

## **Post by a former TIS parent now living in the UAE.**

When Cassandra went to The International School in Portland, Oregon, one of my favorite times of day was driving her to and from school. Although there was traffic, it was a time for us to talk and catch up on what happened during the day. Even though there were days that I would silently curse (okay – sometimes not so silently) under my breath when I had to circle at the top of the hill or when a parent had parked too close for me to safely leave my parallel parking spot, overall it was quality time together.

When we first moved to Al Ain, I was paying a private bus company to take Cassandra to and from school. This seemed like the easiest thing to do since I was still sorting out my schedule, and I didn't have a car. Unfortunately, it wasn't a great solution. The first week, I had to call the bus company several times to inquire where the driver was because he had forgotten to pick her up. She was late to school almost every day for two weeks because the driver couldn't remember where we lived. Then on a couple of occasions the bus driver dropped her off at the wrong apartment building, and since Cassandra was still familiarizing herself with the place, she didn't realize it was the wrong place until the driver had already left. Once he dropped her off far enough away that she actually walked out to the street and had to hail a taxi to get home. I couldn't decide if I should be proud of her for not panicking, or completely freaked out that we were in a new country and that my kid had to do this. Eventually she learned her surroundings well enough to know when the driver was taking her to the wrong place, but communication between her and the driver was still a problem. It was not uncommon to have a different bus driver several times a week – none of which spoke much English. We live 7 minutes away from her school, but there were days that she was getting home 90 minutes after school got out because the driver was lost. Finally in December, my schedule was more established, I had a car, and the bus company wanted to charge me for a full month even though he was only going to drive her four times, so I decided that I would start driving her myself.

Driving Cassandra to school in Al Ain is nothing like the good old days of T.I.S



Her school is on Khalid Bin Sultan Street which everyone actually calls *School Street*. Most of the private schools are along this street, and most of the schools do not have buses. In the 1.5 miles strip of the street near Cassandra's school, there are 13 private schools. Imagine the congestion that occurs at about 7:30 every morning when all the parents drop their children off. These pictures were taken on the weekend. It would be impossible to take a picture of what her school looks like during drop off/pick up times. Well... at least not if I value my life.



The main difference between T.I.S and AAESS is that at the former, parents for the most part followed the rules. Here, anything goes. I have seen parents drive up on the curb, drive through the desert, cut each other off, purposely tap into another person's car, yell,

honk (the honking is incessant), and dangerously overtake other cars (a.k.a. pass each other) – with no regards to kids crossing the street.

In addition to the ill conceived idea of lumping all the private schools together, the design on how parents can get in and out of the school parking is a joke (but not the funny kind).

In these pictures, you can see how a person is supposed to exit the school. You need to turn left to get back on School Street. This is turning against all of the other parents who are trying to take their kids to the schools behind AAESS.



Then once you manage to get into this area, you still have to turn right onto School Street, cut across three lanes to get into the far left lane, and then do a U-turn at the light. Of course this is the same thing hundreds of other parents are trying to do.



It looks so easy... on a Friday morning when there is no school. It has become such an issue that it even made it in The National newspaper in February. This is a link to the article:

[School drop-off offenders to be snapped and shamed by security in UAE](#)

My only solution is to drop her off about 30 minutes early and pick her up 30 minutes late. If I drop her off even just a few minutes later, it is the difference between it taking about 5 minutes to accomplish the U-turn navigation and it taking 20 minutes. Not to mention the the difference between me feeling slightly aggressive and anxious versus me feeling like I am going to get killed.

I told Cassandra the other day that dropping her off at school is the most stressful part of my day. That I can feel the tension in my shoulders and my anxiety rising. Her response, "Mom, if that is the most stressful thing you have to worry about here, your life isn't that bad." Fair point. Life here is pretty easy. But then again, she doesn't know what it feels like to navigate School Street at 7:30 on a Monday morning.