

Mom gets a Drivers License

07-16-2012 by Harry Zirkelbach

Josephine Hernon Zirkelbach was my mother. Her sisters were tall, a rangy thin, and her brothers were burly 6" 2" men. Her nick-name to that family was "Babe". And it really fit, all her life.

At maturity she was still not 5 foot tall, never grew taller, was muscular, did gain weight as she aged.

To children, adults are giants. some more gigantic, the difference meaningless to the child.

Mom never drove an automobile, until she and dad bought a 1924 Buick in 1928. This car was large, boxy, heavy. Dad who had raced cars as a youth, suggested to Mom that she obtain a drivers license. Dad was smart enough to have friends teach her to drive and prepare to pass the Pennsylvania Drivers License test.

The car and the paved Pennsylvania road were a challenge to mom
A Learner Permit allowed each driver to take the Drivers road test three times.
Mom would need three Learner Permits, endless persistence to obtain that prized Drivers License.

The Buick weighed 4800 pounds empty. The front wheels were almost impossible to turn if the car was not in motion. Mom drove seated on a pillow, another behind her back. These provided height and positioned her forward enough to reach the floor pedals. And in that position, she saw the roadway ahead through the crescent arch created by the steering wheel.

If that wasn't enough challenge, the paved roads there had a high center, arched down to the curb on either side almost 12 inches. They were designed to carry off torrential rains immediately.

In addition to the routine driving, obeying stop and signal lights. the Pennsylvania Drivers test required the car to be turned around somewhere in the middle of a side street.

At a signal by the Examiner, the driver was required to reverse the car's direction. Turn left, reverse toward the opposite curb, then drive ahead in the opposite direction.

Neither curb could be struck, the engine “killed” by gear shifting.

She never came close to passing until dad arranged to have a friend loan us their small sedan. The wheel turning, clutch control which were mountainous obstacles in the Buick and to, were mastered completely in the smaller auto. The Zirkelbach's family now had a second driver.

The drivers exam was always a source of laughter to our parents for mom drove the car as much as did dad, and was accident free all her life.

Which in today's world would be remarkable. Cars were not reliable. No freeways. Paved roads wide enough to park an auto on both sides of the street, room enough in the middle to for cars to pass without hitting. And all the time her view of the road and traffic framed by the arch under the upper third of the steering wheel.