

Daily Journal

"Be just and fear not."



RILEY MANNING: Driving lessons offer a much-needed reprieve

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My daughter is at the age where she wants very little to do with me and her mother. Sometimes, it feels like she's made up her mind that we are not on her side, and there's no convincing her otherwise.

She has her agenda, and we have ours, and though the two may intersect occasionally, they are ultimately pulling in opposite directions. Usually over that dang cell phone.

Surely you remember those strange, pent-up teenage years. The ones when the sound of your parents' mere breathing felt burdensome, requests to unload the dishwasher were an affront to your human dignity, and huge moods advanced and retreated like the tides.



The teenage indignities never cease. Just when she's made a connection with a nice-seeming boy who lives across town – a pandemic swoops in, sending everything into a scramble.

I'm mostly poking fun. Quarantine has initiated a stand-down, perhaps. I've really loved working from home and getting more face time with her. I perk up when I hear her bedroom door creak open in the morning, as she trudges out to do her chores (so she can receive her cell phone in return).

At lunch, we pull away from our desks and all work together on the insanely intricate Aladdin puzzle that dominates our dining table. She spends a fair amount of time out on the porch, reading or just sitting. She helps out with the cooking every now and then, now that she's mastered making blue box macaroni and cheese.

Occasionally, we hear her cackle from her room as she talks with her friends. She takes French lessons online and practices on me and her mother. She has a relentless sweet tooth. If there's ice cream or Cap'n Crunch in the house, it never lasts more than two nights. It cracks me up. Portion control is for grownups.

At five o'clock on the dot, she asks (sometimes by text), "Where are we driving today?" This is one of my favorite parts of the day. I've been teaching her to drive for a few months now. We started in the parking lot of our church, navigating between rows of empty spaces, around lamp posts and dumpsters. Then, we practiced on the quiet, low-traffic streets of our neighborhood. Every few days, we venture farther from the house than the day before.



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She's made a driving playlist that we listen to. She's been in my wheelhouse lately – Smashing Pumpkins, Nirvana, even Metallica. We shoot the breeze about nothing, which is to say, everything.

This week, we hit the milestone of driving all the way to the high school, turning around, and driving home. She's tackled Main Street and Gloster, getting better and better at turning and braking smoothly. She's shown herself to be decisive, un-timid, and un-intimidated, and I am so proud of her for it. She listens when I tell her about blind spots, and how to look far ahead down the road to see what's coming.

It's hard to see very far down the road, right now. Every day is a gift, in so many ways.