

Saying farewell to strings, sealing wax, and the little boat ride in Ocean City

Before you become a mother, you expect to notice that your children are growing up when they reach the key milestones: birthdays, holidays, the beginning of the school year.

What you don't expect are the other unexpected moments that come without any warning. For me, many of those happen on our annual beach vacation.



Every year I discover that our children are more confident when facing the waves, more capable of resolving differences with the other children, less disappointed when they lose a boardwalk game, and-this year-actually able to use the outdoor shower.

This year I was astonished to realize I was actually able to sit on the beach.



I still did my share of jumping with children in the waves and standing there frantically yelling my younger son's name into the wind. But more than once I was able to sit on the beach while our children played happily with their father or grandfather or one of their uncles or just with their cousins.

At one point I glanced over at a dad nearby and saw he was reading. Reading! On the beach! His children were playing on their own. And then it hit me. One day soon I might be reading, too. It must be a relief, in some ways, but it also makes me a bit wistful.

But the moment that hit me hardest was one I hadn't expected.

John and I had taken the boys to Ocean City, Md., to enjoy a few rides.



While John waited in line for ride tickets, the boys and I headed over to the boat ride. It's the same ride that was there when John was a child, and he has many memories of riding in circles

on the brightly painted boats.

As we were peeking through the fence at the boats, I noticed a sign with a measuring stick. I couldn't quite make out what it said because Leo's head was in the way.

And then it hit me. I couldn't see the sign because our little boy was too tall for the ride.



Also distressing is the grammatical error, of course.

There had to be a mistake. He's only 6 ½. We should have years left to enjoy the ride. Shouldn't he be bored with it before he outgrows it? But the friendly ride operator came over with the verdict: "He's too tall for this one!"

WHAT?

Leo wasn't disappointed, and Daniel wasn't going to ride any ride that his brother had outgrown—and certainly not alone.

"I'll only ride it if you find someone who looks like him and has the same name," he said in his teasing voice.



I'm so honored to be their mother and to watch our sons grow. I love celebrating their milestones and the successes and discoveries along the way.

I knew we'd leave behind diapers and sippy cups and car seats. It just never occurred to me that we were going to leave behind that little boat ride.

And I'm glad now I didn't know last summer's ride was the last.

