'Those boys are all going to be all right'
C.J. proudly graduates from Fernway; Michael has difficulty adjusting to camp

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It was the first day of summer camp. More change.

No way, said Michael.

"I'm not riding a bus, I'm not going to camp. You can't make me," he told Clem every day since the end of May, when Clem announced he had enrolled Michael and C.J. in Hawken School's summer day camp. Every time, Clem calmly assured Michael that he would like camp, that he would make new friends and told him that, no matter what, he was going to camp.

"I have to go to work, and you have to go to camp. That's the deal."

Sometimes, Clem looked at his middle child and prayed for the help to reach him. "He seems to be getting worse, not better," Clem said. "He told me he didn't want school to end, and I think some of that had to do with leaving behind something that had started when Lisa was alive."

Michael also hated that C.J. was leaving Fernway School. Earlier in the month, C.J. proudly joined his fellow fourth-graders in the formal "clap-out" ceremony that annually marks their departure to Woodbury Elementary for fifth- and sixth-graders.

Dressed in the same clothes he wore at his mother's funeral - including the angel pin in his lapel - C.J. walked like a newly inaugurated president through the sea of hands extended to high-five him. School secretary Lorene Rider erupted in tears.

"He did it," she said, referring to Clem as she watched him hug C.J. "They're going to be OK, those boys are all going to be all right," she said, shaking her head as tears streamed down her face. "A lot of people weren't sure Clem could pull it off, but he did it."

Michael watched his father doting on C.J. and his thumb went into his mouth. "I don't want C.J. to leave," he said later as he stood on the school's front lawn. "I want him to stay here."

'I want another mommy'

Michael feared change, and Clem knew it. Yet there were times when the 7-year-old seemed more eager than Clem to get on with life. The week before camp started, he stunned Clem with one simple question: "Dad, are you ever going to get married again?"

Clem stared at his son. "I don't know, Michael. Maybe. Why?"
Michael looked up at him, his brow furrowed. "I want another mommy."

Clem's mind reeled as C.J. and Christopher, who overheard Michael, immediately chimed in, bantering about names of potential candidates, most of whom were teachers or teachers aides at their school.

Clem recovered, and started to laugh. "Well, whoever it is, it'll be someone who loves you as much as I do and who will understand your love for your mommy. And she'll understand why we have all her pictures around this place."

Later, Clem was pensive. "Michael took my breath away with that question," he said. "I didn't even know he was thinking that way. And look how they all started talking about possible candidates. I guess they really need a mother."

'The old roller coaster'

When Hawken's bus arrived at 8:07 on Monday, June 15, Michael cowered behind Clem as C.J. ran to the bus. Michael was teary, but got on board.

Once again, Clem leaned on C.J. to ease Michael's way. "I hate asking this of you, but make sure he gets something to eat," Clem told C.J. before the bus came. "Look out for him a little, OK?" C.J. nodded his head.

Clem had mixed feelings about laying that responsibility on C.J. "I hate saying, "You're the big brother.' In fact, I didn't even use those words, but I guess he knows that's what I mean anyway."

That evening, though, Clem was buoyed. Michael was full of stories about his first day of camp. "I think things went real well," said Clem. "I feel sooo good. Sooo good."

His relief was short-lived. The next day, Michael was sobbing when he left; on Wednesday, he refused and Clem had to carry him onto the bus.

"I didn't want to do that," said Clem. "It was hard. Here I am trying to be firm with Michael, and C.J. wanted to sit in the back of the bus with the other kids but I had to make him come up and sit with Michael."

Clem's voice broke. "I don't know, some mornings I just wonder how long I can keep it going. I get to work and just feel so depressed at times. I think things are going well and then - wham! - the old roller coaster."

The following Monday, Clem left work at 11:30 a.m. to pick up Michael from camp and take him to a hospital emergency room. Michael's knee had a large gash in it from a fall on the playground, and the camp nurse said it needed stitches.

Clem was despondent. "Oh, and it went so well this morning. Michael started running down the street when the bus came but I grabbed him and just laughed. I told him, "C'mon, Michael. You know you have to get on the bus.' He walked with me, gave me a hug and a kiss, asked when he'd see me again and then sat at the back of the bus - a first."

When he arrived at Kaiser's emergency room at the Cleveland Clinic, Clem took several deep breaths before he carried Michael through the doors.

"I haven't been here since that last time with Lisa," he said. "It's tough coming back here."
'I'll be right here'

The attending doctor pulled Clem aside. "This is hard for parents, but there's no other way," he said. "Michael will have to be restrained while we inject [a numbing anesthetic- directly into the wound. This procedure takes about two minutes and three or four of us will have to hold him perfectly still."

Clem walked over to Michael, who looked terrified as he sat on the gurney and sucked his thumb. Leaning into his face and holding him with both arms, Clem told him, "This is going to be hard, I'm not going to try to kid you. They're going to put a needle in your knee, and it's going to hurt, but it's actually a good thing because then you won't feel any pain when they put the stitches in."

Michael started to cry. "No, no, no," he said as Clem cradled him.

"I'll be right here with you," Clem told him.

For several anguishing minutes, three staff members and Clem held down Michael as he writhed and screamed. A male nurse slipped off Michael's sneakers and, in a friendly but firm voice, told Michael he was stronger than the 7-year-old. "You can fight me if you want, but I'm still going to hold you down," he said, smiling. "It will hurt less if you don't fight the whole time."

As soon as Michael saw the long needle headed for his knee, he wailed. Another nurse lowered the head of his bed so he couldn't see what was happening, and he began to calm down as the injections took effect.

After several minutes, Clem pointed out to Michael that the doctor was stitching. "I don't feel anything," he told Clem, his eyes still teary but his face relaxed. He reached for Clem's face, tugging on his bottom lip and his hair. "I feel you, Dad," he said.

"Oh, and I feel you, too," Clem said, kissing him. "I love you. I'm so proud of you. You're being so brave."

Several days later, Michael insisted on returning to camp. He never again cried in the morning and always got on the bus without a fight.

"It's as if he found his courage," an amazed Clem said.

'This feels so right'

By the end of the month, Clem had found his own courage. It took him eight months to get there, but Clem was finally ready to pack up most of Lisa's clothes and ship them to her sisters.

One box went to Andy, another to Debbie; two others went to Beanie.

"It felt right, I felt like it was time," Clem said after returning from the Federal Express office. "I sent most of it to Beanie because I thought she could use them the most and Lisa had wanted her to have most of the stuff."

He held on to a few things. "I didn't send her two denim jumpers, the ones she wore so much in her last few months. I couldn't bring myself to part with those. Not yet, anyway. But I gave away some of the stuff I originally hadn't planned to let go of. I kept some T-shirts, those things that aren't gender specific that the boys can wear down the road."
“This feels so right,” he said.

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