

Elder Law Newsletter: Grandpa Is Still Driving

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I remember the day very clearly. It was March 22, 1983. I was 16 years old, and I passed my driver's test and was holding the new license in my hands, looking at it triumphantly. I had the ability to go anywhere I wanted to go. Or, so I envisioned. I'm sure my parents would have had something to say about my thoughts of independence if they knew what was running through my mind.

My first car was not my own. I shared it with my parents and older brother. Driving a 1977 Chevy Impala Station Wagon was not the coolest thing, but it had four wheels and gave me freedom. I recently thought about this when my 80-year-old father came home from a long road trip after visiting family in Washington, D.C. on short notice. The airfare was expensive, and he reasoned that he was retired and had the time to take a couple of days for the drive.

My dad has often told friends and family that if they don't want him to come, they shouldn't invite him because he'll definitely be there. He has spent a lifetime traveling the world, and this trip didn't seem much different. But, it was. He won't be driving a long distance ever again.

Shortly after he arrived home, my dad said he wanted to talk. We talk every day, so I wasn't really concerned. He proceeded to tell me that the drive completely exhausted him and that he didn't feel safe. Dad said he had to pull off the road several times to rest, and his body just hasn't recovered. Even though he broke the trip up into shorter days, he still didn't feel good about it. Admitting this was extremely difficult for him.

I often say that my father has two speeds: go and sleep. He puts more miles on his car in a year than most professional drivers. Admitting he needed to make a change was a big step, and I am proud of him for taking it. Being the daughter of a geriatric social worker can be hard because my dad is so independent and determined. We often tease in our family that when we think my dad shouldn't drive anymore, my daughter Hannah will be the one to take his keys away because she is direct and tough. Knowing that taking the keys away from someone who has driven for

so long is an incredibly hard thing to do, we have pre-assigned the task to her. But, maybe we won't have to "take his keys away" when it is time. I am hopeful that just as he did in this instance, he will be aware when it is time to give up driving completely. Some people do, while most fight every step of the way.

Losing the ability to drive is a loss of independence that most of us have had since we were 16 years old. The thought of it makes most people shutter, but we must consider the safety of the driver and everyone else on the road. If you are dealing with an aging driver or are one yourself, here are some suggestions:

8 Tips for Aging and Driving

1. Enroll in a mature driving course.
2. Complete a full [driving safety evaluation](#).
3. Attend a [Car Fit](#) event to check how well your personal vehicle fits you.
4. Talk to your doctor about the driving – ask about medication concerns, physical limitations, etc.
5. Schedule regular vision and hearing screenings.
6. Look into driver services like Uber and Lyft.
7. Be aware of the [older driver's licensing rules](#) in your state. Eighteen states require more frequent vision screening and testing for older drivers.
8. Examine your recent accident record.

Resources:

- [Driving Safety Evaluation at Siskin](#) – an "in-clinic" evaluation, an "on-the-road" evaluation by experienced driving instructors, evaluation and training in the use of adaptive driving devices/ techniques, and a summary with recommendations and support for families
- [Car Fit](#) – an educational program that offers older adults the opportunity to check how well their personal vehicles "fit" them
- [Senior Driving Evaluations](#) – Interactive driving evaluations and other tools for senior drivers, as well as information on licensing laws in different states of the U.S. (AAA)
- [Drivers 65+](#) (PDF) – A driving self-awareness quiz. Helps seniors pinpoint areas of driving weakness and find out how to remediate them. Answer the quiz and get a customized set of tips for driving safely. (AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety)
- You and Your Car: A Guide to Driving Wellness – Includes myths about aging and driving, steps to being a safer driver, and driving skills assessment tools (The Hartford Center for Mature Market Excellence)
- [Driving Decisions Workbook](#) (PDF, rotate it) – A practical workbook for evaluating one's own driving capabilities, with extensive suggestions for working around driving weaknesses (University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute)
- [Driving Safely While Aging Gracefully](#) – Assess driving skills and learn how age and physical symptoms affect driving (National Highway Traffic Safety Administration)