

# DMV puts the brakes on summer freedoms

■ Struggling to pass her driver's test sent one woman in search of her liberty — and her sanity

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Oregon Daily Emerald

Right now just about everything going on in my life has to do with either the process of getting my driver's license or the car I was forced to buy in order to do my newspaper internship in Tacoma, Wash. You may remember me from that odd little story that ran in the final issue of last spring. I'm the 22-year-old author who was at the end of what should have been my senior year, and was sans license.

Well, I'm in Tacoma until late October finishing my internship, and everyone should be relieved (or afraid) to know that I successfully got my license. Here's how:

I failed the written part twice before acquiescing and reading the silly book. That silly book led me to a 100 percent and a learner's permit. Minutes after I celebrated with a goofy photo that had the whole DMV roaring with laughter (those who were physically capable of smiling, that is), I almost caused a four-lane accident on West 11th Avenue (sorry mom, your little Honda had a big scare that day). The passenger didn't help — she just closed her ears as though certain death is any less painful on mute.

I practiced legally with my permit for a few weeks, then went back to the DMV for my first road test. About 30 seconds into the test I did something I knew was an automatic fail: I knocked down the cone that "represented a vehicle."

But the test continued. She was going to give me a break. But because I failed to look in the bike lane, went 35 mph in a 30 zone, changed lanes without checking my blind spot and more, I failed on my own merit. She was so busy writing I don't know how she managed to catch each of those transgressions.

There were so many 16-year-olds in Eugene during the summer that getting an appointment in seven days was not happening, so I scheduled my next test in Salem.

If it weren't for a series of unfortunate and time-consuming events, one of which was my failure to locate a doorbell in order to get the keys to my mom's car, I would have arrived in the stinky little town of Salem calm and collected.

Instead, I arrived highly caffeinated and needing a restroom. The construction around the DMV exacerbated my already frazzled nerves. So, once again, minutes into the test, I committed an auto-failable offense, but, again, the test continued.

I don't know why those DMV folks make you suffer through the rest of the test once you have already failed. I guess it's good practice, but for me, all it did was polish my ulcer and force me to hold back the tears even longer.

When I parked, forming an acute angle with the car to my left, the DMV lady informed me that I did not meet state standards. I informed her that my whole career was most likely ruined and proceeded to cry.

Scared, she left the car without apologizing, undoubtedly thinking, "Look, little girl, I didn't make the rules; I just enforce them with the unnecessary gruffness reserved for government employees and high

school food service workers." She was so preoccupied with her clipboard full of my errors that she mistakenly left her cell phone in my car.

By the time I got back to Eugene (after stopping at the Enchanted Forest to ease my pain — hey, if I've got the pain of a 16-year-old, why not do what they do for fun, too?) the DMV was closed, so it wasn't until Monday that I could inform them of my cellular discovery.

Ms. Gruff beat me to the dial and there was a message for me to return the phone to the DMV office in Eugene. "Listen lady," I thought, "if I had a license that would be no problem. You're going to have to wait the 14 days until I can take the test again to get your phone back."

And so, on July 21, my friend drove me to Lebanon to take my third test.

Bob, who graduated from the University in the mid-70s, administered my test. After I passed with just two errors (how do they know what is "too" close to pedestrians anyway?) Bob let me know that he had failed the test once too. I told them they should have to wear their driving test histories like badges so we neophyte drivers would be less intimidated. After Bob's generosity was documented with a photo, my friend and I finally left.

Just one week later my bags were packed and I moved to Tacoma.

Now I drive all over the place. I have only one friend in Tacoma, so I always go to Portland and Seattle to visit; I went home only once, and just for a friend's wedding.

People are sure to think my driving skills are suspect, but I am still learning.

Don't take the light tone of this article as me treating driving like a game. I try to be the safest driver I can be, and I am making progress. As one friend recently told me, "I am much less scared to drive with you now."

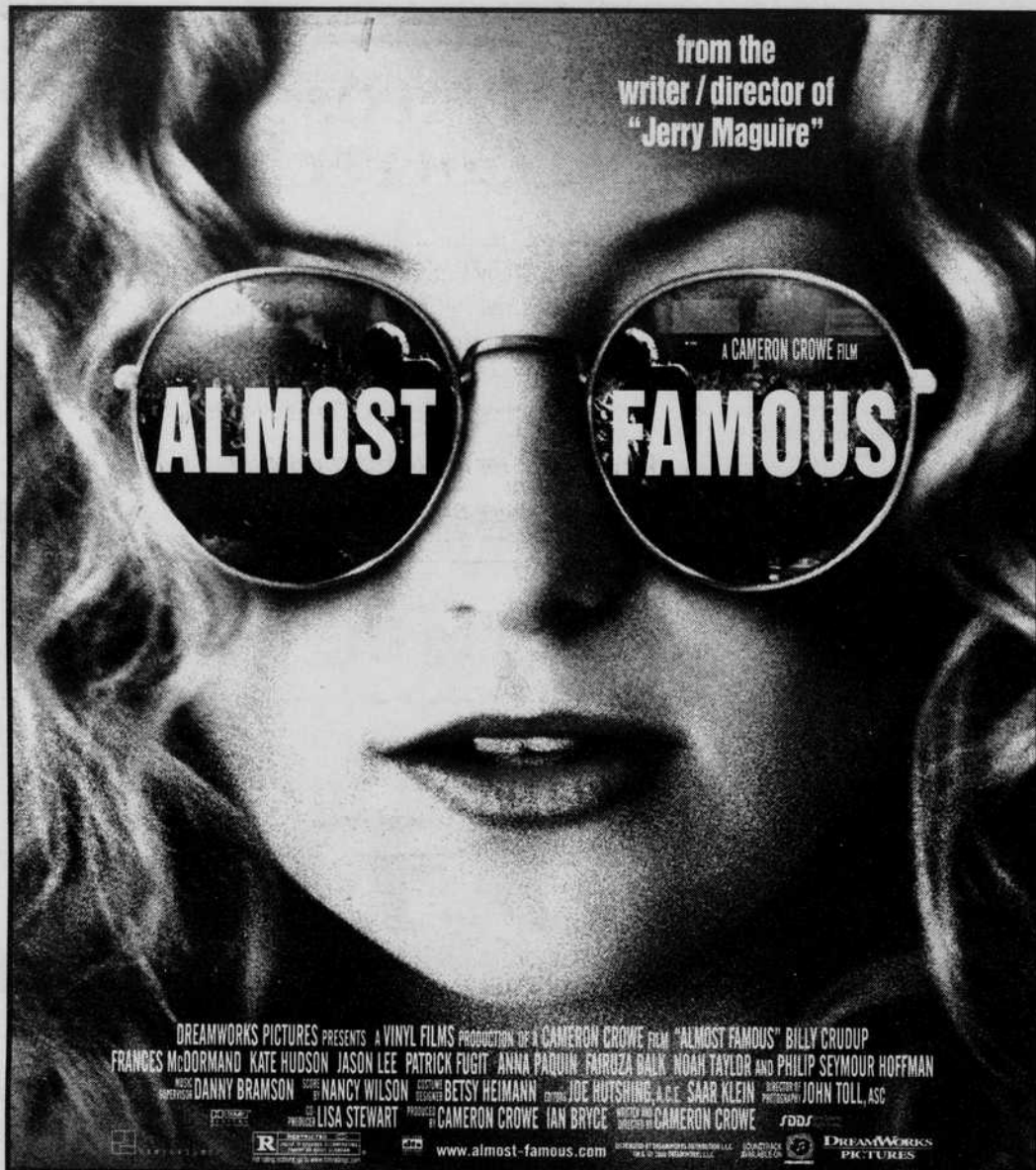
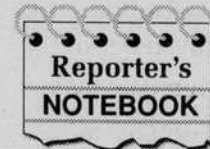
I have been initiated no-holds-barred into the world of driving as well as car ownership. Half of my first paycheck went to insurance and within five days of moving to Tacoma my car was broken into.

In late August I met a young woman I was going to interview for a story about the day care at which she worked. Before we could relocate to the place of the interview she backed her car into my car. It was her fault, but it doesn't eradicate the hassle I was thereby exposed to. I'd been driving less than a month and had already been robbed and beaten. The next day I locked my keys in the car; the spare was at an Acura dealership in Eugene.

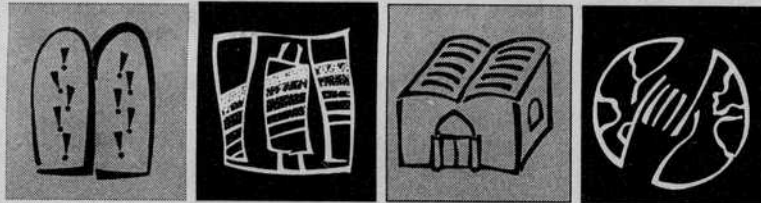
Though it's been a silly ride, I think the experience has accelerated a part of me whose growth was stunted. I'm free as a bird. And though this bird has to make car payments when she'd rather be out buying a new feathered belt, it's worth it. I've learned a great deal, most of which you readers have probably known since you were teenagers. But here are two things you may not have known:

1. You can be sent home from a bar to retrieve your passport if the expiration date on your ID and your date of birth are not both odd or both even. I'll bet they don't see a 22-year-old with a permit and a year-and-a-half good time (it expired in 2001) and an even birth year every day.

2. You can buy a car without a driver's license. I have the 1993 Acura Integra to prove it, and if anybody needs a ride, my guilt from years of bumming rides from friends has yet to pass.



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