

Conversation between us was light and breezy as Cote and I traveled the open road today. We simply relaxed into the ride with each passing mile, heading towards Yellowstone, our next major destination. The park was still too faraway to reach in a single day, but we pushed the pedal and ourselves to get as close as we could. We fell short by eighty miles when we decided to pull over for the night in St. Anthony, Idaho, the last sizable town on our map before reaching Yellowstone's western gate. Cote and I knew we could easily finish the drive in the morning and then have the rest of the day to play inside the national park.

Despite the day's relaxed atmosphere, we did have one "lightbulb" moment. While driving along a quiet stretch of Highway 20, I realized Cote and I had not hugged each other for the past several days. This hit me as very strange, since it was such a daily occurrence in our routine lives back home. A typical day for us meant spending eight to ten hours apart, due to work and school. But before the day was over, we'd come together, hug, and say, "I missed you," or "Goodnight." Crisscrossing the country together on this trip, however, had now joined us at the hip, twenty-four hours a day. Thus, this tender mother-daughter ritual had subconsciously been left abandoned along the roadside of Cote's rite of passage.

"You know what, Cote? I haven't hugged you for days."

"You know what? You're right. You haven't."

"Isn't that weird? I think because we've been together so much, I haven't really thought about it until now. I mean, we talk, we hike, we climb, we drive. And then at the end of the day, we say goodnight. We fall asleep without having to leave the room. I just realized how much I miss hugging you. So when we pull over tonight, I'm going to give you the biggest hug ever."

“Okay. And then when you’re done, I’m going to give you one.”

We kept our promises and shared those hugs inside our motel room in St. Anthony, Idaho. I wish I could say this is how our day ended, with a mother and daughter sharing such a simple, loving gesture, but I can’t. There was another emotion-filled night coming my way. This time it wasn’t fear that grabbed me. It was irritation.

Cote and I cleaned up and settled into our evening. Once again, I opened my notebook to journal, and she opened her laptop to Facebook. Tonight, however, the techno-world my daughter stepped into began to aggravate me on a level I hadn’t expected or experienced before. As Cote clicked and typed, I felt like I was losing her. It was as if she was being led down some private, secretive path that didn’t include me or respect her rite of passage. What made it worse—she seemed to go willingly.

As the night wore on, a coma-like trance came over her. Cote was so engrossed in her multiple online conversations, that she was completely oblivious to the silent but furious one I was having with her inside my head. Despite my rising anger, I refused to give a voice to my objections. Stubbornly I felt that after eighteen years of living together, my daughter should be fully capable of reading all my thoughts and deciphering my body language clues. *Obviously, I’m speaking loud and clear. Why, then, can’t she hear me?*

I rolled over and closed myself off. Eventually, I fell into a restless, fitful sleep. Cote’s online socializing and my refusal to address it poked a pin-sized hole into what I had thought to be our impenetrable mother-daughter relationship. Little did I know, the puncture wound wouldn’t lead to a slow and steady leak. It would be the opening to our biggest blowout ever.