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I am a piano teacher, which is really amazing considering that I made up an entirely new part to the first movement of Beethoven's well-known "Moonlight Sonata" during an eighth-grade concert. I thought the middle section of the movement was strange sounding and needed some changes. Now that I am more knowledgeable and (hopefully) more mature, I appreciate the composition as is. In eighth grade, I did not. Lacking knowledge about Beethoven and definitely lacking humility, I decided to help the master by composing something "better." God must have liked the challenge in front of Him, because 10 years later, He started sending students to me. Usually I keep the Beethoven story to myself because I don't want parents to get overly concerned about the type of teacher who is influencing their child.

What I love about teaching piano is that often a student begins lessons in kindergarten and studies with me until leaving for college. That adds up to a lot of hours around a piano together—sharing music, talking about life, laughing and crying. I am always the teacher, but sometime during those years I also become a mother, a counselor and a friend. My students and I eat a lot of M&M's® together, but our bonding goes much deeper than that. So when it finally comes time to cut the umbilical cord, I want to hide the scissors. It is hard to let go of someone when you have taught their hands to dance on the keys —hands that started with "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" and ended with "Rhapsody in Blue." Which brings me to Alysa.

Alysa was a dream student. She evoked responses like "incredible!" and "wow!" when she played. Buttons would practically pop off my clothes because her giftedness made me look so good. Ecclesiastes 9:10 (NIV®) says: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might..." Mighty Alysa was a joy to watch and an honor to teach. Of course, I was aware that God had more of a hand in it than I did. And wisely, I had not forgotten I came from the humble beginning of changing Beethoven's inspired work.

Alysa and I filled the pages of our history together with her first car, her first automobile accident, her first guitar, her first concerto, and her parents' divorce. She had a great love for playing volleyball, which claimed most of her time for a while, but I withheld the candy and eventually she got back on the piano track. Alysa and I grew together and, in some ways, we taught each other.

It was the end of August when she came to her final lesson with me. She was going to college the following week and would be studying piano with someone else. I was feeling some anxiety, knowing I was turning her out into the world with my imprint. I recall wondering if Jesus felt that same anxiety the last night He spent with His disciples—the night He knew He would be leaving them for death on a cross. Had He told them all the important things? Had they listened? Questions were flying through my head like leaves on a windy day: Was Alysa going to be okay?

* Italian for "go back to the beginning and play to the end."

Would I survive this “ending” and accept it as a natural progression of life? Had I taught this remarkable student everything she needed to know before her university training began? Was Alysa going to do some crazy thing during the performance of a Beethoven sonata?

As our last lesson came to a close, I knew it was time for the dreaded scissors. We walked outside into the sun, hoping the warmth would soothe the pain. We stood on my studio porch, both gulping, both resisting the cutting of the cord. It was Alysa who spoke first: “Let’s not say ‘Goodbye.’ Let’s just say, ‘See ya downtown.’”

We live in a small, Michigan town where most people know each other. I have had mail addressed to me with just my name and zip code, and yet it managed to get delivered. We live in the kind of town where the lady at the movie rental store will let you know if your son tried to rent an inappropriate movie. (I know this from personal experience.) So when Alysa suggested we would see each other “downtown,” I thought it was a sweet way of hanging on to one of the apron strings.

As I hugged Alysa on the porch, a car pulled into the driveway. It was my next student, Melody, age seven, arriving for her first lesson. She was dressed in a party dress. Black patent leather shoes completed her outfit, and dark brown curls flowed to her waist. I asked her if she was going to a party after her lesson, to which she replied, “No, I dressed up for you.” (Gulp.) One was leaving, but God was wasting no time in replacing my loss with someone else...and this time the replacement was adorned in a party dress!

Each new student is like a clean sheet of manuscript paper. Some will turn out bearing simple melodies; some end up with something more elaborate. When one song is completed, there is always another one to start. God continually allows a new beginning and puts His trust in me to love the teaching process, and to love the child, until I reach our *fine* (finish). I remain amazed and humbled as to why He would trust someone who rewrote “Moonlight Sonata” to delicately fashion the musical future of a precious child.

Alysa held up her hand in a final wave as I guided Melody inside to begin her first lesson.

There is a time for everything, and everything on earth has its special season. There is a time to cry and a time to laugh. There is a time to be sad and a time to dance...There is a time to hug and a time not to hug...There is a time to keep things and a time to throw things away.—Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4–6

Thank you, Alysa and Melody, for sharing your lives with me.