

My Stressful,
Disastrous, Overly
Complicated, and
Traumatic
Relationship with
Driving

The beautiful age of sixteen. The period when some of the most groundbreaking love stories happen. The age when you finally gain some freedom. When I say freedom, I strictly mean in the form of driving. Most sixteen-year-olds can't wait to get their license. I Celeste Keelin was not one of those sixteen-year-olds. Most teenagers think they are invincible and act impulsively. Not me, I fall an unreasonable amount of times a day. I also have this restraining habit of overthinking all my actions before I take them. I weigh the outcomes and decide where to go from there. Old soul? I've been told that a time or two. It is because of this habit of mine that while others saw freedom, I saw that I could potentially kill my loved ones or strangers from one tiny mistake. A bit dramatic? That's me.

As my mom will attest, while growing up I hit my milestones on time if not early. So when it came time to get my permit that is precisely what I did. I followed the drill of getting the thick pamphlet from the DMV. A booklet I had no intention of ever reading. "It's common sense." that's what everyone told me. I ended up taking the test three times before I pass. It's safe to say they were wrong. I felt accomplished as I looked down at my permit; my curly brown hair and brown eyes can be seen in the photo. It was just my luck that while I am learning to drive, the whole town is under construction. I never hit a cone, but I may or may not have come close. Even though it was evident from the get-go that my relationship with driving would be problematic, it took a toxic turn the week I got my real license.

I had succumbed to peer pressure and decided, against my better judgment, to go out for lunch. It is a witless choice to go out for lunch because we only had 30 minutes. Everybody knows everything in this town is scattered, so it's next to impossible to make it back in time for your next class. That is unless you break a few driving violations on your journey. That may or may not have been what I did. In the frantic and rushed state, I was in; I didn't think twice about how I was parking and quickly rushed inside to my class. After the final bell rang, I made my way out to my car. I became conscious of the fact that my blue Ford Focus was parked in the opposite direction of the other vehicles on the curb. Mildly embarrassed I continued my journey to the car. That's when I saw it. The soul-crushing, day-ruining and my parents are going to kill me parking ticket. This can't happen my first week of driving, but sure enough, it had. I snatched up the revolting yellow ticket and hastily jumped into my car.

As people passed, I could see the humor in their eyes. With my cheeks inflamed I jammed the key into the ignition and turned. My car's usual purr of life did not greet my ears. Instead, I heard a stuttering groan as my car rolled over and died. Tears threatened to flow down my cheeks as I dropped my head on the steering wheel. I was grasping at straws, desperately trying to keep it together. I made a few more attempts, but they all had the same result. After accepting the fact that my car was dead, I took a

deep breath and called my mom. "Celeste?" my mom's neutral voice traveled through the phone.

That's when the tears flowed. "Mom," A sob ripped through my throat. "car died." some more sobbing. " I got a ticket." People continued to drive by and raised an eyebrow at my predicament.

"Celeste, honey calm down. Take a few deep breaths. " I did as she instructed until I was, for the most part, calm. "What happened?"

" I went out to lunch and parked the wrong way, I didn't know you couldn't park that way, and now my car is dead. I'm stuck here, and everyone is driving by laughing at the way that I parked." my voice was heavy with defeat. Then my mom committed the most treacherous act at that time. She laughed, a deep and overcoming, laugh. I waited patiently until her cackling ceased. "Mom, I need you to come to get me or something." irritation was evident in my voice.

" I'll send Caitlyn to get you; I'm watching the kids." The bad news just kept adding up. Caitlyn is my older sister. She is one of those people that say they are almost there but don't end up showing up for another hour. Her M.O proved right once again as I sat waiting for her for an hour and thirty minutes. When I saw my sister's cube of a car come up the hill relief overpowered my irritation. My sister was older than me by three years, but I towered about a foot above her. We both had brown hair and brown eyes, but while my hair was curly, hers was straight. I was cold out, and I was beyond embarrassed, so I was eager to get this done. We called our dad, and he tried to walk us through the steps of jumping a car. We opened the hood of my car and looked for the metal notches on the batter that he had described. We were cautiously attaching the pliers to the correct location when a spark appeared. My sister and I jumped back with a yelp. We described to our dad what we did, and he corrected our mistakes. After a bit of waiting, I was able to start my car and drive home.

The relief I felt was temporary because this was not that last time my car would die on me. The next time would not be in a controlled setting like a parking lot; it occurred at an intersection. I was taking my friend Trinity home from track practice. A red light stopped us at the intersection by Flying J's. For residents of Rock Springs, it is known as a busy intersection. It is just off the interstate, so there is an abundance of semis. My car began to stutter then went silent. "No way," I whispered under my breath.

"What?" Trin asked ignorant of the changes in my car's behavior.

"My car just died," I answered. Trin began to respond when suddenly she was interrupted by an obnoxious car horn. I looked up to discover a green light had honored us with its appearance. My heart rate picked up, and I tried to bury the panic that was threatening to consume me. "Ok, I should probably put on my hazards." I was trying to talk myself through the situation. I did as I had instructed myself to do and put on my hazards. I breathed in my nose and out my mouth a couple of times, each time I did so

a horn would interrupt the calm I was attempting to create. It was after, I think, the seventh horn when I just lost it. "Is this person for real right now?" I sent a death glare into the rear-view mirror. " My hazards are on WHAT MORE DO THEY EXPECT ME TO DO?" frustration broke my voice.

"Don't worry about them, just take a few deep breaths and think about what to do." Trin, the voice of reason, said to me. I looked at her for a moment. Trin and I have been friends for four years now; she has always had a calm air about her. Trin's hazel eyes looked at me, and she sent me a reassuring smile as she tucked a strand of blonde hair behind her ear.

"Your right, your right," I said the second one more for myself. Then the car behind me cut around me and blared their horn. I took some more calming breaths trying not to let it get to me. I decided just to put my car in park and try to turn it on. The thought came to me from memory. Two summers ago, on our way to Disneyland, the car died, and this is what dad did. It took three turns of the key before it finally worked.

"See you got this." Trin commended me. Then I turned off my hazards, and we continued to Trin's house. My car died on me three times after that, but they were in less intense situations. Finally, my dad replaced my battery, and I have yet to have a problem (knock on wood).

With a replaced battery (a month after getting my license) I began to feel more secure behind the wheel. At this point, I had outgrown the habit of making any excuse not to have to run errands for my mom, something she was delighted about. I transformed from a person who was as stiff as a brick behind the wheel to a one-handed, singing, and dancing driver. That was what I was doing when I was driving to pick up my brother from the Rec Center. I was singing He Knows My Name by Francesca Battistelli at the top of my lungs when I took notice of an irregular noise coming from my car. I extended my arm to turn down the volume, then all of a sudden there was a loud POP, and the steering wheel was twisting around demandingly like a bat out of hell. I desperately tried to gain control of my vehicle as it bounced around like I was driving on the rockiest road known to man.

Once I had power, somewhat, I turned my wheel and veered off to the side of the road. I placed the car in park and put my hazards on, for what seemed like the millionth time that month. The shock of the situation left me staring out the windshield blankly and breathing heavily. When I finally excepted what had happened, I robotically unbuckled my seatbelt and got out of the car. I walked around to the passenger side of the vehicle. The front tire was in pristine condition, so I continued on my path around the vehicle. I stopped in front of the rear tire on the passenger side. If you could even call it a tire anymore. The shredded rubber strings were wrapped sporadically around the rim. My jaw dropped to the floor at the result. The SWOOSH of a passing car snapped me

back to reality. I dug into my pocket to retrieve my phone. My hands were shaking as I clicked the contact that would call my parents.

When my mom answered before I could stop and think of a calm way to explain the event that just occurred, the words "Mom, I almost just died!" sprung from my lips. My voice is full of Panic and desperation. As any mother would at hearing these words accompanied by that tone, my mom went into a full-blown panic. She was crying and demanding to know what happens. I rushed out an unchronological explanation. After learning what happened, she seemed more at ease and sent my dad to help me. My dad saw this as the perfect opportunity to teach me how to change a tire, something he had been meaning to show me for a while but never had the time.

If you thought that was the end of my experience, you are sorely mistaken. About three weeks after my tire blew out another incident occurred. This incident may have been slightly my fault but remember; all are innocent until proven guilty. I'll start this one off with the simple fact that it was a Monday. Nothing ever goes right on a Monday. I had to wake up at an ungodly hour so that I could get a parking spot at school with little to no difficulty. You see because of the placement of my birthday I never had the privilege of receiving a parking permit. So I have to park out on the curb. Curb space virtually disappears after about 7:00 am. So here I was at the butt-crack of dawn driving to school. There was a semi driver ahead of me on the freeway, driving the stereotypical way, all over the road. He was making me nervous, and the clock was ticking so I make the logical decision of passing him. So I floored it. For a few minutes I was on cloud nine, I felt like a professional race car driver. Then I came crashing down when I spotted a highway patrol car sitting off the side of the road. I slammed on the brake and tried my best not to make it visible. Like a flash, he was behind me, but his lights weren't on. He is just doing one of those scared straight types of tactics, the hopeful side of my brain offered, something deep down said that I was lying to myself. As soon as I took the exit of the freeway, his lights went on. I pulled off the side of the road as placed my car in park. I unbuckle my seatbelt the hurried to put it back on, what the heck are you doing, my mind scolded me. The next thing I know there is a tap on my window, and I begin rolling it down slowly. He looks exasperated and asks "do you realize how fast you are going?" I freeze not knowing how to answer. In all truth, I didn't. Something that I forgot to mention was that a broken speedometer was hindered my driving skills. It went out a few weeks prior because of the incorrect application of chains on the tires. I simply shook my head utterly ashamed. "95 in a 75 that's how fast you were going!" frustration was evident in his voice.

"I'm new to driving and was just trying to pass a semi that was making me nervous." I offered. He, however, wasn't having any of it.

"Since you new to driving do you think you are qualified to handle a vehicle going almost a 100 miles per hour?" he shot back. I simply shook my head

because if I spoke, I would have cried. I am what people would call a goody-two-shoes. I don't break the rules and I certainly never had an adult yell and looked so disappointed in me. He sighed and said, "I need your license and registration." I handed him my license with little delay. The registration was another situation. You see I've been in a car that was pulled over but it's never been me in the driver's seat, so I had no idea where the registration would be.

"Do you know where it would be?" my voice was meek. The officer let out another big sigh.

"People usually keep them in the glovebox," he said seeming to have calmed some.

"Ok," I said and opened the glovebox. There were many pieces of paper. On a guess, I grabbed one and handed it to the highway patrolman.

"This isn't it." I took it back and handed him another. "Nope, that's expired." after about five minutes of this back and forth guessing and denying game he gave up. "I'll just go look it up on the computer." he then turned and walked back to his car looking defeated. I sat there for about fifteen minutes thinking about how I should tell my parents. How mad will they be? Will they take the car? Then thoughts were tainted by the injustice of this world. The one time, I speed I get caught. My mom and my friends speed everywhere and never gets tickets. Before my thoughts could get too heated, the officer was back. "Look, hun," he said as he handed me a ticket and my license. "You seem like a good kid, don't make a habit of this. Five more miles over and I would have arrested you for reckless driving."

"Oh," the severity of the situation making my heart race. "I won't" I reassured.

"Good, now drive safely." he returned to the vehicle having said his peace.

Looking back at these events; I realize how chaotic my first three months of driving were. Yeah, all that happened within the three months after I got my license. I was convinced that I had the worst luck and that my relationship with driving was cursed. I continuously found myself in troubling situations when I was behind the wheel, but as I continue on driving, I realize how prepared it made me. I discovered this about a month ago when I conquered my greatest fear about driving. I was driving my friends Joseph and Trinity home from track practice. Snow was coming down heavily; there was already about a foot of snow on the ground. I was driving up the hill to where they lived when suddenly my car started sliding backward. I made the quick decision to flex my wheel to the left to avoid hitting the cars behind me. I was able to control my car as it slid down the hill backward. I directed my vehicle to a snow embankment that managed to bring my car to a stop. I looked at them once we were stopped and burst into tears then hugged them. I could have killed us, one small mistake and I could have killed my friends, but I didn't. I was competent and cool-headed behind the wheel which are qualities that I developed through my tributary experiences with driving. I said a silent

"thank you" to God. I realize that all that time I spend angry that everyone had it so easy when it came to driving, was futile. It was useless because while other people may not have had it as bad as me, they are also not as prepared. I needed to go through all those experiences to gear me up for that moment right there. So that I can trust myself behind the wheel and know that I have the qualities to keep myself and those that I love safe.