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Driven to extremes

Joe Ferullo | Aug. 26, 2009 NCR Today

I woke up a six o?clock this morning, because today is the first day of school for my 15-year old daughter. She will be sixteen next month and by then should be able to drive legally in the state of California ? but she won?t. I?ll get to that in a second.

My daughter is now a sophomore at a Catholic girls? high school about 20 miles from our home, so we?ve built a carpool with other students and parents. However, this being California (where you can?t get anywhere without an automobile), I still have to get up early and drive my daughter to the carpool location.

Now, as I drive bleary-eyed to the carpool drop point, I should be able toconsole myself with anticipation that my oldest will soon be able to drive herself all over the greater Los Angeles metropolitan area. I recall being that age. (Wasn?t all that long ago, right?) I grew up in the Bronx, not in car-crazed California ? but still chomped at the bit to get behind the wheel and find a little freedom from my parents and their busy schedules.

My current attitude surprises me -- I always thought I would dread the day my daughters began to drive, living in fear of all the dangers out there on the road. But no ? I can?t wait for the driving to start. I don?t care if they stuff five friends in the backseat, plug their iPods into the dashboard and blast incomprehensible music to their utter distraction. I just want them to drive themselves everywhere and leave me alone.

And yet, shockingly, my oldest daughter (her younger sister is five years behind her) does not share my enthusiasm for this particular right of adolescent passage. When it comes to training for and obtaining a bona fide state driver?s license, she has actually dawdled. She could have gotten her learner?s permit last March, but didn?t get around to it until last month. She could have scheduled several professional, state-mandated lessons with the driving school for which I have already paid ? but has taken exactly one lesson. She could have earned her actual driver?s license by mid-September, but now will have to wait until next February at the earliest ? and even that possibility is fading fast in my rearview mirror.

She is not alone in this ? very few of her friends are on the fast-track to becoming fully-licensed. Why? Don?t they crave the freedom all teenagers crave? Then it dawned on me ? yes, they do. But having a driver?s license does not represent freedom. It is, in fact, a responsibility. Freedom is telling Mom and Dad you need (NEED) to be at a friend?s house/school function/sports event ? and then relaxing in air-conditioned comfort as you are driven there by someone who loves you very much. Who will then arrange to come back and pick you up.

It?s a good gig. Who would want to give that up? I cajole my daughter, hoping to coax and entice her into embracing this whole driving thing as I did when I was her age. She nods, she smiles ? she tries to seem excited for just a brief moment, really she does ? until she turns back to her homework and digs in.

My alarm will keep going off at six a.m. every morning for quite some time.

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