

With Christmas needles still being picked up by the vacuum, I am told the deadline for applying to colleges is quickly approaching. Being the act-before-you-think kinda guy, I quickly encourage my baby to apply to several colleges.

" Don't cut yourself short, kid-o. Apply to a whole bunch of colleges, see, and then just sit back and wait. When those schools that accept you start fighting over you, you'll be in a great position for putting together a financial package that will best suit your need to keep out of your dads wallet!"

Being the obedient child that she is, she was happy to accommodate me. The other night she came out of her room with a stack of applications and proudly proclaimed that they were ready to go.... as soon as I wrote out the check.

You'd think that after eighteen years of experience I would have learned by now the absolute first rule in parenting; never, never, never encourage your child to do something until you clearly understand how much it is going to cost you!

Forty dollars for this application, thirty for the next. Twenty five here, another forty there... this kid had a pile of applications that would easily set dear old dad back a house note.

This called for some quick revision to my original plan of flooding the market. I worked overtime trying to keep my composure and blood pressure down while I negotiated each application with some smooth talking that would make my slick willie friends proud.

"Now trust me, kid, you don't want to go to this school. They have an awful football team. Who wants to go to a school that will make your Saturdays depressing?"

Needless to say not all the applications made it to the mailbox. She did narrow her selections down to four or five that she really had an interest in and I gladly wrote out the checks. I then made it clear to everyone that macaroni and cheese would become a staple at the dinner table for the next several weeks and I didn't want to get any attitudes about it. **(parental tip:** If you have a child, or are making one, two things to think about. 1) do not waist your time reading a bunch of baby books that try to tell you how to teach your kid to walk, talk, roll over, sit up or go fetch. Children will learn to do all these things in their own time. Use this time instead to investigate all the colleges and find one that really fits your particular likes and dislikes as a parent, and then spend the next seventeen years brainwashing your child so that when the time comes for them to apply for a college, they will only think of one school. It's a bit dishonest, I

suppose, and certainly goes against everything I have tried to teach my children about independent thinking, but if you're clever enough, you can do it in a manner that will make them believe that the whole thing is their idea. 2) I highly recommend that you stock up on those little boxes of macaroni and cheese dinners. You know, the ones you can buy for twenty-five cents. Buy them by the **case** now. They're cheap, you can chop up damn near anything in it to give it a little variety, and come their senior year, it will become as common place in your diet as antacids.)

So with step one completed, we sit back and wait to hear from the schools, confident that they will all be excited at the prospects of having my gifted child in their school.