

Road Rage (and other lessons in social skills)

by Echo R. Fling

If you are a mom, you spend oodles of hours in the car, ferrying the kids to every kind of practice created by man and beast. If you are the mom of a kid with AS, this can be pure purgatory.

Talk about commuting sentences. If you're not organized, forget about it. You'll get nothing but grief. Better not deviate in any way on the course to the piano teacher's house, or you'll hear about it.

"Why are we going this way? Do you know how to get to Mrs. Eighthnote's house if you go this way? We're going to get lost if we go this way!"

A bribe of ice cream at Friendly's sometimes helps. If desperate measures are required, you have to up the ante and make it a Cheeseburger Happy Meal at Mickey-D's.

One time, I had to drive my husband's car because mine was in the shop. Before I could turn the keys in the ignition, I had to first transform into a UN negotiator.

"Mom, you can't drive this car."

"Why not?"

"Because it's Dad's car."

"Daddy said it was OK."

This was the days before the diagnosis. I was quickly getting impatient.

"But Mom, you CAN'T drive this car."

"Yes I can."

"But it has a shifter."

The kid was hitting the panic button. What I didn't know back then was that Mom always drove the car with the automatic and Dad always drove the 5 speed. That was how it was. Don't try and explain to a kid with AS that it was OK for Mom to drive the stick shift. From his perspective, Mom's never drive stick-shifts. It just isn't done. Death, doom and the great unknown await.

"I can drive this car. Don't you remember?"

Of course he didn't remember. It was over a week ago. We're late for piano and I'm sitting here in my driveway arguing with a 7 year-old about whether or not I can safely operate a car with a stick shift.

Arghhh!

As I pull out of the driveway, I peek in the rearview mirror at his contorted face. Surely, he thinks, I am going to crash into the neighbor's fence or hit one of the garbage cans. Maybe he thinks, we'll get out on the open road and run into the back of someone. Who knows. The way his mind works is a mystery to me. I just wish he would get a life and worry about something else.

"Don't you remember that Mommy drove race cars a little bit before she met Daddy?" I ask. "All the race cars have shifters in them."

My son's face brightened with this little "factoid." I guess I was OK now. After all, Speed Racer sometimes lets Trixie drive the Mach 5. A videophile, my son could surely identify with that.

Am I the only one, or do other people have to argue every point with their kids?

Recently while I was sitting at a stop light, it gave me time to think about the deep questions in life. For example; is my kid the only one that picks his nose in front of the class?

As I gaze around at the other drivers, I notice that people get a false sense of privacy in their cars. Why do people do stuff in their cars that they wouldn't do if they are sitting next to you?

I'm talking about personal acts of hygiene. I guess my kid isn't the only one who has a problem with public displays of "pickiness."

"Always keep your eye on the rearview mirror," said my Driver's Ed teacher. And what I saw at the intersection of Nottingham and Quakerbridge Roads that day bordered on the disgusting.

Here I am trying to get my kid to stop picking his nose and here are a bunch of "picky-picky" people. We're talking everything from teeth, pimples and (most commonly) nasal passages.

"Don't turn around," I said calmly to the kids, tapping my finger on my rearview mirror. "But I want you to look in this mirror and see what the person behind us is doing."

The kids, now, 11 and 8 years old, unbuckled their seatbelts to get a good look. I relished their squeals of disgust as they stated the obvious.

"What an idiot" said my son. "He better not eat it!"

"Now you know what it looks like when people watch you pick your nose," I said, hoping that this impromptu social skills lesson was sinking in.

A couple days later, his teacher pulled me aside and asked, "Did you take him to a behavioral therapist? He's stopped picking his nose"

I choked back a snicker. "Naw," I said. "I just took him to Driver's Ed."

I wonder if that guy in the car behind me knows that he just saved me a couple of hundred bucks in professional fees.

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