

Parenting becomes a whole new ballgame when the children become 16 and start eyeing the motor vehicles. The response is instantaneously variable, and runs the complete continuum between pride and terror. Nothing so prepares one for the position of saint like trying to avoid lashing out at one's offspring for failure to do what seems to YOU to be second nature. Of course, few of us remember that time when we put our OWN parents through this hell.

I must confess that I expected more from my daughter. As a straight A student in the toughest curriculum in the state, I assumed this driving thing would be a piece of cake. The floorboards in almost every vehicle I own have been depressed toward the wheel on the passenger side as I tromped on the imaginary brake pedal which wasn't there. And I also suspect the clutch in the poor Subaru is a little tired of learning to do K turns in the middle of a hill, to say nothing of the steering rack wear from parallel parking.

But all too soon I realize how this will be replaced by blase' and even aggressive behavior behind the wheel. After all, it's in her genes. And eventually that too will lead to mild oversteer corrections on twisty bits as she gets the "advanced" training and tests like PCA events which NYS will never think of imposing on the frightened 16 year old's of the state, for fear they would never pass another driver. Ever. I know, because my daughter actually is not too bad as drivers go, but she still failed her first test. We were maybe more eager than her; school is on the other side of the county, and it would SO help for extra-curricular if she could transport herself instead of tying up our driving time to and fro. After intensive training for the 30 days following return from Parade, I diligently assured she could start any of our manual tranny vehicles on any slope doing any maneuver she needed. Then I called to arrange a test time around her tennis practices. She drove perfectly every inch of the entire time. And when it came time to actually drive the TEST, she left the parking brake on, stalled twice, stopped dead in an intersection with no traffic, and drove onto the curb twice parking. Intimidated? You think?

So we practiced AGAIN, to make it even more second-nature. And rescheduled the test for the Thursday after Labor Day. And showed up, only to find that GOD had destroyed the entire test course by taking out all the electrics, signs, etc. in his wind storm. So they cancelled all tests for at least a week. Meanwhile, I am supposed to start a new contract which will require me to move motorhome and car/trailer to Chicago the following Monday, and it has yet to be registered. So we scurry up to the N. Syracuse DMV only to be greeted at the door with "a power surge has just destroyed all our computers, and we are closed tomorrow, and we have no idea when the Downtown office will reopen as they have no power, and yada yada yada..." So we do the only sane thing - drive to Pulaski to see if we can schedule there. No, but we can register without even waiting in line. Here's a secret; spend the time driving there - at least you feel like you make some progress.

Well, the Chicago thing starts to come apart at the seams late Friday, but is replaced by a call from Gillette/Duracell. They want to do another project, and can I be in Tenn. and Indiana next week? I have learned a few truisms about survival in the business world; 1) Those who start with "I can't..." will be lunch for those who say "I can...". 2) No matter what the plan, the contingency coping is the mark of success. 3) Anything worth doing is worth doing well, and anything worth doing well is worth doing for money - and customers know it. So after twiddling my fingers for the last two months, it looks like I may get busy again pretty soon here. All of which makes it that much MORE difficult to get my daughter her driving test. But I may have found the greatest motivator around; she has to walk to and ride the school bus. You know; the thing we have to stop for when its red lights are flashing, so we speed up as soon as it starts to slow...

It has now been over three months since this was started. Sorry John, priorities and all that. I moved heaven and earth to be home to take Jess for the second test... and she failed again. Not so much because she did anything wrong, but because I did. See, where I come from, if you need to park, you have to squeeze into a space smaller than anything else around. Why the hell do you think that space is there in the first place?! NOBODY leaves a space you could park a tandem semi into like they use for the test. So the tester got paranoid that Jess was too close to the car in front (probably the TESTER's) and failed her immediately without even allowing her a chance to prove she was too close or not. And I taught her how to fit into that space noone else could fit. And how to get back out, without hitting anything. It's a lost art, I guess, what with malls and such.

Anyway, now I HAD to go to Chicago, but she had to pay more for the third test. You KNOW she felt bad when she discovered the clerk had no idea how to collect the extra payment for the third test. Like... how does a straight A student fail a driver's test twice? They give out licenses like green stamps. Then park in the weeds to collect bucks from the unsuspecting for that "privilege", but don't get me started.

Anyway, she survived, and finally passed her third test. And we gave her the Subaru 4WD Wagon, which can climb a tree but it will take a week. The only thing it can pass is a gas station, but it is a robust little critter which should protect her well. We stipulated we would provide for gas, oil, maintenance & insurance provided her grades did not suffer and she got no points problems. So far that seems to be working well. But I also lost my daughter to the liberty personal transport represents. I don't get to see her much now, even when I'm home (which will be rare again until at least next July), because she is off with friends, driving to Rochester to see her younger boyfriend, visiting relatives, or simply working late at school. I know she appreciates what she has, even if she disses me repeatedly, and I both mourn the passing of my control and celebrate her leap toward adulthood. I'm proud of her, and I can't wait to have her drive the Porsche on the track. I intend that she know how to save her life at the wheel Let's see, when is the next Skip Barber accident avoidance course...?