

What I Wish Someone Had Told Me When I Was A Teenager
by Christine Bastone

When I was a teenager—I couldn't wait to graduate from high school and be an adult. I believe that I was told something like “enjoy this time—for it will never come again.” But of course I didn't listen. I didn't understand! I wanted freedom. I wanted that same heady feeling when I first got my driver's license to cross over to the rest of my life.

Now that I am an adult—in years anyway—I find myself longing for the much more carefree existence of being a child. After all—it's much more fun to leave all the lights on in the house—than worry about paying the electric bill!

Not that I would ever want to be a teenager again—not for all the money in the world! I don't think it's usually a fun thing to be. So I guess it's a good thing that I can't go back in time! But if I could—this would be what I would tell my teenaged self:

Give some serious thought to what you want to be when you grow up. Find something that you love to do. You don't want to hate going to your job every day. This is a biggie—TRUST ME on this.

You don't want to look into going back to school when you have a spouse and a couple of kids to take care of. Because even if you can figure out how to pay for it—it takes too much time away from your family. And if you're the breadwinner—it makes for too long of a day, too many nights of the week.

You also need to find something that you can make decent money at. I'm not talking millions—but you don't want to worry how you're going to pay the rent every month. And then later when you have kids—you don't want to worry about how you're going to feed them. (Especially their first year when you have to give them formula!) You need to make enough so that you can pay all of your bills—and still have some left over for fun. It is ABSOLUTELY no fun to go shopping and not be able to buy even a few cheap things that you want!

Know now that you can't live on love. IT TAKES MONEY. Now I'm NOT saying love is not important or to marry for money--but unfortunately love can easily be forgotten when you're both so very stressed over money!

Your credit is important. Don't mess it up. Don't go nuts with your first credit card. Use it to build your credit. I recommend having the money in the bank for your purchase every time you use it. If you can't or don't want to do that—I suggest that you cut up your credit card the FIRST month you can't completely pay it off. But please—whatever you do—don't spend tomorrow's money on today—YOU WILL NEED IT TOMORROW.

People tried to warn me about credit too—and I didn't listen. I could have saved myself a LOT of grief if I had listened. Trust me on this—money problems are rough on marriages. They can also cause problems—even estrangements with your family and /or your in-laws. The combination of our money problems and a Christmas vacation spent with my family--totally ruined said vacation once. Plus it's very VERY stressful.

You may think—“oh I'll just declare bankruptcy”. Let me tell you I did not find bankruptcy fun. I HIGHLY recommend avoiding it whenever possible. I mean sometimes it's completely beyond your control (ours was a combination of some bad decisions and some things that were out of our

control.) Besides not being fun—it of course messes up your credit—although ours was pretty messed up by then—so it really didn't make it any worse. But it's on your credit report for 7 to 10 years I believe.

Save some money. A little bit—saved consistently—can REALLY add up. You want some of your money to work for you—YOU DON'T WANT TO ALWAYS HAVE TO WORK FOR YOUR MONEY.

Plus unexpected things happen. Such as the car breaks down—your child gets sick—or your hours get cut back at work. You don't want to have to worry about food, rent and utilities when these things happen.

On a different subject—don't make huge decisions (such as leaving a spouse) without a good deal of thought. Even if it's the right decision—it could haunt you if you make it spontaneously. And if one does haunt you—it could cause problems in making very simple decisions (I once couldn't decide between lemonade and a soft drink—and I don't even like lemonade!)

Take good care of your body—it's the only one you will ever have. Don't let yourself go—it's tough to change things later.

Self esteem, self respect and self confidence are absolutely critical to success. Guard yours.

My how obvious and easy those last two pieces of advice sound! But please don't let that cause you to believe that they are either easy or unimportant!!

Even if you know that you want to be a stay-at-home mom—have something to fall back on. Husbands can lose jobs, get sick or even die. Not to mention the high divorce rate in this country. You need to know of a way you could make money if you need to.

Plus you might change your mind about wanting to be a stay-at-home-mom. It's a lot tougher than it looks—believe me—working part time might start to look like fun—or at least a nice break from the kids. And you actually get to interact with other adults! Now that's a BIG plus for us stay-at-home-moms!

It's a really good idea to have some job skills to fall back on. Take some classes and get some training when times are good—preferably in something slightly different than what you plan to be. This could REALLY be a lifesaver if something happens like jobs become scarce in your chosen field.

TRUST ME—you do not want to be in your forties and have a health problem that makes it impossible to work full time. (or a spouse that has such a health problem) A child under five—who doesn't yet go to school—no babysitter nearby and another child you have to get to and from elementary school five days a week. This can make you feel trapped and hopeless. You do NOT want to have to worry about where the rent or mortgage is coming from every month for years—and wonder just how you are going to make ends meet again this month!!

There are classes online—at your local high school or at your local college. There are also lots of what I call technical schools—where you can go where you will only study what you need to know on the job. Maybe you can even do something on your own—like babysit or mow other people's yards. I don't know—and I don't really care what you find that you can do—as long as you find something that you can fall back on!

DO NOT DROP OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL. Your options will become SEVERELY limited. Sure—you're probably young and strong now—and manual labor can be more fun than school—especially with a paycheck involved. But what will you do if when you get older you hurt your back? When for whatever reason you need to do something else—but aren't qualified for anything else? You do NOT want to have a spouse—kids and a house to take care of—plus try to get your GED at the same time!!!

Now renting is fine while you're in college or something—especially when it's just you. But I recommend buying a house as soon as you can. In my opinion—if you do it for more than short term--renting is throwing your money away. Owning a house gives you options—and houses appreciate. For some reason that I don't remember now--when I got married—I thought renting was a better idea than buying—and so my husband and I didn't buy one when we could—and then for a long time after we wanted to—we couldn't.

This becomes especially important after kids come along. When we first moved into our apartment—it was just my husband and I. And it was fine—for the two of us. Fast forward about seven years and we had grown to four—and it was MUCH too small. Plus—we had a small lake out back and a parking lot out front—so the kids couldn't play outside without constant supervision. I just didn't think about these things ahead of time—and so I'm telling you this so that hopefully you can--and therefore you can avoid—or at least minimize--this painful and frustrating situation.

Don't get stuck making a car payment the rest of your life. Pay yourself the equivalent of a car payment for a few years and then buy it for cash. Now this may not be possible when you buy your first car. But even if you do have to make payments on your first car—I recommend at least trying to make said car last 10 years. That way for 5 years—you can pay for the car—and for 5 years you can pay the equivalent of a car payment to yourself. Because trust me--worrying about having your car repossessed is almost as stressful as worrying if you're going to be homeless. It's not an all or nothing thing though—even if you can't make car payments to yourself for the entire 5 years—any part of that time that you can make payments to yourself will help tremendously.

Be good to yourself. Take care of yourself. If you don't—you're no good to anyone else. A lot of people might very well tell you that this is selfish—but this is so very important that I'm going to repeat it. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF. IF YOU DON'T—YOU'LL BE NO GOOD TO ANYONE ELSE!

Appreciate your parents—they probably did/are doing the best they could. It's TOUGH to be a parent. Not that it's easy to be a teenager--I wouldn't be one again for ANYTHING. But it's not easy being a parent either. It's a VERY different experience on the other side.

Questioning everything that you've been taught seems to be a part of being a teenager. It's an important part of growing up because you need to decide for yourself whether you will accept or reject all of these things that you've been taught all your life. One of these things may be your faith. Now I realize that it may not be—especially if going to church wasn't a part of your growing up. But if it was—I would be patient with this part of your life at this time. In a few years—you might very well change your mind. I clearly remember when I was a senior in high school—how if I had been given a choice—how I did not want to go to church. Although with me—I would probably have been happy if the only time I had to go to church was on Sunday morning! It at least seemed like I was there every time the doors were open—and I still say to

this day that that interfered with me doing my homework! But I digress. A few years later I felt VERY differently. Although sadly by then—the church that I had grown up in didn't exist anymore!!

Now you very well might think that your parents are the lamest people ever. Or at the very least be having difficulties with them. This is normal too. Trust me—in a few years they will seem like much smarter people! The older you get—the more you will probably appreciate your parents. And just wait until you're a parent yourself—you will probably understand your parents like never before then! This is another area I would advise you to be patient in.

Now one of the topics that probably causes friction between you and the adults in your life—is your music. Now this is a topic that I know something about! Oh—I know your music and mine are very, very different. But I bet the feelings are similar.

Especially during my teenage years—I expressed how I felt by what music I played. If I was sad—I played sad songs. If I was mad (and I was frequently mad!)-I played mad songs. If I was in love (I was also frequently in love!)-I played love songs. And of course if I was going through a breakup—I played the love did me wrong songs! Even then though—I sang and listened about stuff I would never do. (no—I will not go into details!!) They were just a way to express my feelings.

Boy did I get tired of all the criticism of the music that I loved! I think the only time that this made an impression on me was when someone in my church took a few lyrics to a few of the popular songs at the time—and gave them a new slant—a Christian slant. It was just a different way to look at them.

I really wasn't interested in going to concerts and stuff. (Which I realize may have kept me out of a good bit of trouble!) I just liked to listen to it in my room. But it was still a very big part of my life. It still is. Since I got my new computer a year ago—I have looked for '80's music online. It's been pretty awesome to listen to the music from my generation again. You see music has a way of bringing you back to another place and time. Music from the 80's can to this day bring back many, many memories.

And then there's the opposite sex! Sorry guys—I don't have much perspective on teenage boys. But teenage girls on the other hand—I have a lot of perspective on them! I may have been a late bloomer—but my first encounters with the opposite sex were quite intense all the same! They just very well might be more innocent than the teenage girls of today I'm afraid. I've heard enough about such things as all the oral sex that goes on to know that. But you can still learn a few lessons from my experience girls!

Like I said I was a late bloomer. I believe that I was a sophomore in high school before I really became interested in boys. But boy once I started—that's pretty much all I could think about! Now it took me a while to find my first boyfriend. I was a junior in high school by then. (yes I was even sweet 16 and never been kissed!!! For like a month! But that's a story for another day—and no it wasn't my first boyfriend who kissed me!)

I was introduced to this guy by a friend of mine. He was 20—I was 16. He was my first love. And there is absolutely NOTHING like first love. We dated for three months and then broke up. And as it turned out—this guy and the girl who introduced us ended up getting married! Oh my was my relationship with this girl intense for a while! And let me tell you my English teacher at

the time certainly got an earful—as I wrote about this experience in my writing assignments! I wish I still had what I wrote. But I do know that I couldn't give you the details here!!

But in the end we worked it all out. This guy become a sort of big brother—and we all became friends again. I have some nice memories of the Prom and Graduation and even their wedding the summer after we graduated. After that we basically lost touch. I've seen her a few more times since then—but not much. And she's certainly the one friend from high school I would most like to look up again.

Then there's my second boyfriend. I don't even remember where I met him! Wow--that floors me! At the time you think you'll never forget these kind of details! Anyway—we were both seniors. We went to different schools though. He asked me to go steady and I wore his class ring. How awesome was that? He was Catholic—so unfortunately my parents didn't like him. And they just couldn't understand why I wanted to see him Friday, Saturday and Sunday! This caused much friction to say the least! After a while I don't think he knew why I wanted to see him all weekend either! He ended up deciding that he didn't want to be tied down after all—and he also wanted to spend some time with “the guys”. (actually I think he wanted to spend some time drinking with the guys—and there was NO WAY I was letting that happen!) Anyway—this was really my first experience with me coming on too strong and scaring guys away! But I was a slow learner—it took a few more of these types of relationships before I caught on!

If I had to do it all over again—I would have given this guy some space to go out with the guys. (although I still highly disapprove of the drinking thing!) And I certainly would have backed off some. Ok maybe a lot! Guys just don't like it when you hang all over them and chase them all the time! I think that they like to do a lot of the chasing. While I don't normally advocate game playing. Playing hard to get—at least a little—never hurt anything! At the very least you can give them a chance to call you—and then plan on not being there when they do!

But seriously—focus on your own life a little. Spend some time with yourself. Get to know who you are and what you want. I know, believe me I know—it probably sounds like no fun. But I recommend it anyway. This becomes even more important when you aren't dating someone but want to be. In my experience—you usually don't find someone when you're looking—but when you least expect it! Anyway—just trust me on this. **YOU NEED TO LEARN HOW TO CELEBRATE YOU AND TO TAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF.** This will come in very handy while dating, after you're married and never more so than once you become a mother!

Now since when I was in school they talked to us a lot about not doing drugs—this at least in part caused me to never want to do drugs! I'm not exactly sure where I learned that I didn't want to drink and drive. I know a lot of kids at my school drank—for I heard them talking about it a lot. But they never approached me. (I assume that they knew that I wouldn't and were afraid that I would tell on them!) And yes I did decide to wait until I got married before having sex! (Again I don't remember what exactly caused me to make that decision.) Although there are a lot of other ways to have fun besides going all the way you understand!!

But that's all that I can say about those subjects. I also never got in trouble at school. (I didn't dare—my father was a teacher and my mother had been too before she had me!!) So I can't help you there either.

I wanted to talk about things I had some personal experience with. I would like you to learn from my mistakes so something good comes out of them. That's my whole point in writing this.

I know that I beat the money bit into the ground—but it is so VERY important. It has caused me a TON of grief. I'm just trying to spare you that.

I hope that this helps. I hope to save you from at least some of the pain that I have been through. That will mean that it wasn't all in vain. Thank you so much for reading this. Good luck--
Christine