



Mohawk Lake in
New Paltz, N.Y.

Travel C8

Food C3/Celebrations C4-C5

Seniors C5

Friends & Neighbors C6

Hobbies C7

C1

SURVIVING

the first weeks on campus

By KATHLEEN MELLEEN
Staff Writer

WHAT if my roommate's a slob or the food stinks? "What if I can't handle the schoolwork or nobody likes me? What if I just want to go home?"

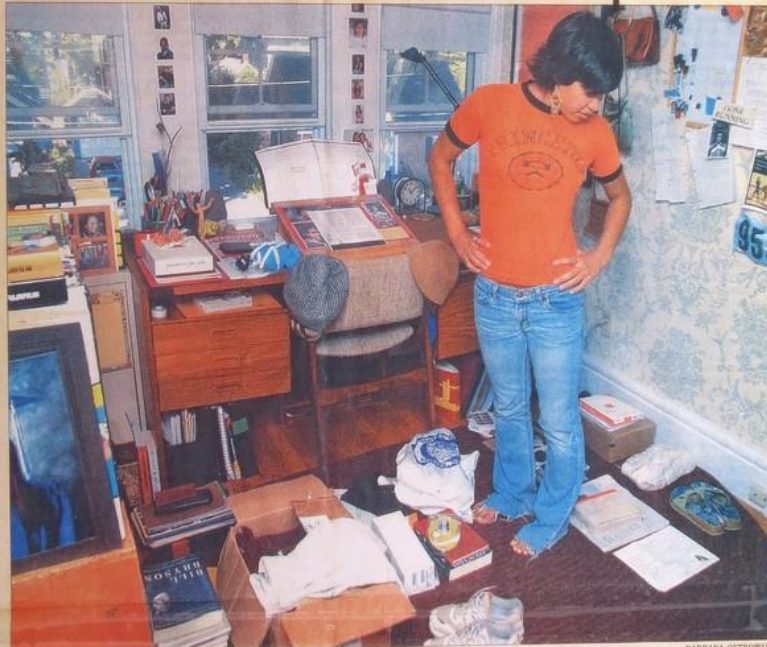
Unsettling thoughts like these, says a local college official, often hound students as they prepare to head off to college for the first time. And, if left unattended, she says, such brooding can spoil the college experience.

Every fall, when first-year students arrive on the Smith College campus, "some are elated, others are nervous and some are scared to death," says Rae-Anne Butera, associate dean of students at Smith College in Northampton.

"I try to normalize these thoughts," said Butera in a recent interview. "Students have to realize they are not alone." Each new student thinks the others are all "calm, cool and collected," but, of course, she added, they aren't.

"Every one of them [feels] some of these emotions, regardless of outward appearances. They all think they're the only one ..."

The Gazette asked two of this year's crop of rookies what has their stomachs tied in knots. Then, we went to Butera for some expert advice on how to avoid these common first-semester pitfalls.



BARBARA OSTROWSKA

As Fiona Miller of Northampton puzzles over what to bring with her when she heads off to Princeton University next month, she knows she has to pick and choose carefully. Living in a college dorm is "like a down-sized version of your whole life," she says.

Fiona Miller says worries about friendships top the list

JUST last summer, Fiona Miller, 18, moved with her family to Northampton from Tucson, Ariz., leaving behind many close, longtime friends.

Relocating just before her senior year of high school wasn't ideal, she says. And, though she thinks of herself as friendly and outgoing, she admits she did have concerns about making new friends.

But make them she did. And now she's preparing to leave them behind, too, when,

on Sept. 2, she leaves for Princeton University in New Jersey. It's a prospect the recent Northampton High School grad is not too happy about.

"Our friendships right now are the best we've ever had," Miller said. "Kids' parents tell them they haven't kept in touch with their high school friends — kids don't want to hear that."

■ See FIONA MILLER/Page C2

lock bags

✓ **Room/Storage:** Desk and bedside lamps, alarm clock, trash basket and bags, lots of hangers, fan, drying rack, tacky adhesive, tool kit, light bulbs.

✓ **Electronics:** Headphones, surge protector, extension cords.

✓ **Linens/Laundry Supplies:** Before buying sheets and a mattress pad, check to see if your college has extra-long twin beds — many do. Also, easy-to-forget items include: laundry bag/basket, stain remover, sewing kit and roll(s) of quarters, if needed. Many schools offer a debit card that can be used in laundry machines.

✓ **Medicine cabinet:** Pepto-Bismol, Imodium, Tylenol or ibuprofen, Neosporin, Band-Aids, cough drops.

✓ **Shower:** Shower tote, traveling-soap container, dental floss, tweezers, nail clippers and Q-tips.

✓ **Office/Desk Supplies:** Many colleges have their own version of an assignment book that includes a calendar of school events. Here are a few things that are often forgotten: Stapler and staples, printer paper, pencil sharpener, Post-it notes, paper clips, rubber bands, scissors, ruler, dictionary and thesaurus, stamps/envelopes.

✓ **Clothing Tip:** If you will be home for a visit before the weather changes, consider leaving winter items behind until you need them as storage space will be tight.

✓ **Shared Items:** Check with your roommate to avoid duplication of audio equipment, TV and/or DVD player/VCR, small refrigerator, area rug. Many colleges offer rental plans for refrigerators or micro-fridges. Check with your college before purchasing or renting these items.

■ **www.collegebound.net** offers these additional suggestions: Pictures of family and friends, movies and games, bathrobe, ironing board and iron and small safe.

■ **Other suggestions** include sports equipment, camera, backpack, inexpensive bike and very strong bike lock, umbrella, your health insurance card, prescription medications, shower flip-flops, plants, small electric sweeper. If you live in a suite, you and your suitemates may be responsible for cleaning your own bathroom. If so, you'll need bathroom cleaning supplies, including a toilet brush.

■ **What not to bring:** Most colleges send a list that usually includes cooking items like hot plates and microwave ovens, candles and pets (although many colleges allow small fish bowls and fish). Falling into the Duh! category: Guns, swords, explosives, illicit drugs and alcohol.

—KATHLEEN MELLEEN

Fiona Miller

■ Continued from Page C1

But, in spite of bidding adieu to her newfound Northampton buddies, Miller says she's excited about heading to college — and thrilled to be going to Princeton, where her parents met.

Though she's heading to her dream school, Miller does foresee the possibility of a few bumps along the way. For example, she found out a couple of weeks ago that she will join six other girls in a suite that includes a common living room and three bedrooms: two doubles and three singles. The university has left the actual bedroom assignments up to the roommates.

"The rule is we can't decide where we'll live until we're all there," Miller said, but she admits that she and the others have already sent a few emails to each other, discussing how to divvy up the bedrooms.

And what if she and her suitemates don't see eye to eye? "We should try to accommodate each other. Avoiding freak-outs will make it that much easier," said Miller, who is hoping to snag one of the doubles. "I want the challenge. It's my first year of college and I want a roommate to have that experience."

She also has high hopes, but lower expectations, about developing close friendships among



BARBARA OSTROWSKA

Fiona Miller is curious to see how she and her six suitemates divide up the single and double bedrooms in their living area at Princeton University. As for getting along, she says, "We should try to accommodate each other. Avoiding freak-outs will make it that much easier."

her suitemates.

"It would be nice if we were really good friends," said Miller, whose mother maintains ties

with her own freshman roommate. "It would be great if that happened for me," Miller said. "But I don't expect it to."

A college dean has some soothing words

THE list of concerns doesn't change much from year to year, says Rae-Anne Butera, associate dean of students at Smith College in Northampton.

At the Gazette's request, Butera offered some words of advice for incoming freshmen. Here's a condensed version of what she told us:

Q: What if I don't get along with my roommate?

A: Don't think that the housing office at your college has magically found your soul-mate. If you expect your new roommate to become your best friend, you're setting yourself up for disappointment.

Talk over preferences with him or her early on. Do you like to study with music? Is a neat room important?

And then keep talking. Don't let little problems grow. Negotiate.

If that doesn't work, people on campus can help. Resident assistants [RAs] are the first stop. They're trained to handle these things (and they've probably been through them, too).

Q: What if I don't make new friends?

A: Getting involved in things that interest you will get you out of your room.

Athletics are a great way to meet people. Clubs are always looking for new members at the beginning of the school year.

Q: What if I'm homesick?

A: Most new students get at least a little homesick. It's normal. Go down the hall and talk to a new friend. Or take a walk to get some ice cream or see a movie on campus.

But, if you're sad, don't clam up or hole up in your room. Talk to your RA. If the sadness becomes overwhelming, professional counselors are available on campus to help.

Q: What if I miss my friends from home?

A: High school attachments are huge. You may think you'll never meet friends like them again.

But, after a few weeks, you'll see that you are connecting to new people. You won't need to rely on old friends as much. In the meantime, it's easy to keep in touch. Use that cell phone that's attached to your ear, or IM friends at their new colleges to find out what's up.

Q: What if I don't measure up in class?

A: There may be a class that catches you, challenges you a lot. Think of it as a mega-growth opportunity. And, yes, you probably will have to devote more time to the books than you did in high school.

It's OK to ask for help. It may be hard, especially if you never needed much in high school. But if you're stuck, don't try to go it alone.

Those faculty members you see around campus are there for you. They expect your questions. Also, take advantage of resources like writing centers and tutoring the colleges provide.

Your college accepted you for a reason: You're capable.

Q: What if I don't like the food?

A: Any way you slice it, eating in a dining hall won't be like eating at home. If you're worried about

not having your eggs made the way you like them, take a deep breath and try something new.

You may be tempted to hit the campus or townie restaurants, but if you've already paid for a meal plan, that's a pricey option. Keeping some food in your dorm room is a great idea for midnight snacks, but don't become a hot-pot chef.

Most campuses offer several dining halls, so shop around to see what's on the menu (usually posted online daily at your school's Web site). And, if you still don't see anything you like? Head for the salad bar.

Q: How do I balance my newfound freedom with my studies?

A: Plan ahead and get your work done early. It may help to treat school like a full-time job — a 9-to-5 kind of thing. Doing your homework during those hours keeps it from piling up in the evening or on weekends — leaving more time for fun.

For the parents

Butera had some advice for parents, too: When you get that first phone call from your child who's feeling overwhelmed by a low grade or college life in general, don't overreact.

Even though the feeling that you need to save them is really strong, wait it out. Instead of telling them, "Pack your bags, I'm coming to get you," say instead, "Let's talk about it in a week."

While you're stewing about it all week long, your son or daughter is probably over it and having a great time.