

That's the last time I was lost. Since then I've bought a GPS navigator and it's kept me on track. Half the time I don't even know what street I'm on. I just obey the pleasant but authoritative feminine voice. "In .6 miles turn left."

Occasionally the navigator and I have a difference of opinion, and I ignore her advice. She corrects me. "Recalculating," she says brightly, with a crisp British accent. "Make a U-turn when possible." If I continue to go my own way, she seems to get annoyed (her voice never changes-, still I detect some agitation), but she never gives up. "Recalculating. Make a U-turn now." Sometimes I turn down her volume until I'm where she wants me to be.

When I went on long car rides as a kid, I constantly asked, "When will we be there?" and the answer usually boiled down to "When we get there." When my kids ask me the same question, I can say "4:35" because the navigator keeps the estimated time of arrival on the screen. They've come to expect this level of precision. That's not to say that nothing alters the arrival time. The navigator assumes I'll be lucky with lights, there won't be any traffic, and my kids won't require bathroom breaks. When any of these events occur, the time is adjusted. "4:41." I get annoyed then, because I feel like I'm letting the navigator down. The estimated arrival time was a challenge and I'm blowing it. So I try to make up for lost time. If I go just five miles over the speed limit, every ten or fifteen minutes the ETA creeps up. "4:40." "4:39."

Sometimes the roads change faster than the digital maps, and the navigator gets confused. Her screen shows me driving recklessly over fields. The arrival time jumps ahead as the navigator estimates it will take me six minutes to bushwhack through the woods back to the highway. "Recalculating," she says, devising ever more ludicrous routes to get me back on track. After my blue triangle merges onto the road on the screen, I'm relieved that the navigator and I have the same vision of the journey. We agree on where I am.

Before I had the navigator, I didn't really have an arrival time in mind. We'd get there when we got there. No urgency. But now there's pressure. I feel like a failure when the arrival time is pushed back. I hurry my kids through the 7-Eleven. If there's a line, I try to convince them that they don't really want those M&M's.

The navigator is changing the traveling experience for me, and I'm not sure it's always for the better. It's a safe feeling; I'm never really lost. If I listen to her, eventually I'll end up where I want to be. But security comes with trade-offs.

I don't notice landmarks as much as I used to. I live in a part of the country where folks give you directions like "Turn at that old place where