

## Changing Lanes

“Oh, you’re 16 now! Do you have your license yet?” That used to be my least favorite question. I’d put on a tight smile and say, “Nope. Not yet.” It took months for me to get my permit after I turned 15 because of how scary driving was for me. It took even longer for me to get my license. Lots of teenagers rush to the DMV the day they turn 16. That was not the case for me. For me, driving meant a lot of things. Scary things. What if I failed the driving test? What if I made another driver angry? What if I got pulled over? Hurt somebody? There are real consequences for driving and I wasn’t sure I was ready to face them.

Excuse after excuse would spill out—“I’m only 16, I’ve got time” or “I don’t need to drive today”—but the excuses were just cover-ups for the real problems: fear and lack of confidence behind the wheel. Getting my license was something I knew I had to do eventually, but I kept putting it off because I “wasn’t ready.”

“If only you could drive...” became a frequent phrase my mom would use when I would tell her about activities or events she couldn’t take me to. She was counting on me to get my license and she wasn’t the only one. As much as I hated driving, the pros clearly outweighed the cons. Facing my fears head on was the only way. So every time my mom would ask, “Do you want to drive today?” I would grit my teeth and nod because I knew this was something I wanted for the benefit of myself and those around me. So I slowly moved forward, focusing on the big milestones—finishing my driving hours, completing the online course, driving with the instructor, passing the written test, getting my actual license, and driving by myself for the first time.

The thing I feared the most was driving with the instructor. Still, one drive at a time, I pressed the gas pedal and inched closer to my goal. On the day of the test, I was shaking and my knees wobbled as I got into the student driver's seat. I thought I was done for—but muscle memory took over, and I passed! More than just passing, I got a score I was proud of. My prayers and practice had paid off! To me, the score represented all the hard work I had put into driving, and all the times I pushed through fear and overcame it.

There's a quote by John Wayne I adapted a little for myself: "Courage is being scared to death but getting back [in the front seat] anyway." It reminds me that courage isn't the absence of fear—it's acting in spite of it. Even though I was scared, I did it. And I realized: no matter how hard or scary, I could do it. The more times I used my courage, the more confident I became.

A few weeks before taking the test with the instructor, my dad reminded me to look at how far I'd come. Until that moment, I hadn't realized how much I had grown—not just in my driving, but also in my confidence. And now, I'm even further. I have my license. I'm realizing the power and freedom that comes with pushing through fears, and being brave. I feel proud that I am moving forward and reaching my goals. Driving down the canyon alone with my playlist on shuffle has become something I genuinely enjoy.

Now when people ask, "Do you have your license?" a grin comes to my face and I can say, "Yes. Yes I do." To me, that license means more than the ability to drive—it's proof that I can face fears and come out even stronger.