

Clearly A Parent: It's Driving Me Crazy By MICHAEL LISAGOR, Vienna, Va., Correspondent

My younger daughter, Jamie, got her driver's license just last year. Now, I know what you're thinking...that this must be the same Jamie who has her own honorary wall of soccer injury casts at her doctor's office (she's had two since my last article!).

And, you're asking yourself, why would any rational, caring parent — a parent whose child-rearing philosophy is firmly grounded in Buddhist principles — allow such a child to approach an automobile, much less steer one? I can only claim temporary insanity (and the realization that eventually you have to let your children grow up if you don't want to lose them).

A ship may be exposed to violent storms and turbulent waves when it sails far out into the open sea. However, unless it continues on its course, overcoming these natural hardships, it cannot reach its destination. (Daisaku Ikeda, Daily Guidance, vol. 4, p. 60)

Jamie's older sister, Megan, has been driving for four years. She once had a little problem I call "pedal nondifferentiation." My wife and I, having had no prior experience teaching young folks how to drive, allowed her to chauffeur us to the train station near our home to drop off our visiting niece and her husband.

There is a very narrow lane called Kiss and Ride where people drop off their loved ones. Megan had just received her driver's permit and had only been behind the wheel twice. Realizing she was about to run into a very tall, very large, concrete lamp post, I calmly instructed her to press the brake pedal. I did this in my usual warm, patient, fatherly voice: "MEGAN...OH, MY GOSH ...HIT THE BRAKE PEDAL ...EVERYONE DUCK...INCOMING!"

Megan promptly stomped on the gas pedal instead and drove right through the lamp post, which ended up staring at me from the other side of the windshield. Fortunately, no one was hurt. The front of our van, on the other hand, was nearly split in half.

We actually apologized to Megan for placing her in a position she was ill prepared for, and she learned an invaluable lesson about how destructive a moving automobile can be. Since then she has been a safe and thoughtful driver. Whenever we drive to the train station we refer to that special lane as Crash and Ride.

Jamie has also turned out to be a very responsible driver. My wife and I have switched from driving her everywhere all the time to worrying about her driving everywhere all the time. We wave to her in the morning as she drives off to school in her cute little Nissan Sentra singing songs with indecipherable lyrics from a tape made for her by her older sister. Then we collapse in each other's arms muttering Nam-myoho-rence-kyo and Buddhist prayers under our breaths.

I guess that's how a father's role changes. When the girls were younger, I could physically try to protect and guide them through life's difficulties. By this age, however, their values are more firmly set. So I have to maintain confidence in their character...in their ability and need to overcome problems on their own. Not easy...but absolutely necessary.

My wife and I are now using our faith to project an envelope of protection around both our children as they wind their way toward their own unique human revolution.

But I'd be less than honest not to admit that, at times, IT DRIVES ME CRAZY!

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