

# A parent's perspective on taking a daughter to college

BY LUCY KE

**Editor's Note:** On Aug. 23, Lucy Ke brought her daughter Sam, a freshman sociology major from Avondale Estate, Ga., to Birmingham-Southern for Move-In Day for new first-year students. She was so moved by her day on the Hilltop that upon returning home she sent an e-mail about the experience to an acquaintance who is a BSC alumna. That BSC alumna forwarded it to another BSC alum and that BSC alum forwarded it to another BSC alum and so on until it ended up in the e-mail box of the 'Southern magazine editor. The majority of that e-mail is reprinted below. As Lucy Ke says, "I've been telling everyone how wonderful BSC is!"

I apologize deeply for this long e-mail, but when giving praise it's nice to be lavish. I can only describe the Birmingham-Southern moving-in experience as a *loving* one, which would sound pretty weird to some, given the controlled chaos of the day, but it reinforced how much BSC cares about its students, and how well they get it. True to the cover letter that arrived days before, "cold drinks and warm smiles" were available to us throughout the day. On the way in, we were greeted not only by a *pleasant* security guard, but students standing in the rain, wearing crazy hats and trash bags for raincoats, all waving and smiling, some saying, "Good morning! Welcome to BSC!"

If you had questions, the students gladly answered them. I did not pass a single person who failed to smile and bid us good morning. Upon seeing Sam's little brother Harry, Tyler Peterson, our first-rate admissions guy, said, "Hey, we need to get you a disposable camera!" This was invaluable to a 10-year-old who felt he was saying good-bye to his sister for a long time.

When we parked outside the dorm, several students were waiting to help unload our car and carry everything up to the room. While unpacking and figuring out how to rearrange colossal dorm furniture, RAs [resident advisors] would step in to welcome, advise, and chat. One helped us move furniture around. A handsome pre-med upperclassman (whom Sam had met at a previous summer camp) came around with cold water bottles and said, "Oh, I guess you decided to come here! Great!"

Then came a late lunch for Sam and me in the cafeteria, which was fresher and more delicious than I'd imagined. The check-out lady said, "Oh, this must be your lucky day! Your change comes to \$7.77." She did not know that everything in my life had been that way all week—my odometer was in the sevens, like the check numbers in my checkbook! So I joked, "I think it's a sign that my daughter is in the right school" and the lady held both my hands when she returned my change, saying, "Oh, she is, dear, and don't you worry, we'll take good care of her."

Convocation was unbelievable. The choir sang an arrangement of Mother Teresa's recollection of her 1946 Darjeeling train ride—"It was in that train that I heard God telling me to go work with the poor in the slums"—first through a student/soloist with a soaring soprano, then a second time with the entire concert choir. Brief, but very beautiful.

Sheri Salmon [dean of enrollment management] talked about the new incoming class, their diverse points of origin, and their high school accomplishments, even down to the number of Johns, Dans and Davids, Sarahs, Marys, and Lisas. It was a funny demographic profiling of 505

new student faces (49 of them transfers).

President Pollick talked about "the silent ride" that would carry the parents home, and the delighted "screams of first freedom" that would be heard from the freshman dorms, but also that students would start thinking, "Oh my God, what am I doing here?" and homesickness would set in. "This usually happens around 3 a.m." His point was that this was the season of life that "required" homesickness of the students, and pain of parting from the parents. It was natural and necessary. He said that if students wanted or needed to, they could come talk to him.

A distinguished professor [William Nicholas, history] talked about the cultural influences of their generation, and how, as a freshman, he had come in as a superstar high school student expecting to beat the pants off his college, only to be dismayed by an "F" on his first term paper. His point: College is the place to make honest mistakes and learn. But, he added, don't make the mistake of compromising yourself (plagiarism) or never coming to class. And by the way, before coming to class, detach yourself from your iPod, your cell phone, your Blackberry, your portable DVD player, and "anything else that might be invented from now until the time you graduate."

I started tearing up not because I was leaving my child (that came later), but because this was a good place for my child to have landed. It was her first major decision and she had chosen well, probably because it's a place where they don't tell you what to think, but how to think. A great deal will be expected of her, but she'll be supported by a fun and loving community that takes its academics seriously, yet doesn't take itself too seriously.

I can totally understand why the BSC alums we've met speak so lovingly and enthusiastically about their time at the college. At their core, they are clearly doing something right.