

VOICES

Going away to college

By **DIANE LUND**
Special to The Observer

In my mind I knew it was inevitable. That didn't stop me from feeling panicky. My daughter was going to college.

"Mom, hurry up, what's taking you so long?" said Elissa, who stood by the front door, her suitcase in hand.

Tinker kept licking her face. As if he knew she was leaving.

On her 10th birthday, Elissa had woken up to find this brown fluffy-haired dog lying on her bed. They became constant companions. Tinker would get so excited when she came home from school, he'd jump up and down begging for a treat. A neighbor promised to take care of Tinker until I came back.

Dousing my coffee in the sink, I reluctantly grabbed the car keys. Two heavy boxes, nearly everything Elissa owned, were in the back seat. I took the wheel. Neither of us spoke for the longest time. Finally, I broke the silence.

"I'm going to miss you terribly," I said.

"Mom, you'll be fine," she replied. "You have so many friends. Maybe you'll meet someone special."

I shrugged. Those weren't the words I wanted to hear.

When we reached the Mount Shasta Viewpoint, Elissa climbed into the driver's seat.

"Don't take those curves too fast," I warned her.

She sped off. Tightening my seat belt, I knew it was useless to say anything. Elissa had a mind of her

ANYONE CAN WRITE

Nearly 40 years in the business have taught me that readers are bombarded and overwhelmed with facts. What we long for, though, is meaning and a connection at a deeper and more universal level. And that's why The Observer will be running, from time to time, stories from students who are in my writing class, which I've been teaching for the past 10 years in Portland. I take great satisfaction in helping so-called nonwriters find and write stories from their lives and experiences. They walk into my room believing they don't have what it takes to be a writer. I remind them if they follow their hearts, they will discover they are storytellers. As we all are at our core. Some of these stories have nothing to do with La Grande or Union County. They do, however, have everything to do with life. If you are interested in contacting me to tell me your story, I'd like to hear from you.

— Tom Hallman Jr., tbhbook@aol.com

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own, an eloquent mind like her father.

Elissa had been the center of my life since the day she was born. I adored her. Every time she did something new, like learning to tie her tennis shoes, I'd buy something special, a book or a doll.

Now our time together was drifting away like the sand on the beach. In a few short days, she'd be on her own. And unfortunately, so would I.

I had urged Elissa to choose a college outside of Oregon. Not wanting to inhibit her life the way my mother had. Always checking up on me. Wanting to know where I'd been, who my friends were. Never trusting me to make my own decisions. Questioning me all the time. Until I couldn't take it any longer and moved out.

Elissa deserved her freedom, unencumbered by me who wanted to control her life.

We had done the college circuit tour the year before. Visiting the campuses of Pomona, Scripps, Occidental and Santa Clara.

She chose Santa Clara. A Catholic school. In northern California. As I pulled into the parking lot, we looked at each other. She looked glorious. A cold sweat ran down my

face. I helped her unload, carrying the boxes to her dorm room.

I drove home the next morning. Expecting to hear my daughter's voice on my answering machine. But there were no messages. My heart ached.

Walking into her bedroom, I opened the blinds. Everything was gone. Her clothes, all her makeup, her boom box.

Then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw her teddy bear. Lying on her bed, its beady eyes smiling at me. I cuddled it in my arms, crying softly. The yellow and white fur around its nose had long ago worn away.

The phone rang. "Mom, are you OK? I haven't heard from you and was worried something might have happened."

"I thought you were too busy to call," I said.

"Mom, you'll always be in my life. I love you," she replied.

When Elissa came home the following summer, I was thrilled. We spent several hours sorting through her old clothes and books in the garage. Tucked underneath her Sunset High School yearbook was the teddy bear.

"Remember this?" I said, dusting it off. "It's yours now. A token of my love."

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