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1164 words

Driving the Crumpled Car

Laura stopped for traffic. The man behind her crashed into our car and smashed it around the right taillight and the hatchback. The crash startled Laura and Amanda, but the crash of vehicular bodies did not harm humans present.

Our car was still operable and legal, so after the interview with police, Laura and Amanda took Juniper on board after her music lesson, and they all came up the mountain, home.

My family's tenuous position on the lower edge of the consumer culture dominated my thoughts while I examined the car. The loss of dependable, inexpensive transportation could cause an economic crisis. A sense of continuing adventure with survival and appreciative wonder at the challenges existence continued to present us shaded my apprehension.

I think existence close to material poverty, a step away from economic crisis, has given me a more fulfilling and more educational existence than material wealth could have given me the last twenty five years, after my earning ability was limited by injuries from an uninsured, propertyless drunk driver.

The damage to the rear of our car did not appear to make it unsafe to drive.

A few months before the car received its crumpling, we invested in repairs and new tires. I said we could pay for what the car needed and have dependable transportation cheaper than we could buy a newer car.

We didn't have a choice. We didn't have enough money to make a down payment on a newer car nor large enough income to handle payments.

I examined the newly crumpled car in warm afternoon sunshine in the driveway in front of the house. I clarified how I felt about automobiles. I have no pride of ownership. Why should I be proud of an automobile? I didn't design or build it.

On the other hand, even if our automobile tends to drain our resources to a state of emergency, negative feelings toward material objects waste energy. I am grateful we own a car, since we live 43 miles from town, and we have frequent needs there.

I hope this nation will develop mass transportation, give up some of our American individualism, and coordinate our needs on community levels so we don't continue to burn enormous amounts of fuel and foul the environment to meet individual

needs and so individuals don't have to own autos to achieve survival from rural locations.

If that ever happens, it will happen sometime in the future.

Meanwhile, the other driver's insurance company offered to pay us the \$900.00 value of the car. From that \$900.00, we could pay the salvage value, \$300.00, and keep the car. We couldn't buy a dependable car for \$900.00, but the agent insisted his company's obligation was only to pay what the car was worth according to the book, not the much higher local price for cars of the same make and year. I accepted \$600.00, and we kept the car.

The appearance of the car doesn't concern our daughters, Amanda and Juniper. The car transports us, so they devote no thought to the smashed-in back. Juniper practiced for her driver's license test and took and passed the test in the crumpled car. She drove it down the mountain to classes at the college, and its dentedness didn't bother her.

We drive an automobile worth almost nothing, monetarily. Miles add up, 165,000 and climbing.

Someone used the car as a supply depot when Juniper parked it in town. She brought it home minus one turn signal lamp and a hubcap. Other parts wear out, and some parts fall off. Yet it continues to meet our transportation needs.

Now Amanda practices for her driver's test in the crumpled car, and its crumpledness doesn't concern her. I think lack of concern for appearances is unusual in the consumer culture, particularly among teenagers.

We study to understand the meaning of existence. We pay attention to ancient words of advice that seem very relevant in this modern world: Do not become enamored of material possessions. Live in the moment, without particular regard for the past and without anxiety about the future.

Excellent advice.

I work half time so I can also pursue interests other than earning a living. Or I am only able to work half time because I have chosen outdoor work that includes physical labor and haven't fully healed physical injuries that limit how much I can work.

Being somewhat unsure how much I define my way of living and how much my way of living defines me adds to my sense of adventure and to my quest to understand what existence is and what we are capable of within our definitions of existence.

After I complete half-time salaried work to help pay our

expenses for material survival, I write. My first objective is not to gain materially, but to say something that might add positive insight or some small, joyful moment to the reader's life.

Writing creates joy and satisfaction for me.

I look at our daughters, who don't care what our car looks like, as long as it gets us where we need to go, who don't mind if most of their clothes come from second-hand stores. They begin to achieve independence from our family and make their way into the world, but they maintain strong ties with Laura and with me. They haven't fallen into undue concern for material possessions nor into a sense of meaninglessness that seems to occupy so many in the contemporary culture.

Our first concern from the start of our family has been to be available to our daughters, teaching them, guiding them, sharing the joy of existence. Attempting to fulfill our ideal of parenthood added to our direction away from the accumulation of money and material goods.

Juniper and Amanda mature with strong values that keep them aimed toward a positive future. They understand meaning and joy are not resident in material wealth.

Much of what I write explores depths of meaning often missed by the consumer culture. We have lived as we wanted, in the mountains, in undeveloped areas. We observe wildlife in natural habitat. We have freedom to explore the country around us, to be together, to play and learn together.

We avoid coveting material possessions. We avoid confusing material accumulation with success, and we avoid confusing lack of material wealth with failure. We own very little.

We are rewarded every moment by a rich sense of family, by a rich knowledge and participation with wildlife and the natural world around us. Because of our respect for and involvement with education within our family, we reap the rewards of participating in many forms of art, our own and a great deal from the world around us. When I look at the badly crumpled, rapidly-aging car, I know we couldn't have found the depth of reward and the sense of fulfillment we've received from the way we live in the largest paychecks, nor in the newest, most expensive, uncrumpled automobiles.