

What I learned from my driving instructor

Can you remember how you were told that ‘You learn for life, not for school’ whenever you didn’t want to do your homework? Concerning school, this never made much sense to me. In maths and physics for example I had to learn many difficult formula and calculations that did not interest me and that I never needed again. Or have you ever had to calculate how long an egg needs to hit the floor from a height of 1.6m? However while doing my driving license I finally grasped what it means to learn for life. Of all people my driving instructor, someone I would never have thought capable of teaching me anything, offered me this insight.

Like almost everybody in my school year I started taking driving lessons when I was seventeen to be able to drive right on my eighteenth birthday. It did not really occur to me then that I might not need a license. In Berlin, where I grew up, you normally travel quicker and more relaxed by public transport. In many areas there are so few free parking-spots that you have to search them with a magnifying glass. And when you have finally found one you have to walk long ways to get to where you originally wanted to go. I quite liked riding my bike anyways. But back then I believed that I absolutely needed a license. It promised independence, freedom, being grown-up! And most importantly: everybody did it. So I went to a driving school near my home and signed a contract that entitled me to eight times 40 minutes driving lesson in the city, 80 minutes on the highway, 80 minutes night-drive, and 120 minutes driving overland. Additionally I would receive twelve units of theoretical instruction. For that I had to hand over all my savings and a bit more. I was quite content...

...until I took my first driving lesson. My driving instructor quickly made it clear that I was one of the most untalented driving pupils he had ever taught. First of all I am afraid of

traffic, especially when I am participating. Therefore I am very nervous and hectic while driving. Furthermore I have problems overlooking the general situation. I focus too much on what is happening around me and thereby oversee street signs, other cars, and side streets. During the first lesson my driving instructor had to shout at me a lot because of all the mistakes I made. Naturally this did not improve our relationship. My motivation decreased rapidly during the ten following driving lessons. After these my instructor decided that I still wasn't good enough for the examination. I had to take another 160 minutes. After that my driving was reasonably good and I made an appointment to be tested.

The night before the scheduled date I hardly slept. At this point all that mattered was to get the whole topic of learning how to drive done with and go home as a person certified to steer a motorized vehicle. Most of all I looked forward to never having to meet my driving instructor again. My appointment was at ten o'clock on a Thursday. That was lucky, I figured, because there wouldn't be so many other cars around. My driving instructor met me in front of the driving school and drove me to where we met with the man from the testing agency. After greeting each other the examiner asked me to get on the front seat and he and my instructor sat down in the back. Then the examiner asked me to start the car, to show him how to turn on the front lights and to start driving. First we drove through some smaller streets, no problem. After some minutes the tester ordered me to enter the highway. With that he fulfilled one of my worst fears. It's not so much the driving on the highway as such, although I have to admit that I prefer lower velocities. Entering and exiting the highway is what scares me the most. But I performed well and managed to continue my drive happily and without any harm. At the next exit the examiner advised me to drive off the highway and onto it another time. I thought that he only wanted to see again how well I could carry out this manoeuvre and drove on more self-assured. After exiting the highway a second time the examiner directed me back to where we had started.

When the car was safely parked he stepped out of it and informed me that I had deeply disappointed my driving instructor. Then he left me alone with the so-described one. I did not have the impression that my instructor was disappointed at all. He merely yelled at me because I had left the full beam on the whole time, not even reacted to someone blinking at me and furthermore driven in the middle lane of the highway the whole time.

And I should not blame *him*, he said. "I only teach you what I can teach you, it's not my problem if you fail the examination. I don't care if you have your license or not." Also he prescribed me four more driving lessons of 40 minutes each. At that moment I hated him passionately. But once I had slept over it and cooled down a bit I realized that he had taught me one of the most important lessons of my life: **That teachers can try to teach me whatever they have to teach, but it's my responsibility and my gain to make something out of it.**

When I went back to my driving lessons I finally got the hang of it. In the next examination I passed without any mistakes. I still don't like cars too much and prefer being driven to driving. But from my driving instructor I learned a lot more for life than I learned during most of my school years.