

A whole handful of wrecks? Ashore's graphic artist, Patricia Eaton, gives the author a high-five for surviving and hopes she doesn't have to use the other hand to count any more.



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**W**hen I read in your Summer 2000 issue that you were inviting readers to tell about their car wrecks, I just had to respond. Actually, I'm embarrassed to admit (especially considering my occupation) that I've had so many wrecks that I can't choose a "favorite." However, each one definitely taught me a lesson. I hope I've learned all that I can via this method and want to pass on my lessons learned to your readers.

**Wreck #1** The year was 1986. I was a sophomore in high school, and life was good. I had gotten my driver's license two weeks before. My father let me drive the car to a late afternoon class, even though the brakes on it were past due for servicing. It was starting to snow when I left. My route took me down a large hill with a bridge at the bottom. At the end of the bridge was a red light. I

panicked and stomped on the brakes, which locked up my wheels. On the wet, icy road, my car fish-tailed and jumped the curb. I ended up on a sidewalk against the concrete wall of the bridge. Since I was wearing a seatbelt, I wasn't hurt. The car wasn't so lucky. Three wheels were where they were supposed to be, but the fourth wheel was nowhere to be found.

**Lesson learned:** Bridges really do freeze before the rest of the road. Bad brakes won't stop you. Red lights at the bottom of slippery hills are treacherous. Seatbelts are good. Two weeks is not a lot of experience.

**Wreck #2** It was 1987. I was a junior. The two speeding tickets I had gotten a month ago had made no difference in my behavior. I was driving through the country to meet my father. I sort of

# Really Wanted To Hear My Five Wrecks?

knew the road. So what if the sign said I should take the curve at 30 mph. I was only going 45. Close enough. Did you know you can fishtail a front-wheel-drive car? I remember seeing lots of green flying by, and all of a sudden, I was on the ceiling inside the car, looking up at the seats. Oops. I hadn't worn my seatbelt this time. Although every part of my body hurt, I crawled out of the car. That's as far as I got before I collapsed. Several other drivers had seen me disappear into the ravine and had called for help. I was bruised everywhere, but had no other injuries. The car was a total loss. I found out later that I had flown over the ravine, flipped a few times, then came to a sudden, upside-down stop against a large oak tree.

**Lessons learned:** A sign that says 30 mph means 30 mph. You can do less, but you shouldn't do more. Seatbelts are really a good idea, because if I try to fly a car again, I probably won't walk away.

**Wreck #3** The year 1988 rolled around. (Do you see a pattern here?) I had been in the Navy for four months and at hospital-corps school in Great Lakes. Since it was only three hours from home, I had spent the weekend there. I was driving my boyfriend's car. We had just stopped for ice cream, and I was eating and driving. I was concentrating on my cone instead of traffic, and I drove right into the back of a pickup truck. Seatbelts were on (Yay!). There wasn't a dent on the truck, but the front end of my boyfriend's car was crunched. The police officer was very polite, and I got only two points on my license.

**Lessons learned:** Don't eat ice cream while driving. Actually, any distraction can cause you to have a wreck. It's important to watch where you're going.

**Wreck #4** Fast forward to 1993. Five accident-free years had passed. No tickets either. I was still in the Navy, driving to work. The speed limit was 35 mph, but everyone else was doing 45, so I was too. I came over a hill in a long line of cars, driving a little too close to the guy in front of me. Someone stopped suddenly, and it was a chain reaction. Bam...bam...bam...bam! Four of us piled up with me in the middle. My seatbelt was on. (I had learned that lesson by now.) The car was history. I had only two more payments on it. Again, the police officer was nice. Three of us received tickets.

**Lessons learned:** Speed limits are for reasons. Tailgating can lead to trouble.

**Wreck #5** It was 1996. I was a civilian working for the Navy. I was driving a mid-size sedan (because I felt it was one of the safest cars on the road) at the posted speed limit—55 mph. The road had traffic lights here and there. As I approached one, it turned yellow. I decided I didn't have time to stop and zoomed through the intersection—at the same time a guy crossing the intersection thought he had time to turn left in front of me. His poor little Honda lost its entire front on the side of my big, bad sedan. I didn't get a ticket, and his insurance paid the whole bill. But did I really not cause that crash?

**Lesson learned:** A yellow light means caution; it doesn't mean speed up and cross the intersection at full speed. Now, I am more likely to squeal my tires stopping instead of hitting the gas.

Here it is, the year 2000. I've been ticket-free since 1993. Every day, I apply the lessons I've learned. I always buckle my seatbelt and focus on what is going on around me. 