

Facing my Fears

As I drove further and further away from my brother's house, I became more and more apprehensive. Actually, I was filled with a mixture of apprehension, anxiety, and excitement over the adventure I was about to embark upon: I was driving over one thousand miles, by myself, from Ocala, Florida to Chicago. I was setting off on this trip with nothing but a paper map, money for phone calls and my own skills, which I had absolutely no confidence in.

I remember getting to north Georgia and calling my brother from a Waffle House restaurant. I told him "gee these mountains are scaring me." He laughed and said, "You're not even in the mountains yet." Uh oh! This was going to be scary I thought. I can't do this. I'm turning around. Then I thought, no! I have to do it or I will lose all confidence in my ability to set goals and achieve them.

I had no GPS on this trip because it was before GPS was available to the public, nor were there any smart phones. So I had no ability to check the radar for weather either. I just had to wing it. I was really on my own. I have to admit there was something exhilarating about this trip – the open road, being my own boss, the beauty of the scenery- that I was enjoying in spite of my fears.

I was also very afraid of heights. This was a problem in the mountains and on long, high bridges. But oddly enough my father's advice from years ago, when he was teaching me to drive, rang in my ears as I crossed high bridges and drove down a mountain. He told me: "Follow the white line in the middle of the road. Don't look right, don't look left, just follow the line in the middle of the road like a video game." I also remembered him requiring my brother and me to be his co-pilots while he drove. The excuse was that it would help my mother by giving her some time to rest her eyes. It dawned on me during this, my first solo trip, as I expertly read my maps and estimated distances, that my father's allowing us to help him drive was all a clever ruse on his part. He didn't need my help to find Florida. He was teaching me to read maps and be independent.

When I reached my destination, I had learned so many things. First, that my father was wise and he had taught me well. Second, I realized that I was a good driver and more than capable of traveling alone, even if I didn't want to. I also learned that no matter how fearful I was of something new, I could conquer the task. I gained confidence in myself and in my abilities that I will carry with me to face any new challenges that may arise in the future.

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