



Buh-bye Mama!

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People thought we were flat out crazy when we sent our son to school just a couple months after his first birthday. The automatic reaction we got was: “But you’ll be going with him, right?” to which the answer was that I would of course be going with him... to drop him off. For the four hours between drop-off and pickup, five (sometimes six) days a week, our 15-month-old would be on his own with no Mommy, no Dada, and no diapers.

While I understood the obvious apprehensions of sending your child to school, especially at such an early age, I can’t say I experienced any of them. As the first day of school grew closer, family members got more and more anxious, as did other moms around me who were getting ready to take the plunge.

Meanwhile, my son was wearing his backpack around the house and trying to walk out the door every chance he got. As eager as my baby was to walk out the door, I was twice as eager to be



the one to help him do it. A couple weeks later, that day finally came.

Freshly showered, and all smiles, Vishnu ran in circles around the house in his brand new t-shirt emblazoned with his school's logo. One quick stop for hugs from the grandparents later, we were on our way. Frank Sinatra bellowed away as we danced in the car for the entire half an hour ride, and my son gleefully shouted “yyyyay!!” at regular intervals. We were ready.

It helped that the school believed in a gradual adjustment process. For the first couple of weeks, each parent waited, and as each of the new children got too tired, cranky, or, worst of all, couldn't stop crying from when they walked in, they could leave. As great of a system as it was though, it was nothing but suspense as all the moms nervously sat in the waiting room straining their ears every time they heard a cry to try and figure out if it was their child. There was just one exception to that: me. It's not that there weren't tears- there definitely were! Somehow, I had just already mentally prepared for them, and knew they would be gone as quickly as they had come.

The tears came on the first day as I handed Vishnu over to a complete stranger, they came on the second day as I handed him over again, but then there were fewer tears as he walked in on the third day, and by the fourth, he casually strolled through the gate without so much as a second glance at me. I started carrying an iPad fully loaded with Downton Abbey for when all the other moms left with their children, and I was inevitably on my own for another hour since my son had no interest in leaving school, but his time hadn't been fully extended yet.

The whole thing should have really felt like a slam-dunk. Before my son was even born, I had decided that if I could only give him one thing as a parent, that one thing would be the ability to walk into completely foreign environments, and seamlessly adapt, adjust, and flourish, all on his own. I had already accepted that, in order for this to happen, it would mean a lot more letting go and a lot less holding on; I would have to love him in a way that gave him wings, and not in a way that would hold him back. Vishnu's easy adjustment to school at just fifteen months should have been reassurance that we were on the right track, but something seemed to be missing.

Sure enough, Vishnu's time got fully extended, and I no longer had to spend my mornings in the waiting room. We sang and danced our way through drive after drive, he happily strolled through the gates, and, four hours later, he walked out through those same gates and we drove home.

One sunny morning, just like any other, we pulled up to school just as The Beatles' Here Comes the Sun started streaming through the speakers. My dancing partner put on his backpack and we walked towards the school gates, taking our usual “big steps” seeing who could reach their foot further or higher. At the gate, he let go of my hand, held his teacher's hand, and started to walk in, just like so many days before.

After taking a few steps, he suddenly stopped, turned around and took a step in my direction. Then, my little baby looked right up at me, and, with a giant grin, waved and said “Buh-bye, Mama!” before turning right back around, taking his teacher's hand, and disappearing into the building. As tears sprung into my eyes this time, I not only knew that my son was going to be just fine, but that he hadn't forgotten that as he walked forward towards new, exciting things in his life, his mom would never be too far away; always watching, and always beaming with love and pride. Now that felt like the ultimate slam-dunk!

