

Taxi Cabs: A Daughter's Tale

The taxi cab took two hours to pick my mother up. She waited outside a Publix on a Friday evening, groceries in hand, hoping her frozen goods wouldn't defrost before her ride finally arrived.

She's 84-years-old and cantankerous as hell. Originally from Philadelphia, she learned to drive at 34-years-old in 1960's Miami and never really took to the rules of the road. She'd drive with the abandonment of a child on a bike flying down a lane after school let out for the day.

Road signs, "No Right Turn," "Prepare to Come to a Full Stop," were just suggestions. Blinkers snapped fiercely. Her last car, a dark green Buick with a six cylinder engine, roared as she accelerated, flying off the starting line, charging down residential streets, breaking only when necessary, randomly as wanted.

She'd press her body up to the steering wheel, two hands gripping at three and nine o'clock, gray hair and glasses whipping left and right as she calculates the fastest way to turn onto a busy intersection. Her face in a distorted array of concentration, mouth turned down and eyes frowning, trying to figure out what the Basterds were going to do next.

Left hand turns are killers, you know.

The large sedan overflowed with mementos of everyday life: old newspapers, crumbled plastic bags, colorful advertisements carefully folded lengthwise, stacked mail neatly cinched at the waist by rubber bands, rejected clothing, VCR tapes sitting in the front passenger seat like some dumb cad stupid enough to be caught in the whirlwind of a car gone mad.

Dirt rooted in the seats, floors, windows. An enveloping odor of rank perfume greeted visitors.

The green machine loved to ride though, and he was her prince. Together they whisked up to Walgreens at midnight and showed up late at doctors' offices. They were a team. He'd keep moving if she kept giving him the gas: To library book sales, Sears' outlets, Aldi's for fruit and Costco for toilet paper, never before noon.

Eventually, his back seat filled with bags destined for a rehab center two miles away: socks, tee shirts, shorts, each with a name written on the inside hem. No underwear though. The Center provided that. My father just needed his snacks and audio books and a radio so he can listen to music.

These rides were harder for my mother. The old man had been her to abuse for 60 years. And now he was sitting in a center filled with petrified wooden people who couldn't talk or move and if they could, sometimes they'd turn their wheelchairs full throttle towards the exit doors, only to be stopped at the gate as the monitor screamed in response to their futile efforts to get away.

He might be going senile my dad. Or he might just be sick for a little while. We kind of didn't know. All this super old stuff is new to us. We're use to the creepy, crawly, catching up on you kind of aging. Not the kind that turned congenial former airline employees into 'stare at the table, listen to an attendant sing-song statements about drinking all your juice' kind of old.

Her concentration changed then. Her world moved from complaining about my dad to real fears of losing him. Can he walk well at home? Will he fall again? Why can't he do anything anymore? Who, for God's sake, is going to wash these kitchen floors?

Maintenance is not her forte. Nor was cleaning, nurturing, or caring for anybody after age two. My mother approached parenting like others' do gardening: survival of the fittest; adapt or learn to do without. But don't expect her to pick up the reins. That makes for soft children and burdened parents.

Rides in the Green Machine, or in the Yellow Nissan, or the Full-Length—seven kids in the back noses pressed up against window panes—Station Wagon were her tickets to sanity. The easiest way to escape little houses with lots of people.

But the problem with treating your car like your kids is that the car has no way to call for help.

One day, he stopped moving. Like an old man who'd forgotten to see a doctor, cancer ate at his engine as fluid slowly drained from the radiator heating up his core and forcing a myocardial infraction of the worst kind.

The day the Buick died my mother lost her independence.

Now she is forced to call 24-hours in advance for a ride anywhere. Anywhere. Always. Every time. That is, if she wants to only pay \$4.00 to use the local system for the disabled.

My father had not minded taking the van. Legally blind for the past 20 years, he would board the service for rides to the doctors and catch a bus back home. It gave him a chance to talk to other people. My mother liked shipping him off. No need to coddle the old bugger you know.

But for my mother, Queen of the Green Machine, Veteran of Inner City Public Transit Service, Walker in Her Youth, it was an abomination. An absolute Cross to Bear to plan and execute at this microscopic level.

Planning anything 24-hours ahead of time requires a level of concentration she had not practiced since Catholic grade school.

Worse still, were the dreaded taxi cabs. These demons from Hell were driven by men of questionable immigration status. The cars were dirty and you know those guys take the long way home just to charge more.

And don't even get her started about U-ber.

That night, she waited two hours for a taxi cab. Her body bent from an arthritic spine and stenosis. Her bladder control shot by seven vaginal deliveries. Her husband at home alone, drifting off to sleep after forgetting to turn off the gas stove. The groceries stacked in the mobile cart she used to navigate long store aisles.

She called repeatedly and got the same answer. "It's a Friday night. The cabs are busy. We'll be there as soon as possible." The ride showed up eventually and an indifferent driver drove the two miles home.

Sometimes drivers' help her lug the plastic bags up to the front door. Most of the time they sit in their seat as she shuffles up and back a few times, using her walker like a basket, slowly emptying out the trunk.

I was furious when I found out. My mother may be a pain in the ass but she's my pain in the ass and no one is going to treat her this way.

I called the taxi cab company and told the young assistant what happened. And I asked her why they made her wait two hours.

My mother's house is in a little town surrounded by a big city. Its' beautiful tree-lined streets shelter well-kept homes, a lovely shopping village, and excellent schools. It is a tiny, fully self-supporting city. And it has one small taxi service.

And those cab drivers probably communicate.

In my best, "don't make me talk to my lawyer," voice I suggested to the sweet young lady that it was in her company's best interest to prioritize my mother as they would any other passenger. I, in turn, would encourage my mother to not wait until 5 p.m. on Friday to go grocery shopping, thereby competing with weekend revelries.

We came to an understanding, I believe.

My mother still bitches about taxi drivers, paying for rides, and planning her outings. Her Partner In Crime sits still in the driveway, slowly turning into a coat rack covered with papers, boxes, plants and more. My father's still rotates in and out of rehab more often than a 27-year-old comedian.

But she can get a ride home the grocery store now. I can tell you that.