

CHOOSING A COLLEGE III

applying within

With the Christmas decorations neatly packed away for another year, I knew that things were about to really heat up on the fast track headed for graduation day. I had been warning myself that once the holidays ended, time would suddenly speed up to a furious pace, holding me hostage to that one phrase that a senior parent hates to think about... WHERE DOES THE TIME GO? Why, if I had a dollar for every time I started thinking like this, by golly, I could put my kid through Harvard - yes, ladies and gentlemen, this too is an on-going theme in this book. A senior parent, born with a wooden spoon in his mouth, constantly trying to think of ways to raise money for his kids college education. I'm sorry to say, however, that again, I could find no one who was willing to pay me a dollar for each time I thought this. Your family and friends can certainly be a source of disappointment.

The emotional turmoil inside also picks up during this time. As a man who openly admits to living by the rule that the only bad thing that happens to kids is that they become adults, I am aware that the thought of my first born leaving the nest and seeking her own world of adventures is certainly a disturbing thought that eats away at you like last night's spicy Mexican dinner. Simply put, her graduation and going away to college will be a very painful time for me, personally. Simply, simply put, I just don't want to let go.

On the other hand, she has worked hard in her youth and developed into quite a young adult. Her many successes are not only a reflection of her own skills and abilities, but clearly a result of good parenting and I should see this as a time to celebrate and embrace each festive moment with the pride of knowing that we have done a good job. I can always sit down and cry about it after she leaves.

Sure enough, with Christmas needles still being picked up by the vacuum, I am told the deadline for applying to colleges is quickly approaching. Being the act-before-you-think kinda guy, I quickly encourage my baby to apply to several colleges.

" Don't cut yourself short, kiddo. Apply to a whole bunch of colleges, see, and then just sit back and wait. When those schools that accept you start fighting over you, you'll be in a great position for putting together a financial package that will best suit your need to keep out of your

dads wallet!"

Being the obedient child that she is, she was happy to accommodate me. The other night she came out of her room with a stack of applications and proudly proclaimed that they were ready to go.... as soon as I wrote out the check.

You'd think that after eighteen years of experience I would have learned by now the absolute first rule in parenting; never, never, never encourage your child to do something until you clearly understand how much it is going to cost you!

Forty dollars for this application, thirty for the next. Twenty five here, another forty there... this kid had a pile of applications that would easily set dear old dad back a house note.

This called for some quick revision to my original plan of flooding the market. I worked overtime trying to keep my composure and blood pressure down while I negotiated each application with some smooth talking that would make my slick willie friends proud.

"Now trust me kid, you don't want to go to this school. They have an awful football team. Who wants to go to a school that will make your Saturdays depressing?"

Needless to say not all the applications made it to the mailbox. She did narrow her selections down to four or five that she really had an interest in and I gladly wrote out the checks. I then made it clear to everyone that macaroni and cheese would become a staple at the dinner table for the next several weeks and I didn't want to get any attitudes about it. **(parental tip:** If you have a child, or are making one, two things to think about. 1) do not waste your time reading a bunch of baby books that try to tell you how to teach your kid to walk, talk, roll over, sit up or go fetch. Children will learn to do all these things in their own time. Use this time instead to investigate all the colleges and find one that really fits your particular likes and dislikes as a parent, and then spend the next seventeen years brainwashing your child so that when the time comes for them to apply for a college, they will only think of one school. It's a bit dishonest, I suppose, and certainly goes against everything I have tried to teach my children about independent thinking, but if you're clever enough, you can do it in a manner that will make them believe that the whole thing is their idea. 2) I highly recommend that you stock up on those little boxes of macaroni and cheese dinners. You know, the ones you can buy for twenty-five cents. Buy them by the case now. They're cheap, you can chop up damn near anything in it to give it a little variety, and come their senior year, it will become as common place in your diet as antacids.)

So with step one completed, we sit back and wait to hear from the schools, confident that they will all be excited at the prospects of having my gifted child, (don't you just hate parents who constantly talk about their 'gifted' child? I want to walk up to them and smack 'em. Everybody knows that all children are gifts from heaven... and I suppose sometimes gifts from hell.).

I made a deal with my daughter that when she finally decides what college she wants to go to, she is to simply say, "Let's go to the mall, pops." I will give her twenty bucks so that she can run into a sporting goods store and pick up my baseball cap bearing the name of the school that I will be rooting for during the next four years.

Of course two of the schools are pretty small schools that do not exactly create a rush of excitement in any sporting goods inventory, so this just may be another case of making plans with good intentions that may require some quick revisions latter on. So what's new? For now we are all set, with the exception of having to run to the bank to cover those checks. This too, of course, becomes an on-going theme for a senior parent. I am confident that every bank in America can tell you when a parent becomes a senior parent. It is during this year that your relationship with the tellers becomes a first name basis - (**parental tip**; if you have a child who is to become a senior any time soon, scope out your bank and try to develop a close relationship with a teller who has a child in college. Trust me, unless your name is Rockefeller, this been-there, done-that experience within your bank will become invaluable when they give you that understanding smile as they creatively slow down the processing of a few checks until Thursday when you get paid.... not that any teller would ever do this, of course. This is just theory. I would never want to suggest that any teller in our American banking system would ever bend the rules for a senior parent, God forbid!).