

**Lynn's Zen**  
**By C. Lynn Perry**

**Ties That Bind**

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One of The Girls called me the other day and told me to stay on the lookout for her son, who was running away from home. Evidently, he was on his way to my house. I can't imagine why he'd pick my house to run to, but as I took up my post at the window wondering if I had any Oreos handy, I remembered the time my daughter, Hannah, ran away from home. She was in kindergarten, and when I picked her up from school after work, she was in a complete funk.

I got her home and proceeded to start Second Shift. Every single, working, mom knows what Second Shift is. I, for one, have Second Shift down to an art form! Here's how it goes, exactly in this order: let the dog out, let cat in, start spinning the load of clothes in the dryer left there from night before and start a new load, pre-heat oven, duct tape child to kitchen chair and force said child to start homework, cook dinner, feed everything that breathes, bathe child, rotate laundry, clean kitchen, scoop out litter box, bathe self (shaving your legs is optional, depending on what just came out of the dryer), tuck in child, open mail, pay bills, finish up work brought home from the office, let in dog, put cat out, collapse.

On good days, I can do this with the telephone hanging out of one ear. Do it right and you can be in bed before your alarm clock goes off. I'm like a well-oiled machine!

But, on the day Hannah ran away from home, I was tired, and she was, like I said, in a complete funk. I had started Second Shift, and Hannah decided, in all her five-year-old-badness, that she was not going to do her homework. To this day, I cannot for the life of me remember what the assignment was: all I know is that I insisted she had to do it.

"I'm running away from home," she announced, and then proceeded to go to her room and pack her Barbie spend-the-night suitcase.

"Where are you going to go?" I asked.

"I'm going next door to live with Tim and Pam."

"Fine," I said, deciding to call her bluff. "I'll help you pack. What are you taking?" I stood there and suppressed the urge to laugh at her while she packed a clean pair of underwear, her blankie, a pair of socks, her stuffed Barney, and a couple of videos that she, evidently, could not live without.

"I'm leaving," she said, hands on hips, looking up at me with those exotic eyes of hers.

"Well, Ok. But put on your jacket and wear some shoes." I said, handing her her pink Barbie jacket and new Barbie Velcro sneakers.

"I hate those shoes!" she screamed.

"Hannah, you just got them this weekend! You picked them out yourself! Why do you hate them?" I, for one, love the concept of Velcro sneakers. Let's face it, when I'm trying to get out the door in the morning, it's all I can do to find two shoes that match, much less have to bother with laces.

"I just do!" she wailed, and started her pilgrimage to the Mecca next door, jacket on and barefooted.

I immediately got on the phone to give Tim and Pam a head's up about their impending visitor, but they weren't home. So, I kept an eye on her and watched her ring the doorbell a few times, and then take her suitcase and settle down on the little hill in between our houses to wait. She wasn't crying... she was just plain mad. You know, in that cute way five-year-olds get where you almost have to stick your fist in your mouth to keep from laughing?

Not wanting to lose time, I ran into the kitchen and threw on an apron and stuck some fish sticks in the oven. I ran back to the window to check on her. She was still sitting there, waiting for Tim and Pam to come home.

I went back into the kitchen and begin setting the table. There, mixed in with her homework, was a note from her teacher that I hadn't noticed before. I picked it up and went back to the window to read it. It explained everything. Simply put, it said, "Hannah does not know how to tie shoelaces. She needs to learn this skill before she can graduate kindergarten."

My little girl, my little genius, could not tie shoelaces! I thought about it for a minute. I don't believe I ever even bought sneakers with laces. Velcro was so much easier. How *could* she know? How could I let my baby get to be five years old without my even thinking to teach her about ties? I was just so wound up with everything else! And, I realized, in that milestone moment, my daughter figured out I had the capacity to let her down. I also realized this was the first time, of many more times to come throughout the years, that like all mothers and daughters, she had had to untie herself from me before she could trust me enough again to come back home. The binds of mother and daughter had come unraveled for the first time.

Looking at her through the window, the enormity of it washed over me and hit me like an on-coming freight train in chest. My heart shattered in that moment. I didn't even try to choke back my sobs. I came undone, and that's when I felt it give. Pop! An apron string. Pop! A heart string.

Because as I looked at my smart, beautiful, precious daughter, picking at grass on that little hillside, digging her naked toes into the earth, I understood not only the thing she was running from; but also the thing that she was running to. She was running to Tim and Pam's. Towards an intact family: a mother, a father, a sister, a brother. Towards a dad that worked, towards a mom that stayed at home and made real dinners...

...towards a mother with time enough to be bothered with ties.