

I lie in bed with my clothes on over my pajamas, the covers pulled up to my neck. Even though the lights are out I must leave nothing showing for fear that my 16-year-old son, Jay, might walk in and see that I am dressed. Jay is used to seeing me go to sleep in nightclothes and if he sees me with my long-sleeved shirt over my T-shirt and my stone faded jeans over my pajamas, and my socks and boots on while I'm supposed to be sleeping... he'll know something is weird. That could blow the whole thing.

So I lie here in my bed with lights out, thinking... No, more like worrying... My bedroom door is open as usual. Nothing can appear different this night.

The light in Jay's room spills through the crack under his closed door. It's 1:50 a.m. and he's still awake! Why doesn't he go to sleep? The men are coming in ten minutes...

They said they'd be here at 2 a.m. I struggle to take long and even breaths as if I'm fast asleep, although my heart wants to break free from my body. Breeeeathe... innnn... Breeeeathe... ouuuut... It has to sound right. I concentrate on the sound of my breath. Jay will hear me and then maybe he'll fall asleep.

I hear my husband, Charles, going into the closet by the front door where we hid two large gym bags filled with Jay's T-shirts, some pants, socks, underwear, gloves, vests, sweaters and shoes. I worry that it gets cold in New England, where he's being taken, but I think I've packed enough warm clothes.

I hear Charles quietly close the apartment door. I hear the lock turn softly. Along with the bags is an envelope with a letter to Jay and the documentation we were asked to send with him. If all goes well, Charles will meet the two men outside our apartment building and the bags and papers will be in their car before they come up.

It's 2 a.m. now. They should be here any minute. What do I do if he's still awake when they come?

My eyes are glued to the clock, 2:01 a.m... 2:04 a.m... Finally his light goes out. Please, God, I hope he falls asleep quickly...

They're still not here. Why aren't they here yet? In the dark I'm thinking: Are they coming? All of our work, months of agonizing, hoping against hope... gone, wasted... I'm afraid to get out of bed and peek through the window shade to see if Charles is talking to the men downstairs. Jay might come in.

I can't stand the tension. I want to scream.

What if they don't come?

What if Jay gets up and decides to go out and we miss this opportunity? My thoughts are racing. I didn't really want them to take my baby. I had wanted him to become a man here, at home...

Outside, on the dark and empty sidewalk, Charles stands at the curb next to a fire hydrant, bags at his side. He waits. His eyes search for the car. Down the street a car turns, moves toward him but then accelerates as it reaches him. He looks at his watch, looks up the street again. He takes a few steps before he realizes he's pacing back and forth.

Five minutes pass. He looks up toward our windows sitting in the face of the brick apartment building, hoping to see Jay's bedroom light out, even though he knows Jay's window is on the other side of the building and can't be seen. He tugs at the arm of his coat, rolls his sleeve back. His watch says 2:05. They're late.

Maybe not.

A white Lincoln town car turns into the service road, its headlights bouncing through the shadows of parked cars. Yes, he sees two big men in the front seat as the car comes closer, slows down, and then stops in front of the open space, at the hydrant where he stands.

The driver steps out and walks to Charles with his hand outstretched.

"Charles?"

Charles reaches to take the man's hand in his. "I'm glad you're here, I was beginning to worry."

"I'm sorry, we're a few minutes late. It's nice to meet you. I'm Brad from Giving Help," he apologizes. "We had a good trip from Boston, made good time, but we got caught in some construction on I-95. This is my associate, Peter."

Charles hands the bags and the envelope with papers to Peter after shaking their hands. Peter puts the bags and documentation in the trunk of the car, but places the letter in the front seat.

"What happens now?" asks Charles, curious about what is to come.

"Don't worry about a thing. We do this all the time," says Brad. "We'll go up and if Jay's sleeping you'll wake him up and introduce him to us. Then you and your wife will say your good-byes and leave the apartment."

"What happens if Jay resists you?" asks Charles.

In a confident manner that suggests he's been down this path before, Brad answers, "I can tell you with great confidence that 98% of the time after the parents leave, the youngster cooperates and comes with us willingly because he knows it's just him and us. If he resists, we give him the truth: there is no choice about coming with us. The choice is about *how* he comes with us. We let him know that we have full authority from his parents and that he can either come willingly or he can come shackled, in plastic restraints. When he hears that and he knows his parents aren't there, he'll cooperate.

"We'll call you every couple of hours on the trip up which should take about six hours, to let you know how Jay is doing. Most kids sleep on the ride up. He can stretch out across the back seat. If Jay needs a pit stop or a snack, we'll stop and all go in together. Trust me, there's no danger of Jay bolting so don't worry about that.

"Some time during the trip, after we know that he's calm and cooperative, we'll give him your letter. We want to be sure he's in the right frame of mind to read it, and won't just rip it up in anger. We do this because he'll regret it later if he does. This letter will be his only contact with you for a while, once he enters his program."

"O.K." Charles takes in a strong, deep breath of the chilled night air and moves forward, signaling them in a determined voice. "Let's do it."

The clock radio says 2:12 a.m. when I hear the front door lock turn, ever so softly, a tiny click. I get up and see Charles tiptoe in quietly, leading the way for the two men behind him.

It's finally happening!

Help is coming for my son!

Charles enters Jay's room first, still wearing his green L.L. Bean jacket. I follow him, and Brad and Peter come next. Brad is tall and stocky, the kind of man you'd see standing in front of a nightclub, a bodyguard type. Peter is even taller but not quite as wide. Our apartment seems to get much smaller.

Jay is fast asleep by now.

Charles turns on the light and begins to shake him gently. "Jay, get up. Wake up, we have someone here for you to talk to..."

I hear myself thinking, *Right, we have someone here for you to talk to, at 2 o'clock in the morning...*

Jay slowly opens his eyes. Groggy and saying nothing, he looks at Charles and then at the men. He looks very confused and draws back as if to protect himself.

"Jay, this is Brad and Peter and they're here to talk to you."

Brad directs us, "O.K., just say your good-byes."

"Good-bye, Jay," Charles says softly.

"Jay, we love you a lot, and we'll see you soon," I say as I turn and leave the room, hiding my tears. My adrenalin is racing.

I remind myself that things are so bad that we have to do this drastic thing. We *have* to say good-bye like this. Everything has deteriorated. We have nothing left but manipulations and intimidation.

I put on my jacket and we leave the apartment. We take the elevator downstairs where we let ourselves into the storage area and then the laundry room as planned. We know that at 2 a.m. it will be empty and dark and we can sit there and look out at Jay and the men when they leave the building, without being seen.

About ten minutes go by before we hear the elevator door open. We watch as Jay steps out behind Brad, with Peter following, the three of them walking single file.

"They didn't restrain him, thank God."

We run to the storage room door, open it a crack and try to position ourselves so we can both see the street outside. We watch these two big men towering over Jay. We can't hear what they're saying. The two men stand by the car with Jay and talk to him for a while. Then Jay gets into the back seat. Brad stands by the driver's door, his hands animated in discussion with Jay through the open window.

After about ten minutes of this both Brad and Peter get into the car, start the engine, and drive away. *Our son is on his way!*

Finally!

Eight months have been spent trying to get help for Jay. Effort after futile effort has been made, running here, running there, listening to "I'm sorry, we have no authority..." and "We have no jurisdiction..." At last he is going to get help...

Back upstairs in the apartment, it is so quiet. Jay's light is still on. We go in to turn it off, glad for the opportunity to be in his room and feel him. It's not enough. I feel empty inside, as if a piece of me is missing.

As I look around a shock goes through me. There on his chair are the clothes he wore that day. *Jay was so disoriented that he left with the men in his pajamas!* My heart goes out to him. It wants to race the highways and take him his clothes. My only son is in a car in his pajamas with two strangers!

I remind myself that this is all necessary. It has to be like this. Didn't we try everything else? There was no other way...

Neither Charles nor I can sleep. We toss and turn in bed, each with our own thoughts, sleep nothing more than an elusive hope, waiting for the phone to ring. At 4:30 a.m. the phone finally rings.

"Hi, this is Brad. We're traveling through Connecticut and I just wanted to let you know that Jay is fine. He's been cooperating. He's sleeping. We'll make a pit stop when he wakes up."

"Great, thanks a lot for calling," I say. "Has he read our letter yet?"

"Not yet, but we'll give it to him when he wakes up."

"O.K.," I say.

"We'll call you again. Bye."

"Bye."

We sleep fitfully. We both feel as though we haven't slept at all. At about 7:30 a.m. there is another call.

"Hi, Brad here. Jay is fine, we're on the Mass Pike."

"Did he read our letter?" I ask.

"I gave it to him a while ago."

"Is he O.K. about it?"

"He seems fine, quiet."

"Do you know if he still has it or did he rip it up?"

"I didn't hear any ripping noises and I didn't see anything," Brad says.

"Thanks so much, Brad. I really appreciate the way you're calling."

"That's no problem."

"You know, he left wearing his pajamas. Can you stop somewhere and let him get dressed before you get to the school?"

"We were planning to stop for breakfast soon. We'll all go into the men's room and he can dress then. Would you like to speak to him?"

"Could I?" I ask.

"Sure. Hold on a second." After a few seconds, Brad comes back on. "Now I just want you to know this. I've told Jay that if he shows you any disrespect or any funny business, I yank the phone."

"O.K.," I say.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Jay, are you O.K.?"

"I'm O.K., I guess."

"Jay we had to do it this way. We need you to get help."

"U-huh," he says.

"Do you know where you're going?" I ask.

"Nooo...," he draws it out.

"You're being taken up to a school that's not only a school but a place where they will work with you on your life. You'll get counseling. You need to work on yourself—your anger and your motivation. I want you to know that we love you very much and we want you to be happy and we want you to be with us again. The right way."

"O.K., Mom." His voice is tearing me up.

"I love you. Take care of yourself. Hold on to the letter. It might be our only contact for awhile," I say, struggling against the tears that I know will eventually have their way with me. "We'll talk when we can."

"O.K. Bye Mom."

And he is gone.

I find out later that Jay has spoken to not only Charles and me, but to our daughters Laura and Val along his journey north. I am very satisfied. Every single one of us has gotten to say our good-byes to Jay with love and care in our hearts and voices. Jay has heard from each of us how much we love him and how we all stand behind him, in full support. Now, finally, after eight months of frustration, eight months of crying, pleading, trying to reason with anyone in power and meeting nothing but stone walls, I am hopeful again that my son will get what he needs, for the first time in a long time. I love him more than I ever knew I could feel. I have hope for my son.

Lying in bed, the light of a new day painting the walls of our bedroom, Charles and I are quiet. Together. Not saying a word yet speaking volumes in a warm, comforting quiet, that covers us like a blanket. The kind of quiet that battle weary soldiers share when there is a pause and they stop to breathe again.

I imagine our son in the hushed quiet, sitting in the back seat of a white Lincoln town car, speeding into the black night, wondering where he is going, alone with these two big strangers. I imagine him watching the coming dawn. I wish for the most beautiful colors to light the sky, so he might not be scared.

I picture him opening the envelope Charles delivered to the men. I see him holding the letter. I imagine how he must be feeling. I read the words again, in my own mind, as I imagine them racing through his own. I wish for our minds to meet out there on that highway.

This is what the letter says:

Dear Jay,

By now you must be wondering what's going on. Please don't rip this letter up because it may be your only contact with us for a while.

We love you and we want you to have a good life and a good future. We've tried everything but nothing has worked. This is our last resort. We really want you in our family. You are our only son. It hurts us to watch what you are doing to yourself.

We love you very much. We want to make sure that you have everything in life that you need. You're a great guy. We have great respect for you. But it's like you're hiding behind a shell—a hard shell.

And you can't grow that way.

For a long time now we're just watching you not doing any of the normal things for your life, for your age. We worry about you. We're afraid for your welfare and at times we've been afraid for your life. We can't sit by and allow you to hurt yourself like this, watching your values go off. We know you don't agree with us right now. You don't think anything is wrong.

You're 16—you don't see the value of your life. You don't see what we see.

Please be open to what's ahead of you and learn all you can. It will help you to find out for yourself why you have so much anger and no interest in working for your future. We look forward to the day when we can see you, who you genuinely are, with feelings and dreams. You have a chance to make a good life for yourself. We want you to be together with us again and part of our family. We all already miss you.

Always remember that

We love you,

*Love,
Mom and Dad*

I was to learn learn six months later that this was an intervention, a fight for our son's life.