

Keeping Family Close: Navigating College Together

Written by Maddie Pastoor

After graduating high school, I was very nervous to go to college and move away from home, but I was excited nonetheless for the opportunity to make new friends, the independence and freedom I would gain, and the chance to learn about new things. I loved ordering, packing, and organizing all the new things I would need for my time at Saint Mary's. Over the summer, my roommate and I met for the first time to have lunch together and discuss all the things we were looking forward to doing at school. All throughout the summer, I worked at child care at ASA in the toddler room, which I absolutely loved, and which contributed to the general cheeriness of the entire summer. Move-in day was very busy but still exciting, and it was so fun to see the new campus where I'd spend the next four years and meet my other roommates and people on my floor. The first few days on campus were packed with activities that Saint Mary's had organized for freshmen to keep us engaged, and I participated in a majority of them, meeting some of my best friends during these.

Actually adjusting to life without my family was a little more difficult than the first few days on campus, in which I was totally immersed in activities and settling into my new routine. I quickly realized that not having my parents and little sister to hang out with at the end of the day was going to be hard at

first. I was not used to being around my friends 24/7 and not seeing my family for weeks at a time. This especially affected my relationship with my little sister, Katie, as it was not as easy to just call or text her like it was parents. Since Katie is so much younger than me, she isn't as easily accessible through digital communication, and I can only chat with her when my parents are with her or she is at home. I wasn't able to see how this was affecting Katie every day like my parents were, so while I knew she must be having a difficult time like I was, I wasn't totally aware of the toll our separation was taking on her.

The main way we try to combat the distance and separation is by talking on the phone each night. Usually my parents and Katie are all on the phone and we each recount exciting or interesting things from our day. It's especially important for Katie and I to talk about what we've been doing without each other because we don't have the ease of texting that my parents and I have. Our nightly chats are basically our only form of communication when I'm at school, and they make me feel like I'm still connected and very present in my parents' and Katie's lives even though I'm not physically there. I

go home every few weeks to see my family as well and I always look forward to these weekends because talking on the phone or FaceTiming just doesn't compare to giving my family a hug at the end of a long week. At home, Katie and I usually spend the mornings together watching tv on the couch or I go to one of her volleyball or basketball games to cheer her on. While I love Saint Mary's and I enjoy my life at college, I will always anticipate and appreciate the weekends I get to spend at home with Katie and my parents.

I'm currently studying chemistry at Saint Mary's and plan on going to PA school after graduation. I'm very excited for this part of my life, but I'm trying to slow down and treasure the time I have now in which I get to spend weekends, breaks, and summers with Katie and my parents because I don't know where life will take me in the future. However, one thing Katie

and I have agreed on is that we both want to take a trip to Australia together when we're older to visit the Australia Zoo because we've been watching and loving *Crikey!*

It's the Irwins for years and this show centers around the Australia Zoo. Katie has wanted to be a vet for as long as I can remember and I think a trip like this would be a fulfillment of one of her oldest aspirations.

