I was a student, Wheaton had a swimming requirement. Freshman year I stood shivering on the pool deck in a school-issued black tank suit, knowing there was no way I could pass. I was advised to leave the test—which I did at a gallop—and gave the issue not a second thought. Four years later, right before graduation, I received a series of letters threatening to withhold my diploma if I did not pass the test. I

promptly threw each letter in the trash. I remember thinking, "I'm Phi Beta Kappa, and I won't graduate because of a swimming requirement? No way!" Well, the letters kept coming, and I kept throwing them away. How the issue was to resolve itself I had no idea. By divine intervention—I can only guess—the college rescinded the requirement two weeks before Commencement. The diploma was mine.

Decades later—years after Wheaton's coed decision turned me away from the college—I find myself back in the pool, literally and figuratively. My son Ryan, a swimmer, announced last year that Wheaton was his choice of college. He applied and was accepted. Visiting the campus with him for accepted students' day, I re-discovered the old Wheaton and was introduced to a new Wheaton as well. It's a Wheaton that has preserved its soul, yet has a renewed verve and vitality. In many ways, I believe it is a better and stronger place. I looked at Ryan at one point during the visit and simply said, "You *need* to be here."

Listening to Professor Coale welcome Ryan to the Class of 2008 was truly a full-circle moment. Call it fate, call it destiny, call it a long-overdue knock upside the head to make me see and celebrate Wheaton as it really is. Whatever forces are at work here, I happily and proudly send Ryan off on his own Wheaton journey.

My journey—in the water—continues. Ryan is my swim coach, and with his help I completed my first Ironman half-triathlon in September, shortly after delivering him to my alma mater.

*Linda Patch is the founder of Linda Patch and Associates, a Boston-based public relations firm.*

BY SHELLEY BORROR JACKSON '77

As a mother of four twenty-somethings, I've now done countless college drop-offs. My children are three sons and a daughter, each with wildly different personalities. Some love being home, others are practically allergic to the thought of more than 24 hours under the same roof. Some choke up and hug tightly as we part; others pretend. Yet my reaction never wavers. I'm knocked out with a grief that can only be assuaged by the cleaning of their rooms once they're gone.



Home away from home at Wheaton.

Nuts, isn't it? No matter what time I return from leaving them at college, I rush to their rooms. There I still see price tags hastily ripped from a new sweatshirt. Piles of laundry remain; clothes, I presume, that were good enough to wear at home but have no place in a college wardrobe. A cat peers from a discarded shopping bag, and a jumble of sheets and comforters suggests that a bed remains beneath the tangle.

The need to restore order to a space I've been forbidden to enter for three months strikes me as logical. It's my house, right? These are the things I tell myself as I toss the sales tags, strip the bed, and sort the laundry. But the charade doesn't last long. I find myself smiling at the sales tag, picturing my daughter in that new shirt. The bed isn't just a tangle of sheets; it's where my son's "man body" landed at the end of every night's prow. And the laundry. It's dirty, but just yesterday it was part of Caddie's run. That T-shirt still sports the paint stains from John's summer job. Mac forgot his Phish CD, and so I feed it into the computer for background music. I linger over everything I touch for one simple reason: it's theirs. The order I need to restore is less about the room's appearance and far more about my undeniable need to touch my children in their absence.

I turn the Phish CD up a little louder, swallow the lump in my throat, and make the bed. **Q**

*Shelley Borrer Jackson, head of school at the Bement School in Deerfield, Mass., sent three of her four children to Wheaton. Caroline Jackson will graduate in May.*