

Our Guest Blogger Writes Traffic Jam: The Importance Of A Good Carpool

Description

My mother has this story she likes to tell. Back in the 1980s, my little sister attended the then Westlake School for Girls. She was in a carpool. One the families in the carpool decided to divorce, but it hadn't gone through yet. The wife found out that her not-yet-ex-husband was having a fling with one of the other carpool moms. Was the wife furious at the betrayal? Yes. Her response: an outraged "That's my carpool!" Never mind the demise of the marital relationship. Her carpool trumped all.

Extreme example? Maybe, but you really can't underestimate the value of a carpool until you really need one. After I switched my daughter's school from our local, two minutes away, fully walkable public school (3rd St. Elementary) to a private school (Mirman) on the other side of the moon, I knew I needed a carpool for sanity. Because, you remember when Christina wrote a post awhile back with the ridiculous squiggle line from "your house" to the perfect "private school"? That could be my commute.

I initially thought I'd be in a small carpool to start, maybe just one other family, and we'd all switch off. But instead, it turned into a four family carpool, including two moms I don't know at all. Fine. It means even less driving for everyone. Except that I have a small car that can only fit three kids (my daughter is big enough to ride in the passenger seat in relative safety), a slight wrinkle that has since been worked out to everyone's relative satisfaction. Frankly, I would've jumped through hoops of fire to make this carpool work out.

Thus far, the actual commute has been unpredictable. Due to the mercurial nature of L.A. traffic patterns, it seems impossible to choose a reliable route. On my first day of afternoon pickup, the traffic on the 101 just stopped. I mean, stopped dead. For fifteen minutes. I really got concerned when people started getting out of their cars and rummaging in their trunks for bottles of water. I kept thinking: there must be a logical reason for this. No. Traffic started up as mysteriously as it had stopped, and the rest of the commute was smooth sailing.

What's really brutal is the morning pickup. Carpools depend on the requirements of the individual drivers, and two of those drivers want their kids to have time on the playground before school begins, necessitating a 6:45 pickup time. Seriously. My daughter has taken to awakening to her alarm at 6am, turning it off in a stupor, and waking in a panic at 6:20. She's developed the sleeping habits of an adolescent overnight.

Still, it's hard to complain. This is a good carpool. This is a carpool I need. This is a carpool I must keep sacrosanct. Other people's horror stories, however, abound. There are stories of forgotten children, awaiting carpools that never showed. Or extra kids showing up, requiring "doubling up"

of seatbelts (probably illegal, but whatâ€™s a mom to do, leave them? Donâ€™t buckle them at all?). I know of one kid who refuses to let his parents join a carpool, because he doesnâ€™t like having other kids in â€œhisâ€ car. How about kids who hate each other and fight all the way, every day? Or fears about someoneâ€™s car model and safety (unfounded, but in this fear-laden culture, probably unavoidable).

Sometimes I look back with nostalgia to my high school Crossroads carpool. Sitting in my friendâ€™s momâ€™s Country Squire station wagon, the momâ€™s long crimson fingernails clicking on the steering wheel in time with the crooning of Neil Diamond. That carpool had many different characters: the silent, hulking, smelly 9th grader, the hapless boy who stumbled out his front door always half-dressed, the mean girl duo who refused to speak to me. My mother says she learned more about teenagers in that carpool than she ever wanted to know, just by listening to our morning conversations (â€œYou guys must have thought I was deaf,â€ she says).

Once your child is in the perfect private school, in the most inconvenient location, youâ€™ll become a tolerant carpool soul. There will be pickups at the crack of dawn, or pickups that are outrageously late. There will be punches thrown in the way back of a minivan while on the freeway. There will be smelly breakfasts to-go, which leave grease all over the backseat. Someoneâ€™s child, at some point, will be forgotten, and everyone will have to be forgiven. You know why? Because itâ€™s your *carpool*, damn it, and without it, life will be unmanageable.

Jenny Heitz has worked as a staff writer for Coast Weekly in Carmel, freelanced in the South Bay, and then switched to advertising copywriting. She now writes about gift ideas and products on her blog, [Find A Toad](#).

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