**[Really Dad? Drives to School](https://www.ctworkerscomplaw.com/really-dad-drives-to-school/)**

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*Michael Kerin and his teenage daughter Michaela of Bethany are co-contributors to the column, “Really Dad?” in which they explore the world through the eyes of their respective generation.*

**Michael**

Black Converse kicks are propped on the dashboard of the TT, with the “Sound of Sunshine” pouring through the speakers. Michaela’s head rocks from side to side as she screams the lyrics: “And that’s the sound of sunshine pouring down, down down, down…” I turn down the radio to try to find out which bus she is taking home, and what she is going to be doing after school since I am flying solo this week while my wife, Lisa, is visiting with “her Mom and them” down on the Redneck Riviera.

She cranks up the lyrics and then mumbles something that I cannot decipher above the cacophony blaring from the Bose. I turn to ask her what she just said in time to see a swish of a camisole being pulled over her head.

“Dad, I said don’t look!” This time the instruction registers clearly in my eardrums that have been dulled by years of unprotected target practice decades ago. How was I supposed to know she had changed my car into an impromptu dressing room? The song keeps banging on.

“So I jump back in there where I learned to swim, Try to keep my head above it the best I can…”

I ask my daughter what was up with her sudden wardrobe change. She tells me that her blouse was too transparent, so she had to add a layer. Immediately, I wonder how I could have missed something so apparent after spending the last half an hour with her at home. But in the blur of getting breakfast ready, feeding the dogs, trying to address a few Christmas cards and organize some workout clothes, I had missed the obvious. The truth is she could have gotten into the car with her hair on fire, and I would have thought the car ahead of me was burning some oil. That would never have occurred on Lisa’s watch: she would have had Michaela hotfooting it back up to her room before she reached the bottom step of the stairway.

I muse about what a lousy father I am as we begin lurching across the speed bumps in the high school driveway, seeing the sleepy upper classmen stagger out of their cars and amble toward the front door. This time next year Mickey will be one of them, driving herself to and from school. I am reminded of a friend’s somber observation recently that he “lost” his daughter the day she got her license. How do the years unspool so quickly? Wasn’t it just five minutes ago that her feet dangled from her car seat as she gave me a good luck kissing hand before skipping into her elementary school?

I resolve to find out the particulars of her plans for the weekend as I turn down the radio again. Getting answers to the five W’s is the essence of good parenting after all. “So Mickey…” I manage to say before she jams up the volume.. She is smiling, rollicking in the beat that will not be denied. She knows just how far she can push me, and I am right at the brink.

“Here I am…Just waiting for this storm to pass me by…”

We pull up to the curb, and I am still clueless about her plans. She nudges me to join her in the chorus. We belt it out, as she gathers her book bag and candles she’s giving to her teachers. I realize with an odd mixture of sadness and pride that she had not needed me or her mother to tell her how to dress this morning. She handled it quite nicely herself. Now she’s almost out the door, and still, I do not know the plan. She clicks open her door, starts out, then turns back to grab my hand and deposit a kiss in it. “I’ll text you later about the plans…” Then she’s gone.

I idle down the driveway listening to the sound of sunshine coming down.

**Michaela**

A morning in the Kerin household is more hectic than any mall on Black Friday. When I wake up, I go down and take T-Bone and Chai out and make sure they are both fed and watered. On the way back upstairs, I turn on and/or refill the Keurig so we can all make coffee. My mom usually cooks breakfast which I know is done when the smoke alarm goes off. Then have to choose a tie to match Dad’s suit, shoes and a scarf to match mom’s outfit, and eventually, I get myself ready. The bell which initiates class dings at exactly 7:32 every morning. My first period class on most days is AP United States History, one of my most challenging. And my parents wonder why I am always late getting in the car.

For most people, the ride to school is a short period of peace and quiet to gather themselves: for me, it is no less hectic than the rest of the morning. While mom uses one eye and hand to drive and the other eye and hand to put on mascara, I rip the knots out of my hair with a brush until I can glide it through my luscious locks without making me wince. Then I plug the AUX cord into my phone and the jam sesh begins. My mom is beginning to gain an appreciation for my taste in music, which my dad continues to deem “nonsense.” Really Dad? My goal is to turn the music up loud enough that my mom can’t hear herself thinking of questions to ask about the day. My mouth and brain have a disconnect until at least 9 a.m.; I cannot yet handle the interrogation. Usually, the scheme works and the only words escaping through the beat are the lyrics to my favorite songs by Wiz Khalifa, J Cole, Kanye West, and all of the other rappers my dad does not approve of. On rare occasion, my dad is the one to take me to school, an experience my brothers dreaded when they were my age.

In elementary school, the drop off area was a large loop which parents would follow until they reached the school greeter and then they would follow the circle the rest of the way around and out of the parking lot. However, it seems my dad had witnessed a few too many of my horse shows because he would prance through the circle a few extra times, completing victory laps, beeping here and there so everyone knew who was arriving. The woman who ushered the children out of their cars began to cover her ears when she saw my father’s TT roll up. Then came middle school, and a different drop off scene. Here, the cars would pull in and follow a straight line from one side of the parking lot to the opposite end, and out onto the road. I honestly do not know if this was on purpose or just to humiliate me, but my dad would go the wrong way nine out of ten times and proceed to beep for the entire length of the road. Thanks for that one by the way, I got laughed at by the security guard almost daily.

And most recently, high school rides with dad. Where to begin? For part of my freshman year, I rode to school with both Caelan and Andrew. In just a few rides, my dad horrified all three of us in haunting ways, mostly targeting the boys. I’ll share a few instances. Usually, my brothers stormed out of the car while the wheels were still turning because they couldn’t get out fast enough. They would then whip their backpacks onto their shoulders (although I’m surprised they fit over their bulging egos) and swagger toward the side door. On one occasion when my dad didn’t scream something along the lines of “Don’t forget you have ballet practice tonight boys!” he did something worse. This time, the boys couldn’t pretend they didn’t know the crazy man in the sports car: they were trapped. My dad not only tied their backpacks together in the trunk, he tied them to the trunk. So when it came time, the boys hopped out of the car with their “cool dude tudes” as my dad calls them, and went to grab their backpacks but obviously couldn’t get them. I don’t know who was more embarrassed, my brothers for looking like goons, or me, waiting for them, revealing not only that I was related to the goons, but also, I was related to the crazy dude in the TT.

This year, with Caelan and Andrew gone, I am the new target. However, at this point, there is not much that my dad can do to embarrass me, I have seen it all. Riding with my dad is like riding with my mom, except when I blast the music it’s to drown out my dad when he screams out the window: “Michaela Kerin, is that the boy that you told me you want to go to prom with?” and other horrifying slurs. Suffice it to say, if mom isn’t available, I would rather ride the filthy bus than my other option.