The big move

A few weeks ago, I packed up our things and headed for California. That may seem like a drastic move for most people, but for me it was a return to my parents and my hometown.

This last year and a half has been really hard on my daughters and myself. We were helped by so many people, but no one could fully relieve us of our struggles, especially the emotional ones. Finally, it seemed clear that we needed a fresh start.

One hitch in our moving plans was that Melise, my 3-year-old, had been planning her birthday party since January! She had her invitation list all prepared—it was basically every kid who went to daycare with her. It just seemed right to fulfill her dreams before we left Colorado and all her friends, even though her birthday was over a month away.

The day before we moved, I asked my visiting father to make a batch of mini-cupcakes for Melise's daycare class. He went to work! Later, I walked through the kitchen as he was taking the cooked cupcakes out of the pan. I saw him pop one in his mouth, and I chided him.

At the daycare, I was amazed at how well all the kids sat waiting, with all eyes on my tray of cupcakes, until we were ready. After we sang "Happy Birthday" to a very surprised Melise, I passed the tray around the table and each kid politely took one cupcake. By the time I circled the table once, the first kids were asking for seconds. I counted the muffins ... I was just one muffin short of having enough! Luckily, one of the older children volunteered to skip on seconds, but that didn't save my father from the guilt trip I gave him about eating that one little muffin!

After having their treat, the kids went about their usual play time. I watched as Melise played happily with all the kids she knew so well. Soon though, it was time for us to leave. I encouraged Melise to give hugs to her special friends and say goodbye.

As we drove away from the daycare for the last time, Melise asked, “Mom, was that my birthday?”

“It was an early party. Your real birthday is a month away.”

“Why did I have an early party?”

“Because we’ll be in California for your birthday, so I thought you should have an early party with your Colorado friends.”

“Yeah,” she said, “cause they’re going to miss me when I’m gone.”

I laughed, “Of course they will miss you!”

Moving day was crazy. I could write a whole column alone about all the haphazard things that occurred, but I’d rather tell you about how my girls adjusted to California.

Alina, being just a toddler, took everything in stride. She’s okay as long as she has her mommy and big sister nearby.

Melise, of course, has had a little more trouble. Slowly, she has absorbed the reality that some of her favorite people are now very far away: Grandma, Grandpa, her cousins and her best friends. We’ve had a few tearful moments, such as the letter she dictated to me for her former daycare teacher that went: “I love you. I miss you. I really really love you. We’ll come get you soon ...” (I left that last part out of the letter.)

Each of these moments has included hugging and reassuring her that we can visit again some day.

In the end, I'm quite proud of Melise because she hasn't cried for toys or playgrounds or places we won't go anymore. She's only cried for people because she instinctively knows that the people in our lives are more important than things.

So as I write this last column, I want to say to all my readers, friends and anonymous supporters out there, "Thank YOU from the bottom of my heart!" You have kept me alive and afloat for so long that it is just shy of miraculous. You are more important than the house or job or coffee shop—oh, how I'll miss the coffee shop—that I left behind. I wish I could give back just a morsel of what you have given me.

In the words of Melise, "I love you. I miss you. I really, really love you." And thanks for everything.

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