



# **13 Is the New 18: And Other Things My Children Taught Me--While I Was Having a Nervous Breakdown Being Their Mother**

*Beth J. Harpaz*

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“I wonder sometimes if there’s something to the old superstition about the number thirteen. Maybe that superstition was originally created by the mothers in some tribe who noticed that in their children’s thirteenth year, they suddenly became possessed by evil spirits. Because it did seem that whenever Taz was around, things spilled and shattered, calm turned into chaos, and tempers were lost.”

So laments the mother of one thirteen-year-old boy, Taz, a teen who, overnight it seemed, went from a small, sweet, loving boy to a hulking, potty-mouthed, Facebook/MySpace–addicted C student who didn’t even bother to hide his scorn for being anywhere in the proximity of his parents.

As this startling transformation floors journalist Beth Harpaz and her husband, Elon, Harpaz tries to make sense of a bizarre teenage wilderness of \$100 sneakers, clouds of Axe body spray (to hide the scent of pot?!), and cell phone bills so big they require nine-by-twelve envelopes. In the process, she begins chronicling her son’s hilarious, sometimes harrowing, indiscretions, blaming herself (“I am a terrible mother” becomes her steadfast refrain), Googling unfamiliar teenage slang, reading every parenting book she can get her hands on, and querying friends who also have teens.

From a derailed family vacation where Taz is more interested in trying to get a cell phone connection than looking at the world’s largest trees (boring!), to a prom where Taz is caught with liquor, to a trip to Australia sans parents in which Taz actually doesn’t get into any trouble and manages to do his own laundry, the events that mark Taz’s newfound and troublesome independence are told with a wry and poignant voice by a woman who’s both wistful for the past and trying her hardest to understand her son’s head-scratching new behavior. In her quest to infiltrate his world by spying on his MySpace page (where he claims he’s twenty-two), Harpaz expands her online monitoring and soon becomes a Facebook addict. She also reflects on her own youth and entry into middle age, and in the process achieves hard-won wisdom.

A book for any parent of teens—be they girls or boys—*13 Is the New 18* is a delightfully comical foray into today’s increasingly widening generation gap and one mom’s attempt to figure it all out with little guidance and a whole lot of misplaced guilt.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

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