

THE DRIVE

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[Assignment: Henry Adams, in his autobiography, claims that the most important things he learned in life he learned accidentally. Write a list for yourself of all the things you remember learning accidentally. Choose one interesting and important item from your list; make another list of all the details that flood into your mind as you recount that learning process. Then write a narrative essay about what happened. Your purpose is twofold: to tell the story as completely as you can, and to comment on what the process has meant to you.

I was putting on my coat at four o'clock in the morning for the third night in a row. My girlfriend, who lived more than a half hour from my house, was again concerned knowing my history of falling asleep when driving. I was even a little concerned. However, having made it home the last two nights in a row, I knew I could make it. I wasn't in the greatest of moods knowing that in a couple of hours my father would be knocking on my door, waking me up to help with the morning chores. The morning chores were an everyday thing at my house and everybody did their share no matter how late they got home. Maybe that was the reason I was so tired, having done the chores the last two mornings in a row.

After kissing my girlfriend good night, I was on my way. I turned the heater on because late October in Wisconsin is very cold. I began singing to the radio as I usually do on the way home from Jill's house, or any other time I am by myself. Singing to the radio is a way to pass time for me. Also, it helps me stay awake. Oftentimes I listen to country music, but on that particular night I listened to heavy metal. I figured that heavy metal would keep me awake better than country music. When I came to the end of the valley road that Jill lived on, I shut the heater off because it was getting real hot in the car, which makes me even more sleepy. In fact, I opened the window so I could get some cool air to help me stay awake.

I had been driving for probably ten to fifteen minutes and I was already starting to fall asleep. Barely being able to hold my eyes open, I decided to pull over to the side of the road and walk around for awhile. Getting out of my car and into the cold weather helps me wake up. It was a real calm night. I walked over to the edge of the road and looked down into the ditch at the culvert. I could hear the water running out of the culvert and into the ditch. After a few minutes, I decided that I was awake enough to start driving again.

The rest of the way was not any easier. Now having driven for about twenty-five minutes, I wondered if I was going to make it without falling asleep. I thought to myself as I was driving about what would happen if I ran in the ditch with my parents' car. I told myself that if I could make it to Gilmanton I would be all right. I live five miles from Gilmanton, and at that time, I was sure I could make it home if I got to Gilmanton. I thought about stopping to take a nap but I continued to drive

because I was afraid of oversleeping and missing chores. As I continued to get closer to Gilmanton, I started to fall asleep. I angled toward the opposite side of the road, getting closer and closer to the edge. Finally, I jerked the wheel to keep the car on the road. My heart started to pump real fast; I became light-headed and my muscles felt weak. I pulled over to the side of the road, got out of my car, and walked around until I calmed down.

I started to drive again. I slowed down for the sharp corner that was ahead. The corner, which was only a few minutes from Gilmanton, was very dangerous. It was one of those corners that you knew was there, but never quite slowed down enough for. After that corner, I knew that I had only a few minutes left before I got to Gilmanton. I drove mindlessly toward Gilmanton, finding myself thinking about something and falling half asleep dreaming about it. When I was driving, I would jump or jerk thinking that I had fallen asleep and was dreaming. When I drove through Gilmanton, I did not see one car in a town with less than two hundred people in it. There are only ninety students in the high school. I remember looking into the parking lots of the bars to see if anyone I knew didn't make it home that night because they were too drunk. I did not see any car that I recognized, which is a bit unusual for a Saturday night. I also remember how relaxed I felt when I left Gilmanton. I figured that I had it made. When I drove around the first little corner out of town, I told myself just five more minutes. I looked into the yards of the farms as I drove by. The farms were dead; all of the farmers were still asleep. I jumped once again, thinking that I had fallen asleep. I was very tired, almost sick from trying to stay awake. It was like I had driven myself into a trance.

I was probably two miles from home. I became very relaxed; I once again jumped. It felt like I was driving in a chisel-plowed field, but I was really in the ditch. I was in such a trance that I did not even react. I hit a big bump, and my head went through the driver's side window. I was knocked out. The car was still traveling at about sixty miles per hour. There was a telephone pole about ten feet to the left of my car, and the railing of a bridge about two feet to the right of the car. The bridge was not very big, because it just went over a small creek. The ditch was very steep as were the banks of the creek. The car jumped the bridge embankment, flew into the bank on the other side of the creek, and landed in the water upside down.

When I finally came to, I thought that I was dreaming. It took me a couple of minutes before I realized what had actually happened. I got out of the car and decided to walk to the neighbor's house and call home. In order to get out of the car, I had to crawl out of the back window. I had numerous cuts and bruises on the left side of my body. As I walked to the neighbor's house to call home, I rehearsed in my head what I was going to tell my parents. At the time, I really didn't know what exactly had happened, so I did not know what to tell my parents. When I knocked on the door of my neighbor's house, he answered right away. I was glad that he was up, but I found it very weird for him to be awake when he did not have any morning chores to do. When my father answered the phone, I told him exactly what had happened as I knew it at that time. He sounded very concerned, and came as soon as possible.

After getting off the phone with my father, my neighbor asked what had happened. I told him the same things that I had told my father. It was at this time, when I was talking to Bob, my neighbor, I noticed I was all wet and had cuts all over. My pockets were full of sand, and my jacket was ripped and also full of sand. My shoes were soaked; it was like walking on sponges. Every time I put my foot down, water would run out the sides of my shoes. I was real cold; I was shivering and I could hardly talk.

It took my parents about seven minutes to get there. Surprisingly, they weren't mad at all. In fact, they were happy to see me alive. Afterwards, my mother said she was glad she saw me before she saw the car. We went to where the car was, and my dad made me crawl in the car to shut the radio and the lights off. After I turned the lights and the radio off, we went home so I could take a shower and my parents could call the cops and a tow truck. On the way home, I noticed the left side of my body was very sore. Because of all the commotion and hype, I really didn't notice it until I was on my way home.

We went back to the accident and waited for the cops to show up. I was completely silent while we were waiting for the cops to come. Neither of my parents said a word. I tried to start a conversation, but could not think of anything to talk about. I did not want to talk about the accident because I was afraid that they would get mad. Plus, I wanted to forget about it anyway. It seemed like it took the cops forever to get there, but it really only took them about fifteen minutes. When the cops finally arrived, I had to answer what seemed like a hundred questions. After the questioning, they wrote me out a ticket and left without saying anything more than "you are lucky." By the time I was done talking with the cops, my father and the driver of the tow truck had already gotten the car out of the water. I was very tired, very cold, and so stiff I could hardly walk. I just wanted to go home and go to bed.

I waited until Monday before I went to the doctor. My hip and knee hurt so bad that I could hardly get from the house to the car, and my head hurt so bad that I could hardly drive myself to the doctor. The doctor said that I had suffered a severe concussion and should not have driven to his office. The rest of my body was fine. I did not have any broken bones or anything. However, I did do some damage to my left knee. I had it scoped about four months after the accident. Other than that, I would have to say that I'm very lucky that I had my seat belt on and was driving a big Ford LTD.