

I have this little song I sing when I'm driving, it doesn't have a particular tune that I could give you to sing it yourself, but it goes like this, "me in the middle.." Repeatedly, until I turn a corner. I sang this so much upon our return to the US that my family knew it was wise not to try and communicate with me when we were stopped at intersections because if they did I'd just sing this silly ditty louder.

The small island we formerly lived on for fifteen years had us driving on the opposite side of the road. It took me a little bit to get use to this when we moved there. In fact there's a legendary family story about how we landed two hours away from the airport we were suppose to land in {hashtag island life, Dear Readers...} and thus instead of having someone waiting to collect us, we rented a minivan. I was thrust into the driver's seat and had to drive the distance. It wasn't so bad on a double lane highway, but I did go the wrong way around a roundabout- twice. It was only made worse by my husband, normally calm and quiet, shouting, "you're on the wrong side of the road!!" repeatedly, as I continued to circle the roundabout having no idea which exit to get off of at that point. The "legend" part of the story comes in when my husband had me take a "short cut" to get to his Mum's home. Instead of taking us an hour to get there it took us two hours. The longest shortcut ever.. On the most narrow back roads somewhere in the back of beyond. We did arrive, safely, but it's forever gone down in the family history books as the craziest short cut in the world.

The part that is lesser known is the internal struggle and the death grip I had on the wheel of the car as I tried to remember to drive on the appropriate side of the road. Something many people don't take into account about these situations is that the driver's side of the car is also on the opposite side of the car. Yes, you read that correctly.

Since returning to America my husband, who doesn't drive, and I have actually gotten in on the wrong side of the car a few times over. It's not so bad when we are together and can laugh about it, but when you're doing a grocery run, alone, and are found getting in on the passenger side of the car and then start laughing maniacally you're bound to get a few odd stares here and there. The upside is that most people start to slowly back away as you crawl to the other side of the car and make your exit from the parking lot.

When we arrived back in the US, one of our first orders of business, aside from finding a

home, was obtaining our own wheels. We all had opinions on what to get, but as the only legally licensed driver, in multiple countries I might add, I got to veto all the choices. Please don't think that I took advantage of this power. No, in fact the first thing I did to any car presented to us was have my 6' child climb into the car and decide if he had enough leg room. If he did, we continued forward with the car, and if he did not we moved on.

When we finally settled on what we thought might be a winner, we all clambered in for a test drive. Now, things have changed a fair bit since I last test drove a car in America. The salesman, for one thing, made no effort to come along with us. I was taken aback and kept saying, "Aren't you coming?" He, most confusedly, said, "No, go, have fun, she's gassed and ready!"

I'll be honest, I was both taken aback by his nonchalant behaviour, as much as I was relieved. After all, do you have any idea what kind of looks you get when people hear you singing, "Me in the middle?" The thing is, I do, because I've made the mistake of singing it at high volume while my windows were down.

There were many places I debated driving to, but the reality is, that I was still in need of singing my little ditty of, "me in the middle!" each time I turned a corner. So, we did the only logical thing I could think of. We test drove the car from the dealer's lot to the new home we were already approved for, and then back to the dealership where we purchased the car. The whole trip didn't take us long, and I even managed to squeeze in a little highway driving while I was at it.

A week later we decided to go check the progress on the house and made the drive from my mother's country home to the next city. The process of remaining in my own lane had become much more simplistic with the new car and it's fancy lane keep assistance. I found that I didn't need to sing my silly song as often and I was still capable of driving on the correct side of the road. Maybe this is where I went wrong, after all it is pride that comes before a fall!

The home we were looking at sits behind some railroad tracks in a semi-fancy new subdivision. . As we arrived close to our court, we spotted the landscapers finishing off their

task. Rather than interrupt them, I didn't turn onto our court, but drove up a little ways on the main road, and then back. The roads are thin in this area, and as many homes are still under some form of construction there is a lot of weaving around the trucks clustered in small groups along the road.

This particular balmy Tuesday afternoon appeared to be lawn mowing day, and there were several large trailers with oversized mowers for tiny yards. As I wove between all the stationary traffic, I slowed before the home about to become ours. We oohed over the small changes that had been made to the front porch, we ogled the even layer of straw all over the seeded front yard. Noted that the driveway was finally unroped, and then, seeing traffic coming from all directions, continued to the end of the road.

There I sat, at the intersection at the end of the road, for a good fifteen seconds noticing that none of the traffic was moving in any direction, when horror suddenly washed over me, "I'm on the wrong side of the road.." It came out as a mutter.

"I'm on the wrong side of the road!" it was now a cry of help.

"I'M ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE ROAD!" I shouted to those in the car with me.

The pick-up on the opposite side of the intersection waved to indicate I should just move. And, in total frustration, humiliation, and being at odds on what to do, I flipped on my turn signal, screamed, "ME IN THE MIDDLE!!" and turned right. And as I crept past the small sports car impatiently waiting for me to get out of their way, they rolled down their window, leaned out and screamed, "Learn how to drive!!!"

My hands clenched the wheel as I continued making slow progress up the back winding road that ran parallel to the railroad tracks. I was lost for words, and simply muttered, "I was on the wrong side of the road! I feel so stupid, how did I not notice that?"

"I didn't notice it either," my husband stated.

"It doesn't matter," a child offered.

“But that person was so rude and so angry! Maybe I do need to learn how to drive..”

“Don’t be ridiculous, you hold more driver’s licenses than they could dream of.”

Which may or may not be true, I mean aside from teens does anyone dream about a driver’s license? Does an expired US license count? Does an international license good in 23 countries count as holding “multiple” licenses? One thing’s for sure though, it’s unlikely that Mr Sporty Car has ever spent his time driving anywhere singing, “Me in the middle!”

The funny thing about moving halfway across the world is that it’s often the oddest things that can have the greatest impact. Driving is something I’ve been doing since I was 16, and now in my 40’s it was like teaching myself how to drive all over again. I had that childlike death grip on the wheel. I felt my shoulders tense up, and was likely over checking my mirrors as I drove below the speed limit everywhere I went.

I have no idea if the person who shouted at me is now one of my neighbours, and while their comments really did sting the day of their occurrence my family spends an awful lot of time laughing about those same words now.

On our former small island home crime was small, accidents were even fewer in our tiny coastal town, and speeding was heavily regulated. Here, in our bigger city, while crime is still low compared to other places in the US, there is more of it compared to island home. We hear sirens going off at all odd hours of the day for accidents that we hope are non-life threatening, and speeding seems to be a rite of passage.

We live off of a road where the speed limit is no more than 30mph. I take speed limits very seriously and refuse to go a pinch over. This seems to aggravate people who indicate their feelings with bumper riding, hand waving, and other nonsense that they wish I’d pick up my speed.

Each and every time this happens to me, I chuckle a little and, with my windows firmly rolled up, say, “Learn how to drive, why don’t you!” Then I patiently keep on my merry way.

Author's Note:



Since the fateful day described above, I have managed to keep myself firmly on the correct side of the road. I haven't had anyone scream at me about learning to drive again, but I have had a few disgruntled drivers disgusted that I actually go the speed limit.

I still worry about being on the correct side of the road more often than not. I've been known to shush the entire car from whatever discussion we're having and loudly declare, "Stop, I have to concentrate so I land on the correct side of the road!" This is especially difficult when you're driving in a parking lot {which I continuously refer to as car parks} that need to be repainted.

However, I've braved the interstate more than once, and unaccompanied, including in the bizarre rain we have around here where you may turn a corner and find it's raining on one road, but not on the one you just pulled off of.

I've yet to officially meet my neighbours, although I've waved from afar at most of them and not a single one shouted out, "Oh, you're *THAT* driver." Giving me full confidence, that we can remain in this neighbourhood a while longer.

The Reluctant Author:

