I could not believe it. Driving laws in Ontario allowed teenagers to get their licenses at the age of sixteen! As my sixteenth birthday approached, I beamed with excitement and anticipation. What I did not know at the time was this: The driving lessons that I learned in our old sedan would stay with me for the rest of my life.

My father, who adored driving, was the obvious choice to be my driving instructor. The first lesson took place in the driveway. While I sat in the passenger seat, he explained the devices in the car. I was particularly frightened by the gear shift, which was sticking out of the floorboard. However, my father patiently lectured on the different floor pedals, the turn signals, and, my favorite, the car horn.

For the next lesson, I sat in the driver’s seat. At that time, it felt more like a throne than anything else. My father asked me to turn on the car, and then he guided me into reverse. As I let up on the clutch and pressed the gas, I felt the car starting to move backward. I was controlling this vehicle! Slowly and carefully, I backed out of the driveway and into the residential street. After a few moments of confusion, I had the car sputtering forward in first gear.

Two weeks of lessons passed, and I was beginning to get bored with the scenery, which never changed. My father had me drive around the same block again and again. I was passing the same landmarks—the neighbors’ houses, the dead tree down the street, and the kids who were playing in the empty lot on the corner. When I could stand it no more, I asked to move to a street that had more action. “Tomorrow. I think you are ready,” my father replied, his eyes twinkling with pride.

My emotions were in overdrive the next day. I was finally on a busy street at night. I shifted from first gear to second gear with no problems. Then came third gear. When I reached the speed that I wanted, I put the car into fourth. I was flying in the old sedan! My father’s concerned voice broke my spell. He said calmly, “Honey, there’s a red light ahead.” I was traveling far above the speed limit and heading toward a red light. All the information that I had learned in the previous weeks leaked out of my brain. I did not know how to react. I blared the horn and flew through the intersection, which by pure luck was empty.

That night my father was somber. I was in tears. How lucky we had been not to have been hit by another car. I waited for him to reprimand me, but he did not. I was aware of the severity of my moving violation. It is now thirty years later, and I have not forgotten that day. In fact, if I accidentally drive through a red light now, I remember the emotions of a sixteen-year-old and the wisdom of a loving father who taught her to drive.