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**Lu Parker**

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Journalist, actress, author, former Miss USA, and a former teacher

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## 16 on the Streets of LA

She had sweaty palms. I was stressed out.

It's the best way to describe my first experience riding in a car with a 16-year-old behind the wheel. It happened recently, and even though I had offered my boyfriend's daughter the chance to drive my car for practice several times, she had never said yes, until now. I realized once we got in the vehicle, and the doors closed, I was now officially a grown-up.

If you have ever driven the streets of Los Angeles, you know there is no rest for the weary. Drivers are aggressive, and often times it feels like you are in a constant struggle to survive from one point to the other trying to avoid a honk in your ear, or a scratch on your bumper.

On this beautiful sunny day, we two girls, one experienced, the other new to the art of driving, got brave, and put the car in drive. One of her first statements to me was, "Okay, show me what to do." I had a hard time answering it. I awkwardly responded, "Remember your blinkers. Check. Fix your mirrors. Check. Put it in gear. Check." With that, she was now in control. Sort of.

We laughed as she drove slowly and cautiously along a residential street, her foot still figuring out the brakes. With her hands, 10 and 2 on the steering wheel, we approached our first stop sign. At this point, I realized how focused she was on doing everything right, but it also made me realize how unaware I am when I drive. Often, there's no time to come to a complete stop. It's just one of many sad reminders that I would realize on this journey.

Two minutes later, while sitting at a stop sign trying to figure out who goes first, we get our first horn. She freezes. I become anxious, and want to yell, "Can't you see this is a new driver?" The guy behind us has no time for it, and beeps again. We take off, but ever so gingerly so now he is, of course, on our bumper. Where is everyone going in such a hurry? I know I'm guilty of it too, but on this day, it made me realize maybe we can sometimes slow down and see what's happening in front of us. Maybe for a moment, we can practice patience. As expected, the angry driver zooms

around us. Now we are free to cruise alone, well, that's until I get the brilliant thought that it would be a good idea to turn onto Sunset Blvd.

Sunset Blvd. is a new jungle of sights and sounds. She says to me, "There's so much to concentrate on." She's right. I remind her of how being a defensive driver is key to safety. It's advice my Dad told me when I was her age, but as the phrase came out of my mouth, I realized once again, it's not what I actually do. How can I be a defensive driver behind the wheel when I'm texting friends, checking email on my blackberry, or even putting on makeup?

At this point, we have practiced right and left turns. We have done a U-turn (that was scary), and we have driven on narrow residential streets. After stopping at a local store to practice parking, I suggest pulling out onto a three lane road from the parking lot. (Not such a great suggestion.) It's funny to think back on it now, but in reality, we both would have liked to have disappeared at this point. But it's also where we meet one of those rare patient, calm LA drivers. After several attempts to merge unsuccessfully, mainly due to people not giving her any space to pull out, it happened. A small white car stopped, allowing us pull out into his lane. It wasn't pretty. In fact, it was slow and awkward, but once she straightened out the tires, and we both started breathing again, the lane opened up and we were cruising Sunset Blvd. once again. Just us girls, one experienced, the other new behind the wheel, but in that brief moment, the streets of Los Angeles didn't seem so scary after all.

In the end, she had learned some new driving skills, and I walked away learning the lesson that we all need to pay more attention to what we do and don't do behind the wheel, how we treat others along the road, and what it means to trust.