

Who needs driver's ed when you have Dad?



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While reflecting on my childhood I find that many of my best memories involve driving. One of my earliest memories that I can recall is riding in our family minivan with my dad.

I had been strapped into my gray car seat with a Bug Juice in my cup holder and Chips Ahoy Cookies in my hands. My dad reached his hand backwards past his seat to ask for a cookie.

We were driving

back to Omaha after having gone to Iowa to get gas. Maybe the gas prices had been cheaper a state over but I'm almost positive that my dad chose to fuel up there so that I could ride over the Mormon Bridge. Of course, then I only referred to it as the "green bridge."

Whenever we were at gas stations, my dad always let me go in and pick out a snack. No matter what I always chose Bug Juice as my drink, usually either red or white in color. My snacks did tend to differ though, a random selection of cookies or candy.

Our Chrysler Town and Country minivan from '03 was always referred to as the "white van." Not the most creative name but it still holds today.

My dad also had a brown and tan Chevy Silverado from '87.

I loved it.

Like the outside, the interior of the truck was brown/tan. It had a row of three seats that were almost couch like, covered in a rough fabric of sorts.

And who could forget the crank windows?

When the truck was parked my siblings and I would often play in the bed of it. The metal outlines of the tires made a great slide, especially when you're three to five years old.

I, of course, also enjoyed going for rides in the truck. While riding in it I didn't have to be in a car seat. There were no back seats that I was restricted to, and I loved being able to have a clear view of the windshield. I also had access to the center console, which meant that I was able to change the radio stations.

My dad would often take the truck out for a drive just to listen to music. I loved going on those rides with him.

My love of 80s music can be credited to the car rides I took as a child. Radio stations like STAR 104.5 and 99.9 KGOR often dominated the vehicle. As I grew up,

I realized that songs like "Come on Eileen," "Just What I Needed," and "I Melt With You" were in fact performed by different groups. I also wrapped my head around the idea that artists were not singing live every time I heard them on the radio.

The radio wasn't our only source of music. Our white van was equipped with a cassette player that allowed my mom to play her old tapes. My siblings and I would always beg her to put in "the cool tape." It consisted of songs such as "Deadbeat Club," "Ring My Bell," "Brass Monkey," "Beds are Burning," "Lollipop," and more. To this day those songs will always remind me of long car rides and road trips.

Every year or two my family tries to take a trip to South Dakota to visit family. Those trips mean sitting in a car for nearly ten hours, usually with five other people squished in the vehicle with you.

When I was really little my family would do everything to keep me entertained in the car. My side of the van was always stacked with board books that I could reach for, the piles all leaning against the side of the door. This meant my door was off limits to

open, we all had to exit on the side of the car opposite of me.

We even had a portable box TV, which was equipped with a VCR player, that we would bring in the car. It would sit on top of our blue cooler that was always placed at the end of the aisle between seats, right behind the front two seats of the car.

Beside my pile of books were a pile of VHS tapes. I sat beside a lot of precious cargo.

Typically my dad would drive for the majority of the trip. As my siblings and I grew older he gained drivers to share the miles with.

Last summer was the first time I got to take a driving shift. My dad was always sitting beside me, helping me pass other cars on the interstate, instructing me how to turn on cruise control, and of course giving me directions.

Just as I had been forced to listen to my parents' music growing up I forced them to listen to my music. Sam Smith, Harry Styles, and Taylor Swift all made their way into the CD player of our new blue van.

Not only did we listen to CDs but we also gave ear to my dad's 90s car mix. Songs like "Hold my Hand," "Linger,"



Wade Landis looks back at the camera in the midst of driving. Landis always struck this pose when asking his kids for a snack during long road trips.

PHOTO COURTESY OF: NICKIE LANDIS

"Valerie Loves Me," and more made great family karaoke material.

To this day I still eagerly blast music in my car, which happens to be the white van itself. What was once the family car is now my own personal vehicle. Although the cassette player no longer works, I still have my aux cord, and of course the dependable radio.

It's surreal driving in the white van simply because I spent so long daydreaming about it. I never thought I would be old enough to drive on my own.

I can still recall my early memories of my dad teaching me how to use the steering wheel. Every so often he would park our car at the top of our driveway and allow me to crawl up to the driver's seat to sit with him. Once I was sitting with him, he would place my hands on the wheel and instruct me where to turn.

With my dad in charge of the gas, and myself partially in charge of the wheel, we would guide the car into the garage.

My dad was also

the person who accompanied me to the DMV when I took my permit test. I passed my first time taking it. However, he thought it would be funny to tell my mom I failed when she called to check on us. My mom was not thrilled but nevertheless I passed.

The first official place I ever drove with my dad was in the Nathan Hale parking lot. He put up with me confusing the gas and brake pedal, my horrible turns, terrible parking jobs, and everything in between.

Once I had surpassed parking lot status, we leveled up to driving in a graveyard. Now I was getting to experience a more realistic road without being on, well, an actual road.

You'd be surprised how twisty the roads in cemeteries are. I'm pretty sure my dad only took me driving there so he could see my struggle through the extremely sharp left-handed turns.

Eventually I graduated onto real life roads. The first time I actually drove on one I was terrified. I had been cruising around the cemetery while my dad was trying to convince me that I could drive home.

I kept stalling, saying things like "after this song I'll go," or "I just want to go around one more time." I finally decided that after "Voices Carry" finished playing that I would make my way home.

We did make it home safely. The fastest I went was 45 mph and it was about a five-minute drive. Nothing too drastic. Still, I was extremely proud when my dad told me that I turned into our driveway well and when he told my mom "She did good."

Yet again my dad took me to the DMV when it was time to get my license. The night before we had done a mock test together, I had been so flustered



Vivian Landis looks back at the camera while recreating a photo of her dad. Unlike her dad she is not driving but parked in the school lot.

PHOTO BY: SHELBY RUDIGER

that I confused my rights with my lefts. Despite how nervous and uncoordinated I was, he remained supportive.

Thankfully I passed! Afterwards my dad took me to Dairy Queen to celebrate.

I've had my license for a little over a year now and I've had plenty of time to make my own memories in the white van. Whether that be taking the "scenic route" because I want to finish a song, picking up my friends, or even just my daily drives to school.

Even though I'm now the primary driver of the white van I will always remember it as our family car. To this day I often think of my dad when I'm behind the wheel.

