



My Teenage Werewolf: A Mother, a Daughter, a Journey Through the Thicket of Adolescence

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"Straight from the trenches, a mom's tale of weathering her daughter's transformation from sweetheart to snark mouth." - *People*

With the eye of a reporter, the curiosity of an anthropologist, and the open-and sometimes wounded-heart of a mother, award-winning author Lauren Kessler launches an eighteen-month mission, embedding herself in her about-to-be-teenage daughter Lizzie's life. Everywhere from middle school classrooms to the mall, from summer camp to online chat groups, Kessler observes and chronicles-and sometimes participates in-the vibrant, dynamic, and scary life of a twenty-first-century teen.

My Teenage Werewolf: A Mother, a Daughter, a Journey Through the Thicket of Adolescence Details

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From Reader Review My Teenage Werewolf: A Mother, a Daughter, a Journey Through the Thicket of Adolescence for online ebook

Megan says

Where I work I see a lot of crappy parenting. I see good parenting too, but a lot of the parenting I actually notice is just crappy. Beyond the actual "call CPS already" situations I've seen, there's crap like the mom who told her child "books are for children, movies are for adults," parents who ignore their crying children in favor of Facebook, and parents who let their children wander at will. Then there's the minor things. Parents who will not let their child do something as simple as carry their own books, insisting they need to be put in the bag instead, for no reason at all.

Luckily, Lauren Kessler isn't a crappy parent. I think she's just tired and worn out. She's very honest in this book. You do see the moments when she should have made a different decision, and she doesn't downplay that. She does tend to do things that are the equivalent of not letting her kid carry her own books, but the difference is that she does recognize after the fact that she was doing that, and she gradually learns that empowering your kids really does make them stronger, and like you better.

While I read this book I tried to remember my own teenage years. Honestly, a lot of it is blurry. The mix of hormones and brain shifting that Kessler goes over in the book, along with a lack of sleep and a lot of stress, means memories don't always get written the way they should. I got along pretty well with my parents. I remember we fought, yes, and butted heads, but for the most part my parents were good at the empowerment thing. They really let me know them as individuals, not as just authority figures. Reading this book was actually like reading my friends' accounts of their home life. It was very interesting.

At times Kessler can be a little wordy, but it was actually a breath of fresh air compared to some memoirs I read, where the author never bothers to explain their motivations or thought processes. I almost stopped reading the book at the point where she begins discussing the internet, but I'm happy I continued on because she didn't resort to the scare tactics or propaganda that media outlets try to feed people. She actually tried out these websites herself and educated herself the way everyone ought to.

All in all - a good and enlightening read. I think all former teenagers should read it.

Ann says

Nope. Didn't like it. Author worries, overanalyzes, diagnoses, and helicopter-parents her way through this book. I understand that the motherly instinct is to worry, but she nitpicks and interprets every little interaction with her daughter and stresses that Lizzie is trying to hurt her. In psychological terms, it seems like she has a preoccupied attachment style. It wasn't even an entertaining read. Also, Kessler seems to embrace the "storm and stress" model of adolescence, in which adolescence is a horrible battlefield of rebellion and destruction; in actuality, conflict is a natural part of adolescence, so there's no need for her to panic so intensely. This book might have been better left under Kessler's pillow.

Maria says

What I Can Tell You: This book is exactly what mom's of children entering the pre-teen stage. It is written about a daughter but I think the concept works just as well with a son, although Lauren completely mentions how much easier the relationship with her sons were. I do agree that the relationship is different but not necessarily easier. I also believe this is a great book for counselors, teachers, principals of middle schools and anyone who works with children. Very insightful book.

I feel in love with Lizzie, a very smart, head strong girl knows how to "eventually" talk about what is REALLY bothering her. This can only be credited to her very smart mom who obviously raised her to speak her mind and not be afraid to be who she is.

While I can't imagine I would do what Lauren did which is throw herself head first into her daughter's life to figure out what makes preteenage girls work. Reading about Lauren in school with her daughter is exactly what I would want to do. To REALLY see what is going on, to be a fly on the wall and to watch her interactions with classmates, friends and boys. However, I don't know any teenager that would have been OK with this.

You will appreciate the candidness of Lauren's book. Lauren uses humor and common sense to deal with the differences in her and her daughter. At times she wonders who has the issue, something that only few mother's can do. To be able to "pick your fight" is an art form. Something I have totally mastered in my personal life. Knowing when to say "this is my hang-up, my problem, my issue" not theirs is half the battle.

I want to run out and buy this book for all my girlfriend's with daughters. It is not preachy. Is filled with humor and I loved reading Lizzie's comments to her mom. Through their headbutting you can see a deep, deep love between mother and daughter and that was my favorite part of the book.

As the mom of an already spirited 5 year old, I already know that I have to love her for the spirit in her and that I will undoubtedly have many, many moments where I feel like Lauren. However, the one thing I have that Lauren didn't have is her book to help me tread through the waters of preteen angst. God help me!

This book will be sitting in my library waiting for all the times I will have to re-read it. Thanks Lauren and Lizzie for a fantastic journey.

Literary Mama says

"The descent from mother-goddess to mother-demon is a predictable, well-documented narrative, as predictable as the descent from sweet little girl to moody, mercurial teenager," remarks Kessler in the opening pages to her book, *My Teenage Werewolf: A Mother, a Daughter, a Journey Through the Thicket of Adolescence*, her incisive and cogent book about parenting teenagers, which begins with a scene of her seventh grade daughter, Lizzie, coming home surly from school while Kessler struggles to communicate with her. In Kessler's words, here's why she wrote the book:

"And so I set myself a challenge: I would figure out who this girl I lived with really was and how to forge a lasting, loving bond between us -- even in the midst of the Sturm und Drang of her teen years. To do this, I would immerse myself in her world. I would read everything I could, from gimmicky advice books to feminist treatises to neurological studies on the teen brain. I would interview teachers, doctors, therapists,

coaches, camp counselors, teens and, of course, mothers, scores and scores of mothers. I would be part journalist, part cultural anthropologist. I would be Margaret Mead in middle school."

I would walk through fire for my daughters, but I'm not sure I have it in me to go back to middle school. Thankfully Kessler does, and she takes us there.

Read Literary Mama's full review here: <http://www.literarymama.com/reviews/a...>

Ciara says

this book was well-written & nicely readable & everything...but also a little cringe-inducing. it's non-fiction about the author's attempts to build a better relationship with her teenage daughter, lizzie, than her own mother had with her. kessler explains that she & her mother began their decades-long estrangement when kessler turned thirteen, & she is terrified that her relationship with lizzie might go the same way...even though kessler managed to shepherd two boys through their teenage years without any damage to the parent-child connection. but kessler insists that a mother's relationship with her daughter is different. without ever really explaining why exactly. there's some stuff about how a daughter feels a greater need to separate herself from her mother because they share a gender & the mother psychologically represents the daughter's future. who knows, maybe there's some validity to that, but i do not remember looking at my own mother as a representation of my future. i think teenagers are just difficult, regardless of gender.

so the thing that had me cringing was that basically the entire book is predicated on kessler's own long-standing mommy issues. she doesn't want to be the kind of mother that she had, & she constantly analyzes her relationship with lizzie for signs that she is doing something different/right. every time lizzie behaves in a way that is different from the way kessler behaved when she was a teen (which is constantly, because they are two different people), she takes it as a sign that she is succeeding. it just seems like a neurotic way to raise a child. granted, i do not have a teenage daughter, so i can't speak to the idea that maybe this is just something that all mothers of teenagers do. but damn. i hope i manage to resist the impulse when the time comes.

i was also cringing a little because...well...lizzie seemed kind of bratty. & spoiled. i was a terror as a teen in a lot of ways, but lizzie does shit i'd never dream of doing...& is seemingly rewarded. when kessler decides that she needs to do some "fieldwork" at lizzie's school, observing her in her natural habitat, as it were, she regularly splits during the school day & comes back, bringing her daughter fancy espresso drinks from starbucks, or sushi to replace her lunches packed at home (by kessler--she lets lizzie just pass them off to a classmate). man. i can't begin to imagine my mom buying me a fancy starbucks espresso drink even now that i am 31! let alone when i was 13! those things are like \$4 or \$5 a pop! i wouldn't even ask my boyfriend of almost four years to drop that kind of cash with no expectation of being paid back!

kessler also mention numerous times that she had "performed for love" as a teen, working hard in school to get good grades in the hopes of making her parents notice & care about her. but lizzie does not work hard in school & has the grades to prove it. the family seems to have a "no internet unless grades are Bs or above" rule, which is good, but kessler causally mentions that lizzie breaks the rule & seems to suffer no punishment. lizzie spends incredible amounts of time online or playing video games. when she sets up her myspace page, she works on it nine hours a day for two days. it is not lost on kessler that lizzie's grades would be much improved if she could muster that kind of attention & focus for her schoolwork. this is all mind-boggling & scary to me because i came of age pre-internet but know i'll be raising my own kids in a digital age, & i really don't know how to deal with letting them have their fun but also setting limits.

& when it comes to boys...kessler knows that lizzie spends a lot of time on teen chat websites, flirting with boys. she sees lizzie blow off one boy's request for cybersex, & she's proud that lizzie said no to the boy, but...mom was sitting right there. lizzie strikes me as amazingly precocious when it comes to boys. she tells her mom that she made out with her boyfriend when she is only twelve years old. i didn't even kiss a boy with closed mouth until i was 16, & it's not like i'm a mormon. i was a teenager in the 90s, i was raised an atheist, i was a punk feminist. i don't know. lizzie seems to know a lot about sex at age 12--more than i did at that age, & it's not like my mom was shy about that stuff. her best friend was a stripper (& we all knew, & understood what that was).

& also, kessler is amazingly critical of lizzie's friends. she fusses over how most of them come from divorced homes, & some of them have a lot of responsibilities as a result. lizzie's best friend was born to a 16-year-old mom & is a latchkey kid who has to spend her weekends taking care of her younger siblings. another friend is bussed in from a "bad" neighborhood & sometimes shares stories about the neighbors having a domestic violence incident. kessler actually writes something about how she & her husband have worked hard so their kid could live in a neighborhood where the neighbors don't beat on each other. like only poor people ever engage in physical abuse. seriously, i was so offended by that. kessler consistently refers to these friends as "sketchy," even though a 12-year-old has no control whatsoever over whether or not her parents get divorced or how old her mother was when she was born. it's not like the kids are smoking crack when they come over to hang out. one of them does get grounded when his father finds a bag of pot in his backpack, but for all of kessler's sturm und drang about lizzie's "sketchy" friends, she mostly just uses this incident to write about how she used to be a huge stoner & she doesn't want lizzie to know that.

i don't feel great about being so critical of this book, because i feel like parenting is really difficult, & no matter what you do, someone is going to step up to the plate to criticize your decision. there's so much judgment between parents, or from non-parents with an idealized perspective about how they'll handle the tough issues when they come up. ultimately, who knows how i'll handle having a teenage daughter, or if i'll ever even find out for sure? but i hope i am able to keep my personal issues to myself.

Lauren Kessler says

OK...so this is MY book, my new book, just out from Viking. But I AM reading it to prepare for public readings/ book tour. Reviewers are calling the book "hilarious," "insightful," "harrowing," "poignant" and "like reality TV, only much much better." Which was meant as a compliment, I guess. It's an in-the-trenches exploration of 21st century teen girl culture and that maddening, sanity-stealing -- but absolutely essential -- relationship between mother and daughter.

Susan Bazzett-Griffith says

Lauren Kessler's memoir about shadowing her daughter in an anthropological experiment to help both explain and deepen the mother-daughter bond was really a fun, cringe-worthy, heartwarming, horrifying read. Basically, reading the book is, indeed, like living with a teenager. Must give credit where it is due, in that I think Kessler's daughter sounds more extraordinary than ordinary of a teenage girl, in that even with attitude and mood swings, she seems to definitely have a soft spot for her family and her mother, which is a testament to the strength of their family and her mom's determination to maintain a relationship with her daughter, even as her daughter naturally starts to push her away. Go-to recommendation for all moms with pre-adolescent girls-- I remember being one and being awful. I'm glad I only have a son. Four stars.

Lenore Webb says

You have to look right, wear the right clothes, be seen with the right people. You can't be too skinny or too fat, too loud or too quiet. Stand up for yourself and what you believe in - unless your opinion is unpopular. This is the world of middle school, the world that author Lauren Kessler delves into in *My Teenage Werewolf: A Mother, a Daughter, a Journey Through the Thicket of Adolescence*. The story is well told and completely true as Lauren describes her struggles with teenage daughter Lizzie, who, it seemed, went from sweet and loving to attitudinise and mercurial almost overnight. In short, a werewolf.

From psychological research to social anthropology of a world all its own, Lauren leaves no stone unturned as she fights and argues, wounds and is wounded by, sympathizes and scolds, then finally begins to observe and understand Lizzie and her world. Observance during the school day reveals the many layers of the middle school social ladder and the ways it effects Lizzie as things change from day to day. Teachers scold as well as educate, friends shun one day and embrace the next, crushes change and change back, and biting comments are exchanged amongst students, oftentimes masked by denials and lies. Despite the cruelty of middle school, Lauren manages to remain an impartial observer - most of the time. Eventually, mother and daughter are brought closer - until the next misunderstood comment sends mother struggling to see inside daughter's head. The struggles, inevitably, continue though more and more time passes between each misunderstanding. Eventually, a common ground is reached. Mother understands daughter's world, daughter's mind. Daughter realizes that maybe Mom isn't that uncool.

I would recommend this book to anyone looking for an amusing, informative read.

Jennifer says

I had high hopes for this book.....I really did. But after awhile, it just got to the point where I could not finish it.

The book was written in an attempt for the author to maneuver the shark-infested waters of teenage girl adolescence and the tricky mother-daughter dynamic. What drew me to the book was the description of the author submersing herself into her teen's life to have a better understanding of her and her relationship. As a mom of a soon-to-be 13 year old and a 9 year old tweener, I figured this would be a good read for me....and I could get some ideas along the way. Another reason I was drawn to the book was because of my own mommy issues....something I felt I shared with the author.

In the end, I was bored and frustrated. There were quite a few chapters on the science aspects of the teen brain. I understand why this had to be put into the book....a little background is always helpful, but I grew bored with the science part of it. I felt it was too much. My opinion, of course.

Please do not take this review as to be a criticism of another mom's parenting....because it's not. Parenting is hard and we're all trying to get through it the best we can. So, the remainder of this review is, in fact, my opinion.....take it or leave it.

First, let me say that the author has three children - two boys and one girl. She has successfully managed to raise two boys without any issue that she mentions. But the mother-daughter dynamic is a whole other can of worms....and the author's daughter is also the youngest.

Second, we all have mommy issues and all want to do something different than our own mother did....some of us more than others. This book is an example of that. The author spends a lot of time sharing her own mother/daughter dynamic, which, I believe has impacted her need to work harder at her own relationship with her daughter. I get it...I'm doing the same thing.

However, I also believe there is a fine line between normal teenage girl hormones, downright disrespect, and permissive parenting. The author's daughter is, quite honestly, adorable.....to a point. She's strong-willed, knows what she wants.....and she knows it. She uses this against her mother (the author) to the point of being manipulative and the author allows it.

The daughter is doing poorly in school.....thanks in part to spending a lot of time on the computer in chat rooms and playing video games. Mom sets up consequences -- no Internet, etc. -- but then when Lizzie breaks the rules, adopts a "oh well" attitude. When the daughter gets in trouble at camp for, once again breaking rules, mom tries to get the consequence changed, even though she admits that her daughter was wrong. Her daughter is rude to her almost constantly, but the author tolerates it....as if she's afraid to step in and tell her that her behavior will not be tolerated.....even though she said in the book that she would not tolerate that type of rudeness from her sons.

Two other things really set me off --

1) The author wrote about her privacy being violated by her own mother....diaries read, snooping in her room, eavesdropping on conversations....something I can definitely relate to. But for as much as she hated that as a teen and said she wouldn't do it herself, she often admits to violating her daughter's privacy in the same way.

2) After a particular shopping trip where mom bought Lizzie a pair of shoes that she's been wanting forever, Lizzie comes downstairs modeling the shoes and is very happy with the results of the shopping trip. The author enjoys a moment of peace and harmony with her daughter...short lived before less than 5 minutes go by before Lizzie pitches a tantrum and says she hates the shoes before throwing them down the stairs. Mom sat there and said nothing. Lizzie never wore them again and mom ended up throwing them out after the cat throws up on them. I read that and sat there stunned. What...the...hell?!! At the time of writing, Lizzie was the same age as my daughter. If she ever pulled a stunt like that, one of two things would have happened -- 1) I would have taken all her other shoes and she'd be wearing the ones that she's "been wanting forever" and I just bought for her until the soles fell off OR 2) Someone would be doing extra chores until the Apocalypse to earn the money to pay me back for them.

Bottom line -- I wish the author and her daughter well and hope their relationship improves. As for me, I'll pass the book on to someone else and stick with my own parenting instincts.

issues to myself.

A. says

An interesting wander through a mother trying to negotiate her daughter's adolescence. Kessler spends time at her daughter's school, her summer camp, and talking with experts in an attempt to parse out teenage girls and how to respond to them in ways that will continue to build a relationship rather than destroying it.

I mostly enjoyed the book, though I found myself disagreeing with some of her parenting choices (if the website says 14 and older, you don't let your twelve-year-old sign up for it and pretend to be older than she

is--that's irresponsible). The discussion on teenage brain development was probably the part I found most interesting. I was a mopey teenager rather than a rebellious one, but even in the midst of all that teenage angst, I found some of my behaviour and responses inexplicable. Nice to know that there was something of a neurological explanation for that.

Cindy Hudson says

Worried that she was losing touch with her teen daughter, author Lauren Kessler did what few moms would be willing to do: immerse herself in middle school classrooms, locker rooms and cafeterias, taking notes all the while to turn into a nonfiction book. The result, *My Teenage Werewolf: A Mother, A Daughter, A Journey Through the Thicket of Adolescence*, is a revealing work that will both concern and give hope to moms everywhere.

My Teenage Werewolf's universal appeal comes not only from Kessler's personal experience, but also from research and information offered up by experts regarding the world teen girls currently inhabit.

Kessler also reveals her own flaws and insecurities, and she doesn't elevate herself as the perfect mother who is trying to understand an imperfect daughter. Instead, through Kessler's experience with her daughter and from the details she reveals of her strained relationship with her own mother, we see a sincere struggle to understand the complicated mother-daughter dynamic.

Kessler's honesty, her wit, her insights, and her straightforward writing style combine to create a fascinating study of parenting today's female adolescent. I highly recommend it for any mother who has raised a teenage daughter, is raising one now, or knows that one is part of her future.

MollyD says

This book was so painful to read. The chapter on the science of the teen brain was very interesting, but the rest of the book was an exercise in frustration. The author spends half her time bemoaning her teen's bad behavior, and the other half enabling it. She bemoans the fact her child didn't use traditional toys, or read books, but allows her unlimited and unsupervised computer time and video games. What can a mother do, she wails, when her daughter brings home Cs after spending hours on the computer with video games and chat rooms. She sets up rules for her daughter such as no Internet use after misuse, but then cheerfully acknowledges she is aware her daughter is breaking this rule. She intervenes to reduce a punishment at camp, while she admits her daughter's behavior was out of bounds and dangerous. Although she often talks about how she desperately wanted privacy from her mother, she reads her daughter's journal and eavesdrops on conversations with her friends. She described how hurt she is when her daughter is rude to her, but tolerates and almost encourages such behavior, choosing to view it as "strong girl behavior" rather than the unacceptable behavior it actually is. Having had two kids (one girl, one boy) go through the teen years, I know you don't to accept or validate every rude thing that flies out of a child's mouth. She compares her daughter's behavior to her sons, and concludes that you simply have to accept bad behavior from a teen girl, behavior that she is the first to say she wouldn't have accepted from her sons. I found the fact that she shadowed her daughter at school strange and intrusive to the girl's life. She reasons that it is research for the book, but admits she wants to find out details about her daughter's life. My conclusion: Because she set such different standards for her sons and her daughter, she shouldn't be surprised they behave differently. She is oddly enough, too permissive but far too intrusive at the same time, but can't see that. Very disappointing

read.

Elizabeth Scott says

While this is a great look into the mind of the mother of a girl right on the edge of beginning her teens years, I have to tell you, what really blew me away was Lauren Kessler's daughter, Lizzie. Lauren Kessler worries over her, and how they don't talk like she'd like them too, and how they end up fighting when she doesn't want to, but I came away from the book thinking that Lizzie is one of the strongest girls I've ever read about. EVER. She has such fierce convictions, and such a strong belief at herself--and to have that when you're in the thicket that is middle school? WOW.

Recommended not only for parents, but for anyone wondering about the parent/early teenage girl relationship, and a very wonderful portrait that proves that yes, there are still plenty of strong, smart, amazing teenage girls out there. Lizzie, I salute you!! And Lauren, wow--what an amazing daughter you have!

Jeanne says

Rarely do I read a book and think, "I need to buy this for X." But My Teenage Werewolf is one I'd like to buy for every woman I know. Not just mothers. Women. Because we have all been there, struggling to understand who we are and who we will be and trying to make our parents understand.

Lauren Kessler manages to impart both her frustration with and love for her daughter as she gives women a rare look into the real life of a teenage girl (her's in this case). I'm saving this book for when my daughter hits those years so I can read it again and again to remind myself that she needs my understanding as much as she needs my guidance.

Sara says

I was not going to read this book just because I thought the title was pretty lame. However, I heard some interviews with the author, fellow Oregonian that she is, and it sounded interesting. I found it more than just interesting, Ms. Kessler becomes a keen observer of the world of middle-schoolers, and chronicles their days in an almost anthropological fashion. I recommend this read to anyone who has tweens, soon to be middle-schoolers, or works with them. I came away with a better understanding of why they can be so weird, wild and annoying and alternately so endearing, sometimes all in the same moment.
