

Driving desire

License dangerously easy to get in America

During their summer vacation in a small Midwestern town, three Finnish friends of mine decided to rent a car and drive to New York City. At that time, only one of them was old enough to rent a car. Ironically, he also happened to be the only one who did not have a driver's license.

For a while, it seemed they would have to give up their plans, but someone suggested that Joni, the guy without a license, could take the test and get one. Joni thought the idea was ridiculous because he had never driven a car in his life. But he decided to take the test anyway, just to see what it was like.

So Joni went to the testing station, guessed or reasoned out 15 of the 20 multiple choice questions and was ready for the driving test in 10 minutes. He confessed that he had never driven a car with automatic transmission — which was true enough — and the instructor was more than happy to explain how to start and where reverse was.

The driving itself was pretty easy because Joni still remembered how to drive bumper cars in amusement parks, and also because it was early afternoon with practically no traffic. After 15 more minutes, Joni had an American driver's license. He and his friends went directly to the rental office, and the next day, they hit the road to the East Coast.

Had Joni caused a fatal accident, the story would make a nice moral of the importance of knowing one's limits. Luckily, Joni wasn't a bit interested in driving without more experience, and his friends drove safely to New York. However, Joni already had driven once — in the test — and found out how much fun driving could be. Back in Finland, it took him six months and \$2,500 to get a valid license.



Veera Supinen

"Getting a driver's license is a huge business in Scandinavia; it takes time, work and money."

Getting a driver's license is a huge business in Scandinavia; it takes time, work and money. Most of us get the money from our parents and relatives when we turn 18 or graduate from high school. Once we've got the money, we go to a driving school and have at least 30 lectures on cars, traffic rules and driving theory. We also take about 30 driving lessons, which include driving downtown, on highways, in dark and in winter conditions. The written exam is impossible to pass unless you have attended all of the lectures and studied hard by yourself, and I know only a few people who have not failed in their first driving test. If and when you fail, you have to take extra lessons, which can raise the total costs to \$3,000 or \$4,000.

Private driving schools practically have a monopoly in Finland as well as in other Scandinavian countries. It's possible to take lessons from your

parents, but in the final driving test, instructors are more demanding and strict with those who have learned at home. The same goes with people who have foreign, especially American or Canadian, driver's licenses.

In the United States, I've started to appreciate my driving instructors and their "trivial" teachings. For one thing, they emphasized how dangerous it was to be intoxicated while driving by showing us a countless number of videotapes, newspaper clips and statistics.

Thanks to those repeated warnings, it is very rare that people my age drink and drive in Finland. We also know to drive especially carefully, or not at all, when we're tired or sick or when the traffic or weather conditions make driving trickier than usual.

In many ways, driving is safer and easier in the United States than it is in Europe. Americans are generally good and polite drivers, streets are broad and well taken care of, and American cars are just as foolproof as we've always been told. On the other hand, it also can be more risky. Distances are enormous, cities huge, weather conditions often extreme, education poor or nonexistent, attitudes indifferent and the number of cars higher than anywhere. People often drive cars that wouldn't pass regular quality checks, which are mandatory for every car in Scandinavia.

The irony is, of course, that these laws and regulations aren't as badly needed in Scandinavia as they are in America.

Unlike Americans, Scandinavians don't need cars. Public transportation is functional and takes us nearly everywhere.

Supinen is a junior history and American Studies major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

Rolling jock

Inexperienced in-line skater left belly up

I don't know if you are aware of this or not, but there's a new sports fad that's sweeping the nation. I am not alluding to "Midget Rolling", a popular sporting event in Texas in which a midget is maliciously rolled down a hill in such a manner that he bites his shin at least four times, but rather, Rollerblading.

It is truly an exhilarating sport. Rollerblades are unlike conventional skates in that they have only one line of four wheels harnessed to the boot. A person can reach enormous speeds with one mere stroke of the leg, and the tricks that can be accomplished are spectacular.

That's why, when a buddy of mine who works at Play-It-Again Sports invited me to go Rollerblading, I told him to "go have his way with a hen of some sort."

You see, I have learned that when people ask me to participate in a sporting event, there is always a hidden agenda involved. Usually, I am only invited so that others can enjoy watching me run around aimlessly and, eventually, fall so violently that my entire shirt flees my torso and exposes my abundance of belly.

In my friends' eyes, that's all I'm really good for.

So you can see why I was a little timid when asked to give Rollerblading a shot. (Don't worry, I know I wouldn't be a true idiot if I learned from past mistakes, so I gladly accepted the offer.)

By the time we got to the store that rented Rollerblades, there was no turning back. Now, whenever I saw people Rollerblading on TV, they never wore helmets. Their glistening 17-year-old bodies only had shorts and skates on, with the occasional appearance of a nose ring.

I NEVER saw any of them in the dork outfit I was wearing. They gave me knee-pads. (Which I mistakenly wore on my elbows)



Steve Willey

"... if there is a campfire in a 3,000 yard radius, according to the guy rule book, we MUST pee on it."

elbow-pads (which I purposely stuffed in my underwear), a helmet and wrist guards.

I don't know about you folks, but I typically don't like doing things that require so much protective equipment. It usually is a good indication that one of two things are about to happen: 1) your chances of running into something are VERY high, or 2) you are about to be decapitated.

I was nervous, but willing. Amazingly, I was able to stand right up in the Rollerblades. It was actually EASY! Unfortunately for me, in order to get the true enjoyment of Rollerblading, my friends informed me that I must "roll" several thousand miles.

It was difficult at first, but soon I was able to propel myself rather easily. I had a steady, rhythmic pace, and although elderly "power walkers" were passing me, I was content with my progress.

Then came a hill — a downward sloping one with a beckoning intersection at the bottom.

Instantly, I began a rapid descent.

At first I began passing walkers, but as my speed increased, I passed joggers, then bicyclists, and finally, cheetahs. I was moving at a phenomenal pace. My buddies, who had neglected to tell me how to stop, attempted to wave away the crossing traffic.

Spectators began to congregate. The crowd on the bike trail parted as I approached the intersection. The once-blinking "Don't Walk" sign was now a steady stream of red letters. Mothers turned their children towards their laps. Fathers cupped their mouths. Somewhere, teen-age boys were lighting their farts. An awesome hush fell over the crowd.

Suddenly, as if a volcano had erupted, the hush turned to a cheer. I opened my eyes and unclenched my jaw. Miraculously, I had made it!

For you non-male readers out there, you should be advised that all men follow a guy rule book. We are forced to do certain things in certain situations. For example, if there is a campfire in a 3,000 yard radius, according to the guy rule book, we MUST pee on it.

And in the event of expressing joy and relief simultaneously, as in my case, I HAD to strike the Heisman pose. I failed, however, to remember that the guy rule book clearly stated not to do this on Rollerblades.

Instantly, my left foot, which never had any intentions of cooperating with the pose, flew from the concrete, and sent me, predictably, into a violent tumble without my shirt.

My friends laughed, attractive women vomited, law-officers threatened to arrest me unless I "put on something."

And I learned my lesson.

Never again will I accompany a friend on a stupid sporting excursion. Unless, of course, I'm asked.

Willey is a junior ag-journalism major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.

People must demand more from movies

Recently, the hot topic in Hollywood and the media was People's absolutely stunning discovery that — who'd have guessed it? — racism exists in the movie industry. Among the observations were that black folks are sick of films that paint them as obscene, predatory or sex- or drug-crazed simpletons. They crave high-quality movies about black love, relationships and everyday lives.



Donna Britt

"Just because millions of folks, white and black, swim willingly in swill doesn't mean we have to pour another drop into the pool."

Bull. Or that's what I thought after reading the most recent film grosses. They revealed Fox sitcom star Martin Lawrence's new film, "A Thin Line Between Love and Hate" — whose hero is an obscene, sex-crazed simpleton — to be a hit. The James Earl Jones-Robert Duvall dramedy, "A Family Thing," is not.

The feeling seemed validated by my chat with a young, black movie fan about what she wants in black movies as opposed to what she actually pays to see. Miatta David, a New York University freshman from Silver Spring, Md., loves movies so much that she sees one flick per weekend.

Black films, David complains, are "so repetitive ... about low-income homes with no father figure, where you go outside the door and either get killed in a drive-by or offered drugs. I'm tired of it."

Then I asked David her opinion about recent, stereotype-busting black-oriented films, such as "Devil in a Blue Dress."

"I didn't see that. ... My friends said it was kind of boring," she said.

"Once Upon Time, When We Were Colored?"

"It looked like a good movie," said David, "but it's not playing around here."

"A Family Thing?"

"I haven't heard of that."

Her words — and the healthy \$9.3 million first-weekend take for "A Thin Line Between Love and Hate" compared with the paltry \$2 million for "A Family Thing" in its second weekend — are telling. Reviewers overwhelmingly skewered "Thin Line," about a playboy's comic comeuppance, and recommended "A Family Thing," about a white Arkansas man's unpleasant discovery that he's half black and has an African American brother in Chicago.

One could conclude that some well-meaning black folks' oft-stated desire for quality films is just talk.

But hey, you can't trust the media — especially since black audiences often disagree with critics, who overwhelmingly are white. I had to see for myself.

Actually, I found "A Family Thing" better than described by critics, some of whom carped about its "sentimentality" — clearly any film that shows the races groping toward something other than mutual contempt is a fairy tale. Sharp, funny and surprisingly plausible, the movie sensitively deals with such

underexplored subjects as the once-common tragedy of white men raping black women, and how blacks and whites forged friendships even during Jim Crow's heyday.

"Thin Line," I discovered, isn't quite an unmitigated disaster. I'm no Lawrence fan, but the audience I saw "Line" with had fun. Lawrence's riffs on some brothers' lame lines were on target; his film's lesson that commitment is cool and love should never be faked is fine — and may be heard by folks who'd never see a sweet movie like "A Family Thing."

So why am I disappointed?

Because we as a people — and even Lawrence, whose career is built on crudeness — deserve better. So many critics of "Thin Line" complained about its rampant use of the F-word that I counted — and came up with a whopping 65 examples. Just because millions of folks, white and black, swim willingly in swill doesn't mean we have to pour another drop into the pool. Little kids, like the dozen I noticed accompanying their parents to the R-rated "Thin Line," see this stuff and perpetuate the behavior such entertainment celebrates.

I mean, really. Can our community afford even an ounce more vulgarity? Can't a bankable, entertaining comedy be made using the F-word, say, just 25 times, or even none?

Black folks know better than anybody — as shown by the fact that even the most foul-mouthed rapper invariably attributes his success "to my main man, God" — there's a higher order of right and wrong to which we are accountable. The more we ignore it, the deeper our community and our nation will sink.

It's never just a black thing, a money thing or even a family thing.

Demanding better — for our kids and ourselves — is a love thing. And the right thing.

(C) 1996 Washington Post Writers Group

