Motherhood Transitions: Menopause, Teenagers, Gender Identity and Disability

CARMEN G. FARRELL

October

It's hard to separate what's causing what—I fall into bed as soon as possible after dinner, dishes, driving my eldest to soccer or field hockey practice, a load of laundry, or a slew of emails. Exhausted, I make it through a page and a half of a great book, then lights out. I'm awake ninety minutes later. Like: awake, awake. Turn on the light. Flop around and read for two hours. Try not to wish I was asleep. Turn out the light. Try not to think about fifteen-year-old Jordan failing grade ten math. Turn it on fifteen minutes later. Read one point five pages. Try not to think about thirteen-year-old Jess being in a new high school where no one except Jordan knows him. Where he's defined by a diagnosis at the top of his grade eight individual education plan: a syndrome so rare no one comprehends his suite of physical, intellectual and social disabilities. Turn off the light. If I'm lucky, I'll fall asleep for another hour and a half. This pattern has morphed into months of sleeplessness. Does my head hurt from lack of sleep, or does lack of sleep result from a hurting head?

Most nights, it's three hours of sleep—if the last waking cycle happens at four or anytime after, that's the beginning of my day. My doctor, the one who shepherded me through two pregnancies, prescribed Zopiclone™, so I tried various fractions of the little blue sleeping pills to find the sweet spot between effectiveness and addiction. But each time, I woke up drugged and heavy. Gradually, the potency of the sleeping pill crumbs decreased, becoming a quarter of a pill. When that stopped working, half a pill. Then the fractions had morphed toward a whole until the effectiveness of the whole also became less of a sleep-inducing medication and more of a daytime zombie's power source.

From: M.E. Bhave, T. Esnard & K. Solomon (Eds.). *Theorizing Motherhood and Emerging Adulthood: Representations, Explorations and Contentions*. Demeter Press, 2025.

Getting off them took weeks. Then I tried a "natural" product called Sleep-Ease™ until Health Canada pulled it off the market because it contained an undeclared drug, Estazolam™. Consultations with a naturopath yielded no help either. No pills or supplements alleviate middle-of-the-night sweats, my body thrumming with a mysterious, hot electric vibration. It seems there's no medical or herbal supplement that works, so I resign myself to a sleep-deprived, jet-lagged state. It's unclear if my brain fog originates from lack of sleep or a hangover from constant, daily head pain. My doctor says the headaches are menopausal and tries to uplift me by saying her sixty-year-old patients feel great. I want to scream: I waited to have children and entered midlife with the solid foundation of an established career, a graduate education, and preschoolers. I didn't realize my choice would mean teenagers plus menopause.

Can I live ten years like this? My children need me, but my intellectual and emotional intelligences are clouded, removed and unavailable to them and me. I'm physically present, but perception, judgment and awareness of what's going on under the waterline for my children drown and suffocate under the stuffy pain in my head. At the end of the workday, I'm no longer a partner to my husband, retreating to the marital bed without him, bowing out of weekend social engagements, so he goes to friends' houses alone. Being horizontal makes my head hurt slightly less, but guilt fires my imagination. Bright, sparkly, unwelcome guilt.

At a time of mothering, when I need all my faculties engaged, they're on the couch with their feet up, watching Netflix. Peri-menopause has arrived for these fun years of parenting teens. My eldest, Jordan, at this time, was transitioning from using she/her pronouns but hadn't yet organized her psycho-ed assessment that would eventually pinpoint executive functioning challenges. Yet she's found the courage to have the "how would you feel if I brought home a girlfriend instead of a boyfriend?" conversation with her—no, their— dad and I. At this point, almost sixteen, it's an academic

From: M.E. Bhave, T. Esnard & K. Solomon (Eds.). *Theorizing Motherhood and Emerging Adulthood: Representations, Explorations and Contentions*. Demeter Press, 2025.

abstraction–there have been no love interests yet. At least that I've been made aware of.

Which is more than fine. Counselling this child through grade ten academic expectations and friendship realities feels booby-trapped. The wrong word from me, the not-carefully-thought-out slant to an observation or–heaven-forbid–advice, will obliterate our delicate, mutual safe zone. Gifted, this child chose to change high schools for the last three years of secondary school to attend an accelerated academic program. They're a talented writer and thinker but struggle with math. However, with the certainty of adolescence, Jordan is convinced there's no future in the arts and envisions a future STEM career. They insist they love physics. Thanks to their smartphone and its connection to the wide outer world, they are enticed by astronomical breakthroughs like vanishing stars that measure the space-time warp, the discovery of possible habitable planets orbiting the star closest to Earth's own, and the first-ever detection of gravitational waves.

November

"So, Jordan," I begin. It's early Saturday afternoon, post-soccer game, and they've taken me up on a "let's grab a hot chocolate on our way home" invitation. "I know your report card results weren't what you hoped for." All the math and science courses hovered at the barely passing level.

Jordan looks into their cup for what I'm not sure. Something about the hunch of their shoulders and downcast expression makes me momentarily afraid another migraine has descended. "Is your head okay?" I fret. They nod yes, still staring at their drink on the café table. The headache triggers are various and somewhat mysterious: hormone swings, changes in barometric pressure, stress…the neurologist hasn't been specific. I've been called to the school many times over the last two years to collect a beleaguered, wrung-out child. This term, sudden migraines have already sent the number of missed classes into the double digits. The lost instructional time in subjects that aren't

From: M.E. Bhave, T. Esnard & K. Solomon (Eds.). *Theorizing Motherhood and Emerging Adulthood: Representations, Explorations and Contentions*. Demeter Press, 2025.

a strength is starting to catch up to Jordan.

"You are such a gifted writer. Look at your English and Social Studies marks," I continue, hoping to focus Jordan on their academic gifts.

"Mom! There's no future in that. I want to be a scientist!" They glare at me defensively—we've been down this road before, and they're protective of their point of view. I miss the days when my advice was gospel to young Jordan. "There's nothing new to learn in the arts—all the exciting inventions are in science!"

"Well, I understand you're interested in scientific subjects, but perhaps careers exist to write about stars, galaxies, and new science for lay people?" I offer, trying to find a middle ground for Jordan to pursue their interests while emphasizing their capabilities.

"I don't want to do that, Mom." Glowers at me. Any post-soccer endorphins have worn off, and the sugar from the hot chocolate hasn't had any positive effect.

"Well, I can't tell you what to do, sweetie; it's your life. But you're not playing to your strengths here, and you're in a tough program. The standards are high. It's November. If this is what you want, you'll have to work that much harder." I can't catch their eye. "Do you really want this? Are you willing to put in the extra time?"

Jordan looks up, eyes hooded with protectiveness. "Yes, Mom. It's what I want."

"Okay then. We're spending a lot of money on a math tutor…"

"I need a physics tutor, too," they interrupt.

"Okay, if you're willing to do the work, all right. But it can't be a crutch to rely on forever. We'll try it through the next term, okay?"

I am not convinced this is a viable plan or that the work required will transpire. But the command-and-control era of mothering is firmly in our rearview mirror. The phase of preschool-aged Jordan wanting to grow up—to be "in charge of me," as they used to say—is over and replaced with teenage

From: M.E. Bhave, T. Esnard & K. Solomon (Eds.). *Theorizing Motherhood and Emerging Adulthood: Representations, Explorations and Contentions*. Demeter Press, 2025.

determination. I must stand down; I am in charge of nothing and along for the ride, able to make occasional observations about what goes flitting past the window. With school, I'll have to park my doubts, let them try their plan, and not even *consider* a hint of "I told you so" if marks don't improve.

I am beginning to realize this child—who I used to know so well—will not choose popular, well-trod, and easy paths. This is a painful realization—most of my mothering efforts have been directed at smoothing and easing my children's life paths. I left my paid career to make a profession of mothering them. From toddlerhood, Jess required intensive interventions and a mothering style tailored to his suite of disabilities. First, we had to figure out therapies to help him walk and develop fine and gross motor skills. As he moved past toddlerhood, deciphering his social and speech challenges was added to the mix. By early elementary school, he needed an extensive Individual Education Plan to address his intellectual disabilities. Jordan's needs, to some extent, could be learned from books and adapted to her and our family's circumstances. For Jess, I needed to figure out and participate in every aspect of his conscious life…as if I were living his life with him. Interventions for Jordan were also intensive, but once I laid out the scaffolding, they could clamber and navigate the experiences alone, with friends, or in the community. Jess could never do that and has, and always will, require his dad or me or a hired replacement for us as his co-pilot. Another thought bubble for the middle of the night: how will he manage when his parents are gone? In many ways, his high school needs resemble earlier and younger ones he won't grow out of.

Jordan's trajectory—at least through the remainder of this school year—is becoming rocky. All I can do is support where I'm allowed, temper my advice for when it might be tolerated and travel alongside to the extent I'm permitted. The counsellor I would seek out before Jordan's high school career was complete would say— "You have to come alongside them. Ask yourself how *you* would want to be treated in this

From: M.E. Bhave, T. Esnard & K. Solomon (Eds.). *Theorizing Motherhood and Emerging Adulthood: Representations, Explorations and Contentions*. Demeter Press, 2025.

situation." For some time now, permission has been required to enter an occupied bedroom, a blind eye must be turned to the clutter and chaos of teenage belongings and a tentative détente must be maintained between teenage freedom and motherly supervision. "Pick the hillsides you're prepared to die on," my father used to say, reflecting on his parental experiences of raising my brother and I.

I didn't expect this *so soon*. And I never imagined it would feel so abrupt. I thought it would be a slow transition… perhaps a gradual and mutual realization that I wouldn't be needed so much. There were times when they were little, hanging off me, mommymommy mommy-ing me, that I fantasized about unattainable separateness. I was their runny-nose tissue, their protection from rain, their source of food and sustenance. I couldn't pee without someone looking at me with big eyes. But the payback was always that I could fix it. Mommy could make a boo-boo feel better, and I was the blue fairy granting fantastical childish wishes who vanquished all their problems with my magic wand. Currently, I'm often cast as the evil witch.

The best I am is neutral. My mothering aims to be inoffensive. I want to influence and guide, but it has to be more from a lived example than from talk. Jordan's hypersensitivity to any actual or perceived hypocrisy means I must always walk the talk. Which is difficult when it's increasingly difficult to imagine the world they will live into. The ways I live and what I prioritize aren't a blueprint for their future. How do I prepare my children for a world with climate change, degradation of late-stage capitalism, and political extremism? The generation I represent is part of their problem. Mine and previous generations are the ones who wrecked the environment, took all the economic stability and good health care and left them with what? Heat domes, atmospheric rivers, a global pandemic, unaffordable housing, post-secondary education systems for the rich, erosion of the middle class? The systems and infrastructure of my youth and adulthood weren't radically different from my parents, but my children can't

From: M.E. Bhave, T. Esnard & K. Solomon (Eds.). *Theorizing Motherhood and Emerging Adulthood: Representations, Explorations and Contentions*. Demeter Press, 2025.

see much in my life that might reflect theirs. I'm unprepared for sending Jordan and Jess into a world that increasingly perplexes me. Somehow, when I had imagined a future for my babies, it meant a better version of my life. I don't know that anymore.

For now, though, we leave the coffee shop with our tutorial plan and head home, where Jordan disappears into their bedroom with its closed door, per usual, and I find Jess sitting in his customary chair in his father's home office, mesmerized by preschooler-style YouTube videos repeating on his Android phone. With my husband also glued to his computer, working, I hope they haven't spent the last two hours like this, but I decide not to risk marital discord by asking about it.

"Come on Jess, you need to get changed. Coach has a special practice session for the cross-country team this afternoon. We need to get going," "You need to wear running pants, a long-sleeved athletic shirt, and running socks," I say as I follow him up the stairs to help him with parts of dressing that can be problematic: tight socks.

As the day has progressed, my head is increasingly unaligned with my motherly goals. It wants silence, darkness, and quiet. Not noisy cafes, shouts and screams from soccer sidelines, and concentration on traffic logistics. But I want Jess to be a part of this team, so headache notwithstanding, there is no question of my not doing it.

Jordan chose this school for the academic program that's currently adding to my head pain, and their programming for neurodiverse learners with high needs like Jess was well regarded in the community. It seemed a good choice for both kids. But I've logged many sleepless hours over the past several weeks worried for Jess and the quality of his inclusion in Grade Eight. It's not like elementary school, where we knew many families and kids were used to seeing parents in classrooms and hallways. High school is a dead zone for parent involvement, and I can't hover and engage like I did in Jess's elementary school. With almost

From: M.E. Bhave, T. Esnard & K. Solomon (Eds.). *Theorizing Motherhood and Emerging Adulthood: Representations, Explorations and Contentions*. Demeter Press, 2025.

no ability to do so, he has to navigate high school himself, with well-intentioned aides who don't know him.

A natural place of inclusion for teenage boys is the sports teams, but Jess's physical disabilities preclude most of that, except cross-country. It's a rare high school sport where all are welcome. And it's unique because kids from several grades train together: boys and girls, grades eight to twelve. In the short weeks of the season so far, Jess has been showing up like a champion, doing all that was asked of him. He's done it without finesse or success…finishing dead last in every training session and every race. But he earns the respect of his teammates with his determination and endurance. With an ungainly and awkward-looking gait, he completes the same workouts they do. He does it with a smile on his face, often laughing as he arrives at the finish line. He loves using his body and being part of the kids' energy. He giggles with pleasure, absorbing the enthusiasm around him. Races offer no incentive to win, just the excitement of the cheering, clapping, and satisfaction of completion.

I am navigating multiple new lines in mothering: negotiations with Jordan, dredging up physical reserves for myself where none exist, and living Jess's teenage life with him but with the added expectation of invisibility. No institutional support exists for students with disabilities to participate in extracurricular activities, so most kids don't because it's up to families. But I want Jess to be seen as a person with dimension, not a resource room kid with an aide in tow. I want him to have a high school life where he's not stuck in a box with a label on it. I sit through every practice, trying to understand what's needed for Jess to be a part of the team. I drive a van full of kids to each after-school race, quietly listen to the conversations of the neurotypical boys in the back, and make mental notes about the music they comment on, the movies they watch, the games they play, and what they think of different teachers.

From: M.E. Bhave, T. Esnard & K. Solomon (Eds.). *Theorizing Motherhood and Emerging Adulthood: Representations, Explorations and Contentions*. Demeter Press, 2025.

I do this to inform my mothering from the sidelines, to soak in information as I do when I drive for Jordan's volleyball tournaments. These chauffeuring sessions are invaluable portals to the dynamics of high schoolers. Because Jess doesn't notice these things, I observe the kinds of hoodies the kids wear and the brand of sneakers on their feet so he can dress like them. I offer to help time the kids during their practice laps at the after-school practices so I can see them on the forest trails and not worry about Jess tripping over his feet, getting injured, falling behind the group, and getting lost in the unfamiliar neighbourhood. I over function so that he can function. Books about adolescent development are of little help. I need immediate context and on-the-ground intel.

In the pouring rain and cold of today's practice, I sit in my puffy long coat, under an umbrella, on the concrete bleachers near the school's athletic fields so I can keep an eye on Jess when their training laps bring them closer. From afar, I glimpse the group dynamics. His teammates notice when he jogs into the group of early finishers and offer Jess their raised palms for the high fives of "yay, we're done." Jess perceives the gesture and responds.

He looks for me at the end of practice, and I wave him over. On the trip home, the heater blasting, my head bellows with pain, expanding and contracting like an accordion. Squeezing and wringing out my brain, leaving it limp and useless. I'm so *done* with driving: I am ready for teleporting. But it hasn't been invented yet. I glance at the clock: 4 pm…how many hours until I can lay down? At the red lights, I bang my forehead on the steering wheel. Probably, I shouldn't be driving–the pain is so distracting–but when I bang my head, at least it's a *different* pain.

December

Jordan's end-of-term report card is worse than October's, but I have no energy for that fight this month. The low grades on the report card have generated an email from the school's administration. They understand about the headaches and missed classes, but failing is failing. This kind of attention is

From: M.E. Bhave, T. Esnard & K. Solomon (Eds.). *Theorizing Motherhood and Emerging Adulthood: Representations, Explorations and Contentions*. Demeter Press, 2025.

new. Also new: the flurry of a high school relationship and Jordan's late-night video chats in corners of the house where they think they can't be overheard. More closed doors in my home. I don't know this other girl, don't know the family. Fiona seems to be regularly locked out of her house late at night for arbitrariness that is difficult to unravel. In addition to school, she's expected to hold a part-time job to pay for groceries. Her half-siblings have different fathers, and the man in the house isn't loving toward her. Jordan, however, is taking Fiona on like a counselling client, and Jordan's romantic feelings mingle with caretaking and a lack of boundaries. Jordan is unequipped to deal with Fiona's drama, which includes threatened suicide. At least Jordan cries to her father and me about this. We're not totally out of the picture.

Jordan's friend circle in this new school, beyond one or two girls from the volleyball team, seems needy and unstable. Relationship boundaries, for Jordan, have always been porous; lost sleep over the elementary school friend playground fights of others was a common occurrence. I feel resentful of the introduction of this unpredictability to our family life. One of Jordan's friends struggles with a brain chemical imbalance—apparently—and threatened Jordan with her knife collection, showing up at our house late at night more than once, necessitating another novel, unwelcome experience: to accompany Jordan to the RCMP detachment to register concern. Words like "restraining order" and "protection services" had never been part of my lexicon.

January

We have a week before Jordan's return to school for our report card conversation. The Christmas tree is down, visiting family has gone home, and guest bed sheets are washed. I know coming down hard on anything—even though my bruised, aching brain shouts profanity, and I want to scream, "Focus on school, not your f-ing girlfriend!"—won't get us closer to understanding or connecting with each

From: M.E. Bhave, T. Esnard & K. Solomon (Eds.). *Theorizing Motherhood and Emerging Adulthood: Representations, Explorations and Contentions*. Demeter Press, 2025.

other. It will send Jordan further away, perhaps even physically away.

Readying myself for our talk and finding some quiet, I lay on my bed to give my brain a bit of the horizontal rest it craves. But Jess's replaying of his current favourite YouTube tunes waft up the stairs, and there is no quiet. Instead, for solace, I retreat into some grief to fortify my mental resources. By spending time with my sadness, I can contain it, put it away, to focus on what Jordan needs from me. Being a mom to teenagers isn't what I anticipated. It's so much less: so isolating.

My generation had been raised to believe we could have it all. "We" being cis-gendered, heterosexual women of the late twentieth century. This meant sex without marriage. Reproductive choice and health. Careers and families. Or not. Opting out of motherhood was equally valid. We could play with Barbies as girls but not be objectified as women…or so Gloria Steinem said. We were second-wave feminists who navigated our versions of Harvey Weinstein but never or rarely said #MeToo to one another. Usually, we dealt with unwanted comments or, worse, of family, friends, classmates, or teachers in isolation. But together, we lauded being women. Firmly entrenched in our genders, we celebrated our differences from men as equals or betters. My generation had it all: no longer barefoot and pregnant in kitchens.

But once pregnant, mothers-to-be like me imagined gendered and equal roles for our baby girls and boys. My boys would play with dolls, and my daughters would play with trucks and blocks! I applaud Jordan's desire for a STEM career, though I struggle to comprehend their understanding of gender. I grieve my assumption that we'd share my gender identity. I'd never thought of gender as fluid, had understood sexual orientation in two terms, maybe three: heterosexual, homosexual with some experimental crossover—but wasn't familiar with the term bisexual or bicurious. In short, it was a pink and blue world with she and he pronouns where "they" meant groups of people. Jordan is completely

From: M.E. Bhave, T. Esnard & K. Solomon (Eds.). *Theorizing Motherhood and Emerging Adulthood: Representations, Explorations and Contentions*. Demeter Press, 2025.

uninterested in understanding my experience and has no patience for my stumbling inaccuracies in navigating pronoun preferences, learning the eleven or more types of sexuality, and accurately affirming Jordan's evolving expressions of gender identity. The reality of mothering teens isn't the "all" my young feminist self had imagined.

I stand at Jordan's bedroom door. "Jordan, can I come in? I need to talk with you," I say to the white composite plywood door. With permission, I enter and sit on the edge of their double bed. I circle my flat palm over the surface of the turquoise paisley-printed duvet we'd picked out together. *Not even two years ago*. That kind of shopping trip wouldn't happen these days. "The vice principal emailed. You're failing math and physics," I say. "I imagine this isn't news to you," I venture.

Jordan is quiet. "Mom, it's like there's something wrong," they say. "When I'm doing the problems, I know it." They pause. "But then, when I'm in the test, it's like my brain goes somewhere else. I can't remember it," they sigh. This is not completely surprising; we'd dealt with test anxiety for the first time in Grade Seven. Early high school had seemed to go okay with a modified testing environment. But the missed classes…

"Okay, well, let's get on top of this. Teachers like it when you follow up, stay in communication and are proactive. Can you go see your teachers when school goes back?"

"Okay."

"Let me know when you've set that up. Ms. Sylvester and Mr. Didak want me to participate in it."

"Okay."

This seems to have gone pretty well. Perhaps some comfort will be tolerated. "Jordan, we'll get this sorted out. I know you want to do well."

"I do, Mom." I reach out to give them a hug, and they lean into me, absorbing the comfort. I breathe in their scent to imprint the memory of closeness for later.

From: M.E. Bhave, T. Esnard & K. Solomon (Eds.). *Theorizing Motherhood and Emerging Adulthood: Representations, Explorations and Contentions*. Demeter Press, 2025.

February

But then I screw up. My best compromise while I'm learning proper pronoun usage is to use they/them when Jordan is present. But on the telephone with friends of mine, I use she/her to save explaining to these friends—who have known Jordan since preschool—what they/them means to them. I can't. I can't interpret Jordan's experience for them or my friends, and I'm still figuring out my own.

I didn't realize Jordan was home. "Mom," they glare at me. I heard you on the phone!" Daggers in my direction. They stomp off.

March

Jess's school-based team, which consists of his learning support teacher, speech-language pathologist, aides, and occupational therapist, convenes a meeting to start planning for Jess's post-high school life. Work experience will become part of his school day next year. With each passing year, they aim that Jess will gradually spend more of his school day in the community, hopefully working and pursuing leisure interests so that by Grade Twelve, the majority of his day might be in the neighbourhood, with aide support fading to zero. At least this is the optimistic hope we're gathered to discuss.

Unlike his sibling, Jess has no friends or assistance network that his parents or the government don't fund. He cannot generate relationships, maintain friendships, or navigate life choices. Professionals describe him as nonverbal. His speech is completely unintelligible and he relies on the robotic sound of his voice output software on his Android phone to speak for him. His motor movements are ataxic, and his involuntary limb movement is beyond his control. Therapies have been extensive, expensive and time-consuming and have filled his schedule and mine and will extend into the rest of his life.

While I might lament the sudden fall from grace in Jordan's life, parenting Jess stretches unchanging and infinite. At a time when my biology is screaming, "Prioritize yourself; it's time to stop this

From: M.E. Bhave, T. Esnard & K. Solomon (Eds.). *Theorizing Motherhood and Emerging Adulthood: Representations, Explorations and Contentions*. Demeter Press, 2025.

intensity of mothering nonsense," his needs remain almost precisely to when he was six. He requires his nails clipped, his shoelaces tied, his bank accounts managed, and his meals prepared. He always will. Although I've had more than a dozen years to adjust to a high school reality, grieving his dependence never fades. It just changes.

From his babyhood until I die or just can't do it any longer, I spend my time and energy managing his world. I manage the environment around him so that others can see him. So that he can show up as the best version of himself. Without me, cross-country wouldn't exist. But it continues, very successfully, because of him. He shows up with an optimistic attitude, and the good-hearted people around him see his grit and determination and admire and include him. But he needed me to set up the situation. Just like he needs me to find ways for him to spend his days, navigate bureaucracies to try to convince government funders to consider his independent living needs, and help him stay connected with family who don't live nearby. Someday, that may be all he has: extended family younger than me.

Jordan's tutoring sessions have shifted to our kitchen. Driving to tutorials elsewhere didn't provide a window into what was happening, so this term, I paid extra to have tutors come to us. I can see Jordan is struggling with concepts, but also discern their effort. The midterm report is marginally better; they're passing. But these aren't university-level marks. However, they're not giving up, so I need to support them, even if I think they should shift the focus of their studies.

June

Jordan has to have the opportunity to make their own mistakes. Jess just needs any opportunity to try and some support when he does.

With both children, in profound ways, I needed to shift from imposing my expectations and wants on them. For Jordan, I needed to do that so they could evolve into their own identity, separate from mine. So that they could move into the world. With Jess, I needed

From: M.E. Bhave, T. Esnard & K. Solomon (Eds.). *Theorizing Motherhood and Emerging Adulthood: Representations, Explorations and Contentions*. Demeter Press, 2025.

to let go of expecting that he might do that too, plan for where he's at, and try to advocate for his inclusion in neurotypical circles: to help others see and include him for who he is. I needed to help him be seen in the world. And I needed to see both children differently, separate from me. More equal.

I certainly wouldn't have predicted this when Jess and Jordan were little. I thought mothering Jordan would be easy and Jess would be the difficult one. Friends said boys were more complex. Jordan was my sparkly little light in the pink or purple skirted dress that "had to twirl" and made the corners of our lives bright and bubbly. Jordan's exuberance pulled us into community relationships.

That brand of motherhood seems simple compared to the daily psychological gymnastics with teenaged Jordan and the physical and mental exhaustion of needing to think about Jess and his life in 360-degree terms. My children are no longer my children. They are becoming my young adults.

But mothering them doesn't go away; it must grow with them.

From: M.E. Bhave, T. Esnard & K. Solomon (Eds.). *Theorizing Motherhood and Emerging Adulthood: Representations, Explorations and Contentions*. Demeter Press, 2025.