

It was a dark and stormy night... actually, it was about four in the morning, but from what little sleep I'd gotten, it certainly still felt like night. The windshield wipers flashed in the downpour, and the headlights shone in an attempt to provide ten feet of visibility as I drove down 35E, my mom drowsily navigating in the passenger seat. That early morning was the third of five times driving to the DMV last summer, though twice, I couldn't secure an appointment. Every time I thought I was ready because I knew the theory behind it. Every time, save the last, I was proven wrong. I, a student who prides herself on being an excellent test-taker, have failed the Minnesota driver's license road test twice.

That first July day I drove out to the DMV, I had no idea what to expect. I'd only finished my required driving hours the week before, my parking was subpar, and I didn't know how the test itself was structured, though all written preparation I'd completed was nearly flawless. The examiner explained that I'd need to treat the unmarked course as a four-lane road throughout—I should have paid closer attention to that fact. My car drifted into the center of the road, and I cut wide corners after turns until my erratic driving was put to a stop. My first failure was miserable but inevitable with that kind of driving; I would have failed myself, too.

The next two times down that freeway could hardly be counted as failures. Road testing in Minnesota is notorious for full schedules and impossible appointments, and while that particular DMV did accept walk-ins, they were in short supply. Twice before the crack of dawn, I drove down the increasingly familiar freeway, only to find that all the day's slots had already been filled, with some hopefuls having arrived as early as two in the morning. I would have to wait weeks for another appointment.

My second road test started out well. I didn't have to adjust to complete a perfect 90-degree back-in, and I stayed in my lane. But just before the end, my front bumper nicked a pole

on the dreaded parallel park. The examiner said to continue anyway, but I didn't believe I was good enough to pass. Ultimately, it became a self-fulfilling prophecy when I hopped the curb on the final downhill park. This second failure was much worse than the first. I had been so close, and if I hadn't worried so much, I would've been licensed before the school year began. As it was, I had to repeat a parking lesson, pay a fee, and obtain yet another appointment in mid-September.

Throughout my educational life, I've upheld a reputation of doing well on tests, and I pride myself on it. My pride in these easily measurable scores quickly warped into my measure of my own self-worth. I'd assumed this real-world test would be as simple to conquer as any test at school, but I was as wrong as the way I first drove down that one-way street. To me, the fact that I had failed meant that *I* was a failure. But this isn't how the real world works, and I still had a license to get. I realized that my worth isn't measured by whether I fail once or twice, but whether I keep trying. All previous tests would be left in the rearview mirror once I passed, and this pushed me to try one last time. The fifth time did the trick; I narrowly squeaked by with a pass, and I was finally licensed.

In the end, it matters that I passed once, not how many times I've failed. Every day my driving improves a little more. Even dark and stormy nights don't scare me now—though I still don't ever want to go back down that freeway to the DMV.

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