**[Really, Dad? Really letting go](https://www.ctworkerscomplaw.com/really-dad-really-letting-go/)**

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**Michaela**

My brother is currently spending a semester abroad in Vienna, Austria. Before leaving he offered the idea of my visiting him alone. When I proposed this to my parents, their eyes filled with hope and adoration at the thought of a culturally engaging and potential bonding experience for their son and daughter. And much to my surprise, my father did not display symptoms of a cardiac arrest at the thought of his 17-year-old daughter traveling 4,144 miles across the Atlantic Ocean by herself.

Based on this reaction, one would assume that when I asked my parents several weeks later to go to Indiana over winter break they would not think twice before saying yes. However, their response would have made you conclude that I was asking to go to a different country by myself. … Oh, wait. This immense difference in their attitude was due to nine letters: B-O-Y-F-R-I-E-N-D. The boyfriend, mind you, whom I have known for five years now and have been dating for almost two. I was justifiably enraged by their irrational decision-making and thus a ferocious debate began.

One night, my parents told me that the three of us would be going to dinner with a couple that my father knows through work. I was at first reluctant to “fifth wheel” the dinosaur reunion, but I reluctantly blessed them with my presence. Right off the bat, my mom decided to humiliate me by explaining the controversy to these two strangers (to me) using several alternative facts.

“Michaela is upset because we won’t let her stay in a hotel room in Indiana with her boyfriend for a week.”

My dad immediately leapt to my defense, telling them that I merely wanted to visit him, not to shack up in a hotel room for week.

NOT!

In reality, he slithered down into the booth across the table from me and avoided eye contact in the manner of a bird that has just flown into a windshield. However, even after this embarrassing betrayal, I won. See, my mother had unwittingly assumed that all parents are as illogical in their parenting methods as she and my dad. She was (not so happily) surprised when her “ally” sided with me.

“If you trust her and believe that she is responsible then unless there is a serious concern that you are putting her into danger, you need to give her some freedom.”

One would think that my parents, bright as they are, would look at their soon-to-be 18-year-old daughter who (not to toot my own horn) is driven, responsible, and has never broken their trust, and see this on their own. But they are getting old and at some point, as my mom likes to point out, you have to swallow your pride, put on the reading glasses and read what’s in front of you. Needless to say, my flight leaves Friday.

**Michael**

“As long as I’m living my baby you’ll be.” This was the refrain from a book that I used to read to Michaela every night for the first nine years of her life. During that time when she would run to the door to loop her arms around my knees every night, it seemed impossible that she would ever be anything but my baby. Nine more years have blinked by and my baby girl is just a few months shy of 18. Last year she began dating a senior in high school, who went off to college in Indiana at the end of the summer. She has seen him when he comes home on breaks, but it is always like ripping off a Band-Aid when he has to fly back.

So it was inevitable that the question would come up, and it did, repeatedly, almost as soon as the wheels were up on her boyfriend’s outbound flight after the Christmas break. “Can I go out to Indiana for winter break?” She may as well have been asking me if it were okay to declare her childhood over. The words stung like the purple tentacles of a Portuguese man-of-war.

“No problem as long as mom flies out with you,” I suggested helpfully.

“No, I want to go by myself.”

“Sure. Next February.”

“But you let Caelan go all the way to Virginia to see Logan when he was a year younger than I am.”

Guilty as charged. In fact, we had allowed her older brother to take a train down to Virginia by himself when he was 16 years old to spend a spring break with his girlfriend. But that did not mean I had to double down on bad precedent. I pointed out that Logan’s dad was with his daughter under their roof during the entire visit: I would be 850 miles away.

“You need to trust me, Dad. In six months I am going to be living in a dormitory surrounded by boys.”

The mantra has continued for weeks, as inexorably as waves rolling onto shore.

“So have you guys made up your minds?” she asked the other day, meaning, have you caved in yet? My wife is a licensed clinical social worker who deals with teenage issues all the time. She told me that we needed to trust Michaela to make her own decisions, but ultimately, she was deferring to me. As long as I made the right decision. I ran it past one of my best friends, who told me: “Have a little faith in her. Let her go, as she is in the process of letting you go.”

And so we will let her go to Indiana, and I suspect to farther flung places in the coming years. She needs to find her place in the world. But I hope my sweet girl will always remember, wherever she is, that as long as I’m living my baby she’ll be.