

Driving Lessons

RIDING IN THE CAR with my mother, I learned at least one thing—she did not want me to die.

Before seat belts, car seats, booster seats, rear-view baby mirrors, sun-blocking window screens, and other miracles of modern parenting, my mother had a failsafe protection system. Whenever she stopped quickly, she threw her right arm in front of me, ostensibly to save me from flying through the windshield. Certainly her forearm would prevail over the hurtling momentum of 8-year-old me going from 40 to 0 in one second flat.

I learned a few things from the rest of my family too. I learned that even with only two inches between us, my older brother's right hook could draw a pretty decent bruise. I learned that if I whined long enough on a family trip, eventually the candy bag would emerge from hiding. And I learned that the brakes of an old station wagon are not 100-percent reliable, especially when the car is loaded with six people, heading down a mountain, sporting a car-top carrier, and towing a pop-up trailer. (Thankfully, no serious damage was done.)

When my kids' school moved five miles further north, many parents were upset to learn that they would now be driving 20 minutes each way. Then one experienced mother spoke up, saying that she enjoyed time in the car. Since her kids tended to forget she was there, she learned more about them in the car than anywhere else.

Lately I've been wondering what my kids have learned over the past 11 years as I've schlepped them around town. Driving usually causes me to tune in—to a song, to NPR, to my own thoughts. Unfortunately, it's usually my kids I tune out.

What does that say to them? We now have a school bus (hallelujah!) and we



I wonder what my kids have learned as I've schlepped them around town.

finished preschool, so I have less driving time. Still, we spend a solid chunk of each week in our assigned seats in the minivan. Training up a child in the way he should go is not restricted to the house. So here are some things I hope they will learn, and I'm learning them too:

- Talking on the phone while driving is not a good or necessary thing, as it endangers others. I'm still working on that one.
- The story the kids want to tell me is more important than hearing the second part of the song "Poughkeepsie" by Over the Rhine. Really, it is.
- When other drivers cut us off or commit other outrageous crimes against us, we should be forgiving. I am learning to bite my tongue.
- We must tolerate one another—and one another's musical tastes. Sometimes

my young daughter needs to hear Raffi or Curious George, which does not always coincide with my older son's desires. Theoretically, this has taught him tolerance. Their interaction has certainly taught me tolerance. (It's also taught me that sometimes you just have to pull the car over to the side of the road. And yell. Loudly.)

- Eating from a drive-thru restaurant may be convenient, but it is also expensive, unhealthy, and environmentally unfriendly. Sadly, my kids may have to learn that lesson from someone else.
- We have to share. Yes, you must let your sister look out "your" window.

I want my kids to learn to love each other and the world we travel through. My brother and I did have some good times in the car. No one was ever seriously injured on our long-distance trips. And what I learned from my mother in the car didn't come from deep, emotional times of sharing. My mother's arm-throwing protection was not a conscious act; everything in her was ready to protect me without a thought.

What I learned was that she loved me. I hope my kids will learn the same. ■



Kristy Quist is editor of *The Banner's Tuned In* section and is a member of Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Mich.