

“Stay with The Herd”

My son's coming up on the age of 12, and he's yet to travel anywhere of significant distance... *alone*.

We're changing that.

A few weeks ago, we bought him a prepaid smartphone (so cheap these days), something that he could use without limit over WiFi, but also something that he could call us or we could call him if an emergency arose.

Then, we took him to the train station and rode with him north a few stops (not as far as he'll ride in the future, they were going to a movie, about 25 minutes) to meet up with a friend of his. He's stayed overnight with this friend before, but since he lives so far away, learning to use the train will mean many more sleepovers in the future.

Two days later his friend's parents put him back on the train (he bought his own ticket with my borrowed debit card), and 53 minutes later we picked him up here in Salt Lake City.

Today we took the next step. Everything was the same, except this time we weren't going with him, and he was going all the way. 53 minutes later, his friend picked him up on the other end.

He's an old pro by now!

Let me back up. As we were preparing to board the train together this first time only, we were going over everything to watch for: keep his bag in his hands or on his back; listen for the announcements to know when your stop is coming up, immediately connect to the train's WiFi and stay in touch with us.

And then out of my mouth came words I'd never thought I'd say, "When you're waiting to get on the train, or once you've gotten off and before you find your friend, stay with the crowd. There's safety in numbers. You're less likely to be targeted if you're not alone."

That's right. Me, a bona fide individualist, advised my son, my flesh and blood, to *stay with the herd!*

I couldn't believe. It felt so wrong, yet so right.

Context is everything, of course. Yes, he should stay with the herd. There really is safety in numbers.

However, when it comes to thinking, *stay away from the herd*, because chances are their

thinking is horseshit.

Alright, enough of that. He just arrived with his friend today and plans another two nights, maybe longer. This is just the beginning for him, and for our other kids. It's so exciting to see his budding independence, his becoming a "free range kid." I highly encourage everyone, so long as their child feels confident in themselves, to give them these and similar opportunities.