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Happy returns for the summer

By Ellen Scolnic

and Joyce Eisenberg

Our supermarket bills are doubling, and our car usage is being cut by a third. No, it's not some new green initiative. Our oldest kids have come home from college - home where it's boring, where friends don't live on the same hallway, and where food delivery stops well before midnight.

They'll be home for at least part of the summer, and we're so excited to see them.

When your kids are little, you can't imagine a day when they'll be independent. Then they get on the bus and disappear to school. They learn to drive and call you from the city, asking how to get to the big street that leads home from Fifth and Market. Next thing you know, you're dropping them off at college with clothes, a laptop, and a debit card.

Although it was more than 15 years ago, one of us clearly remembers her daughter, Samantha, standing over her bed as she slept, willing her to wake up and play. Joyce would close her eyes, hoping for another minute of sleep. It never worked. They'd be dressing and undressing Barbies before breakfast.

Now the tables are turned. In the morning, Joyce works at her computer, waiting for Samantha to wake up. By 1 p.m., she's still pacing the hallway, staring at Samantha's closed bedroom door. And when it opens, Joyce is right outside, waiting for her to play.

Putting your own needs second is the first rule of Jewish mothers. Paula Hyman, a Yale professor, looked into the stereotype of the overbearing Jewish mother, partly to reassure herself as she entered that phase of her life. She found that the stereotype was based on a kernel of truth. "Eastern European Jewish culture fostered intense mothering because of the physical and psychological insecurity of life in the *shtetl* [Jewish village]," she wrote for MyJewishLearning.com.

Life is easier now, but Jewish mothers still like to be involved in their kids' lives. We try not to nag and lurk by the bathroom door so much, but we can't help it. We want to spend time with them, take them to the Please Touch Museum, and buy them a stuffed animal.

But those days are long gone, so we do what we can. We dream up family outings that they'll want to be a part of - a Segway tour, a Phillies game. We buy their favorite foods, making special trips to the deli for lox and bagels and to the health food store for orange peach mango juice, so when they open the refrigerator they are thrilled at how thoughtful their mother is and will want to come home again soon.

We prepare something wonderful for dinner, and enough of it for the child and the child's possible drop-in friends. Should the child decide to eat elsewhere, we're left holding rib-eye steaks and a big bowl of salad.

Our kids know how to do their own laundry, but why should they when Mom is so much better at it, and secretly enjoys folding all those rock concert T-shirts?

Having them home is wonderful but nerve-racking, because now they're used to living by their own rules. At 11:30 p.m., when we're going to bed, they're heading out the front door to "see who's around." When we're gardening and paying bills, they're lying on the sofa watching *Entourage* because they "worked really hard last semester."

We never know how much gas will be left in the car. We stub our toes on sports equipment left in the hall. Our daily routines are disrupted. But it's the commotion of a full house that makes a mom's heart happy. Life is so much more exciting with them around.

Joyce Eisenberg and Ellen Scolnic, also known as the Word Mavens, wrote the "Dictionary of Jewish Words." For more information, see www.thewordmavens.com.