

OPINION

THE CARY NEWS

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 30, 2008

■ **The shorter the better.** We suggest no more than 300 words for letters or 600 words for columns.
 ■ **Don't forget:** Every submission must include the writer's name, street address and phone number. We publish the writer's name and town of residence. We don't withhold names or

print anonymous letters.
 ■ **Get it in on time.** Submissions should be received by 9 a.m. Monday.
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 Get it to us:
 ■ **By e-mail:** carynews@nando.com.
 ■ **By fax:** 460-6034.
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Journey of self shouldn't stop

The other night the "Biggest Loser" made me cry. If you're not familiar with this reality television show, overweight folks compete to see who can be the "Biggest Loser." Not exactly a tear-jerker.

I was folding laundry, and one of the finalists teared up, explaining it had been such a journey losing 100 pounds, and she couldn't believe she'd made it. I found myself nodding and, suddenly, sobbing, wiping my eyes with one of my son's socks. Right about then, my husband and son ascended the stairs.

PARENT PATHWAYS



CHRISTA GALA

"What's wrong?" my husband Jerry asked, trying to decide, I could tell, if he was the cause of the tears. But it wasn't him.

After six years of studying for my master's degree in English and creative writing at N.C. State, I am finally graduating in May. My tears were happy tears, tears of disbelief, accomplishment and relief. When I took my GREs six years ago, I did so with a haphazard attitude. If it was meant to be, it would

happen. Five months later, I became pregnant with my son.

"Good thing you haven't been in school that long," a friend said shortly after I discovered I was pregnant. "What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, you're not going back after the baby's born, right?" she replied. "You won't have lost too much time or money."

I realized that if I wanted this, I couldn't leave it to chance; I was going to have to work for it. And I didn't know then that my husband would get laid off and start a brand-new business or that I would take over the mortgage payment. I found myself one night, about seven months pregnant, rolling change on the living room rug so I could pay the cable bill.

After my son Tyler, now 5, was born, I had to cut back my work schedule. I could barely afford part-time daycare; tuition went on a credit card. Frequently, I was exhausted and in pain from a chronic back problem discovered after Tyler was born.

But as hard as it was to pay for school, attend classes and juggle work and parenthood, going to school was a luxury, an indulgence, and I knew it. I didn't want to quit. Instead, I prioritized. Parenting came first, work second because it paid the bills, and school third. So a B-minus in coursework was good enough. An A was great, but what I needed was course credit and my sanity, not a stellar GPA.

As I got further into my program, it got harder, and I got discouraged. One semester, a literature class I was taking was a good 15-minute walk from my car, and I frequently slipped in a little late, flustered with trying to get a 2-year-old to daycare, fight traffic, find my spot and make the hike. One morning, the professor reprimanded me harshly in front of my peers. I stared down at my desk. I was 34 years old. A student with grown kids leaned over and with a kind smile, whispered, "It's hard, isn't it?" I nodded, not looking up. I was flooded with both embarrassment and anger, close to tears. This was too hard. It wasn't worth it.

But my friends and family, once detractors, now rallied around me. My sister threatened bodily harm if I quit. My mother stayed with Tyler and ferried him when needed, a used car seat a permanent fixture in her car. My mother-in-law, the front desk goddess at my husband's auto repair shop, juggled a busy office while my son played in the waiting room. Countless times, Jerry took Tyler out of the house so I could pound out papers and, later, the hundred-plus pages my thesis required.

Like the woman on the "Biggest Loser," my tears were for the journey and the realization that I had finally completed something that, really, I didn't have to do. It would have been so much easier to quit. I am proud I did not.

The question I've been getting most recently is, "What are you going to do now that you have your degree?" My answer isn't glamorous. I'm not going to get a raise or a new job. My thesis wasn't a masterpiece. So I don't know.

I did learn this: It's OK to do something just for yourself, even if it's considered a luxury. Even if it's hard. Even if it's expensive and it takes time away from your family. I learned the journey of self doesn't — or shouldn't — stop once you have kids. Or ever, really.

But Tyler hasn't learned any of this. My tears confused him. "Are you sad, Mommy?" he asked. "No, T. These are happy tears," I told him, smiling at his blurry image. The truth is, there's a lot of glory in the hardship and struggle that are part of the most challenging journeys, chosen or not. I hope he cries happy tears himself one day.

Contact Christa Gala at christagala.com.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Dillon Patel of Cary collected used eyeglasses for a community service project. See his letter below.

YOUR LETTERS

Used glasses will have second life abroad

I am really excited that it is that time of year when all bodon belt eligible to test for their black belts are ready to show off what they have learned. White Tiger Taekwondo in Cary teaches discipline, self-control, dependability, focus and many other life skills as well as having fun and meeting new friends. My name is Dillon Patel and as a first-degree black belt candidate I have to do a group charity project and an individual project. As our group project we are going to be walking at the National Multiple Sclerosis walk on May 3. As my individual project I choose to collect used and unused prescription glasses and sunglasses so that they can be sent to Unite for Sight. Unite for Sight is a nonprofit organization that will send out all of the glass that I have collected to countries in need of them.

Over 4 million pairs of eyeglasses are thrown away each year in North America. Twenty-five percent of the global population needs eyeglasses. That is a really big number. Your eyeglasses as well as non-prescription sunglasses will be distributed to children and adults in Africa, Asia and Latin America. I am really grateful to all my friends and family and even people I don't know who donated glasses to this great cause. I collected over 350 glasses and they are still coming in to me. Recycling doesn't only mean papers and bottles. Even things that you may just want to throw away can go to someone in need.

I am a first-grade student at Davis Drive Elementary and I love to go to White Tiger. I recently joined their Junior Leadership team so that I can give back and help other students with the skills that I have learned.

Dillon Patel
Cary

School tracks are safer

I read Ms. Colopy's article on April 23 and I think that she is right. I think we should be allowed to use the school tracks, too. The reason I think so is that when I ride my bike at Lake Pine my mom cannot see me. I like to go a lot farther than she can. If we could use the track, my little sister could also walk on the track and my mom could see all of us. I also think that we should have a track to have fun on because when my little brother was riding his bike he had trouble steering and he crashed off the path. He scraped his arm really badly and he still had to bike all the way back to the van.

I think we ought to be allowed to use the tracks because we pay for the schools and they don't allow us to use them. I also homeschool and I do not even get to use the tracks. We can be safer and get good exercise.

Kateri Buser, 7
Apex

A salute to Cary EMS

I am writing to let the community know about one of our most important organizations that is also the least spoken about. I have seen the ambulances around town for the last 13 years and just didn't even think about it unless they were behind

me and I had to move over. I have been lucky enough to be the fourth graduating class of their Citizens Academy. The four-week class was a real eye opener. In the past, I have never even paid attention to the flyer about the \$60 fee for the ambulance subscription for a year. Now I know it will be the smartest \$60 I can spend yearly.

I have learned so much the last four weeks about this outstanding community service provider. They are exactly the crew I would want to take care of my family or myself if we were ever to be in need of their service. I have seen firsthand all their prep work to keep the ambulances stocked and ready to go in a moment's notice. They are located on Medcon Street off Kildaire Farm Road. I have passed it many times and never even realized they were housed there.

They have one of the most important jobs in this town and don't even have a traffic light so they can get out to save a life. I wonder what could be more important than that? We have been able to put in traffic cameras for red light tickets. We should maybe install cameras for all the people who don't yield to emergency vehicles. There's a thought!

Steve Cohen is the Cary Area EMS chief. He is very proud of his crew and will tell you so in a heartbeat. His staff has put in many extra ours in enlightening the community in first-aid response. I have come away with knowledge and confidence in my first-aid training.

We should feel very proud, safe and confident with the privilege of having such a caring and knowledgeable staff as our Cary EMS. I for one salute the crew and staff of the Cary Area EMS and hope you all do too.

Susan Moore
Cary

Kost in Chatham

The citizens and voters of Chatham County need to know that Sally Kost is the only Chatham County commissioner candidate for District 1 that even knows about us in the Lost Corner of Chatham County.

I first met Sally several years ago when the residents of the Lost Corner were trying to understand and feel comfortable with the Northwest Cary Land Use Plan. She is knowledgeable about land use planning and truly cares about what we all had to say.

Sally Kost understands the importance of regional cooperation, and is committed to working with Cary for the protection of Jordan Lake. She is chair of the Chatham Planning Board and understands the regulations that guide growth in Chatham. As a former county budget official in both Wake and Orange counties, she has a vast amount of knowledge of how government works.

Many of my neighbors feel as though we are "forgotten" up in the northeast corner of the county, but Sally Kost knows who we are, and she cares.

Betsy B. Phillips
Durham
(Phillips lives in a portion of Chatham County affected by the Northwest Cary Area Plan.)

QUOTABLE

"I'm sort of an Obama grandmama."

SHERRI HARMON, Cary resident, Barack Obama supporter

and grandmother of six (see story page 1A)

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