

Don't call it empty

I had heard quite a bit about the concept of an empty nest for the past year. I pretty much ignored it. I headed towards August with total excitement. A day before my son, the second of two, was to go to college, he looked in the virtually empty refrigerator: "Do you think you're going somewhere?"

Did I? No, not really. But in the hopes of making a fresh start myself, I thought I'd empty out the refrigerator and start again. Even to me, it seemed a little weird.

After arriving back at the house, empty refrigerator and all, I realized a basic truth: The nest is not empty. I am in it. And, so is a 70-pound dog.

So to those who use the phrase "empty nest" – I say bah. I am in this nest and I still need to eat. I came home. I fed the dog. I filled a small cart at the grocery store and added some food to the refrigerator.

It seems to me that the phrase "empty nest" needs some tweaking. Referring to it as empty sounds melancholy. Not only am I not melancholy, but I'm feeling optimistic, excited and well, free. Maybe it could be called something else. I've been searching for a new term to describe what the household feels like now. Freedom Nest? Airy Eyrie? The kids who move on are not the only ones who can fly now. So can those that are still in the nest – and there's plenty more room now.

It is a different sort of lifestyle, to be sure. Having no teenagers in the house has led me to some initial realizations.

Day 1: I realize that I can dance naked in the house, but decide it's best not to.

Day 2: I realize I can blast the music in the morning. I do.

Day 3: I try dancing with the dog to the loud music, but find that she just licks my face.

Day 4: I am thrilled to realize that there



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is no one around to question my behavior if I choose to eat ice cream before dinner. Or instead of dinner.

Day 5: At three in the morning, I realize that when something falls in the middle of the night, there is reason to be nervous. I add a hammer to the list of bedside necessities.

Day 6: I notice that the dog isn't finding life too exciting and she's taken to sitting outside waiting for someone more fun to come home. She even went into a state of giddiness for the garage door repairman.

Day 7: A few moments of truth ... there are chores that unfortunately can't be shared: lawn mowing, dog walking and more importantly, dog clean up. I wonder if the nest just isn't full enough.

Day 8: Wait. This is good. I realize again that I can dance naked in the house. I do.

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