

# Write Your Life

## *A micro memoir writing project*

### What do you still do “the old way?”

#### Living in the pre-PRNDL world

That’s me and my mom in our 1964 Chevy pickup, leaving the State Street KMart in Saginaw. Make that getting ready to leave. It’s late afternoon. There’s heavy traffic on State Street. I’m fifteen years old. I have my driver’s permit.

This vehicle has a three-speed manual transmission mounted on the steering column. I’ve learned the H pattern for shifting. I’ve learned it, I have a theoretical grasp of it, but that tricky physical maneuver of making the vehicle go is not yet coded in my nervous system or part of my muscle memory. My left foot holds the clutch to the floor, blood draining from that leg; my right foot is poised over the accelerator. I’ve shifted into first gear. Now I wait for my turn.

Back home we have a big Pontiac with an automatic transmission, but I’ve decided I need to live in the pre-PRNDL world.

“I think this is it,” I say. A gap in traffic is coming my way.

“There’s no hurry,” my mother says.

I can do this, I say to myself. Don’t screw this up. It’s a simple matter of contrary motion: gently ease the clutch while simultaneously lightly pressing down on the accelerator. A little less clutch, a little more gas. Increments.

I ease the clutch and go light on the gas, then a little too much clutch and way too much gas, the engine roars, less clutch no clutch, even more gas, and the pickup leaps forward into traffic while I’m executing a hard right turn into the near lane. We made it. The engine is still roaring. What? Second gear. Shift, shift into second! And third gear. Easy. Steady. Easy.

Decades later, I mean today, I drive a car with a stick shift. I always have. This car is old, it has four doors, it looks like a miniature garbage truck, and I drive it 5 mph under the speed limit. A trip to the grocery store is time travel. I’m 16 years old shifting gears in my VW bug. I tell my grandsons that this four-door beater is a sports car. I’m joking. But not. I’m coming around a curve on Quarton Road one day, going through the gears, when it occurs to me that those boys will probably never know how it feels to drive a stick. They will never feel a vehicle going through the gears, never hear it unless I point out the whine or thunder of a motorcycle as it accelerates, and the rider shifts gears.

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I think: I don't have to drive 5 mph under. When I get those boys in the car, I need to drive it like it's sports car, really drive it, so they feel it. I want them to feel it.

That feeling will be more rarefied with every passing year, as car makers go electric. There's no stick shift in electric, no PRNDL in electric. There's just go forward, go backward, stop.

I'm going forward in reverse.