

moving on but at a discounted price

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Honorable Mention, Creative Non-Fiction

LAST SPRING, I WAS OFFERED \$400 FOR MY 20s.

Well, actually, it was for my 10-year-old Honda Civic. As I sat under the blinding fluorescent lights of the Honda dealership watching “The Boss” work his financial magic on a possible trade-in, I looked out to the Eden of cars: a 2003 bronze CR-V. It was rich. It was sparkly. It was Bling-on-Wheels. I had to have it.

I remember feeling this way about my Civic at the exact same dealership a decade ago. God, how I wanted that car. It was compact. Cute. And the most brilliant shade of green best summed up as “90s Sorority Girl Teal.” (Granted, I wasn’t in a sorority, but I wore butterfly clips, drank Zima, and liked small bright cars, which essentially placed me among their ranks.)

So, I got the Civic. It had 27 miles on it, and, I swore I’d drive it forever. And judging from the odometer, capping out at 177,032 miles, I damn near did. I drove it through everything: Rain, snow, dust, 117 degrees, and 17 degrees below zero. Together, we braved the elements and other various road hazards. Coyotes, cars, cops—you name it, we dodged it, I knew this car inside and out. So when the purring of the motor became more of a screeching, I knew our time together would be ending shortly.

And like any good parting of ways, I had to prepare for it. This car was a part of me. It drove me to and from college, and after graduation, it was my chariot to interviews and eventually my first “real” job...and my second...and my third...ultimately to the job I have today. It moved me from Colorado to Arizona, to California, and back to Arizona. Together we scorned valet and learned how to parallel park into the tightest space possible; we learned which gears best work on steep hills; we learned brakes don’t help when skidding on ice; we knew a dead ignition meant a dead battery, no matter what some hotshot at Pep Boys said; and we learned exactly how far past the “E” mark we could go before running out of gas.

The car drove me to concerts, to parties, to birthdays, to funerals, to places I shouldn’t have gone, and to places I needed to go. What hadn’t we done together in the last decade? Through good times, and bad times, I’d be on its side forever more...that’s what cars were for...Oh, good Lord, the thought of not having my car had turned me into Dionne Warwick.

“I’ll give you \$400.”

I must’ve misunderstood him, I looked at the Sharpie-scrawled number, then at the bright Crest Strip smile of Dave, my salesperson, a tadpole minion from the upper midwest who had finished his training mere weeks before, and over to The Boss, who had probably been working there about a month longer than that. There were no misunderstandings. That was exactly what was said.

No way. The memories alone on that car were worth more than that! Granted, I didn't exactly spend the last decade livin' la vida Hilton, but my early adulthood was certainly worth more than four measly bills. Even if it wasn't, the car certainly was.

"But it's never been in an accident!"

The Boss was unfazed. "If you consider the number of miles the car has on it, the year, and the outdated model," He squeezed his hands together. "If I gave you any more, I'd lose my shirt on this deal."

He wasn't budging, and I definitely wasn't budging. So, I walked out.

A friend of mine once told me she negotiated a "Never Been Puked In" Discount into her recent trade-in. Sadly, due to an unfortunate incident after an open bar Christmas Party in 1996, I was unable to strike the same deal. However, the car had a few special boasting qualities of its own, so I began to jot down a few that could certainly be worked into my trade-in.

1. The "I'm OK, You 're OK" Discount: The car has held its own outside Hollywood clubs, Rodeo Drive shops, the Ritz Carlton in Marina del Rey, the At One Yoga studio in Scottsdale, even the snobbiest of all snobby parking lots: AJ's in Paradise Valley. The car may not look like much, but that 10-year-old ride is Escalade by Association, Discount: \$400.

2. Bad Part of Town Discount: Two blondes in a bright green car taking a wrong turn on the way to Disneyland doesn't exactly scream "Straight Outta Compton," yet we made it out scot-free. Ghetto-friendly may not mean a whole lot to a car dealer from Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, but it definitely did to my friend and me as we successfully rolled through the hood. Discount: \$400.

3. The Lillith Fair Discount: It withstood the Tori Amos Phase. The Jewel Phase. The Sarah McLachlan Phase. The Paula Cole Phase. The Cranberries Phase. The Everything but the Girl Phase. The Beth Orton Phase. The Indigo Girls Phase. The Norah Jones Phase. Yet it never whined once. Discount: \$400.

4. The "Where Were You When..." Discount: Kurt Cobain's suicide. Princess Di's car accident. The Columbine shootings. John-John's plane crash. The second Twin Tower falling. Thanks to radio broadcasting, my car found out about these things the same time I did. Though the world stopped, the Civic never did. Discount: \$400.

There it was: \$1,600. Blue book value. Of course, there were a myriad of other memories that elevated the personal value to far more than that, but in the cutthroat world of car wheeling and dealing, personal value and 50 cents might get you a couple local phone calls and a reputation for being "overly sentimental."

My new, oft'-repeated motto became, "Screw Showcase Honda." And just as I was figuring out how to needlepoint it onto a pillow, I received a phone call from Dave, the Car Dealer.

"I've been talking to my boss, and we worked a deal where we can give you \$1,600 for your car!"

My interest was piqued, though it was noon in the middle of a workday with meetings all afternoon that couldn't wait, not even for a discounted SUV. "When do I need to get back to you?"

"I need to know within five minutes."

Five minutes. Screw Showcase Honda. "I can't do that."

"I tell you what, I'll give you an hour. The Boss wanted you to be the first to know, but we've got a bunch of people in line for the CR-V, so we need to know soon."

A bunch of people? In line for my future car? "I'll let you know in an hour."

"Excellent!"

Ironically, after about four and a half minutes of deliberation, I decided to go for it. It was time. It was breaking my heart, but it was indeed time to move on.

At the end of the day, I drove home to get my title. I walked out and saw my car in the driveway for last time and felt a surge of affection for this piece of machinery that had been such a part of my young life.

As we put-putted up to the dealership, I saw my new car waiting for me, new and big and shiny. My 30s. Dave, sans Boss, ran up to me, all full of commission-fueled glee. The time had come.

I pulled out my final belongings. I wasn't about to have some heartfelt speech with my car like what one would see in the movies. I mean, it was a car, after all. And just as the value was unspoken, so *was* the sentimentality.

"Are you ready?" Dave asked, as he shut the car door for me.

"Yes," I said as I walked into the dealership, sending one final glance to my 20s—bargained up to Blue Book value—before moving on.

