

DEBORAH McADAMS

Parents are more than skin deep

Parents can be such an embarrassment. They always talk about what it was like when they were your age. They had to drive their grandma's Rambler to college and they bagged groceries for ten hours every night to pay tuition. Some protested the war in Vietnam and a few probably dropped acid, but you can't tell by looking at them.



It happens to everyone. One day you're spending every dime you earn on state-of-the-art stereo equipment. The next day you're shopping for a mattress that won't hurt your back.

Those cutting-edge hipsters of the '60s now look like Wal-Mart catalog people. Your dad sweats profusely when he mows the yard on a riding mower, and he parts his hair just above his right ear because there's nothing to part farther up.

Your mom throws a fit when you wear long-handled under cut-offs. She called the Crisis Center when you pierced your nose. She has a collection of bizarre exercise devices in the basement, including a Barbie-doll size trampoline and a set of giant rubber bands. She went through a seaweed-and-tofu phase, a yoga phase and an exotic houseplant phase. When the kids are finally out of the house, she'll join a rock-climbing group and start a newsletter for menopausal women.

Parents seem to live in a shell. They just don't understand the way things are now. People carry guns in high school. Friends kill themselves. Everyone knows where to go for an abortion. Only girls from poor families have their babies. Life is gritty for teenagers, and parents seem to live in a la-la-land of mini-vans and frozen yogurt.

If it's hard for kids to believe that parents were ever teenagers, it's just as hard for parents to believe their kids are teenagers.

Although the duration of a lifetime appears to be linear, time picks up speed after one's 30th birthday. This unusual phenomenon manifests itself in subtle ways. Suddenly, people have to do an equation to remember their age. A couple of beers will put them to sleep. They can't believe it's already Christmas again, and they fixate on

young people's growth rate — my, they can't believe how much you've grown.

The time-acceleration phenomenon is yet another joke of the universe, a sub-group of the mysteries of the universe. Jokes of the universe include nostril hair, cellulite and rational communication between men and women. Nothing makes time-acceleration more evident than kids leaving for college. Parents may treat their college-age kids like babies because time-acceleration makes it seem like only yesterday they were fishing jelly beans out of a certain nose.

Actually, parents do understand that life is gritty. Half of the marriages they celebrated two decades ago ended in divorce, and others are on shaky ground. Their best friend from college has cancer. Lately, they've noticed a lump beneath their arm that just won't go away. Property taxes are going up again, the car needs new skins and grandma may have to go to a nursing home.

Life can get so gritty that people find ways to ignore painful things. A glorified ranch house with a Ford Taurus in the garage represents middle-class entrapment (as well as free rent) to an in-your-face teenager. It represents comfort and security to people who have lived in two dozen cheesy little apartments and need a little respite from life's accumulated grit.

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Parents vacillate between telling their kids, "you'll find out one day, and not wanting their kids to find out. Consequently, it may be hard for parents to talk to their kids about depression, sex, illness, drug abuse and abortion. They omit certain family secrets from their oral history. They can't help it. They think they're protecting their kids.

Young people in high school and college are confronted with a menu of deadly issues including AIDS, eating disorders, suicidal depression, alcohol and drug abuse, violent relationships and peers with pistols.

These realities exist at UNL, and a survey by the Bureau of Sociological Research asked students to rate the seriousness of campus problems. Students rated parking as the most serious problem on this campus for five years in a row.

Parking. Life does, indeed, get grittier.


The parents of those UNL students who perceived parking as the most serious problem on campus have done a good job of protecting their kids.

Parents might want to consider protecting their kids less and preparing them more. If families don't learn to talk about AIDS, eating disorders, depression, violent relationships and substance abuse, kids may long for the days when parking was their biggest problem.

Deb McAdams is Daily Nebraskan editor and a junior news-editorial major.

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Class of 1989	Born Jan 1, 1976	Husker

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