

To the Teens

by Larry Simoneaux

I don't know what it feels like to hear the words that two sets of parents received this past weekend. Like every other parent, I don't ever want to know. I'm not sure I am strong enough to handle it. So, this is to the teenagers. It's a message and a prayer. It's from us to you.

We were once just like you—just as young and daring. We were once sure our parents hadn't a clue as to what we wanted or what we were all about. We were once sure we could tackle the world. We were once, down deep, scared to death to face the world. We were once just like you.

The only real difference between us as parents and you as teenagers is a lot of “been theres, done thats.” And, believe me, a lot of our “done thats” were just as dumb and silly and dangerous and exciting as anything you've done or will do. That's why we worry.

We made it through. We got older. We fell in love. We got married. We had you. That means we sat up endless nights while you were a baby. We changed you when you were wet. We fed you when you were hungry. We held you when you cried.

We watched you take your first step. We made stupid faces to see you laugh. We listened to your first words. We bragged about you at work. We sent you off to your first day of school. We kept your drawings and school projects. We put your birthday cards on the refrigerator.

We watched you in your first play. We cheered for you when you made the team. We worried about whether you'd be popular, and then, when you were, we worried about your friends. We were angry when we shouldn't have been. We asked you questions we shouldn't have. We made mistakes and hurt your feelings. We didn't say, “I'm sorry” or “I love you” often enough. We argued with you. We laughed with you. We stayed awake in bed and worried when you stayed out later than your curfew.

We watched you change before our eyes into strong young men and women who were about to leave us. We were scared and happy and sorry at the same time.

We want to see you become firefighters and doctors and lawyers and policemen, merchants, pilots, beauticians, teachers, librarians, and forest rangers. We want to talk with you about how exciting your work is. We want to listen to you tell us how dumb or mean your boss is.

We want to see you meet the man or woman of your dreams. We want to see you fall in love and do the same crazy things we did. We want you to get married. We want to pass you a few dollars to help you through the rough spots. We want to see you have children and watch you start all of this all over again.

The thing we're most afraid of is that, sometimes, those things we worry about happen. Sometimes, for no rhyme or reason, you're taken from us by things beyond our control. Sometimes, we never get to see or do the things I've talked because you're not here anymore—and that is a hurt that cannot be described.

So, this is for the teenagers out there. It's the same thing parents have said to their children forever. It's the same thing you'll say to your children. They'll feel the same way about hearing it from you as you do when you hear it from us.

Please. Be careful.

We love you.

You're all we really have.