

After quite a few years behind the wheel, my aunt still hugs the side of the road. It's a habit ingrained in her at a very early age by her first driving instructor, my dad.



"I wish he'd never done that," my uncle sighs from the passenger seat, even as he is counting the paint pigment dots in the side of the mailbox flashing by just inches away from his window.

I don't know all the history, but I do know that eventually, after much begging and pestering, my dad finally agreed to teach her.

He took her to the town cemetery. She learned how to drive the family Packard, an automotive monstrosity far more akin to, say, the Sherman Tank than the family sedan, by maneuvering between the tombstones and granite plot markers. To this day, pedestrians are far safer lying in the middle of the street than walking on sidewalks whenever she is in the area. Not that she's a bad driver. In fact, she's very careful and considerate, innately understanding, as all demure Southern Ladies do, that an automobile is a convenient, cost-effective way of transporting children, pets, and the elderly from point A to point B as safely as possible – unlike her nephew who views a car as yet another symbol of my incredible sexual genius and supernova-like gender lure.

No, she's very conscientious; she's just a product of her education.

The inherent problem is her original sensei, my dad, was probably one of the lousiest drivers ever to slide behind the wheel of a two-ton Detroit death machine.

Poor old pappy! It wasn't that he was inherently dangerous, he was just, well, sometimes a little distracted. I can still see him, in full righteous indignation, reading me the riot act about the raft of unpaid parking tickets I racked up my senior year at Wofford. He was going on and on about my cavalier attitude and dilettante lifestyle, his finger stabbing the air just in front of my nose, even as he plowed into a huge pine tree at 25 miles an hour.

And he never broke stride from his tirade.

"I MEANT to do that," he snapped, before launching into the rest of his dissertation on what he saw as my numerous shortcomings.

Of course, even dad couldn't help his origins. True, he was one of the worst drivers – from Pharaoh to Grace Kelly– but not the worst. That title would undoubtedly go to his father, my grandfather, the late great Col. John Sr. The man's gravel throwing exploits were legendary and even fifty years later can send shivers up the spines of cops, judges and pedestrians everywhere.

The classic bit of family apocrypha, of course, explains how his reign of terror on the highways of the lowcountry ended. It seems that one day, as he was coming through town, he was nearly t-boned into an oblivious blot by a logging truck hauling a full load up Highway 78 from Summerville to Denmark. Infuriated, granddaddy chased the guy down, honking his horn, flashing his lights, yelling out the window, shaking his septuagenarian fist until the guy pulled over.

Granddaddy was loudly expostulating on the hapless truck driver's shared heritage with baboons, and his possessing their waste products for brains, when the state trooper assigned to the area pulled up to the scene some fifteen minutes later.

"What's wrong, Colonel," the officer said, and quickly got an earful, probably something about the poor truck driver's baboon ancestors, when that poor soul finally got a word in edgewise.

"But sir," the trucker said, "I had the right of way at that stoplight; it was green for me."

To which granddaddy replied, absolutely nonplused, "What stoplight?"

As it turned out, the stoplight had been there for nearly a year.

Shortly after that little event, the state saw fit to not renew the colonel's driver's license.

Fortunately, the sins of the fathers do not run through the generations. Interestingly enough, as it turns out, I'm a great driver. In fact, I'm the greatest driver who ever lived, and all of you out there would do well to acknowledge that fact and simply move out of my way to show your unwavering respect.

In fact, always remember that if you do something I find objectionable, it's only because your heritage consists of baboons and your brains their droppings, whereas if I do something you -- in a moment of heresy, of course -- might find objectionable, it was simply a risk I was willing to take.

Don't worry, though; I don't require any bowing, scraping, or worship of any kind.

Just pull over.