

## Driving Lessons

by Marilyn Reeves

Like most kids, my Dad taught me how to drive. Luckily the old two-tone green Pontiac had automatic shift, so I didn't have to worry about shifting gears – just put it in drive and go. I must have done alright, because on my 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, my very first license in hand, I was allowed to use the car on my own that day. After all I was a good kid, responsible, made good choices. But perhaps I still had a few lessons left to learn.

The very first thing I did was to drive out to the Dairy Queen and purchase an ice cream cone. I had visions of holding the cone in my left hand while driving with my right – oh yeah! That illusion lasted until I tried to turn out of the parking lot onto the highway. *Oops!* Seems like I actually needed the use of both hands to make that turn. So my brand new, unsavored ice cream cone had to be sacrificed to the gutter. That was Lesson No. 1.

A few days later I decided to take a spin outside of town on a section of highway with rather steep hills. Accelerating down that first hill was exhilarating – almost like riding on a roller coaster – until I happened to look at my speedometer. I was going 85 miles per hour! *Oops!* Well, chalk that down as Lesson No. 2.

Over time I got better and better at driving – learned to keep both hands on the wheel and to watch my speed. Occasionally I got to use the family car to drive my girlfriends to some event in the evening – usually happening at the school. Afterward, we'd go out to Bob's Café and treat ourselves to Cokes and french fries. Then we'd drag F Street a few times (which is what the cool kids in Salida did for kicks back then) and honk at the boys driving by.

I'm happy to say I never had an accident, unless you count the time I knocked down a boy at the ice skating pond, who walked right in front of me. But he wasn't hurt, thank God! Scared me more than it did him.

Probably my worst disaster was deciding to drive down the abandoned railroad bed on the other side of the Arkansas at the end of town. The rails had been taken out as well as most of the ties, so I was basically driving through the cinders ... up past the hub caps. Hadn't gone more than a few feet before the car got stuck. I had to send my 8-year old sister Rosie back across the bridge, to run – terrified – past the pool hall and the beer joints below 1<sup>st</sup> Street, and on up another block to the safety of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, where his store was, to fetch Daddy.

He came and rescued me, and somehow got the car back out of the cinders. He didn't lose his temper, didn't ground me or even scold me. Lesson No. 3 – I had the best Dad in the whole wide world! ... not to mention a pretty awesome little sister.