

Mumbles

I drove up the twisted one-way streets of Glendale with a nervous confidence. I was 16, full of ignorant aspirations and ready to take my drivers test...for the second time. Failing it the first time at the Pasadena DMV wasn't my fault, really. It was pouring down rain in the middle of an El Nino storm. I only made it out of the driveway before the supervisor failed me on some minor technicality, like not checking my mirrors, or not looking both ways, or something ridiculous like that. And everyone knows how unfair the employees at the Pasadena DMV were. Working behind bullet proof windows gave them a heightened bravado, the security to be complete and total assholes without having to worry about suffering any consequences. But this time it would be different. I had the security of knowing I was taking the test in a more friendly environment, free of bulletproof windows.

As we approached the Glendale DMV my driving coach prepped me. My parents had insisted that I go to a professional driving school after I failed the first test, and as part of the package you got your own certified driving instructor who served as a coach and a moral supporter when you took your drive test. Don, my coach, was a middle-aged guy, who wasn't big on emotion. I became increasingly uncomfortable as he spouted off technical terms and driving laws. We arrived at the DMV and I was relieved at the simplicity of it all. It seemed so organized. I pulled up to the drive test lane and got in line. In an effort to block out Don, I turned my attention to the clouds, which were slowly burning off in the April sun. However, my attempt at daydreaming was quickly interrupted as Don gave me the line up of all the supervisors.

"That's Marie. She's pretty easy. She likes to talk during the test, so don't be distracted by that if you get her." I made mental notes as he went along... Marie, talker, don't get distracted. "That's Jorge. He's big on scanning. Make sure you're always scanning the road if you get him" Jorge, scanner. "Over there is Ming. If you cry, she'll pass you." Ming, sucker for tears. A man about 50 years of age caught my eye. His Filling Station shirt had pit stains and the buttons were an inch shy of popping off. It looked as though he spent more days in the donut shop than he did in the shower. "Who's that?" I asked. "Oh, that there is Mumbles" Don replied. "Mumbles?" I asked. "Yeah, you can never understand a word he's saying. He's probably the toughest one here. He's a stickler for the small things. Ya know, nervous ticks, taping your fingers on the steering wheel, sitting too far back in your seat. He considers it a sign of weakness, a dangerous lack of attention. You can check your mirrors and scan the road all you want, but it's the little insignificant things he'll get you on."

My nerves were at an all time high now. I sat there praying I would get Marie the talker or Jorge the scanner. My car was slowly inching towards the front of the line. Three more cars to go and my driving fate would be determined. I saw Ming, the crier, approach the first car in line. She checked the person's papers, and then climbed in to the passengers seat, and the car drove off. Well, Ming was out. I was now third in line. Don continued with his reminders and rules. I tried to pay attention, but I was glued to the cars in front

of me. A couple of minutes passed. Then Jorge, the scanner approached the first car, climbed in the passenger seat, and they were off. Okay, no Jorge. I started a rapid silent prayer, "Please no Mumbles, please no Mumbles, please no Mumbles" God must have choose to ignore my request, because Marie was approaching the car directly in front of me. Okay, I told myself not to panic. I was a good driver.

I tapped my nails on the steering wheel as my car inched closer and closer to the front of the line. Tap, tap, tap. ...Tap...tap. I kept reminding myself to quit, but the more I tried the more they tapped. It was as if my fingers were completely independent of my body and had a mind of their own. A large dark shadow appeared over my shoulder. I slowly followed the darkness up the door and to the window. There he stood, the demon of the DMV, Mumbles. "permiregistrationproofofinsurance?" "Excuse me?" I replied. "rpermitregistrationandproofofinsurance?" What was permistration? Papers? Dear Lord, he was just asking for papers, how the hell was I supposed to understand him once he started giving me directions? "Oh, my permit and registration!" A nervous laugh sputtering from my lips. Mumbles rolled his eyes, and let out an impatient sigh. I gave him my papers, Mumbles looked them over with a disapproving eye. With the quick mark of a pen, he threw them back at me and my coach exited the car. My only ally was deserting me, I was being left to fight the battle alone. Mumbles stepped in. A brief moment of discomfort as he fiddled with the seat to accompany his large mass. My hands were choking the steering wheel and we hadn't even started. "ullorwardanmakeaeftturn" Praying that I was doing as he instructed, I moved forward out of the line and made a left turn. I proceeded down the road at a cautious 25 MPH. Mumbles was shifting back and forth nervously in his seat. Okay, think fast Allison, what are you doing wrong, I scanned the road, I checked my mirriors, I was driving safely down the left side of the road. HOLY SHIT!!! This isn't a one way street! I discreetly moved to the right side of the road and hoped he hadn't noticed. I started to tap my nails, but quickly stopped at the thought of a big "F" on my score sheet. "makauturn" Mumbles instructed. Makaturn...I quickly tried to sound out exactly what it was Mumbles was trying to tell me. Makaturn...mak a turn...make a u turn...? I proceeded to make a U-turn...at least that's what I think he asked me to do. I checked in all directions, then turned my head and checked again. I proceed to make the turn and caught sight of another car in my rear view mirrior. My mind went blank.

I reactively slammed on the breaks. My car stalled. I fretfully tried to coordinate switching the gears and manipulating the clutch. Mumbles gave me a shifty glance. I paused, took a deep breath, and decided to turn my hasty reaction into an opportunity to show off my driving intelligence. "Oh, ha ha...I'm going to have to make a three point turn here." Ha!! Take that Marble Mouth! I got my car running again and made a graceful U-slash-three point turn, and as I drove down the road, I noticed the DMV. I couldn't have failed already!!! All I had done was drive down the street and make a U-slash-three point turn! I breathed a sigh of relief when I was not instructed to turn into the parking lot but to proceed with caution down the road. Mumbles sat in the passenger seat and garbled out incoherent orders. I learned that what sounded like "Pick a fight?" was in fact, "Make a right," and "Range aims!" was really "Change lanes!"

When my obstacle course of a drive test was almost complete, we pulled into the DMV parking lot and I proceeded to the back of the returning drive test line. I fidgeted nervously as Mumbles added up the marks against me. I had shown quick reflexes when I noticed I was on the wrong side of the road, I demonstrated cool and calm attitude when my car stalled. However, the waiting was killing me. A particular car in the parking lot, which had decided to share its car radio with the rest of the San Gabriel Valley, grabbed my attention. Normally I wouldn't appreciate Old School Asian Rap, but the welcomed distraction was far better than having to sit there and wait in silence with Mumbles. I tapped my foot and turned my steering wheel into a drum. Maybe Asian Rap wasn't so bad after all. "Miss...miss?...MISS!!" I suddenly realized that Mumbles was trying to get my attention. I had gotten so wrapped up in finding my Asian Rap roots, that I didn't hear Mumbles call my name. Mumbles had his right hand extended with my test results in hand. He quickly withdrew his hand and started making more marks. I sat there in confused silence as his pen made harsh and heavy sounds. He asked me to pull forward, and park my car. My test was officially over. I breathed a sigh of relief.

Mumbles threw my test paper down on the seat, and exited the car. I quickly grabbed my sheet and my eyes went directly to the box where my final score was. A zero was a perfect score. You had to have less than a 7 in that box to pass. I noticed that initially there was a six written in, which had been crossed out and replaced with a 9 and a big F written across the entire page. In the comments box, there were a few short sentences describing what a danger I was to my fellow drivers due to "my lack of attentiveness" and my "inability to stay focused in stressful situations."

I could decipher Mumbles ramblings, one-way streets, and stalled engines, but I had failed because of a brief moment as air drummer for the Wu-Tang Clan!!! I didn't have the will to fight anymore. I just sat there, bewildered, alone and dejected, another victim of Mumbles. The demon of the DMV.