

April 9, 2021

One of the things I remember most vividly is the year I got my driver's license. My first 15 years were just a slow, seemingly endless countdown to this milestone. Everyone around me could not wait to turn 16 so they could get to drive.

Today's kids do not seem to have as much urgency around this achievement. For me and my peers, driving represented freedom. I guess today you can be anywhere at any time on your device, but at the time, freedom meant being able to go places, to be with friends, and to be without parents. The other change, I guess, is just how much today's parents cater their time to meet their kid's needs, so the role of chauffeur is considered part of the "parental duty", one that I have played endlessly with my own children. In my youth, my parents did not consider my need to get places as anything close to a priority.

Back then, I lived in Kerrisdale, and in 1977 there was a motor vehicle branch on Arbutus around 46th Ave., which was a couple of blocks from where I lived. On this date, 44 years ago, as I turned 16 years old, I went to get my learner's permit. At that time, there were no training courses or appointments necessary. My Dad spent the next 2 weeks being nagged at by me to take me out to practice at every opportunity. Of course, the first place we drove at was the old Woodward's parking lot at Oakridge (Woodward's always makes me think of chocolate malts, but that is another story).

After I could successfully drive around an empty parking lot, we ventured out into traffic. I still remember a bus moving out in front of me, which caused me to reflexively change lanes, without looking. I would love to tell you my Dad responded calmly to the car veering sideways, but that would be a lie. Thankfully the space beside me was empty and I did not hit another car, but this was a very good lesson for me (and my Dad's white-knuckled screaming did help to reinforce my learning!).

Two weeks to the day that I received my learner's permit, my mother drove me to take the driving test, because back then you could take your test after just 14 days. She dropped me off with the car and walked home. She told me that I would either be driving home or that I could walk and come get her to pick up the car (there were no cell phones for instant communication).

I do not remember too many things about the driving test. I remember the instructor being really impressed with my parallel parking and equally unimpressed with my ability to back up in a straight line. When the instructor went through the checklist at the end and told me I had passed it was one of the greatest feelings I had experienced to that point in my life. I still remember driving home and nervously pulling into the carport.

Looking back, I should have driven around much longer as it was not too often that the car was free for my use; but at least I had a piece of paper that said I could!

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