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**Special Discounts (and Memories) at the Container Store**

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With eight days and counting until freshman move-in day, each day seems to bring a new exercise in getting ready. And thanks to those lists from Web sites like [HerCampus.com](http://www.hercampus.com/) and [Collegeandfinance.com](http://www.collegeandfinance.com/), there’s little chance of forgetting things as important as say, a Panini grill or ear plugs.

Over the last several weeks, my college-bound freshman and I have been to one store after another, each with its own “College List” itemizing essentials to be included in the send-off.

Some of these establishments even make events out of college shopping. When a postcard invitation from the nearest [Container Store](http://www.containerstore.com/welcome.htm) slid through our mail slot in late June announcing “College Night” and a special discount — one night only! — I immediately marked it on the calendar.

On a Sunday evening in July, Nicole and I drove over to the store — list in hand — only to be greeted by yet another list on a special “Welcome to College Night” table out front. Nicole was asked by an enthusiastic employee to write her name and the school she’d be attending on a sticker and wear it proudly inside the store. While I watched an angry patron be denied entry (“I’m sorry, ma’am, but this is a special event only open to college students,” explained a store employee), Nicole was simultaneously placing a red circle on the geographical location of her school on a large poster-size map. We were now cleared to enter.

Once inside, we faced a frenzy. There were no shopping carts available, so I went to look for one in the parking lot, encouraging Nicole to start shopping solo. There were no carts in sight, so I went back inside and hovered over a woman and her daughter at the checkout counter. She looked at me, feeling my pain, and was about to walk out with her coveted bag and box-filled cart, when a tall young man in a royal blue Container Store apron approached with a smile and a large trolley, offering to help her out to her car with her packages.

Gripping my newly procured cart, I found Nicole in the hooks aisle, where I also bumped into a mother from our town who was doing this task for her college-bound son — without him (that’s one devoted mother, I thought). Nicole and I worked as a team — I read off the relevant items from the list and she located them (hangers, check; soup thermos, check) and tossed them into the cart. Despite the challenge of weaving a large metal box on wheels without bumping into innocent feet and backsides, our outing was going well. And then, I saw the checkout line.

I’d been to the Container Store before, and the longest line was five or six people deep, just past the wall of gadgets and its impulse buys, like key-chain flashlights. But on College Night, that line snaked through the kitchen aisle, around the garbage cans and cookie jars, and all the way back to the gift-wrapping aisle! I was ready to jump ship and come back another day — yes, and pay full price — when I stopped myself. We were there for a purpose and would complete our mission.

While I waited in line, Nicole ran around picking up las- minute items we’d forgotten, like that putty that sticks to every surface imaginable. I was starting to enjoy the energy of the place — all those young adults about to embark on such an exciting time in their life — and then I noticed the line lady. A young woman donning a silver tiara and a banner draped diagonally across her torso — like a Miss America pageant contestant — which read “line lady,” the smiling employee was asking people in line, “Did you find everything you need?” and “Would you like someone to grab you an additional box of push pins?”

Nicole eventually joined me, and while we deliberated over the red-versus-green pop-up laundry bin, she caught sight of a girl she knows from high school. Julia came over to say hi, and the two of them chatted excitedly about their rapidly approaching departure dates. At that moment, I thought about how these two girls first met when they were merely 12 weeks old. We lived in Manhattan at the time, and met Julia and her mother at a new-parent neighborhood event on the Upper East Side.

I glanced at these nearly 18-year-old women, and had a flashback of them as infants in strollers and later as wobbly toddlers at a playground in Central Park. The nostalgia washed over me and I thought I might get weepy. But then, the line lady shouted for us to keep the line moving.

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