

WORKING LIFE

DMV

Does the *D* stand for “dumb”?

Illustration by Belle Mellor

True Tales From the Workplace
Division of Motor Vehicles. I have a saga that’s both personal and actual.

Chapter 1: A few years ago, I (inadvertently) let my driver’s license expire. So, I went to the DMV to renew, and it turns out that the penalty in Washington, D.C., for letting your license expire isn’t a fine, but having to take the written and driving tests. No matter that I’d been a licensed driver for more than 30 years. Not only that, I had to take the written test right there and then. You know, with questions such as,

How many feet from a fire hydrant are you allowed to park? A) 10 feet B) 11 feet C) 11.5 feet D) none of the above. I take a number, grab a study booklet, and start cramming—having also to watch the electronic board for my number to come up. Any other day, I would’ve sat there for at least 30 minutes. Today, my number lights up on the board in five.

I enter the testing room as the only person over 17 and not a recent immigrant. I sit down at the computer and begin. You could fail only five questions;

I miss four. But I do pass and move on to the next step: being issued my...yes, that's right...my learner's permit—just like the one I got when I was 15 years old. It says I'm not allowed to drive without the presence of an adult in the car. Single, that is going to make it difficult to go to work every day. (I now confess: I ignored that rule.) I regale everyone in the office with this story and when I go to the parking garage to leave that night, I find a rather crude hand-lettered sign on my car's rear end that says "Caution: Student Driver." *Ha, ha.*

About six weeks later, it's off to an inconveniently located facility to take my driving test. I have to bring along a co-worker because, remember, I'm not allowed to operate a vehicle without an adult present. My adult can't stop laughing all the way out there. We arrive, and she attests to the fact that she accompanied me there in the car. However, she's not allowed to accompany me during the driving test, so she has to wait inside testing headquarters, a trailer parked on the lot. I will owe her big-time.

It is pouring rain, and I'm told to wait in my car for the tester. I wait, sure that I've forgotten how to make left-hand turns and brake for stop signs. I'm cold and drenched by the walk from the trailer to my car. I wait. And wait. And wait. I realize I've been waiting for almost an hour, and so then has my adult. I'm really going to owe her big-time.

Finally, the tester shows up and gets in on the passenger side. "I'm sorry. I forgot you were out here." I smile a bit too brightly. "No problem." Off we go. I drive, brake, turn—whatever he tells me to do. So far, so good. We return to the lot for the parallel parking portion of the test. He looks out the window—it's raining buckets—looks at me, and says, "You look like a really good parallel parker to me." Test over. I'm actually disappointed.

I'm a helluva parallel parker and hate missing an opportunity to demonstrate my skills. Never mind. I get my license and take my adult to a nice lunch.

Chapter 2: Fast-forward to just a few weeks ago: It was time to renew my license plates. No missing expiration dates ever again! I go to the DMV and find that it has "streamlined" procedures. There's a separate room just for people who need only to renew their plates. I step out of the long line in the main room and proceed to the annex.

Inside, I take a number from a doohickey like you find at the deli; no electronic board like in the main room. Fine. I sit with the 20 or so other people and wait for my number to be called. Thing is, there's no counter. The clerk asks, "Who's next?" Then we all have to compare our number slips to see who is, indeed, next. "I have 36, what do you have?" And so on.

(Perhaps this is a good time to state that I am not making any of this up or exaggerating in any way.)

Long story short, I renew my tags and am handed the biggest darn sticker I've ever seen, which I have to place in the inside corner of my windshield on the driver's side—a big old ugly sticker in the inside corner of the windshield of my BRAND-NEW PERFECT VOLVO C-70! Could they have made this sticker any bigger?! What happened to the discreet little month-year stickers you just stuck right on the tags? Oh yeah, *streamlining*.

It is pouring rain, and I'm told to wait in my car for the tester. I wait. And wait. And wait.

Chapter 3: OK, I am now legal on the road for the next two years and don't have to think about the DMV again till 2004. But wait! A week or so later, I receive a letter from the DMV stating that it has come to their attention that D.C. police are ticketing people unjustly because they are not looking at the billboard-size stickers on the windshield; they're still looking at the teeny tiny stickers on the tags—which, of course, people can't or haven't bothered to scrape off and have now expired.

Say what?! You mean to tell me there has been no communication between the DMV and the DC traffic police that big stickers are now being used? *Get out!*

And inside the envelope? Some little stickers to put on my license plates. They read: *See sticker in window.*

Perhaps this is a good time to reiterate that I have not made any of this up or exaggerated in any way.

Do You Have a True Tale From the Workplace?

Tell us actual stories that happen at your work, and we'll mention you as a contributor to Working Life (or grant you anonymity, if you prefer).

Just email Haidee Allerton at worklife@astd.org or write to me at *T+D*, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.

Fame can be yours!—or a place in the Working Life witness protection program.