

HOW I GOT MY JOB

The silence which followed my reply to this question had a stunned quality. What could I have said to cause such a silence, why?

I was at a social gathering, and the subject of careers and jobs had arisen. My turn to tell - I am a Driving Instructor, I said, and the stunned silence reigned for quite a few seconds.

Then came the usual remarks "How brave" "How many cars do you get through in a year?" "Do you spend all the time covering your eyes?" I gave the usual sickly grin - everybody was being wildly humorous, and I had heard it all before, many many times.

When at school, I had grandiose ideas about commercial art, a career in photography, photographic journalism. I would hold the world as my oyster, and home would be any place where I hung my seven-foot two-colour school scarf. This piece of clothing and I were inseparable, as besides providing warmth and comfort, it doubled as a tow rope for boy-friends' cars, an escape line from windows, a swim suit if none other were available, and a tier-upper of kids to trees if I was supposed to be walking them, but had ploys of my own!

The best laid schemes ... out of the window went all career schemes, and the lost generation started on its career of helping out, on the land, in the forces, in factories.

At first I was flung headlong into transport. Fortunately I had driven heavy vehicles, horse boxes.

So a bus driver I became, driving work-people to and from factories and air fields, and children to school. Workmen are easy passengers, in the morning still slumbering, very silent, almost morose, at night very hungry - home James, and the faster the better!

But the kids!! Little limbs of Satan, always thinking up something diabolical to confound the unfortunate driver who was responsible for their safe arrival.

There were exceptions of course, like the dear little boy who made me a pipe rack, held ^{together} by a wooden Mickey Mouse - rising to heights of skill with his fretsaw. Although I found no actual use for it, I treasured it, as it helped to restore my liking for children which had reached a low.

Domestic circumstances moved me away from Witney back to my birthplace, Bexhill on Sea. There I became a taxi driver, a wonderful seat from which to observe people. Every job has a highlight sometime, and in this one I was privileged to drive Princess Marina, and the young Duke of Kent, Princess Alexandra and Prince Michael during their stay at Bexhill.

After a year or two, I engineered it to get back to Witney, where I had many friends, and I joined the Womens' Land Army, and helped to wind up the organisation when the time came.

Every story should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. So we come to the end - why did I become a driving instructor? Suffice it to say that the need was there, and I had taught girls in the WLA (without dual controls) So, to a college in London I went, and returned fully fledged and ready to roll.

The demand for instruction was enormous, and never failed in all the 25 years I sat poised over dual controls. I made many friends, and heard many tales of joy and sadness. Another hot seat to which confidences flowed. There are so many human stories, some ^{of which} can never be told as they belong solely to the teller. The aspect of fear which so many people emphasize, just does not exist. It would be communicated to the already nervous pupil if the instructor were prey to this emotion.

One has dual controls, one is alert in a relaxed way, and one gets well acquainted with danger pictures and signals, and thus things go smoothly.

Many tales I could tell of quaint happenings, and of frustration, when one has mentioned a point of procedure about forty times before light dawns.

There is little difference in the initial ability of ~~men~~ and ~~women~~ in general. The main difference is in attitude to learning this particular skill. Generally the woman humbly realises that she has much to learn and is prepared to give time, thought and patience to the job. Some of the men rather feel that they should have been born knowing it all, and resent the fact that practice is needed. However, I found that a man will accept more criticism from a woman instructor than he would from a man, provided it is reasoned and constructive.

Whilst not wishing to blind with science, I feel that a good working knowledge of the internals of the motor car is a ~~good~~ selling point with men particularly, ^{as} ~~and~~ it makes for respect for the instructor, and this is essential.

I am in process of winding up this, my last career, now. Age and economics combined have made this desirable from the first view, and necessary from the second. I hark back to my youthful ambitions and whilst no career as such is likely, I want time to play around with pens, paints and films.

It was an interesting slice of my life, the rewards were various, but the main one was the satisfaction of achievement, and the happiness shining from the faces of the successful candidates. They ran into hundreds, and although I can't remember everyone, I see the years as a firmament of stars, and I remember the bright ones and the ^{dull} ones who eventually became bright, and the

unstarlike, but interesting ones.

Bless them all.

No, I am not brave - no need! Oddly enough, a car lasts two or three years, and is in splendid condition when sold, even if carrying many miles.

No, I never, but never, cover my eyes - I want to live!

Does this answer your questions?