

# The Drive to Insanity

by Kaberi Dasgupta

"With time, I began to enjoy the sense of power associated with being 'behind the wheel.' I was in control; I made the crucial decisions... well... sort of..."

Last summer, I resolved to fill a void in my education (after all, there is a limit to the number of soaps that one can watch, even in the summer.) I decided to learn how to drive.

The week that I obtained my learner's permit also happened to be the week that the journal re-broadcast its piece on Los Angeles freeway murders. At any rate, I was soon sitting in a car with two brakes, beside my instructor, Louise; I was in the driver's seat.

"You want me to drive right now?"

"Yes."

"But this is only my first lesson."

"I know. Don't worry. I've been teaching for years, and I haven't let a student cause an accident yet. I won't let you be the first."

I had been the first person that my elementary school teacher had encountered who was utterly incapable of doing the flexed

arm hang. I was also the first person on our block to continue to ride a tricycle at the age of seven. Being the first has never been a problem for me.

However the car was soon in motion, and I appeared to be driving. My foot was on the accelerator, and the steering wheel was in my hands (well, Louise's left hand was also rather close to the steering wheel.)

"Stare straight ahead," she instructed. "You'll automatically steer straight if you stare far ahead."

I had less faith in automatic reactions than she did, but I tried to follow her instructions.

"Uh, there's a car coming towards us," I soon informed her.

"Yeah. You'll find a few of those when you're driving."

More eventful than the lessons were the practice sessions. Louise had to be restrained and tactful in her criticism; my parents felt no need for such constraint.

"What are you doing?" demanded my father.

"Driving," I replied. Apparently not.

At times, however, even I have to admit that this question was appropriate. There was, for instance, that red light that was hiding behind a tree.

"What are you...stop!"

After we left the intersection, Dad started rambling, as if he were in a daze, "I was sure that she was going to stop. There

was a red light... she had to have seen it..."

My mother was more adept at keeping her emotions under control (well, at least her verbal expressions. She did develop a curious habit of lunging for the dashboard every so often.) Perhaps this was because of the fact that she had more to gain by my learning how to drive. She was tired of chaffering my little sisters to piano lessons, ballet lessons, jazz lessons, art lessons, school choir, choir choir, girl guides, and birthday parties. (Now is it obvious why I delayed learning how to drive for so long?)

With time, I began to enjoy the sense of power associated with being "behind the wheel." I was in control; I made the crucial decisions....well... sort of....

"Turn left..."  
"Here comes a stop sign..."

"There's a car behind you. Did you see it?"

"Signal. It's time to signal."

"Drive at 60 not at 50..."

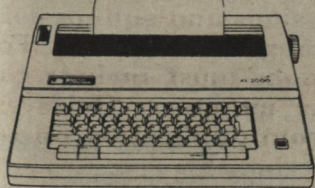
"Slow down....what are you doing?"

That is probably as close to being in control as I will ever be when my father is beside me.

Learning how to drive has been educational in other ways: it has taught me how to accept defeat gracefully. The first time that the tester said, "Well, you came really close," remained cheerfully philosophical. The second time, however, I was tearfully philosophical. The third time? Well, I hope that I get my license the third time, if only for the sake of the department of highways; all those employed there are on my sisters' hit list.



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