

## **"To a Daughter Leaving Home" by Linda Pastan**

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The poem "To a Daughter Leaving Home" (by Linda Pastan) is a very emotional poem about what you can assume: a daughter leaving home. The voice in the poem is of a parent who seeks to explain how special times can be, and how easily a daughter can be lost. In this case the special time is the time when the parent was teaching the daughter how to ride a bicycle when she was eight in a park. This poem's deeper story is about the life of the daughter and how quick the daughter's life went by until they say goodbye. This poem is addressed to "a Daughter Leaving Home" and the poem is written to make the daughters that are leaving their homes, reflect upon their own lives, how they have gone through them and how they have kept in touch with their parents.

In this poem poetic devices help translate this story into the actual message. In the poem the parent goes beside the daughter as she rides her bicycle, and the daughter "wobbled away". This example of imagery has generated an image of the daughter not in full control of how she is riding the bicycle. As she goes the parent is surprised to see that the daughter has gone down a "curved path of the park". The poet Linda Pastan has used "curved path" as symbol to represent life. Linda Pastan has used a "curved path" to symbolize life as a fun, dangerous and unpredictable path, that is not does not go in one straight line. "I kept waiting for a thud of crash" this quotation can tell us that the parent is worried and panicked about the daughter getting hurt, which in this situation seems likely. The parent goes sprinting after the daughter. "smaller, more breakable" This

quotation is explaining how the daughter in the parents eyes is fragile. Also the daughter is not in reach with the father. But the daughter continues to go independently on her bicycle "pumping, pumping". She goes on with her life "screaming with laughter". This is making the parent feel as if they are the only one that realizes that the daughter is in danger, because the daughter is on a bicycle that she has barely learned how to ride she can easily fall and hurt her self. The deeper meaning in that is, as she got older she was going through life independently, a life the parent thought she was risking, but to the daughter it was only a joy. The daughter goes on without the parent. The daughter goes with "the hair flapping" which to the parent is a "handkerchief" waving "goodbye". The simile "the hair flapping like a handkerchief" ties the poem together making the parent left behind sad, and the daughter having to say goodbye. The mood this creates is very emotional. It is very sad that the parent has had to say goodbye when the parent had not managed to be in touch with the daughter. This poem can make daughters who are leaving home reflect and maybe spend sometime with their parents.

## To a Daughter Leaving Home

Linda Pastan

When I taught you  
at eight to ride  
a bicycle, loping along  
beside you  
as you wobbled away  
on two round wheels,  
my own mouth rounding  
in surprise when you pulled  
ahead down the curved  
path of the park,  
I kept waiting  
for the thud  
of your crash as I  
sprinted to catch up,  
while you grew  
smaller, more breakable  
with distance,  
pumping, pumping

for your life, screaming  
with laughter,  
the hair flapping  
behind you like a  
handkerchief waving  
goodbye.

## ANALYSIS

The title of the poem 'To a Daughter Leaving Home' struck me as it is really innovative and makes you wonder how the poem is going to be. It is a poem by Linda Pastan describing a mother's emotional state when her daughter goes away. This poem is by a mother for her daughter, showing all the worries she has for her. And goes on about how the mother has seen the daughter grow up and also cherishes the sweet memories that they had. The title of this poem suggests that it is dedicated to a daughter leaving home and most probably it is by a mother. However, after reading the poem for the first time, it seemed out of topic as all it talks about is a mother talking about a time when she taught her daughter to bike ride. But then after reading it more than once, I realised that it actually has a deeper meaning that shows how the daughter has grown in all the years and how sometimes she failed in life but the mother was always there to help her around. Nevertheless this poem ends in a sad tone as it refers to how mothers will always have a concern for their child no matter how old they grow. The main theme in this poem is sentimental, as the mother is sort of looking back to the times when her daughter was young and travels through time as she talks about she bidding her goodbye. The choice of the opening of the poem, "When I taught you at eight to ride a bicycle, loping along beside you as you wobbled away on two round wheels", makes the reader feel that the author is contemplating about her feelings and memories. I can't help noticing the stream of emotions, skillfully used by Pastan in this verse to reproduce the atmosphere of reminiscence. Then the whole poem sort of follows as a metaphor to real life. For instance, 'loping along beside as you wobbled away', suggests that the mother made her daughter ready for life and watched her grow. Then the line, 'In surprise when you pulled ahead down the curved path of the park, I kept waiting for the thud of your crash as I sprinted to catch up', is also a metaphor to how happy and astonished the mother was when she saw her daughter growing up so well and whenever she had troubles the mother was always there to sympathize with her.

There are quite a few noticeable literary devices in this poem. The first

most noticeable simile is in the line “the hair flapping behind you like a handkerchief waving goodbye” where the poet refers the daughter’s hair as a handkerchief waving goodbye. In the line “I sprinted to catch up, while you grew smaller, more breakable with distance, pumping, pumping for life”, pumping is an onomatopoeia. And also there is repetition, as for the word “pumping”. Likewise, the word ‘thud’, in the line “As I kept waiting for the thud of your crash”, is an onomatopoeia as the word ‘thud’ sounds like a crash.

Towards the ending of the poem, Pastan portrays that the daughter slowly detached from her mother as she grew and explored the different aspects of life. While the daughter left her mother happily looking forward to a bright future, the mother feels pretty sad as she is left alone with the memories that she had with her daughter ever since she was born and also learns to let go.