

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.