

# Driver lets inner teen take the wheel

Driving home from work recently, I was almost sideswiped by a teenager in a souped-up Civic with neon-blue bulbs on the hood. I'd have cursed the aspiring "Jack-ass" till the next 50 Cent concert, had I not felt like his kindred spirit.

I'm 25, but in the past year I've been getting in touch with my

## NOT FOR NOTHING Cara Nissman

teenage side by relearning how to drive.

I got my license at 16, then spent eight years jaywalking because of my hometown's wicked-high insurance rates. Now that I've left behind minimum-wage retail jobs and bad '80s bangs (Warrant, anyone?), I'm finding my way back to the open road.

The transition hasn't been easy. The first time I turned the key, I couldn't remember which was the gas pedal. And I ceaselessly circled streets because I hadn't learned to parallel park.

That was nothing compared with the first time I chauffeured my fiancé. Admittedly, I shouldn't have driven us to the place we first fell in love. I dented that memory faster than you can say, "Flat tire." I tuned out his directions because I was concentrating on stupid things — like the road. After several outbursts, I abdicated the driver's seat and agreed to drive alone until I improved.

Now that I've steered solo (and accident-free — if you don't count that run-in I had with the side of my house) for a while, I've learned to enjoy the freedom I lacked as a teen. I revel in revving to Guster and lose control behind the wheel only when I spot a Filene's sale.

Sure, I've encountered obstacles, including road heaves the size of Stripperella's chest and near-fatal chumps — one of whom rear-ended me in a parking lot. I've gotten lost lots of times.

And I've experienced plenty of irony. My car's odometer clicked to 666 as I passed a Revere hot

spot. And the song "Crash Into Me" played as I merged onto a busy highway. Luckily, no one obliged.

I'm clinging to my sense of humor because driving has advantages. I no longer have to squeeze onto a cramped bus. I can sail through drive-throughs when cravings call. I'm more self-assured. Obnoxious Boston drivers? I joined their ranks the day I cut off a filthy Range Rover in my blueberry Hyundai Accent. Rather than fume when stuck in traffic, I get a big kick out of the Big Dig now, if only because the slower the traffic flows, the less likely some smart guy will smash into me. Driving a petite car among boundless, bloated SUVs, I'm intimidated. But I'm enjoying the challenge.

Guess being a teen again isn't so bad after all.

*Cara Nissman is a member of the Herald staff and writes the Your S.T.U.F.F. page for teens, which appears Mondays in the Herald.*