

Parenting Solo: Wake Up!

Written by Michelle Greenlee Harris, Columnist

Friday, 22 February 2013 10:54 - Last Updated Friday, 22 February 2013 10:56



My daughter's early days in high school were tough for both of us. She struggled with homework, hormones and fitting in. Really she was struggling with her parents' divorce. I was struggling with the divorce too and the laws in this state making assault a crime.

I imagined telling a judge "Your honor, the frying pan I used to pop her in the back of her head was merely a medical instrument to unstop her ears. She was acting like she didn't hear a thing I was saying. " I could sell that argument to a jury of my peers – frazzled solo parents who would think about their own unruly teenagers and acquit me in ten minutes. My baby's freshman year was the first year that were totally out of sync and no information seemed to transfer from my head to hers. She took every morsel of knowledge I laid at her feet and kicked it down the street like an old tin can.

It made me wonder how and when children absorb enough life lessons to get out on their own. A friend once asked me how old my daughter was. Back then, I told her I was fourteen years into an eighteen year bid. We were just beginning her high school journey and if I had known how long it would be, I would've packed a lunch. At some point parents get time off for good behavior don't we? I guess not until we pound the rocks between our children's ears and pour in enough common sense to make them useful to society. But how and when does the learning occur?

I figure a transfer of knowledge happens in several stages. The first is imprinted before birth by way of shared DNA. There are things that my daughter does just like her father and me simply because she came from us – unfortunately the inherited traits are usually the ones we did not want to pass on.

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There are traits that she acquired by watching. I pick the onions off my burgers – she picks the onions off her burgers. Easy peasy.

Other information is engrained in our children by sheer repetition. You know, those lessons you have to repeat from birth until the time they leave the nest. Then one day (usually after enduring a similar episode with their own children) - they get it!!!! Occasionally my girl will concede that I'm not completely stupid and she'll give me credit for knowing a thing or two about life. She is careful to stop just short of saying I was right.

I figure, she'll admit I'm right just after scientists discover that cheesecake burns fat. She doesn't have to admit anything to me. It just makes me feel good to see the light bulb turn on in her head. If the whole truth were told, the lessons between mother and daughter go both ways. I learn and grow as much as she does. Still, I have my frying pan ready just in case.