

**Dotsie Bregel,
Founder and CEO of
The National Association of Baby Boomer Women
(NABBW)**



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Empty Nest Turned Opportunity

With

Natalie Caine

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Empty Nest Turned Opportunity

With
Natalie Caine

Dotsie: Hello and welcome to the call.

For those of you who don't know me, and who may be friends of Natalie or people who visit her site, I am **Dotsie Bregel**, and I'm founder of the **National Association of Baby Boomer Women** which can be found at www.NABBW.com and also www.boomerwomenspeak.com which are the number one sites on major search engines for baby boomer women. I'm passionate about educating and empowering my generation of women which is "boomers" and we were born between 1946 and 1964.

I would like to mention our sponsors before we get started, and then I'll introduce Natalie, and then we'll begin the interview. Our sites are proudly sponsored by **Me Again** products which are tried and true products for women at midlife. And that can be located at www.meagainonline.com. We're also sponsored by **Sunsweet**, for those who are interested in digestive health. And **Sunsweet** can be located at www.plumsmart.net. We're also sponsored by www.dolans.com, so if you are interested in excellent financial information that will encourage you to live a more financially responsible midlife, you can find them at www.dolans.com. And then our last sponsor is **Elations** which is a daily drink supplement that offers relief from joint aches and pains. It's an alternative to taking those large horse pills, and so this way you can just drink a bottle a day and be without your aches and pains. You can find **Elations** at www.elations.com.

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Okay, Natalie, are you there?

Natalie: Yes I am.

Dotsie: Okay, I'd like to introduce you. Natalie Caine is the founder of Empty Nest Support Services, and her Web site is www.emptynestsupport.com. When her daughter was a senior in high school, she realized as a soon-to-be empty nester, she would be undergoing a major life shift. And not wanting to confront this transition alone, nor have her many friends face this without strong support, she created a support services group which quickly grew into a new career and an exciting fulltime business. And Natalie, we share something in common and that is Boomer Women Speak was also launched when I was staring the empty nest in the face when my three children were all in high school. So its interesting how you can take something that's of interest to you, and even a passion, and turn it into a business, isn't it? She never imagined that this passion would lead to speaking engagements, consulting, teaching others how to facilitate support groups, running her popular Web site which features articles, teleseminars, blogs, newsletters, the story of the month, an art gallery, and a lively free forum. So she keeps herself busy right within this topic and also has her passion as her family. So it's worked well. She lives in Southern California with her husband and cat. And your daughter is now living away from home and working, is that right?

Natalie: That's true.

Dotsie: Okay, alright. Anything else you want to add to that?

Natalie: No, and thank you for having me Dotsie and you did a great job introducing me.

Dotsie: Okay, good, good. We decide to do this topic this time of year because I know personally, I have some friends who are struggling and in fact, my next door neighbor sent her youngest away to New Orleans and we live in Towson, Maryland so she's quite a ways from home. This is a really tough time for her. And I just know that this is the time of year where the kids are gone, they've been gone a couple of weeks, people are looking at, like heading to see their children for a parent's weekend, so we thought it would be a good time to hear from our expert about the topic. What we're going to do is we're going to talk a little bit and then we're going to keep some things in mind while we're doing this. There are quite a few things to consider and when Natalie and I talked about this, we mentioned that there are the parents that you have to take into consideration, and there are the children. And then there are the parents that are doing well, and there are the parents that are not doing well. Then there are the children that are doing well, and there are the parents that are not doing well. So as we go through these questions, we're going to take those things into consideration.

And then we'll be able to talk to you at the end and see if you have anything to share or maybe if you can tell us if you're in the middle of a little bit of tough time after the last one left home and hopefully, what we have to share here today will

be of help. I guess the biggest question, and I guess it might be hard for some of the people on the call that have not prepared, but Natalie, how would you begin to prepare for the empty nest because even if people are coming into this preparation late and the kids have already left home, what are some of the things that they could be doing?

Natalie: Well you can prepare at any time. It could be the day before; it could be when they're in junior high school. And one thing is to begin to make a list of what people have complimented you about. Over the years they may say, you're such a good organizer, you're such a good cook, oh my god, your garden is always beautiful; it makes me feel so relaxed; you're so considerate. So you just literally write down what you remember people complimented you about. Then make another list that says what you think you're good at, and the third list is what's fun for you to do. And in those three lists, some will connect; some won't have anything to do with each another. But it begins to let you drop into a place that you haven't had time to go in to. And the other thing that's a really simple experience is just go to your local bookstore and start to walk up and down the aisles you don't usually visit. You know for example, one woman I was working with—she's a chef, actually—and when I told her this idea she said, "Okay, I'll give that a try."

And she went to Barnes and Noble and went down the Science Fiction aisle. She found some books that she remembered even from childhood. Long story short, she kept them in the trunk of her car because she was always busy and whenever she had, you know, ten minutes before the soccer game, or waiting in line, whatever it was, she had this book. And it sparked in her a whole new imagination. She took a few notes on what touched her in this imaginary world and from there—its such a stretch but it does happen—she designed napkins with imaginary codes on them. So my point in just a few of those examples is just begin something that you haven't done before. And it gives a message to yourself, I'm here for you and I'm open to something new.

Dotsie: Okay that's really good and in fact, you're not going to believe this but I was heading home from the airport yesterday and I had the radio station on and they were interviewing these two women who wrote this book called...wait a minute, they didn't actually say the title while I was listening, but about the empty nest. And that's some of the things that are very similar to what they were discussing and this was just yesterday. I thought that was crazy. What about, why is this stage so difficult and then maybe we can talk about—you know, I think one of the reasons is because we have given ourselves up, pretty much, for however many number of years we've been raising children whether we stay at home or whether we work. And now all of a sudden, we have this time to consider, "wow, I really put myself aside for so long. And now I have time to address myself again." And like you're saying, kind of come in to our own, or who we were before we had children and what our interest were whether it was, you know, horseback riding, or whether it was like this woman with her—what was it;

her science fiction, because it's like we've almost lost ourselves for so many years. So tell us a little bit about why this stage is so difficult so that we can kind of address that and then go from there.

Natalie: Sure. Well you know, I will tell you guys that over the six years that I've been talking to thousands of parents, and recently, exciting news as well, is that fathers are asking for support; the number one thing that has come up is—am I normal? Is this how I'm supposed to be feeling? And my explanation of why this is a difficult time is literally your house goes silent. It goes from a 10 to a 1. And you know it in your head; it's coming, it's coming, some day they'll go to college, what do I think I want to do, but most humans aren't good at planning ahead. And that's not a criticism; we're just full with what we're doing now. So it stays in the back of our mind, and then all of a sudden you really are hit with it when you hug your kid's good-bye at the door and you come back home.

So you have this sudden shock; you have a huge role change. Your child would walk in the room and they'd light up to see you and you'd light up to see them. And over the years, when they start to hit that junior high/high school, it still shows up that it's beginning to shift. You're still lit up and you can't wait to hear what happened at school that day, or a party and any dreams they have. Suddenly they're gone and your role shifts because you're asked to now be more of a mentor than a manager of their life. You don't know their schedule, you don't know who they're hanging out with, or how they're feeling, you don't know how they look, you don't even know if they ate. It's such a huge change that it's shocking.

And the third thing is; it's not spoken about enough I don't believe in the world, but it will be; we're kind of the pioneers now of empty nest, it's a true step-by-step grieving process because the role that you loved playing, signing up to be a mom or a dad, has been your most rewarding and unconditional love you've ever felt. And then all of a sudden that feels gone. It's not that they're not coming back, but you know that what happened probably won't happen; now you're going to be asked to be different.

Dotsie: So it's really like the whole life transition that we're looking at, and changing roles. We're no long, you know, the mom who is hyper-involved with their children; we're moms from a distance. So we're grieving who we were, where we've been, and the fact that we'll never be going back there. I'm just wondering if you could talk a little bit about—because I want to shift this to a more positive thing where we can take it from a midlife crisis and turn it into a midlife opportunity. But before I go there, I want to talk to you about what you do when you get the sinking feeling and the tears begin, and you're kind of just getting down about it. And then we're going to switch and we're going to talk more about the positive side. What do you recommend for women who are really grieving, who are missing the kids, you know, I know some women who go to their kids college Web sites and read what's going on at the college, and just

spending too much time thinking about the child being gone. What do you recommend that women do?

Natalie: Well, I was one of those women. So I have a full-time career, married, meetings with my husband's partners, girlfriends, hiking, you know, a very full life. But that disconnect from my daughter because we were so close was painful. And what I use to do before I even made my coffee at 6 am, I would run to the computer, pop on instant message and hope that she was there for a minute, or see if there was an email, check the cell phone and literally had the phone Velcro to me at one point; at work, in the car, just to not miss a moment with her. And what I did before my daughter, whose name is Rachel, left is I made a list, in preparation for those sorrowful moments, of everything that is fun for me. I mean from the tritist of just walking through a nursery garden not buying anything—just—I started accumulating in a journal what's fun for me; music that I liked. The other thing is that I had a sign by my computer that said, "Pause, count to five before you email her or call her." Do you really need to do that right now? Or do you need to call a girlfriend to say let's go for a walk, or do you need to get up and get out the door, and walk yourself. You want to have a few of these practices because the truth is, where you have a career, whether you are close to your child or not, you will feel at certain moments a sorrow and you'll be glad to have that Kleenex with aloe. You have to acknowledge first this is a loss, I know what I'm missing, and then the dreamer side comes; the parts of you that went dormant. Because in my research, I've really seen that when we choose to be parents, it's natural that parts of us have to go dormant. So as you open to this freer time and more space, you're letting the dormant side know, "Okay, I can come out again." And one of the fun things that we've done in the groups and on one-on-one is that we've created what we call a sacred space. In that sacred space, let's say you're going to choose courage because initially you don't feel very courageous, you don't feel very energetic. You're shocked. You like wait, I'm a go-getter and now I'm not going. So you may choose courage. And then you look through magazines and find things that might represent courage. One woman zeroxed a tarot card that represented courage. And you put it in on a napkin or pretty cloth in a place that no one will touch. Mine when I first started doing these little sacred alters was in my office, first time, up high. But the problem with that was that my cat Sophie decided to knock it down. So I had to find a new place. But the point in doing this is that every time you pass by that, you pause in front of it and it's a reminder that oh yeah, I could go in for some courage today which means I'm going to call a friend and say hey you want to meet after work just to talk a while, do you want to come over Saturday? What we forget to do is put something in our calendar that supports us.

Dotsie: Yes, and having something to look forward to is what I was advised because I had three children and the youngest two left at the same time. So we went from having—one was away and then he came home in the summer, that summer. So we have all three kids at home and then all of a sudden, all three were gone. So we went from having three at home to just two at home, three

again in the summer, and then all of them were gone at the same time. And I was encouraged to always have something to look forward to whether it's a night away with your spouse, or just a walk with a friend, a trip to the mall, or a movie, or whatever, just have something on your calendar to look forward to. Because one thing that we haven't mentioned, Natalie, which I think is real important is I don't know if everybody on the call is familiar with the term "Helicopter Parents," but it's a big term right now for baby boomers because we are hovering around our children who are either in college or young adults in the workplace, and we're just hanging over them, really staying too involved in their lives. And I know that this often happens when children go away to college. The parents continue with, "Oh can I come this weekend? Will you come home this weekend? When will I see you next? When will I talk to you next? Why didn't you respond to my email? Bla, bla, bla. I saw you online, but you weren't responding." Whatever it is. What we have to remember is that definitely has an affect on them. Unfortunately, it doesn't help our relationship, I think it hinders it. And so it's important for our children to see us not getting stuck and able to move on. It's just so hard to find that balance, I know because I'm working at it right now. I'm an empty nester but my oldest son has just bought a home and lives in the city. My youngest son has just graduated and is working in New York, and then my daughter's away at college nearby, but lives away. And so I'm trying to find that balance between—I feel like picking up the phone and calling them often, but I feel oh gosh, I just don't want to do it every time I think of it, you know? And how often should I email? Should I send them this? Should I tell them that? Can this wait for a couple of days? Because I don't want them to think that I'm sitting around waiting to communicate with them. I don't want to be a pest.

Natalie: You know you're talking about Dotsie for the rest of our lives, you know, my mantra is, I need to be a good role model.

Dotsie: Exactly

Natalie: So whether they're home or not, you still want a role model that "you have a life." You'll have some tough days, so you want to be real. You know, it's a tough day today Hun, I miss you, but I'm doing just fine, and the cat's fine, grandma's fine. You know, can't wait to see you at Thanksgiving. But you know, two keys that really help with that pull that we have is, and write it down, put it in your bathroom, your car, *focus on yourself*. It's a habit we don't have as parents. But it will bring you back and keep you from chattering in your head, "I want to call them, I want to know what's happening, they didn't answer me," go oh yeah, this is for me to focus on me.

Dotsie: That's a great little reminder.

Natalie: The key is to say, what do I need right now and what am I feeling right now? So if you start to develop this inner dialogue with yourself, and get to unfold more parts of you, it could that right now, I just need to get out of here, right now

I've got twenty more minutes at the office and maybe I'm going to cry in the car and then when I get home, I'm not going to stay in the house. It's two things to remember and it's to really focus on yourself and the second, which I think is the hardest practice, is to lower your expectations. When we get into trouble, which is trouble of disappointments, hurt, resentment, feeling betrayed, is our expectations are unrealistic. How could they not call me and thank me for the care packages? How come they didn't answer when I called them and said look I need to know your schedule, da-dah da-dah-dah, in case of emergency? Those are expectations that you have but as Dotsie was saying, in the kid's world they're not thinking that way anymore. They're away from home; their thought is I don't have an authority right now, I don't have to punch in, clock in, report in, I'll handle it. I might not handle it like my mom and dad do, but believe me, I won't miss the flight, and if I don't feel well, I'll go get some Tylenol. And you want to let your kid's problem solve on their own, make their mistakes, and that's a motivation for you. I don't want to rescue them right now. If they really, really, need me, they're going to call me. So go back to you and say what do I need right now, what am I feeling right now? And if no one is available and you have a day off, and you're not working for whatever reason, have that plan. For me, on the weekends, it was getting into nature. I really relax more, so much, if I'm by water or in a forest, and just out of the house where the energy shifts for me. So it just having those reminders to yourself of this is a tuff time, and I don't have to push myself to start volunteering, or getting a new career, or start dating since I'm a single empty-nester, you know...the pusher has to get quiet, and the nurturer has to come forward to you, just like you've nurtured your kids, and say, this is a tough transition for me. I've never been here before and I've got to take it easy and be gentle with myself.

You know before I dropped by daughter off and helped my three nephews, because their mother had died and she was my best friend, I actually did some food at home I freeze just because I love to cook and the act of cooking is nurturing. And then I had a little box, just a left-over box from a gift. And I put quotations in there from me before I left; I put some little objects in there. This is going to sound silly but one of them was a ball and jacks. Just to remind me to play more because we forget to play as adults and its such an enlivening energy. A hula hoop, a jump rope, crayons; you just start a collection to awaken these parts of you.

Dotsie: Okay, so basically if you're feeling in a funk, reach out and start doing some of these things that you've been talking about. So let me just see if anybody has a question right now, about kind of the sad side and how do they go about getting help. Does anybody have any questions so far? Because I don't want to gloss over this if there is somebody who says, oh I just having such a hard time, can you be more specific, or something like that.

Natalie: You know one of the things that I would like to share if we have time. There is so much to talk about because it's such a range of relationships that you

have, feelings that you have, but a lot of questions I get are, you know, I'm not that in to my partner. So I wanted to give before we run out of time, a really successful, fun thing to do with your partner. If it's okay Dotsie, I'm going to describe it. It takes two minutes to do it.

Dotsie: Sure!

Natalie: It's called the Pieces of the Pie. Literally you draw this big circle and you divide into your pies. And here are the categories. Health, creativity, spiritually, relationships, career, finances, fun, and intellect. So what I did with my husband is I remember it so well and we still talk about it. We went outside with coffee in the morning in our backyard, and I said, you know, this will take a few minutes; this is a way for us to see just where we are today. And what you do with each of those areas, health and creativity, you look at how much time am I spending on my health? How much time am I spending having fun? How much time have our stimulated my intellect? How much time am I looking at my finances? So you can do this by yourself and if you have a partner, they do it at the same time. It is so safe; it is so telling in a matter of five minutes. And then from there, you look at, oh I see the gaps, I see where I'm out of balance. Then each of you kind has a chance to say okay, I'm just going to pick this one. For my husband who is very busy and runs his own business as well, he realizes he wasn't doing his guitar anymore and that's a fun piece for him. So no way was he going to take lessons, but we set up this timeline and said, okay, what about if you play the guitar for me? Saturday or Sunday. You want to do it during the week? Whatever. So it's little increments like that we start to do.

And the second partnering idea or to do for yourselves that has been so helpful is having a journal. It worked for this one family; it was amazing. He was a writer and she was a professor at a university but his verbal skills weren't very strong and she felt very abandoned. So I said okay, how about you just take a journal and each night, you pass the journal to each other and you write whatever you're thinking and feeling about in this transition and in the morning, leave it on the kitchen table. It worked for them. It wasn't threatening, there was no critic that would come out, they didn't have to be as vulnerable hearing themselves say it, and what came out of it that was so cool is they took time off and rented what my daughter use to call a home car, and they both discovered that what they wanted was to see America. And they never knew that. So for their vacation that's what they decided to do was keep a journal of what happened on the road. It's just amazing what can happen is what I'm trying to say.

Dotsie: Yeah, I agree and I think so much of our future lies in being still today. And that's something that I always promote, just be still and get to know yourself. And I think that's what happens when we're in our empty nest. We know who we are when it comes to taking care of our family and we know what our role is and we're darn good at it. But once that is taken away from us, we need to reevaluate and say okay, who am I now? And I think that one of the best ways to do that is

journaling and just being still and being prayful, and I love your idea of the pie. Can you run through those pieces of the pie again for our transcriptionist to make sure she got them all?

Natalie: Sure. Here's the categories. Health, creativity, spirituality, relationships, career, finances, fun, and intellect.

Dotsie: Okay and so basically what you're doing with yourself, I think this is excellent, and a perfect time to do it, because it's a big life transition, is going through each of those topics and sharing with one another where you are, where you stand, where you would like to go with them. Is that correct?

Natalie: That's it. And I would tell you as a sidebar that I've had a lot of kids, college kids call me. They call in the summer before they go and they call when they're gone. And they'll say, I'm writing this because my mom is driving me nuts. She's so depressed, she calls me too much, and it's really interfering with my life. I've referred her to your Web Natalie, but is there anything quick that you could recommend? This is the one I pass on. Whether your single, married, and I've even had college kids when they're homesick, and they send me an email, I've had them do this for themselves.

Dotsie: So it's like a little personal inventory.

Natalie: It's just a way to go inside and check it out in a matter of five minutes. It's fun.

Dotsie: Excellent, and that's good. And actually, it leads into taking this midlife crisis and turning it into an opportunity. I would have to say that I totally believe in the seasons of life. I actually chose to stay home when we had our children, and that was a decision that my husband and I had made prior to even having children; that I was going to be a stay-at-home mom. And so when I was looking at them leaving, and then what compounded it by me was that my mom became ill with cancer and was given six months to live. I had always volunteered. I don't know if any of the other women on the call volunteer like a crazy woman at the church, the school, the rec counsel, the neighborhood, etc, wherever the kids were involved, we did our fair share of volunteering and I had always done that.

And then when mom became ill, I had to say I can't do any of this volunteer work anymore. I mean because, you know, at one point this one thing that I was involved with became almost a full time job. What happened was I helped my family care for my mom, and then she died in like six and a half months. And then when she was gone, I was first of all saddened by the fact that mom was no longer with me, and then also by the fact that I was really feeling without purpose because I had dropped all the volunteer work except one project, and my children; one had his license, one was in Driver's Ed, well actually two were in Driver's Ed, and my kids just didn't need me. So for me, I was really feeling

without purpose and I think, again, that is what the empty nest is; women are feeling without purpose. But I believe our generation is seeing this midlife crisis, whether it is an empty nest or a divorce at midlife, or losing a job, or whatever a crisis could be at midlife, and we are just looking at it with different eyes, and experiencing it as an opportunity. So we go within and we say okay, what can I do here because I'm going to be living a heck of a lot longer which is another reason I think we're taking this more seriously at midlife because people aren't dying in their 60s as a rule anymore. I mean some people of course do, but overall, we have people living into their 90s and 100, and our generation is going to live longer than the greatest generation. We need to find purpose; we need to make this an opportunity. So those tools, the journaling and the one you just mentioned are really good ideas.

Do you have anything that could encourage the women on the call to look at this as a time of opportunity and really try to turn this into a time that is positive and not negative, especially after the first couple of months? You know, we kind of get use to the fact that the kids are gone and really settle into that new idea. So can you help us there, Natalie?

Natalie: Yes. I want to just tell you of two of my recent quotations. I love quotations. When I started facilitating women's groups back in 1982, I started a basket. I would just collect quotations. I want to just read these two for you right now. This first one is by a Balinese dancer and she said, "There's someone out there who needs you, so live your life so that person can find you." And it's what you're talking about. When we seek meaning in life, we don't just want to do the marketing, the laundry, and chit chat. You know part of what we loved about parenting was it gave us a wide range of feeling good about ourselves and discovering the dark and light sides about ourselves. So we seek that meaning.

The other quotation that I love by David Whyte who is a poet. He said "People are really hungry right now. One good word is bread for thousands. And people are so hungry. Say you one good word." So what that this, it's natural when we're grieving to get negative and say I don't have enough money, I'm alone, I don't have a partner, I can't think of what to do, you know? She gets to study abroad, I don't, she got a new laptop, I never had a laptop—it's normal that those voices are going to emerge. And so, this is part of grieving. You have to understand that you are truly in grieving—it's shocking, you're angry; you're scared—change, whether it's joyous or scary change, still completely takes you off balance. So what you want to do and it's a practice again, is really ask for help. And what I've notice in the six years is we don't ask the right person for help. Maybe we ask a friend that we've had for a long time which is great, but use your experts, go to your community colleges, go to your libraries, look on the Web. If you're interested in being a graphic designer, or if you're interested in mentoring kids from low-income families, if you're interested in going to Chef school, whatever you have a slight interest, do some research and then get an expert. And if money is an issue—which it is for all of us now, I mean these are tough times—

you can do a barter and say, you know, if you mentor me on this and teach me Photoshop or computer skills, I could deliver meals for you.

So you want to start thinking that way where you think outside of the box, and number two, you shift your perceptions. Always let yourself empty your well, which means go ahead and let yourself have a good cry. I've had parents call me and say I need a good cry and I can't get it out. I'm irritable, I've got a headache, my nose is stuffy, I have a backache. I can't seem to cry. My thing is go rent Terms of Endearment. Rent a movie.

Dotsie: Oh, I never thought of that.

Natalie: Because sometimes we are so busy and so in our heads and then we drop into this vacant space, we need a sad movie to jumpstart that flow of grieving. So you do that for one. And number two, you really ask for help. And you really like Dotsie was saying, make a plan for yourself, and really like our kids are, in some ways, they are paralleling what we are doing. They're seeking new stimulation and new dreams and new friendships. We're doing the same thing but for a different reason. Try to remember that, you know, you're a seeker now. So let yourself have those big dreams as well as the small dreams. And I'm telling you right now for women, there is so much support out there. There are so many resources and financial support at adult classes that are maybe twenty dollars, fifty dollars. And my other key that I talk about often because I experienced it myself, is step out the door, and I did work full time, but step out and say okay, I'm going to go listen to this book lecture or I'm going to this music concert. And if you don't like it, get up and leave because you're feeling so vulnerable right now and a part of you might get caught up in that, "I can't do this right now," and that's okay. So if you give yourself permission, "I'm going to go to this event and if I don't like it, I get to come back," usually you do hang a little bit longer than you thought. And check your local colleges for live music. The arts for us right now in this major transition are extremely healing. Painting, drawing, music, dancing. I had two women start piano lessons at their local college. Another joined a chorus, she took lessons and I did that as well, I took a music lesson. You just have to let yourself experiment with what you might like. Ceramics, whatever it is and they're not that expensive, these classes.

Dotsie: Yeah and you know, Natalie, I have to say that because sometimes people will say that oh everything takes money. Well, you know, we are worth it, first of all. And we're busy sending away these care packages to kids...you could take that twenty bucks and go sign up for the course at your local, ah, not community college, but I know our high schools have community ed at night and those courses are so inexpensive and its just to take your mind off of missing the child and all of the negativity, and trying to focus on something new and different.

Natalie: I just want to acknowledge because I've seen this over the years, that the first stage is really being able to empty your glass and pour it out; the

grieving. And one of the things that we did in our group one-on-one, is to write a letter first, just for yourself, about everything you loved about being a parent. Because this way, you're not just burying the sorrow, and what's missing for you, you're acknowledging, you know? As much as I hated bringing those snacks to soccer class, you know, I also loved it. It made me feel good to be a nurturer. So you write this letter about what you loved about parenting. And then the next letter you write is what am I going to love with my free time? And if a little part of you slips out and goes, "nothing, I can't think of anything to love," you just continue to write and I'm telling you it is just like a storm...the sun will truly come. You don't stay in the storm forever. It will come all of a sudden and it could be that you just take photographs in your garden in the morning, you know? Photograph your neighborhood. You have no idea what will come until you show up with yourself.

Dotsie: We only have a few more minutes, but I did want to ask a question about some women are probably wondering what is—I mean, how often should I be in touch with my child that's away. How often should I—I know you say don't have expectations, but do we talk once a week, do we email once a week, and do you recommend getting Web Cams?

Natalie: No.

Dotsie: Okay but everybody does things differently.

Natalie: And that's a point, Dotsie. At this stage of our lives, this major transition, as adults now, we learn to live with paradoxes. Here's a paradox, "Well, I don't think anyone should have a Web cam." "Oh you want to have a Web cam? Okay." So in other words, it's difficult. I tell the college kids this as well as the parents, as well as the professors; living with paradoxes will give you more peace. Give yourself permission to hold both energies. And on a specific level, you can't compare how you're dealing with this transition to how your best friend's doing it because they don't know the inner works of what really went on in your family.

Dotsie: Right—exactly.

Natalie: Sometimes we don't reveal. We don't reveal drugs all the time, we don't reveal that our kid was a lazy slob or a procrastinator, we don't reveal a DUI, and there are certain things that are private in a family, and there are other families who do reveal. There is no rule. So what I'm saying is it has not successfully worked to ask a college kid to call Tuesday night at 8:00, because it makes them watch a clock, it gets them in trouble with their parents, you know, it is a setup to fail.

Dotsie: So you don't recommend, "Just call me every evening," you don't recommend that?

Natalie: No, I don't. I do not. What I recommend and this is a time and it is so hard to practice, to trust your kids, you know? You're going to call and they're going to be in the midst of something and you're going to wish you hadn't called them. You know I would call my daughter and she'd say, "Mom, mom, I'm whispering. We're in the middle of my solitaire acapella song group. We're rehearsing."

Dotsie: Oh, and then you hang up and you feel like gosh why did I do that.

Natalie: You're going to make a mistake; they're going to make a mistake. You're going to be so angst for whatever reason one day you're terribly missing them you know, all rules out the window, I'm calling I'm demanding they call me back today. That's a paradox. You get to do that. You get to say, "You know what, I'm feeling little today, I'm kind of angst, could you just either pop me an email, tell me anything about your day, or could you just leave a voice mail or even call me. You get to do both. So it doesn't work to have a set time. It doesn't work to have these expectations of you know, you're going to email or call. They just feel badly about themselves. And they feel held on a string.

Dotsie: Yeah and I just think communications, because I'm going through this right now with my kids. We've never done the "call me at such and such," we've never done that. And we've always been we're in touch when we feel the need to be I touch whether it's them or us. That's kind of what I'm going through right now with them being totally out of the house and out of college, and that kind of thing. It's just interesting because other families do it differently. I have a sister who hears from her kids every Wednesday night and every Sunday night. And it works for them but for me it's like oh my gosh, what if it's Monday night and I need to talk to my daughter?

Natalie: And I'll tell you. A big complaint I hear and it's surprising, is "You know, I keep emailing him and I leave him messages on his cell. He doesn't answer emails and he doesn't answer his cell." You will not believe this but literally two weeks went by before a family heard from their child. That's excruciating.

Dotsie: Yeah, I don't like that.

Natalie: But you can't control it, that's the point. You're going to hurt, it's going to make you angry, and you're going to let them know, that was too scary for me. My nephews, some of them are not good at email. They don't like it. They don't want to respond when they have to respond. I have that feeling and I've had to work on it for years. If the phone use to ring at home I would think oh my god, I've got to answer that. Now its like, "No, you get to pause." If you don't want to answer that now you can call them later. So we are all kind of in this learning curve of our expectations and self care. Self care is a new piece every day. It's a new piece of life.

Dotsie: Okay. Do you have anything that you would like to add before we close? Well actually, I would like to add something before we see if anybody has any questions and that is to please visit www.nabbw.com because Natalie has gosh, probably over 30 articles archived there and I'm telling you; everything that we have addressed is in those articles and some are just very specific, and very helpful. And then Natalie, do you want to tell them about your site and the community that you have there because I think that's very supportive.

Natalie: Yes actually everything is free online. There is a free newsletter, the message board, it's active, caring parents that respond immediately giving support, asking questions, you know we do blogs, we do stories of the month, there is no membership to Empty Nest Support Services. You know we're building community because we've lost community when our kids left school and we were a part of that school. So I just encourage you to come for support, if you want a private consultation, if you want me to come speak, help you start a support group in your community. I've done that and then I come back in six months for a follow up; you know we're doing a new journaling online class, I'm doing private retreats with empty nesters just so they get individual, step-by-steps of how to move through it and how to deal. You know we just don't have time today, but a big shock and issue is the transition when they come back at Thanksgiving.

Dotsie: Oh boy, that's a whole, other talk.

Natalie: And how do you really, really have a healthy relationship with your married kids, with your college kids, with your kids that are working abroad or working full time? It's a very big issue. So keep visiting the Web and hopefully we'll have some good tips and support for you so you never go through this alone. Just don't go through it alone. Get some help because it is a very tough transition, and then it's so joyous and so freeing. It's like that V-8 commercial, "Oh my God, I could have had a V-8!" You're not there yet until you're there. So be careful of yourself.

Dotsie: Right, right. Does anybody on the call have a question? Sometimes it takes people a couple of minutes to get the courage to ask a question. And if anybody doesn't want to ask and you'd like to email Natalie after the call or at a later date—Natalie, you want to share your email address?

Natalie: Yes, it's Natalie@emptynestsupport.com.

Dotsie: Okay did you have anything else you wanted to share?

Natalie: They can also pop in on the Web if they have a question, that's fine as well.

Dotsie: Okay, that sounds good. Alright Natalie. I just want to thank you for all of your expertise and for supporting women today and we will be in touch from the association, and have a great rest of the day!

Natalie: Thank you for having me, Dotsie.

Dotsie: Okay, you're welcome. Good-bye.