



The Terrible Teens: From Lies to Growth and Enlightenment

by michelle payton

Part of my interpretation of being a mainstream metaphysical mom is maintaining the philosophy that everything happens for a reason. In mainstream terms this basically means that I force myself to move past labels like "bad," or "regret" and look forward to find the silver linings for most situations. This, in turn, helps me achieve my ultimate goal of growth and enlightenment.

Maybe you noticed the words "force" and "most?" This comes from being a mother of not one but two teen-agers and a wanna-be – one girl in college, one boy in high school, and one (yes, she was on purpose) in elementary school. So on a daily basis I move from having conversations on practicing safe sex, to I don't care if "it's a misdemeanor" it's still illegal, to I know "South Park" is a cartoon but it's still inappropriate for an elementary schooler. On a good day, I call each of them by their given names instead of a combination of the three plus dog – LeAlEmSage, my youngest has brushed her hair and teeth without me asking, my boy has told me the truth about where he is and who he is with (or has he?),

my oldest... well, I don't really know what my oldest is up to and ignorance is bliss.

Silver lining: I have learned how to adjust my approach to different personalities and needs which has rewarded me with a higher percentage of good days.

What I do know is the pivotal ages so far for my oldest two teens began their freshman years in high school then peaked at sixteen and seventeen. One of the most irritating shared traits was they lied all the time. My teens have pushed back on this point saying all people lie, and this is actually true – it's been shown that adult women and men lie three or more times per day (men actually more than women). What is also true is the human brain isn't fully developed until about 25 years of age (particularly the reasoning area.) But being a teen (more than three decades ago) was simple compared to parenting them. Lies, all the work-in-progress, and adult staging; no-one sent me the memo that said, "Oh by the way, you have to relive elementary through dreaded high school years through your kids' eyes." The post script that would read, "And if you do a really (labeled) 'bad' parenting job, you will be publicly embarrassed, and potentially penalized with fines

and even jail time."

Silver lining: Parenting has made me a better person (eventually) by understanding that enlightenment comes in stages, honoring that everyone is at a different stage, and stages are defined differently by different people.

Teen lies run in stages as well, and can have big ramifications. When little one's lie (12 and under age range) about putting their toys away, it's irritating but harmless. When teenagers lie, it can become complex – teenage pregnancy and a child raising a child, addictions, driving under the influence, truancy and expulsion from school, and worse. While my teenagers were defining themselves, I was simultaneously protecting myself from stress (the #1 killer in America) and even the law! A mixture of disappointment, anger, fear, sadness, feeling foolish or like a failure all emerged when our kids told me one thing, and other adults, school administrators, teachers or their own friends told different stories. To add to the confusion, my dilemma also included how I could give them room to grow, while getting close enough to the truth to keep them safe?

Silver Lining: I have learned to be more patient and creative in communication. For instance, turning off the television while having a meal at home or driving the long way to the mall, teens would rather talk than have awkward silence. Casual chit chat

became pearls of wisdom.

As parents, the likelihood of having full teen disclosure on any matter was slim. It didn't become just about them, but also about not "snitching" on their friends (as my son would say, "Snitches get Stitches.") As they became upper classmen in high school, the realities of alcohol, sex and smoking reared their ugly heads.

Alcohol... Our past homes had the dreaded basement (and even worse if it was a walk-out). When our kids were small the basement was a great play area, but the word "play" was redefined when they hit the terrible teens. It wasn't enough to do bottle checks, we had to open "water bottles" and smell them to make sure it's wasn't vodka or other alcohol. The ultimate eye opener was when one of my teens' classmates was drinking, smoking pot and driving and killed himself and his girlfriend after leaving a party. Whether our search tactics worked or not, teens drinking in our household could have equaled jail time for us, the parents, not to mention potentially lost lives.

Sex... We have a rule that says that all doors remain open when mixed company visits. One night, I noticed a closed door in the basement when one of my kids' friends visited. I stomped loudly down the stairs announcing that they were at risk of me seeing their teenage hind ends. And when I opened the door, the girl jumped into the attached bathroom claiming "cramps"

and the boyfriend lay on the couch in a fetal position saying he had Tourette's and was feeling dizzy. This was so outlandish that I wondered if there could be any truth to it. What if he did have Tourette's and I was being politically incorrect? How could they bundle so many lies into one minute so quickly? The ah-ha moment was when I dropped the boy at his house (taking advantage of that awkward silence in my vehicle), and the boy bragged about being able to fit in the girl's jeans that night. My husband's and my inside joke became "Oh, that must be Teen Tourette's."

Smoking... This has been a hot topic for many and it's estimated that more Americans die from cigarette-related illnesses than from alcohol, car accidents, suicide, AIDS, homicide, and illegal drugs combined. This information came from a Phillip Morris booklet for Youth Smoking Prevention ("Raising Kids Who Don't Smoke... Could your kid be smoking?") – the resource feels like a bit of a dichotomy, like a candy company saying don't eat sugar, but there were some good stats here. Because my husband and I don't smoke, I just didn't think this was going to be a problem for our kids. Wrong again. This was yet another "deer in the headlights" experience, as both of my teens had brushes with this addiction. First, I started seeing lighters laying around in one my teen's room so I asked, "Why do you have lighters?" Answer: "I like to play with them." When

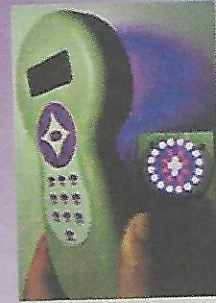
I noticed smoke aromas on my teens clothing I asked, "Are you smoking?" Answer: "No, my friend was smoking in my car or (another answer was) I was with kids that were smoking." Another interesting statistic is kids who have friends that smoke are nine times more likely to be smokers compared to kids whose friends don't smoke. An administrator called to say one of my teens was seen smoking, so I asked, "Are you smoking?" Answer: "No, I grabbed the cigarette from my friend and put it out so she wouldn't get caught." Now some of you reading this would say, "Come on Michelle, are you that naive?" Maybe part of it was denial, but my answer is hands down "Yes." What rattled my consciousness on this subject was to see my kids' excuses printed almost verbatim in the Phillip Morris literature in sections "If you think she's lying" and "Stay alert for warning signs."

Silver lining: My kids knew that they are being watched, which put the brakes on some of their unacceptable behavior creating a safer teen "playground."

Being a mainstream metaphysical mom, embracing that everything happens for a reason moves me closer to enlightenment. Finding the silver linings – adjusting my approach to different personalities and needs, understanding that enlightenment comes in stages, honoring that everyone is at a different stage, and stages are defined differently by different people, being a more patient

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and creative communicator, and helping my kids create a safer teen "playground" – has come with many mental bumps and bruises, but has helped us all grow..

My Next Silver lining: My youngest is only 9 so I have six years before our next Teen Growth Spurt.

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