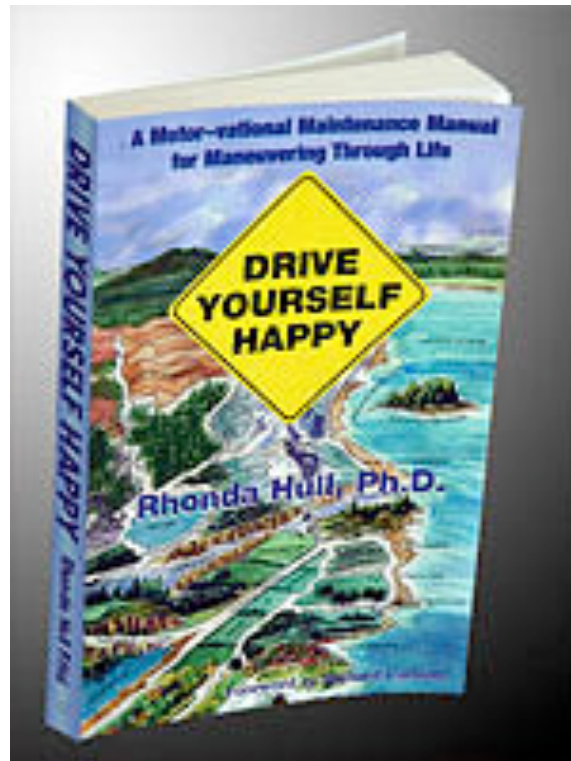


DRIVE YOURSELF HAPPY:

A Motor-vational Maintenance Manual
for Maneuvering Through Life



(sample chapters)

by **Rhonda Hull, Ph.D.**

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Preface

As a child, a “road trip” in the car was usually a joyous adventure full of wonder and heightened awareness of simple details. The hours on the road opened the doors to creativity and playfulness. Falling asleep in the car to the hum of the engine provided both distraction and renewal. Each stop held new possibilities. The destination was usually as fascinating as the journey. And, the journey ultimately always led home again.

The journey of life is no different. Making your travels worthwhile is important to me. I trust that this book will become one of those user-friendly, dog-eared gems that accompany you on this magical adventure and allows you to appreciate in a new way the gifts already yours.

If we are lucky, we have one or two “teachers” who touch our hearts and direct our souls along the way. They manage to influence us to stretch, and provide us with a mirror that offers us a glimpse of our true magnificence. They somehow make us feel safe and accepted enough us to grow despite our occasional resistance, bouts of fear, and our forgetfulness of who we really are. They make our journey easier and more meaningful than it would have been. My dad, a “car guy,” was one of those teachers.

As we confront life’s lessons and challenges, sometimes with grace and more times with awkwardness, we accumulate a few resources that become the foundation of insight to direct us as we go, and experience is what we get when we don’t get what we want. These teachers, resources, and experiences become the compass to which we attune our journey.

To provide encouragement, as if by “coincidence,” a few durable books present themselves as a reference to our wisdom. They somehow appear at just the right time and magically say just the right thing. Their essence stays with us forever, not only in our treasured collection of books, but on the bookshelf in our heart, ever at the ready. We are among the most fortunate if we choose consciously to gather a handful of these usable “road signs” to which we can return time after time for renewal, direction, and good counsel when we lose our way...which we will. Acting as a portable mentor, they assist us in getting back “on course”, which we do most of the time in spite of our “detours.” Through this process we are offered the assurance that being “off course” is an integral part of being “on course” and needs to be welcomed as an ideal way to help us to clarify the best road to take. Though we often forget, life is as much the journey as it is the arrival at the destination.

I am confident that the essentials shared in this book will provide comfort and direction as you maneuver the life laid before you. As you stretch beyond your “comfort zone,” whether voluntarily or nudged by the circumstances in your life, it will be the “owner’s manual” and “driving instruction” that reminds you that you need not travel alone. I am certain that if applied, especially in small and incremental steps, the “tools and rules for the road” will “fill up your tank (and your heart),” “recharge your batteries (and your energy),” “balance your tires (by being centered physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually),” and “put new spark in your plugs (by moving from worry to an attitude of gratitude).”

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Through car analogies and driving insights familiar even to devout pedestrians, this “road map” will provide you with a new perspective of seeing life as a present moment situation from which you can live a happier and more consistently peaceful life regardless of your circumstances.

Now is the time to embrace life as an incredible journey and yourself as the driver. Now is your chance to create a happy and fulfilling life in big and small ways. Now is the time to adjust your perspective and apply some of the simple concepts that will assist you in your travels. Why now? Because now is the only moment you really have.

This experience called life is absolutely amazing. It is one surprise (opportunity) after another. The process of life can be overwhelming, exhausting, exhilarating, and unpredictable in its twists and turns. And yet, regardless of the road blocks and obstacles it is always a blessing even when disguised. It can be experienced as a joyous and wonderful adventure by taking the “scenic route.” Life offers only an illusion of control and invites faith or fear at every turn. That choice is yours, and herein lies your power. Simply remember, love is always the answer.

So, take your foot off the brake and put it in gear. Welcome along for the ride!

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Chapter One:

EVERY THING I EVER NEEDED TO KNOW ABOUT LIFE I LEARNED FROM A “CAR GUY”

The most basic and important things I ever needed to know about life, I learned from my dad. He was a “car guy.” He was not perfect and made his share of mistakes, yet he had a soft-spoken and genuine humility. What he did--as well as what he didn't do--offered me crucial and sustaining guidance for joyful and confident living. He taught me how to keep my life on course with integrity, own my mistakes willingly, and make corrections as part of the process of living a good and happy life. Directly or inadvertently, he taught me about seeing the extraordinary in the ordinary, surviving change, being loved, creating success and the importance of having your words and actions be consistent with your values. I couldn't be more grateful.

In 1992, my dad passed away. He succumbed to a combination of stress-related illnesses, compounded by years of smoking and hanging asbestos insulation. This, too, was a part of his legacy and message.

Both my parents, driven by the lacks and limitations of their childhood, were devoted to providing a better material life for us. They applied their strong business ethic and seldom worked less than 24/7 in an insulation business they started together. After over forty years in business, they took few vacations and never truly knew the meaning of retirement.

My mom sacrificed her desire to stay home with her kids in order to work outside the home to protect us from the financial limitations she had as a kid. With my grandmother's live-in help, along with my mom, my dad actively participated as best he could in raising his daughters at a time when most little girls were expected to play with dolls and hang on mom's apron strings.

The profound sacrifices of well being and health that both my parents made have sadly demonstrated to me the price of stressful living. This is perhaps their most all encompassing life lesson. Making a living is not worth sacrificing a life. I am certain that it is not worth waiting for retirement, waiting until I get "it" all done, to have the life I want. I saw them not wishing that they had spent more time at the office, but instead questioning their choices, wishing they had found greater balance, and regretting what they had missed.

My dad's spirit is still very present with me. He continues to motivate my passion for my work. He is one of the most powerful reasons I am who I am and who I continue to become. His greatest joy was to help others and he would experience particular delight in watching them have fun. Because of his generous nature, the importance of what he shared with me makes it even more important for me to share it with you. His life has the most meaning if your journey is a bit smoother and his mistakes save you a few wrong turns and detours.

Let me introduce you to him. He was a big man in so many ways. Despite having broken his back in his late teens and being paralyzed for over a year, he grew to be a strong and private man who seldom asked for help. He had hands the size of baseball mitts, and yet it seemed he could fix just about any car with the

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skill and precision of a surgeon. This surgeon, however, often worked in the dark with tools no more sophisticated than a piece of bailing wire. Fortunately, I often was the ‘surgical assistant’ who got to hold the flashlight for these after-dark procedures. This is how he taught me to be independent, to observe, and to question.

He was a man of few words, but when he spoke, you listened, because what he said mattered. Totally gentle and unassuming, he was a remarkable man in stature and inner presence. He had a signature sense of humor, loved to tease and tell jokes, but his head would always nod unintentionally, which always foretold the delivery of the punch line. He was a generous man, surprisingly shy, who felt more comfortable communicating with animals and cars than with people. He delighted most in watching others enjoy themselves, and when he laughed, his entire body participated. Uncommon to find today, his word was his bond and deals were sealed on his handshake, and quite a handshake it was. It was a gesture of faith far more dependable than any contract signed in triplicate today.

My dad’s passion for cars and driving became the common language that made him and his profound lessons accessible and applicable. As the daughter of a “car guy,” I grew up knowing the best of both worlds. Along with the “Tiny Tears” and “Patty Play Pal” dolls my sisters and I had a motorized car my dad built when I was about four from plans in Popular Mechanic. By nine I was backing the family car up and down the driveway motivated to be the first ready for school, and by twelve I had a dirt bike to chase rabbits in the desert and go carts to spin circles on the dry lakes. A special father-daughter event was attending an occasional Friday night stock car race and destruction derby. Not only could I play dress-up, fix my dolls hair and change diapers, but I had plenty of miles of behind the wheel experience before the ink was ever dry on my legal driver’s license.

As an adult, not a phone call from my dad went by without the opening words, “How’s your car running?” At face value it was a conversational question of minimal significance, but when I learned to listen beyond the words I heard so much more. And, what a gift it was. It was his indirect way of saying “I love you” and letting me know he cared when more direct words were uncomfortable. Had I based my happiness and knowing I was loved by my dad waiting to hear specific words with more sentiment, I never would have realized the depth of his love for me. Learning to hear what someone intended to say, listening beyond the actual words that are used and having the actions match, allows communication on a much deeper level, less confined by the limits of Webster.

Even so, as often is the case, not until after he was gone did I fully appreciate the invaluable wisdom and powerful life lessons my dad was offering me through this mutual language of cars and driving. In ways probably not always conscious to him, he taught me the importance of present moment living. He showed me the value in compassion, generosity, and gratitude. He strengthened my quest for learning by allowing mistakes to be opportunities to learn. He fostered my vision of a happy life through his tender sense of humor. He demonstrated the peace and power in having your words and actions match.

How I wish he were still here. How I wish I could hear his belly laugh, see him in his mechanics coveralls, dunk toast in hot chocolate at midnight with him, and know his presence signaled by the giggling of the change in his pocket. And, yet he is here, just transformed. Now, he truly is bigger than life with his “tools and rules” of common sense wisdom passed on to you here in *Driving Yourself Happy*.

Chapter Two:

ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY -

NOTICING THE SIGNS OF HAPPINESS LIFE HAS TO OFFER

Everyday we see the same old signs. STOP, YIELD, REDUCE SPEED, CONSTRUCTION ZONE. The linear and logical list goes on and on offering structure and order to our travels. Each sign and signal contributes their literal translation to get us to where we need to go safely. With our willing heart they also offer another entire level of definition and direction, a dual meaning with a deeper message beneath the same old signs. The hidden meaning, if we are open to benefiting from it, enhances not only our physical journey through life, but the inner journey guided by our heart as well, and the messages are a constant reminder, available just around any corner.

Do you remember how stressful it was learning to drive a stick shift car? And then that definitive moment came where you no longer had to think of which gear to use, but instead just “knew.” In that moment of instinct-over-facts, driving became effortless, almost a spiritual experience of flow?

Have you ever had the pleasure of lying on your back in the grass staring at a cloud filled blue sky, trying to decipher new shapes from whatever form the billowy clouds take? And that miraculous moment when the “elephant” or “lion” become evident when it wasn’t just the moment before?

How about looking frantically for your keys, only to discover that they are in your own hand or somewhere right under your nose. Or, frustrated by a problem, you find yourself thinking about someone totally unrelated that you haven’t talked

to in a while, only to have the phone ring with them on the other end (thank you, Richard) providing the piece (peace) of information you were needing?

A coincidence? Or, a miracle? You get to decide.

In that magical, indescribable moment is where the wisdom of the ages resides, time stands still, and where everything becomes clear and easy instantaneously, without needing to make sense and for no logical reason. In that moment whatever happens is miraculous. It is in that moment that we let go of what we “think” and are willing to embrace that we just “know.” It is in that moment, if we were to practice stringing one after another, where the mystery of genuine happiness resides.

Imagine for a moment how your life would be different if you believed everything was not a coincidence, but perfect, no matter what your judgments tell you. What if you accepted that the signs that surround you had the added purpose of offering you tailored insights and limitless possibilities perfect for whatever your challenge at hand. What if you welcomed change rather than resisted it, and trusted that the outcome, good or bad, was somehow perfect even when you don’t fully understand how. What if clues and solutions were at every turn if you just learn to recognize and be open to them? What if? Well, they are.

We trap ourselves in our inflexible, practiced, and limited way of thinking that restricts our ability to be creative and enjoy the miracles available to us with a fresh perspective. In our rush through life, using the distorted filter that faster and more is better, we forfeit our childlike innocence and faith in favor of “measurable” accomplishments. Life ceases to be fun, and suppressing our awareness we prevent it from being the marvelous adventure that it is. We make it harder than it needs to be by staying attached to our logic, fears, and misperceptions, resisting change. Through our fear of change and in our efforts to

uphold our perspective, we are terrified to consider or accept that control is only an illusion. We are conditioned to believe that it is what protects us. We narrow our focus and become so uptight that we miss the obvious opportunities for happiness, particularly when signs and signals for new direction come in unexpected forms, from an unsuspecting source, or at an unpredicted time.

Life becomes a struggle when we ignore apparent signs, miss the available gifts, numb ourselves to the insightful messages, and resist the lessons that beckon our growth by thinking that our way is the only way. In our efforts to force life into our definition of “right,” we become the “shock absorber,” hanging on too tight, and feeling every bump. We resist, and what we resist, persists. We lose sight of the magic and the mystery by trying to manage life rather than live it. Confused and worn out, we wonder why we feel so beat up by life and are tempted to believe that “life is hard and then you die.”

Already having lost my dad and only months after my mom’s passing, I was enjoying the drive back to the San Francisco Bay area from visiting my dear friend, Donna, in South Lake Tahoe. I found my thoughts flowing freely, miraculously dodging my conscious scrutiny and review. Driving can provide a quiet, trance-like reflection time when we have no particular mission other than to get from one place to another. Free flow effortless thinking is actually soothing and creative when we allow it to happen. We welcome it when we are unencumbered by particular time constraints, critical thinking, or allowing ourselves to get distracted by the insensitive acts of other drivers.

With a residue of the peace of Tahoe still in my heart, I was simply observing my thoughts coming and going. Silently and on a deeper level I was ask

ing this feeling of calm to become a part of my daily life rather than something to which I needed to retreat. I was longing for a clear “sign” about not only the direction of my work, but also for revising and fine-tuning the direction of my entire life.

From my lane of free flow traffic on Highway 50, I glanced up on the right shoulder of the road to only half-consciously notice a sign that read, ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY. This sign announces that a particular stretch of highway has been adopted by a community group who assumes the responsibility for having that mile or two of roadway kept clear and free of litter. Their contribution serves a very important purpose in making our travels more pleasant and by enhancing our environment.

I continued driving along. My thoughts were still flowing subliminally through my head regarding my desire to have a clearer direction about where to place my focus. And, my journey presented me with another duplicate marker a bit further down the road, another ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY sign. It was a message that I had probably unconsciously seen a million times before in just as many other places. Yet, for an unknown reason it was standing out asking to be noticed along the side of the road.

The wheels in my head started to turn with greater consciousness. Now, instead of seeing it as ADOPT-A-HIGHWAY, the same old sign that I had seen over and over in my travels took on a new and more profound meaning. It was the answer I requested, if only I would open my eyes to its message. Loudly and clearly, it finally registered. It was the perfect reminder and it carried the ideal message meant just for me. This “sign” was in some way a reminder from my dad encouraging and directing me in how to better enjoy my journey through life. The

clarity that I wanted would come if I would only... ADOPT-A-HIGH-WAY..."ADOPT-A-HIGHER-WAY-OF-THINKING."

From that moment on, every street sign I saw carried a potential message, every coincidence a potential miracle, every signal a potential "turn indicator," and every challenge a certain gift.

So, what is a HIGHER WAY OF THINKING? It is a key to happiness and an indispensable tool for your journey. It is an absence of control and an expansion of faith. It is when we make a commitment to live according to our values and the things of true importance. It is when we know without a doubt that the most important things in life aren't things. It is when we are willing to suspend judgment of others and ourselves, forgive quickly, be accountable lovingly, and open to seeing things a new way.

It is when everything is in perfect relationship, we can see the "elephant" without trying, and we find our keys without effort. It is when, without forced "thinking," we just "know" when to shift gears instinctively according to the subliminal sound of the engine and a feeling in our gut. It is that unsuspecting and peaceful moment when life seems to flow, answers come to us without obstacles, and the miracles of life become more easily visible and accessible.

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Chapter Three:

OPEN YOUR TWENTY MINUTE WINDOW

Am I the only one who finds myself forgetting things more and more often? I dare to say, no. The older I get, the more common the complaint becomes. Still, my critical voice is always at the ready and willing when I face the frustration of having forgotten something.

My mom, a powerfully independent woman herself, told me that on her side of the family I am related to the one and only Annie Oakley. For those of you who haven't brushed up on your American History, Annie was a bold and feisty woman of the Old West and probably the nation's finest sharp-shooter in the late 1800's. She was a risk-taker and the very spirit of personal independence who was also known for her compassion and gave freely of her time and energies to benefit others, especially women. Unaware of my relationship to Annie until shortly before my mother passed in 1994 makes the parallel of reflected characteristics in my life even more intriguing. When I discovered this colorful fact about my ancestry, and combined it with the opportunities and personalities that influenced me as I grew up, a lot about who I am now took on new meaning and my actions and personality over time began to make more sense. This awareness actually uncovered another layer of peace and pride in me. Instead of feeling displaced and contrary to the mold, I felt a greater sense of passion, purpose and place. If there is any truth to the nature vs. nurture concept, both genetics and up-bringing score a point as I further discover who I am, who I have become, and why I feel so strongly about having a meaningful life. Whether by nature or nurture, the impact of my history continues to amaze me and I feel very grateful for the mentors in my life, both known and unknown, who accompany me on my journey through life.

Powerful women in my family are abundant. On my dad's side of the family there is my dear Great Aunt Zella. She is still alive and a sweet, kind and gentle lady barely over five feet tall, but a giant in character who I'm certain could wrestle a bear and win if she had to. Don't let her frail stature fool you. To look at her you would never suspect her tenacity. She lives in Fredonia, Kansas, where I believe the average age is about 80. The last time I saw her she was 94. Aunt Zella I think is now close to 97. This qualifies her as a senior citizen there, but just barely.

Zella is quite a remarkable lady with an incredibly resilient spirit. She still has an admirable recall of the experiences and people of her youth and in depth details of the blessings and challenges that shaped her past. She definitely has the family's sense of cantankerous humor and delights in sharing with you that she is probably the only woman her age in Kansas with a round bed adorned with a red tassel bed spread and decorated with heart shaped pillows. It is with a wink of her eye that she admits that she bought it for her teenage daughter many years ago and chuckles as she shares that she keeps it just to keep the neighbor's guessing.

Although my Great Aunt Zella's present moment memory retention has narrowed over time to about a twenty-minute window of sustainable recollection, she still maintains a unique sense of optimism, acceptance, and wonder. I make it a point to write Zella at least once a month and my cousin Jean faithfully reads to her my letters. She shares with me how much Zella enjoys my correspondence, and, then with candor comments that the nice part is that her mom gets to enjoy them over and over again. You see, Jean can read Aunt Zella my letter in the morning, and by noon she has forgotten she has already heard it and is just as happy to hear it again. Spread out over twenty minute intervals, my letters bring repetitive delight to Zella, and she responds to each reading as joyfully as if it were the first. I feel grateful to know that I contribute to her happiness ten-fold, while

only having to write one letter. Genuine happiness often is the result of very simple acts of kindness, and often we do not get to know the full benefits of our seemingly unimportant gestures. It was Mother Teresa who reminded us, “You cannot do great things in this life, you can only do small things with great love.”

Even though for her age Aunt Zella is quite spry, I was not surprised by the news from my cousin several months ago that my Aunt Zella had broken her hip. An injury of this nature is not uncommon for a person of her age. Inquiring how it happened, I was not really surprised to learn that, true to her nature, Aunt Zella had sustained the injury to her hip falling in her aerobics class! For several weeks Jean would keep me informed on her recovery process, and said that the greatest challenge was to have someone be on hand when Zella would awaken from a nap to prevent her from getting up, for she would forget during her brief naps that her hip was broken and be eager to get back to her aerobics class.

I am grateful to say that Aunt Zella has fully recovered and is back to her old antics, although with a bit more care and at a little slower pace, but with no less passion and exuberance. It is said that when the student is ready, the teacher appears. Aunt Zella is probably totally unaware that she has been an invaluable guru for me. Her uncomplicated zest for living got me to thinking about what it would be like to live so present moment by choice rather than dictated by solely by chronology or ill-health. What would it be like to have life be that fresh, and renewable every twenty minutes? The more I resisted the thought of this memory lapse and mental pause that generally is feared and looked at as a limitation, the more I considered instead that it might be quite wonderful if we all could live that way, from a twenty minute window. The more I considered it might be a potential gift, the more magnificent and peaceful I realized such a reality could be, because it meant that even the worst transgression would be forgiven and forgotten in that

twenty minute window of present moment living. There in lies true and durable happiness.

My dad always said, “The older you get, the faster it goes. I have found this to be true of time and memory. I have come to know that we don’t have time to forget to forgive. We need to redefine forgiveness. It does not mean condoning the actions of another, but acknowledging them and placing the transgression in the past. Anger holds us hostage and forgiveness brings freedom and peace. Your unwillingness to forgive hurts you the most. By withholding forgiveness to prove a point and make yourself “right,” you may be the only one who loses a good night’s sleep.

Being kind will allow what we have forgotten to find us, bringing solutions and ideas we otherwise would not have considered. Clean up your negative self-talk. My dad would tease and say, “A clean car will go faster.” We must be willing to forgive ourselves our short-comings and limitations as well. There is a difference between holding yourself accountable for your actions and “raking yourself over the coals.” Taking corrective action with compassion and forgiveness leads to lasting change through self-love.

Learn to minimize the times you wander to your past unconstructively, obsessing about the things that you cannot change. That was then and this is now. Even the challenges and disappointments of your past offer the gift of clarity about what you want to be different today. Giving your power to your past prevents you from feeling the depths of happiness possible now. Use the past for clues to shape your present moment, but don’t live from there. Remember the truth in this by realizing that it is hard to drive a car forward effectively looking only in your rear view mirror. And, regard yourself blessed on good days and bad, trusting that embedded in every disappointment there is an ultimate blessing for the finding.

Practice redirecting yourself back to the present moment when you drift into the future for anything other than making action plans. Worrying about things over which you have no direct influence or control in the moment wastes precious energy that could be far better used constructively caring and making a difference. Use the energy you would waste on worrying to taking the small steps you can to do what you can, and beyond that have faith.

Choose to make now a priority. To do so, experiment with forgiving quickly all transgressions to insure the greatest amount of freedom and joy. Holding resentments and grudges keeps you a prisoner of the past. Creatively use the clues from your past without re-living it or holding onto it. Apply willingly what you learn from being on and off track to create the now that leads to the future you want. Opening your vision and opening your heart by opening your twenty-minute window makes available to you all the signs, directions and signals along your path to make happiness not just your method of traveling but the state at which you arrive.

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MEET RHONDA HULL



Dr. Rhonda Hull is a Ph.D. with attitude. And her attitude is happiness.

Who said life doesn't come with an owner's manual? Rhonda wrote it! She is the author of *Drive Yourself Happy: A Motor-vational Maintenance Manual for Maneuvering Through Life*. She has worked with diverse audiences all across the country and abroad sharing her roadmap for a more joyful, productive, and meaningful way of life.

Rhonda believes that the greatest gift we can give one another is taking full accountability and responsibility for our own happiness. With her practical, purposeful, and playful approach, Rhonda guides the way to passion and purpose, and demonstrates that durable happiness is possible, even amidst a hectic world that is stuck in the fast lane.

ARE YOU READY FOR A TUNE UP?

Fasten your seat-belts and invite Rhonda to speak for one of your groups or events! Or, consider mentoring with Rhonda to get you back on the course. Rhonda is the one you want to work with if you want life to be more like a joy ride, rather than a demolition derby. ***E-mail Rhonda at: rhonda@driveyourselfhappy.com***

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