

Driving the best part of a trip

In 1977, nobody cared about seat belts.

So on long trips, if you were just the right size (and I was in 1977), you could stretch out on the back seat of your parent's car and stare at the stars through the back window.

That's where I spent every long trip to Omaha from everywhere else. And that's where I learned to love road trips in the way only a Midwesterner can.

In the Midwest, you learn to love the ride for its own sake. There's nothing else really, no scenery or landmarks. No hills, even.

Just miles and miles of fields and brush and sky.

So you love the drive itself. The constant humming, the way your head rocks back and forth when you relax. You count mile markers and pretend that you're your own movie and the radio is your soundtrack.

And you think, "Here's the part where I stare pensively out the window, wondering where I will stop next on this journey we call life."

Back then — when I was just the right size, lying on the vinyl seat — I didn't realize how stressful driving could be. I never worried that my dad would fall asleep or make a mistake, even on long trips.

My trust (or maybe ignorance) allowed me to abandon all worry the moment the car started.

The ride was always the best part of the trip, and it still is ... just like the ride there, wherever "there" may be, is always better than the ride home.

Last weekend, I traveled with a pack of old high school friends to South Dakota. There is nothing inherently exciting about driving to South Dakota in the middle of the night. And our destination wasn't too thrilling. A wedding.

But I was excited about it all week. Not about the wedding.



Rainbow Rowell

"For the first few hours, we buzz and giggle and shout. The riders bounce off the walls, trying to adjust to their shrunken world."

Frankly, I didn't care where we went. I was just excited about the road trip and all its ritual.

Like loading up the van with clean clothes and travel-sized toiletries. Stuffing in pillows and blankets. Watching the seats fill with familiar faces. Making all the necessary stops: I'm hungry, I'm thirsty, I have to go to the bathroom.

For the first few hours, we buzz and giggle and shout. The riders bounce off the walls, trying to adjust to their shrunken world.

Because for eight hours, their world will be nothing more than the inside of that cheap van, slickery with strangeness and Armor All. That and a few dimly lit, barely cleaned restrooms and maybe a few feet of concrete between the van and the gas pump.

Then, when everyone has settled down and made their spots their own, my favorite part of the trip begins. The part where people's

voices get slower and their faces glow soft green in the dashboard lights. The stories and the silences get longer.

And some — the weak and the tired, poor saps — fall asleep.

But those of us who stay awake — and I always, always stay awake — watch each other change, rocked to a new state by the spinning wheels and the ever-growing need for sleep.

We suck on Cokes that we paid too much for at the last stop, trying to stay awake. And then we swing back and forth from very, very tired to somehow beyond tired to very, very tired again.

And I, not so naive and trusting and much too big to curl up in my seat, cast nervous glances at the driver and the road before us.

I always forget where we're going, just like I always forget during the previews just what movie I came to see. Really, I don't want to remember; as long as we're on the way there, the trip, the break, the vacation, and the waking sleep of the trip itself — everything — has still just begun.

The wedding was nice, by the way, but it was secondary. A pause between trips. A really long bathroom break with white cake and country western dancing.

And the ride home was like every other ride home. Grumpy, stiff, rumbled. Half of the van just wanting to go home, just wanting to sleep. The other half quiet.

And me, my soul sinking with every mile, knowing my time in the passenger seat is crumbling. Knowing that soon, I'll climb tired and weak-kneed into a bigger world. A world with no seat belts, no soundtrack.

Rowell is a senior news-editorial, advertising and English major and the Daily Nebraskan managing editor.

Our special guest

Chuck Sigerson

Third political party not a viable solution

"All across America, not a single incumbent Republican congressman, senator, or governor running lost — not one!"

Americans, with a penchant for instant gratification, are concerned that neither the Republicans nor the Democrats reflect their views or are acting quickly enough to solve real or perceived problems.

Many think there is too much bickering and not enough action, and with this concern comes a call for a change in our system and the end of the two-party political system.

Americans should think long and hard before they change a political system that has made the United States the greatest country in the world.

It should be clear, however, that from the beginning we actually developed a two "major" party system, because there have been numerous small political parties through the years.

Each of these smaller groups represented a different viewpoint — but all failed to capture the imagination of the public and move into major party status. Recently, the election of 1992 provided more than a dozen candidates for president in more than a dozen different political parties.

This brings us back to the question: Is a third party really the answer, or would it create more problems?

There was a major change in the course of our country in 1994. Taking a hard turn to the right, the American public rejected 40 years of continuous Democrat control of Congress, and 40 years of big-government programs.

The people looked at our horrific debt, the explosion of crime, the endless cycle of welfare dependency, and saw a Congress that was unresponsive and unaccountable, and said "no more."

All across America, not a single incumbent Republican congressman, senator, or governor running lost — not one!

But Democrats were dropping like flies, and when the smoke cleared Republicans held 31 governorships, a majority in the Senate, and — for the first time since 1952 — a majority of the House of Representatives.

All this took place less than one year ago, and even though Congress has pursued the most aggressive legislative policy in history, there is an apparent appeal of a third party... or is there?

Americans like to believe in heroes and causes.

Ross Perot was a cause in 1992 and his "third party" helped elect Bill Clinton to the presidency.

Jesse Jackson is a hero to some and he may take a run at the presidency in 1996.

Colin Powell is a hero to many, a political unknown to all but a select few, and, like both of the others, a media darling.

And there lies the real engine driving the third party movement.

A third party will not solve a gridlock problem, it will exacerbate it.

A third party will not bring a cohesive government, it will bring a bickering, multicoalition

government.

A third party will not bring more accountability, it will make it more difficult to assess voting patterns and assign credit or blame.

A third party will not bring about "better" candidates, it will bring only "more" candidates into the system.

Finally, a third party will not bring us together as a nation, but has the potential to further divide us along racial and ethnic lines.

So, if all of these negatives exist for a third party, why is there such a clamor for one? In two words, ideology and news.

Survey after survey has shown the predominance of liberal views within members of the media, and they are not going to stand by idly while Republicans downsize the social programs in which they believe.

By providing massive news coverage for a third party effort, they are creating dissension in America and are diverting attention away from the Republican agenda in Congress.

Further, they know a third party, as in 1992, would help re-elect Bill Clinton and might reduce or even end the new Republican majority in Congress.

After 40 years of cozying up to the liberal-left in Congress, the press found their friends out of power after the 1994 elections. They would like nothing more than to see their friends back in power. Just as important is the "news" factor.

All things considered, sensationalism is a trademark of the press, and what would be more sensational than a third party? Just as the O.J. trial riveted America to the media, so would a third party effort. The news would be spiced up every night, there would be more candidates to dissect, more commentary, and more important, more audience and advertising revenue.

A third major party would be a win-win for the press, but would not help a political system that has served America well.

The answer is not more political parties or more candidates, but more political participation by Americans.

Millions have fought and died for our Republic; is it asking too much for people to take part in our election process? Pick a candidate, pick a philosophy, or pick a party, but most of all, get involved.

The real answer is not a third party; the real answer is participation in the system we already have.

Sigerson is the chairman of the Nebraska Republican Party.

Special ed molds intriguing life

Jotting down every stray thought that passes through your head is a bad habit — like incessantly whistling the odd jingle or popular tune.

Neither adds anything to your ability to please.

Either can turn a strong young man into a wandering lollygagger — making an idler of the virtuous ant.

Both should be quashed in children lest they pollute the adult.

It's too late for me, of course — I have both habits. Or, maybe I should say, they both have me.

Save your own sons and daughters!

I escaped the normal socializing process by being born an extraordinarily slow learner. By the time all the other little boys'd already gotten the whistling beat out of them, I was still puckering around a wet "whoosh" that barely passed for sound at all. I would not learn to actually whistle for several more years.

It was the same with writing, only more so.

As a small child I was taken by worried parents to a specialist who recommended professional help.

I wasn't crazy, I was crippled.

"Learning disabled" was a new term to my folks back in 1969 — it was a new term to the world.

A paradigm had just shifted in education theory and I was to be the lucky beneficiary of the New Way of Doing Things.

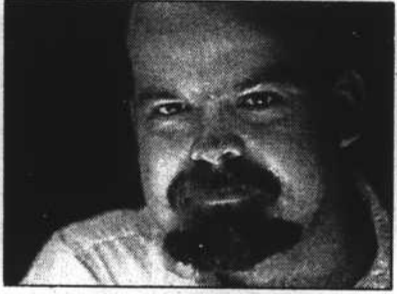
I was sent to a special school.

Though extremely expensive I think my parents warranted it by remembering the doom pronounced by Dr. Jones, the "specialist" I referred to, who said:

"Mark will never write or draw like other children."

He said nothing, alas, of whistling.

He only held out the small hope, a sop to my parents' bruised sensibilities, that special education might do me good, and let it go at that.



Mark Baldrige

"I try my best to be like everyone else: I blame my parents."

They grasped the straw.

Twenty-six hard years later I still do not write or draw like other children — in that all the other children, my age peers, don't seem to do much of either...

...while I don't seem to do much of anything else.

Oh, yeah, and I whistle. I'm doomed.

However, I do not fault the system. Had I been ground through the mill like the rest of you I'm certain I would have turned out more well-adjusted — it's not the system's fault I missed that crucial window of conformist opportunity.

I try my best to be like everyone else: I blame my parents.

Not that they did it on purpose — little did they know they were building a monster in their boy. Little did they know I would grow into the nothing that I am.

But if I had been allowed to fail gracefully from school — to drop out with the gear-heads and the pot-heads and the dead-heads and the hippies — I might have made something of myself by now.

There is no shame in dropping out. Or not much shame.

And afterwards one can learn a

trade, or perhaps go on welfare — eat government cheese.

I never had any trouble reading, thank God (or whomever), so I'd still be a citizen of the larger world of books.

I'd have read everything — maybe more than I have now:

Between the books I've never read for classes and the books I've never read for pleasure (because of those classes) there are a lot of books I just haven't read in the last 20 years.

I might have read them all.

I certainly would've spent my free time differently, talking with my dropped-out friends — smoking dope — about history and science and how, wouldn't it be cool if you could turn into the Loch Ness Monster just, like, you know, any time you liked?

Instead, I had to spend every extra moment I had as a child scribbling and puffing and trying to catch up.

Having to work harder than my peers I found it difficult to stop. And I still do.

But it could have ended differently.

I would have been happier maybe. Married by now. I would certainly be making more money.

sigh

I could have been a contender. Instead, I've become that most pathetic of creatures, the aging undergraduate.

You may recognize me by my traditional goatee and notebook — product of a life spent throbbing between dreary academia and crushing, thankless labor.

I will sit, hunched, in coffee-houses, scribbling and doodling for many years to come.

And in odd moments, when I am not really conscious of doing it, I'll whistle.

Baldrige is a senior English major and the Opinion page editor for the Daily Nebraskan.

BE OUR GUEST

Contact Mark Baldrige c/o the Daily Nebraskan, 34 Nebraska Union, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588. Or by phone at (402)-472-1782.