

Drivers Ed 1967

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In 1967, many of my friends turned 16 and entered a very exciting rite of passage. It meant that as soon as humanly possible we presented ourselves at the Licence Bureau on Catherine Street, to take a written test on the rules of the road. Having studied the booklet more intensely than any school subject, most of us passed on the first try.

Some of our parents were less than enthusiastic about this event, and worried about entrusting their car to the kids. A ninety-day permit where a licensed driver had to accompany the learner was one thing, but once we passed that road test and had a driver's licence, they knew it would become a free-for-all.

My dad was very calm about it all. He had been through this years before with my older brothers. He couldn't wait for me to have my licence. This would mean I could be sent out to do all the errands that took up my parents' time, and he would no longer be required to drive me anywhere.

Once I had a ninety-day permit and my dad was ready for my first lesson, I was already in the car. I backed out of the laneway and drove nervously around the block without touching the gas pedal. The second time around was a little speedier. Dad's only comment was "Don't make your turns so wide, you're not driving a tractor trailer."

The next phase of driver education involved driving downtown to Albert Street every day with my mom. The skinny intersection at Wellington and Parkdale was the scariest due to truck traffic. After that we followed Wellington across the old viaduct to Albert Street, uneventfully. We always came home by the Queensway and thankfully I didn't know enough to be nervous driving that route; I thought it was great fun.

Then came the parallel parking I had been dreading. We found a one-way street in the neighbourhood with a convenient gap between two parked cars. Two families who were sitting out on their porches watched with interest as I maneuvered the car into the vacant spot. Of course I had to practice, so I moved out of the spot and tried to back in several times. The audience gradually looked more worried and tense, until finally two of them hurried down and moved both cars. I drove away with a red face and my Dad, laughing his head off.

The next thing I had to learn was how to drive in snow. One Saturday during a winter storm Dad and I were out driving on Wellington St. I parked in the Kentucky Fried Chicken lot at Sherbrooke while he went across the street to do an errand. The lot hadn't been plowed, so I was stuck almost immediately. Fortunately just in time, two happy fellows wobbled out of the Elmdale House next door. They noticed me spinning around the lot, pushed the car out and careened off down the sidewalk.

Very few of us took lessons from a driving school; instead we learned through casual lessons from our parents. Today, because the city is bigger and traffic is heavier, formal lessons that emphasize defensive

driving are considered a better idea. Still, we must wonder if those who agree most heartily today, might have felt differently 49 years ago.