

**50 Years of History, 33 Years of Car Ownership, 26 Years of Marriage:
The Auto-genealogy of Peter and Jane Drury**

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A Note on this Auto-genealogy

This Auto-genealogy is a description of the role that automobiles have played in the history of my immediate family. My parents vehicle ownership also reflects aspects of North American history and trends in automobile history, most importantly though, the acquisition and sales of my parents' cars represents many of the social and financial changes that have occurred in my family over the years. This auto-genealogy is based on two primary sources. Two separate interviews were held with each my Mom and my Dad. These interviews and this assignment in general, helped me to not only acquire extensive knowledge on the social history of my parent's car ownership but also of their 26 year relationship and for that I am thankful. The names in the paper have been changed to protect privacy.

Dad

My Dad turned sixteen in 1973 and took his drivers test on his birthday as he was very anxious to begin driving. He had an older brother which he shared a 1967 Volkswagen Beetle with. It was white and was mostly used to get back and forth from school and hockey. He quickly got frustrated with sharing the vehicle and decided to save up for his own.

In 1974 my Dad decided to buy his own first car. It was a 1966 Austin Healey Sprite, the first of a long list of English cars he would end up owning. When I asked Dad why he preferred English cars he said he and all his friends had them probably because they were so “taken in with the British Invasion, that listening to the Beatles and the Who just seemed to go hand in hand with driving an English Car.”¹ He said they even had a Mini Club at school but his friend Bruce drove one of those so he wanted something different and settled on a Sprite. He said that he and his friends were all still absorbed in the counterculture and that after watching the Vietnam War on the news for years they wanted nothing to do with anything American (I guess that ended when he married one...) He also said that American “Muscle” Cars were a North Van thing that was looked down on by his West Van buddies. With all this in mind he settled on a Sprite as the first car that he bought for himself. Other than the above mentioned reasons, he liked it because it “just sipped on gas but was still peppy.”² All his favorite road trip memories were in the Sprite – on the way back from a boys’ weekend on Vancouver Island his Sprite had an electrical fire in the dash on the Upper Levels Highway in Vancouver.

¹ Peter Drury, personal interview, 28 October 2006.

² Ibid.

After he put out the flames and restarted the car he never had another problem with it. Another interesting aspect of the Sprite was that when he bought it the price included a “parts car” as well which Dad was able to interchange parts himself and therefore do much of the car’s maintenance himself. This self maintaining of his car became a hobby with his friends, something that is almost impossible with today’s heavily computerized automobiles. Dad ended up needing money for University tuition so he sold the Sprite to his brother Andy, hoping he would be able to buy it back off him, but Andy took it up to Banff that summer and lost it in a darts game. I don’t think Dad has forgiven him. As far as influencing his future purchases Dad credits the Sprite with beginning his self-proclaimed “lifetime love of four bangers.”³

In 1975 after Dad paid his tuition he realized that taking the bus for an hour each way to and from UBC everyday was not something he could stand for more than the first few weeks. He ended up taking the little money he had left and buying a 1964 Chevy Bel Air. He used it primarily to drive back and forth to UBC everyday. Unfortunately he only owned it for two weeks. He went into the mechanics to have something basic fixed and it turned out that it was so rusted out that they couldn’t even put it up on the hoist for fear that the hoist would go right through it. Needless to say he was back on the bus the next day. He got frustrated with this again in bought his second car that year, and in a move that went back to his Volkswagen roots, bought a 1968 Volkswagen 411 Wagon. It ended up being one of his most reliable cars and he was able to drive it through his next two years at University. He ended up selling it for \$200 to “the old German guys who had been working on it for the last few years.”⁴ He had to sell it because “I had \$12 to

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

my name and the brakes were so bad that I had to start breaking two blocks early for a red light, in fact when driving down Broadway I would start braking if the light was green so that I would be stopped by the time it turned red.”⁵

Only a few months later Dad’s Grandpa took pity on him and sold him his 1972 Datsun 510 Wagon for one dollar. His Grandpa had called that car the Bluebird, and so Dad did too. One trend that was beginning at the time Dad had the Bluebird was to have a stereo in your car. Dad had a radio and wanted a tape player instead. He asked for one for Christmas and got an Eight-Track instead, but since he’s always been a bit choosy about his stereo equipment, he was less than impressed with. Dad did not sell the Bluebird until 1984, when he traded it in against a new VW Rabbit diesel he was buying for my Mom.

I’ve always known that my Mom preferred new cars, but it was not until the interview with my Dad that I realized this with the exception of one Volkswagen Jetta he has only ever bought used cars for himself. When I asked him why he quite obviously prefers used cars he replied “because they’re cheap, they’re good value and I like them as much as the new ones” he is also a firm believer that “things just aren’t built like they used to be.”⁶ He also pointed out that because Mom always has a new car he is allowed to have a car that might be more susceptible to break down because hers will always be reliable. Finally when I asked him why he still prefers vintage English cars he replied, “just had so much fun in them back in the day that I can’t say no to them now.”⁷

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Mom

Like my Dad, my Mom turned sixteen in 1973 and shared her first car, a Volkswagen Beetle, with her older brother. Hers was a 1963 that her Dad had bought for her Mom. It was my Grandma Ann's first car and it was special because at that time it was unusual for a woman to own her own car; "the idea of a woman driving a car, let alone enjoying a car, was marked as a "deviant" script which played itself against the normativity of a male identification with the car".⁸ It was most common to wait for your husband to come home from work and have him drive you around in the evening or on the weekend. Grandma Ann was able to go wherever she wanted during the day because she had the Beetle. When Grandpa Jerry was young his father would not even let him borrow a car so as soon as my Mom's oldest brother turned sixteen the Beetle became his and Grandma Ann got a new station wagon. When my Mom turned sixteen, and then her younger brother Patrick turned sixteen they all had to share the Beetle. They all ended up attending Washington State University in Pullman and shared the Beetle out there too. According to my Mom the Beetle, "spent more time in the shop than it did on the road" mostly, she admits, due to how hard they drove it.⁹ Some of the breakdowns that she had to deal with turned her off used cars forever, in fact it would be the last used car that she would ever drive for an extended period of time. Another facet of the VW Beetle that would influence both of my parents' future car decision was that they both drove one during the first major North American gas shortage of 1973 and did not have any major problems with them because of how fuel efficient the four cylinder Beetle's

⁸ Cindy Donatelli, "Driving the Suburbs: Minivans, Gender, and Family Values," *Material History Review* 54 (Fall 2001): 91.

⁹ Jane Drury, personal interview, November 2 2006.

were. During the second major gas shortage in 1979 they would still both be driving small, fuel efficient cars.

In my Mom's family attending college was not an option but a requirement. As a reward when her and her brothers graduated they were allowed to choose a new car as their graduation gift. My Uncle Jim chose a VW Van and my Uncle Patrick chose a Toyota Celica. When my Mom graduated from Washington State University in 1978 she chose a 1978 Fiat 124 Spyder. My Mom says she chose the Spyder because, "I really wanted a convertible and there wasn't that many to choose that wouldn't break my Dad's bank account"; she remembers the Spyder costing \$8,500.¹⁰

¹⁰ Ibid.

As A Couple

My Mom and Dad were the children of two couples that were friends at the University of New Brunswick. They knew each other as children but did not meet again until both of their families attended the same wedding in the summer of 1977. After my Mom graduated University in 1978 they began dating. They married in 1980. Throughout their courtship and first two years of marriage my Mom drove the Spyder and my Dad drove the Bluebird but as their assets and needs began to become one, decisions regarding cars became ones that had to be made mutually. Their first joint car decision was to sell Mom's Spyder in 1982 so that they could go to Europe for Uncle Jim's wedding and so that they could put a down payment on their first house on Tod Road in Oak Bay. My Dad remembers the day they sold it because it sold for \$7,500 and "the man who bought it gave your Mom seventy-five one hundred dollar bills which she apparently fanned herself with for the rest of the day."¹¹

In the spring of 1983 my Dad got his first "real adult job" working for the consulting firm Coopers Lybrand.¹² Once my parents secured well paying jobs and settled into their mortgage they bought the 1984 VW Rabbit Diesel. Then, in 1985 my Dad was promoted to a senior consultant position at Coopers Lybrand and felt like now he and my Mom could afford not only their house payments but also a second set of car payments. With this in mind Dad finally bought his first and only new car, a Volkswagen Jetta. It is the first car I remember us having. It was a big deal for my parents because it was their first car with a cassette player; 16 years later I would get my first car only to be upset it came with a tape player. I always joke with my parents that even though the Jetta

¹¹ Peter Drury, personal interview, October 28 2006.

¹² Ibid.

was their first new car together it is the car I associate with their and our poorer years. We had it during the years where our living room was furnished in wicker and we still only had posters on our walls, we didn't go on vacations and all of our general consuming was on a smaller scale. When I bring this up with my Dad he says I'll understand in 5 years and that even though they borrowed money from my Mom's parents it was never that bad. My Dad says, "we were fine. We were both working. We were making our mortgage payments. We were eating three meals a day. Hell, we even had a little T.V. and beer on the weekend."¹³ Actually, when I look at all the consuming my parents were doing at this point in their lives I realized they were "yuppies". Yuppies, or "young urban professionals" were the generation in the 80s who "embodied the drive for material acquisition."¹⁴ Due to the fact that they had just bought a house and two new cars my parents definitely qualified as part of this unique social group in North American history.

Although Mom and Dad were yuppies for a brief time, it seems they overestimated their budget and ended up selling the VW Rabbit. They were living in Oak Bay at the time so Dad would take the bus to work and Mom, who was teaching at Frank Hobbs, drove the Jetta. I was born on March 18, 1985, shortly after they sold the Rabbit, and the Tod Road House wasn't big enough for the three of us so my parents cashed in their savings and put a down payment down on a house in what was then the just developing and out of town subdivision of Broadmead. In 1986, once they settled into payments on the Broadmead house Dad was able to buy himself a car, a 1968 VW Beetle,

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Jacqueline Jones et al., eds. *Created Equal: A Social and Political History of the United States* (New York: Pearson Education, 2006), 951.

and let the Jetta become my Mom's car. The fact that my parents were driving two small and fuel efficient Volkswagens at this time ended up being a good decision because the inflation of gas prices during the third major North American gas shortage in 1990 was not a big problem for them.

Mom liked that the Jetta had a big trunk and when I was born she was able to move all my baby stuff around in it. She was also proud that it was a 5 speed because lots of her girlfriends only drove automatics. My Mom said, "as soon as a car gives me grief I want to get rid of it. I like a car under warranty. I'd like a new car every three years."¹⁵ Sure enough right when the Jetta started to have problems the mini van craze began and my parents sold the Jetta to buy one for themselves. By 1993 both my brother and I were in school and with that came after school activities, friends and general weekend business. The Jetta had become what my Mom refers to as, "a break-down-mobile"¹⁶ and she decided it was time for our family to pick the newest suburban hot commodity, a mini van. The first car built like a mini van was in 1932 and called the Scarab, only 9 were produced and it was intended to be slept in, like a Winnebago.¹⁷ The next similar development was the station wagon, which both of my parents had as their family car when they were children. The station wagon is also the only other car as linked to the nuclear family as the mini van became. The first full model year of the mini van was in 1984 with Chrysler Dodge Caravan and 200,000 sold.¹⁸ My parents bought our first mini van in 1993, one year before mini van sales of all brands hit all high of 1,265,575 in 1994.¹⁹

¹⁵ Jane Drury, personal interview, November 2 2006.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Donatelli, "Driving the Suburbs," 85.

¹⁸ Ibid., 84.

¹⁹ Ibid., 84.

I remember going to the dealership with my parents when they purchased the 1993 Mazda MPV. My Dad loved to go to car dealerships even when he was not actually in the market to purchase a car, so I had seen many a car salesman at work before. They basically focused on speed, horsepower, handling and other racing related aspects of cars. This was the first time that the number one aspect of the car that was being sold was safety. This van had features like airbags, ABS breaks, and I even remember the salesman telling Mom that the gold colored paint would be more visible at night than any other car. It was the first time I saw a car be pitched in a way that would appeal to a Mother who would be driving her children around in it, rather than a man who would be driving it for pleasure and probably status. My Mom loved that in the van she could, “throw all you kids and your stuff in the back and have room to spare.”²⁰ That is the one thing I remember about our first van, the amazing amount of room in it. My Dad says his favorite feature was that when we made our regular road trips to visit my Mom’s family in Seattle, “you and your brother sat in different rows and couldn’t even pick fights with each other.”²¹ Although the van was good for the first three years, it started to have problems and because my Mom relied so heavily on it day in and day out it was time for a new one.

In 1995 my Dad sold the VW Beetle because due to the fact that he was now working at the Ministry of Health he finally had the funding to get back to his “love of fix-er-upper English cars.”²² Much too my Mom’s distress, she sensed it was a “break-down-mobile,”²³ he bought a 1974 TR6. Sure enough Dad was unable to justify the

²⁰ Jane Drury, personal interview, November 2 2006.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Peter Drury, personal interview, October 28 2006.

²³ Jane Drury, personal interview, November 2 2006.

maintenance costs of keeping a vintage sports car as his “daily driver.”²⁴ Again, in a time when he needed a reliable car he went back to a Volkswagen, this time a 1980 VW Rabbit.

My mom’s next car was a van again, a 1996 Dodge Caravan. By this time my brother and I were another three years older and so our friends were bigger and our sports required more equipment. My Mom says they chose the Dodge for two reasons. One, my brother was just learning to read and he thought the sign outside the Wille Dodge dealership was funny and wanted a car from there with a license plate surround that said Wille Dodge on it. Two, it was the one van that came in an extended option that had enough room between the seats and the trunk, “for half your brothers hockey team and all their bags.” It was a roomy car; I remember being able to stick my legs all the way out without hitting the seat in front of me. Since my Mom had figured out her love of new cars by this time, she decided to only lease this van. By the time the three year lease came up it was no longer under warranty and we no longer needed such a big vehicle. The mini van has been described as “a car that has literally and effectively boxed in millions of women” and I remember being glad my Mom sold hers because I was starting to feel like with all the driving she was doing for my brother and I that she was living out of it.²⁵ Also, a new trend had taken hold of our suburb, the SUV. The Caravan was my Mom’s first car with a CD player and air conditioning. She got amenities in her vehicle before Dad for two reasons, one, she prefers newer cars, and two she spends a lot more time in the car everyday.

²⁴ Peter Drury, personal interview, October 28 2006.

²⁵ Donatelli, “Driving the Suburbs,” 85.

It is not until 1998 that Dad finally bought the one type of English car he had always been dying to buy, an MGB. This particular one was a 1980 MGB Mk IV; he would have preferred an earlier year but he would have to wait for the right one and for a time he could afford one. With this car my Dad joined his first car club, the Victoria MG Club. By 1998 Dad was working for IBM so this time he could afford to keep the car up, but still he sold it within a few years, this time to a friend who still owns it, because in 2001 Dad inherited my Mom's Father's 1985 Mercedes Benz 300D.

The Mercedes is a special car to my family because my Grandpa Jerry left it to us in his will. The reason we got it, and not my Mom's brothers is because my Dad is such a car fanatic that Grandpa Jerry knew he would take good care of it, but also for a more personal reason. I was the first grandchild to be born on my Mom's side of the family and apparently that was a huge cause for celebration, so on the day I was born Grandpa Jerry smoked a cigar out on his dock and then went out and bought the Mercedes. It is a bit of a boat by car standards now but it's a diesel so it was fun when I lived at home because we could always tell when Dad came home. The Mercedes marks a bunch of car firsts for my Dad. It is his first car with a CD player, leather interior and finally, air conditioning. The Mercedes is my Dad's current car. He uses it for commuting to work and also for when we go on road trips. It has a big bench seat in the back so he likes to drive our British Bulldog around in it because she can stretch out in the back. He is really proud of it and always talks about how it's "built like a brickhouse" and how it will last forever.²⁶ I know him better though, it's been five years now and I guess that he will get the itch for a new one soon!

²⁶ Peter Drury, personal interview, October 28 2006.

2001 was a big car year for us, not only because it was the year that I got my first car, a 1986 VW Golf, but also because my Mom got a new car as well. I remember my parents coming home from a day at the car dealerships, not an uncommon event as it is one of my dad's favorite weekend outing, with lots of glossy SUV brochures. My Mom's younger brother Patrick who lives in Seattle had recently traded in his Ford Explorer for its big brother the Expedition. My Mom thinks Patrick lives for excess so none of the vehicles she was interested were on that level. She said she was tired of being the "van-Mom" who had to cart everyone and their stuff around and so the last thing she wanted to do was become a "Suburban-Mom" and only have more seats and trunk space to cart around more people and more stuff.²⁷ In the late 1990's a stock market boom combined with low gas prices led many Americans to buy "large new sport utility vehicles (SUVs) such as the Chevrolet Suburban, despite their low gas mileage" and my Mom was determined not to fall into this trap.²⁸ The three SUV's I remember them looking at were the Dodge Durango, mostly because she liked the shape of it and had a good experience with the Dodge dealership. Her next option, and probably the one she liked the best was the Jeep Liberty. Finally, she looked at the Honda CRV. The Jeep Liberty, however, at the time she was looking at them were only available in the US and so she would have to wait for awhile to get one. She also ended up choosing the 2001 Honda CRV because it was a 4 cylinder and we had family friends who were bus drivers who warned us that gas prices were going to get quite high that summer. When oil prices did in fact begin to rise dramatically in 2004 my Mom was happy with her decision. She loved the CRV from the beginning and ended up buying it when the lease came up. We still have it and although

²⁷ Jane Drury, personal interview, November 2 2006.

²⁸ Jones, *Created Equal*, 1022.

it has the general features of an SUV we don't have to feel to awful about owning a conspicuous vehicle. My Mom says she will drive it "until the dog dies and I can get one of those cute little Audi TTs."²⁹

Although I have always shared my Dad's interest in English cars, and cars in general for that matter, the '64 MGB was the first car I helped him pick out. He had been hungry for a new car project since he sold the '80 MGB and had been watching the classifieds like a hawk. One Saturday morning in August he got a call from a friend of his who restores cars who gave him a lead on the '64 MGB. We went to look at it in Cadboro Bay together on my way to work. It was completely covered in dust in the garage of an elderly man, George. George was the second owner of the car and bought it when it was only 6 months old. He regaled us with story after story about the road trips he took in it with his wife. After she died he had no desire to drive it anymore and so it had sat in he garage for twelve years. Shocking as it seems, it started right up and my Dad bought it that afternoon. Two years later he was able to afford to have the entire body rebuilt and repainted. Then we resealed the interior, re-stuffed the seats and put in new mats and an original steering wheel. It was with this car that my Dad renewed his membership with the MG Club. He currently has collector plates on it so he only drives it for pleasure and only in fair weather. It is my Dad's current pride and joy. But like any good car aficionado he is already looking again, this time for an MGA, and ultimately an Austin Healey, more specifically a 1967 BJ8. In fact both my brother and I always talk about how if we ever make it big we will buy my Dad his Healey.

²⁹ Jane Drury, personal interview, November 2 2006.

Although both my Mom and my Dad started with Volkswagen Beetles back in 1973, their automotive tastes differed from there on out. He likes vintage and she likes brand-spanking new. She does not understand his need to restore and he does not understand why she will not hang on to a car for more than a few years. That is how it has always been, since the day they met, her driving a Spyder and him a Datsun Wagon. They've upgraded and they've compromised and I guess what counts is that they're still on the road.

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