

Teenagers put parents' wisdom to the test

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It's bad timing, but a lot of kids become teenagers just as their parents are hitting their mid-life crisis. So everybody's miserable and confused and seeking that new sense of identity. ? Laurie Halse Anderson

I think Laurie hit the nail on the head with this one.

Parents are there for the entire journey, from birth through adulthood, and we often don't pause and reflect on each stage of this evolution. We don't have time!

My wife, perhaps like all moms, has a great memory. She can recall all those special moments and the exact times they occurred with unbelievable clarity. She often says, "don't you remember when ?? and honestly, I don't. Maybe my brain is configured differently, or I merely prioritize things in other ways. I don't recall their first steps or first words or even public tantrums. I have vague memories of lugging around those awkward, overweight car seats and struggling with uncooperative strollers. I do recall early school years, plays, recitals and the like.

I am also not one to flip through old photo albums and recall all those childhood Kodak moments. Boy, they all seem like a lifetime ago.

This summer, we had a chance to visit an old friend who works at Severn Lodge. Gary was the social director at The Delawana Inn, a place that became our annual retreat for a dozen years. In that idyllic spot, our children grew and tons of memories were made and recorded. It remains unforgettable to this day.

We hadn't seen Gary in about five or six years so he was simply amazed at how our kids grew into adults and mature teens. It was nice to catch up, and simply enjoy the outdoors again at a very neat resort.

Yes time flies. But in the moment of driving kids to and fro, hastily making lunches and waking them up in the morning, some moments are just lost to the eddies of the flow of time. They get buried under the muck.

I think the most memorable times are still ahead.

I have pretty much forgotten what it was like to be a Niner, entering high school for the first time. Our youngest just started secondary school and her tales of home room and eating lunch outside with friends brought a few smiles, and twinges, to my weathered face.

Yes, high school. Oh my. Formative, potentially cruel and hopefully positive years ahead. There will be drama in the halls and conflicts with students and teachers alike. There will be successes and failures. We will endure.

Now that this is my third kick at the can (at the same school)? I'm well versed in what's ahead and ready to tackle Romeo and Juliet yet again. Third time's the charm!

Matt Haig believes teenagers are philosophers, "thinking about the big things like existence and identity at a time when their identities are changing so fast."

Basically, teens only have to think about themselves and the here and now. It's up to us "experienced" folks to help with the big-picture expertise. But isn't that pretty much a downer, for youngsters who are just starting their lives with unbridled passion and optimism? Should we burden our kids with the realities of house prices, mortgages, cost of living, etc.?

And those are things we know about. Most of us parents are new to Twitter, Instagram and the like, and have no idea of the power of these social tools. When we were kids, our failures and torments were limited to just a few. Now, the entire world can see and comment on your once-private humiliations.

And then there are relationships. Oh boy. I had limited experience as a teen and my grown-up years came with learning on the go. After 24 years of marriage, I'm still learning and have a few more things to work on to get it right. I can try to offer a few tidbits and common sense approaches to the opposite sex but I'm by no means Dr. Phil.

I had a long chat with my son the other day about relationships. All I did was lay out the realities of life, decisions and paths. It has taken me many, many years to realize a few things. Basically, my advice is this: "you can take make a decision that will take you here, there and somewhere in between. Think of the worst case scenario and go from there. Keep your expectations realistic. Tackle one burden at a time and try to remain positive. Always move forward. Ask for help when you need it; we're always here to help and yes we do know a thing or two.

I also told him to think about how much better he will feel when one or two of his troubles are off his plate.

God gave us broad shoulders for a reason. And, like the Serenity Prayer, we all hope that God allows us to accept the things we cannot change; grants us the courage to change the things we can, and gives us the wisdom to know the difference. All we can really do is guide, support and encourage. We can't force our kids to do anything, and threats are counter-productive. If we think about it, we're not perfect either. Maybe my way isn't the best way. Or perhaps mom's intuition doesn't always apply. We learn by doing and we adults continue to learn by adapting, moderating, adjusting and altering. It's a two-way street, this parenting thing. In order for us to get better at it, we need to listen and learn from our children and just where they're coming from. We know things have changed dramatically and the analogy of walking knee-deep through the snow to school just doesn't apply any longer. Navigating the dense fog of young adulthood can be tricky. Get out the flares and flashlights and let's get to it folks!

