

# “It’s not exactly a walk in the park”

The life of a teenager today as told by those living it and those remembering it



**T**hanks to everyone who sent us thoughts on being a teenager today. We heard from quite a few teenagers who can write very well and thoughtfully. There’s not enough space to publish all that the judges selected. Look for more on our Web site: [www.carolinacountry.com](http://www.carolinacountry.com)

I myself was a teenager not long ago. I felt similar to how many teenagers feel today: introspective and worried, but hopeful and adventurous. I complained that too much school work impeded my progress at sports and romance. And in spite of all the chores at home—I kept the animals fed, the grounds mowed and raked, the barn swept, the mudroom orderly, the younger children in line, you name it—I still strayed into trouble from time to time. And I began wondering who I am and where I fit, which I’ve since learned takes a lot of practice. We all get good at it sooner or later.

We look forward to more of your submissions to our “Nothing Could Be Finer” series. See page 18.

— *Michael E.C. Gery, editor*

Photos by Taylor Salstrand, Raleigh.

## A TEENAGER, THE THIRD TIME AROUND

I’m 62 years old, so I figure I’ve been a 17-year-old three and a half times over.

As a first-time teenager, I worried about geometry tests, boys and whether my fingernail polish matched my skirt. Now, I ponder important stuff like gasoline prices, fat grams and whether I turned off the iron.

I used to measure success by the number of my friends, but now I know that one close friend is better than money and fame. For teenagers, hurting means being jilted or brokenhearted by an unkind remark. Today, if you ask me what hurts, the answer is usually “everything,” but now I know that hearts heal and unkind words are usually regretted.

Like most teens, I had a lean, strong and supple body, which isn’t true today, but at the same time, I am more comfortable in my own skin. And although I once had a teenager’s perfect eyesight instead of bifocals, my third turn at being a teenager has given me clearer vision of the world.

It was great fun to be a teenager during the 1950s, when the term “teenager” was first coined. But I like being an experienced teen even better.

*Barbara Pilcher  
Arapahoe  
Tideland EMC*

## A FINE LESSON

A few months ago, my 17-year-old niece, Katie, got a speeding ticket. She asked her mom for \$85 to pay her fine and court costs. Her mom, a single parent, reluctantly went for her purse, but I stopped her from getting her checkbook.

I told them about the first time my dad made me go to court to learn how the judicial system works. I also volunteered to take Katie to court. Well, the horrified look on Katie’s face said it all. Katie went on the offensive, using the old “but I’ll miss school if I go to court” routine.

“This will be educational,” I told her, “and you’ll be the talk of the school!”

Katie wanted to know what she had to wear to court. I told her to wear her Sunday best.

Court day arrived, and we left her house at 7:30 to be early for a 9 a.m. court date. I could see Katie was beginning to fret. We got two front row seats in the courtroom and sure enough, all types of offenders arrived. Katie asked me to rehearse what she was to tell the assistant district attorney and asked for what seemed like the 1000th time, "How do I look?"

When the ADA showed up, she announced where each type of offender should line up. I shoved Katie to the "guilty with no attorney" line. Poor Katie looked closer to 12 than 17. When it got to be our turn, Katie launched into her script. The ADA knew exactly what our mission was and listened to Katie mumble through her story and confession. The attorney asked Katie if she accepted a reduced fine to pleading to a lesser offense, and with a meek "yes" reply, we were off to the clerk's office to pay the fine.

As we left the courthouse, Katie asked, "Is that it?"

All I could say was, "Yep."

She said that she couldn't wait for all her school friends to ask her about court. And I got my reward: a warm hug and a thanks.

*Peter G. Ellis Jr.*

*Emerald Isle*

*Carteret-Craven Electric Cooperative*

## OUT OF TROUBLE

A teenager today is quite different from the teenager I was back in the 1940s. I grew up on a tobacco farm and worked in tobacco during the summer. Besides working in our own tobacco, I helped our neighbors. With the money I made from the neighbors, I bought my school clothes and my schoolbooks.

If teenagers today work at all, they spend their money for things they don't really need. They have too much, and they don't appreciate what they have.

Teenagers today are smarter than I was. They learn so much from TV and the computer, but some of the things they learn are not

good. I think so much violence among teenagers comes from TV and the computer. I'm not saying all teenagers today are bad, but too many of them are.

When I was a teenager, my parents kept us so busy, we didn't have time to get in trouble.

*Gladys Pegram*

*Littleton*

*Halifax EMC*

## TOTALLY CONFUSING

For me, the teenage years were very confusing to say the least. It was almost like I woke up one morning to find that boys, who had once been nothing more than good friends, now seemed to give me butterflies when they were around. Girlfriends who had once only talked about toys and Disney movies now talked about what boys were the cutest, how to style your hair, wear your clothes, paint your fingernails or what shade of lip gloss was totally hip for the season.

My friends and I were practically joined at the hip. We would stay with each other every night and sit outside at the patio table talking, singing our favorite songs and laughing about whatever happened during the day.

I spent most of my teenage years trying to figure out who I was, thinking I knew one day, only to find myself completely different three months later.

I look back and still get that indescribable feeling of being care-free, vibrant and so ready to be grown to see what life had in store for me. It's nice to reminisce about it, but I am glad you only go through the teenage part of life once.

*Angela Cox, 21*

*Parkton*

*Lumbee River EMC*



## Looking Forward

### TRYING TO FIT IN TO EVERYTHING

Being a teenager today is all about trying to make yourself as perfect as possible. I'm 14 years old and you can take my word for it. The tight jeans, short skirts and high-heeled shoes we wear are *not* comfortable. We wake up every morning wondering what to wear just to be picked on at school.

And then there's this: If you didn't fit in when you were younger, you never will. Because by high school, everyone has spilt up into groups and won't dare let anyone else in.

As for the boys, their problems now are the same as they used to be. They always think about one simple thing: girls. Teenage boys will always walk up to a girl and ask her on a date usually just to be turned down.

There is one problem that affects both teenage girls and boys: peer pressure. Every teenager has friends, and some friends will push you into doing something wrong. The biggest problem is smoking and drinking. I think the world for teens has taken a turn for the worse.

*Holly Hopkins*

*Rocky Mount*

*Edgecombe-Martin County EMC*

### HIGH STRESS AND HIGH DRAMA

Beep! Beep! Beep! Your alarm clock goes off at 5 a.m., and you're lying there in bed catching a few more minutes of sleep after going to bed near midnight trying to study for that chemistry test you have the next day.

We teenagers go through a lot. We take on too much, and we end up feeling burnt out. So by the weekend, all we want to do is sleep and relax. I'm 16 years old and going to high school.

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High school is hard enough as it is. I stay in school for seven hours then come home and do another two to three hours of homework.

I have other things besides school to juggle. For example, I play sports for my church basketball team and softball team. I also need my own personal time to myself or with friends just to relax from a stressful day at school. Other things that I'm going through are relationships and friendships. Just the other week, my friend and I got in a huge argument over something so dumb. And I know it's dumb, because I can't even remember what it was about. High school is full of drama. Especially when I'm dating someone; it seems as if everyone else is in the relationship, too.

Not a lot of adults give us credit, considering all the stressful situations we get put in and all the drama that goes on at school and with friends. I think I've been handling it well, given the circumstances.

*Lindsay Worden  
Charlotte*

### TRYING TO DIG OUT

I am a 14-year-old boy who just started high school a couple of months ago. So far I am slowly struggling and trying to come out of the hole I dug myself into.

I am supposed to be in the early stages of growing up, but still I want to go out with my friends and play like I am a 6- or 7-year-old. I am the older of two brothers. They say when you are young you can't wait til you grow up, and when you are older you wish you were younger. Right now I am at that point in life to where I don't know if I want to grow up or stay young.

*Justin Pawlowski  
Lehigh Acres, Fla.  
EnergyUnited*

### IT'S NOT EXACTLY A WALK IN THE PARK

Being a teenager is one of the most dramatized and fun chapters in a person's life. It is a fun time and a time to really get to know who your true friends are. It's not always about fun and games though. We have to take on a lot of

responsibility when becoming a teenager and do more things for ourselves. I know as a teen that I have to balance my time for talking to my friends and doing my schoolwork. School gets tough as one gets older. I have been stressed out before from it, and frustration can begin to build.

I also know teenagers are judged by the way they act and dress. Popularity plays a big role. These are some things that most teenagers and I go through in everyday life. It is not always a walk in the park. You have to earn other people's respect and show them that you are mature and responsible.

Nonetheless, being a teenager is really cool, and it is a time when a person has more choices and responsibilities in their lives to make it fun and interesting.

*Ryan Craven  
Charlotte  
Union Power Cooperative*

### WE'RE NOT ALL BAD

They call it a "lockdown" at my school, and it consists of being locked in your classroom, waiting on the police to check your lockers and bags. When it's all over, they bring K-9s in your room and check for drugs or whatever they're looking for. This is all because some untrusting adult thinks they saw "weed" or something like it in one of my classmates' back packs.

We are teenagers, yes, but we're not convicts. Not all of us do bad things. Some of us are nice, respectable kids who have manners and do good things. A lot of people look down on us and don't trust us, but if they'd just give us a chance, they'd see that we're just as capable as any grown-up would be.

I'm almost 18 years old, and getting a job has been such a pain in the neck. They either don't like that I'm a teenager, or they don't like the teenager attitude that we're all expected to have. I have my days, but all in all, I act pretty decent.

I love being a teenager, but sometimes I wish some of them would just grow up.

*Kim Wilson  
Clayton, Ga.  
Haywood EMC*

## Send us your best Earn \$50

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What would you do?

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### The Rules

1. Approximately 200 words or less. We retain reprint rights.
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3. Photos are welcome. Digital photos must be 300 dpi and actual size.
4. E-mail or typed, if possible. Otherwise, make it legible.
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