

Ingrid Buchwald

Bob Bednar

Roadside America

24 October 2024

### Amoeba: A Personal Nonfiction Narrative Essay

People say that the things you love are created by the people you love. When people share their passions and joys with you, you will also find joy in them. So when you learn to drive, the person that teaches you has a major impact on your automobility and your reactions to events when driving. Thankfully, my father loves cars and loves to drive, so the joy for driving has been prevalent since I began to drive. Because of my love for driving, I often will drive just to experience that feeling with no destination in mind. This seemingly pointless driving changes the way that I view myself as a driver and helps me better understand the road and how my car interacts with it. Many people that drive have never driven just for fun because they don't have enough experience to trust themselves and their car. These people hardly speed and follow all traffic laws exactly as they are written. While I would consider myself a safe driver, I am not like these people. I love driving fast, I hate stop signs, and I get annoyed when people don't accelerate fast enough. Generally, I still obey traffic laws, I just believe that they take the fun out of driving. This belief that traffic laws destroy fun means that when I am driving, and having fun, I am probably not obeying the law.

Just a few weeks ago, my roommate, my girlfriend, and I were getting ready to go to a Clairo concert. Once we finished getting ready, I grabbed my keys, knowing that I was the designated driver. As we pulled out of the school parking lot, I chose to ignore the maps and started our journey on the highway that had a higher speed limit. We pulled onto the highway

ramp and I accelerated up to the speed limit, 80 mph, and then continued accelerating to around 85 mph. I believe that it is perfectly normal and safe to go five miles over the speed limit on a highway, but I have a police radar detector in case the police disagree. As we drove along my girlfriend picked up my phone to change the music. She decided to shuffle Clairo- an obvious choice considering our destination. I continued to drive, forgetting about my speed, and singing along to the music. As I merged onto Interstate 35, where the speed limit drops to 65 mph, my roommate requested one of my favorite songs, Amoeba. I turned the volume up and we all sang along even louder. I looked down at my speed as I merged into the middle lane and realized that I was still going 85 mph even though the speed limit had changed to 65 mph. Now knowing that I was going twenty miles over the speed limit, I took my foot off the gas. As soon as I finished merging, I looked over and saw a cop. He had his windows down and looked over at me. I knew that I was going far too fast to slow down in time, and I knew that he knew this too. As he turned his lights on, he reached his arm out the window and pointed directly at me.

As I began to pull over, I looked down and began to turn the radio volume down. As I turned the volume down, I realized that my favorite song was so loud that I could not hear the radar detector even though it was beeping. While I was obviously frustrated, I still remained calm because I know how to act during a police stop. While my girlfriend and I were laughing at my mistake, I turned around to see my roommate looking very nervous. As I watched her start to fidget and look around, I realized the privilege I have as a white driver. While my roommate and I have both never been stopped by the police, as a white person I have the privilege to believe that I will be safe, whereas she does not have the privilege to just believe as a person of color during a police stop, she will be safe. While I was talking to her, I pulled out my license and looked in my mirror to see the cop walking towards us. Because we were on the highway, the

officer was walking to the passenger side, where my roommate was sitting in the backseat. As she saw him walking towards her, she started to legitimately panic. She was asking if she should roll down the window or if she needed her license or if she should take her seatbelt off. I was still calm and assured her that she would be fine staying just the way she is. As the officer and I exchanged words and he scanned my license, she stayed nervously silent in the backseat.

When the officer turned and began to walk back to his car after just a few moments, she turned to me and mentioned how easy the stop was. I was kind of confused by this because I have never needed to imagine a scenario where a traffic stop does not go easily. Because she isn't white, she has been taught that driving is something that should be feared. While she has evolved past this fear of driving, the fear is still prevalent in the way that she drives and the way that she acted in this situation. She has always relied on fear to keep her safe while driving because that is what she was taught. She doesn't speed, she stops at yellow lights, and she is scared of cops. While these things may annoy a driver like me, who has the privilege to ignore some traffic laws, they help ensure that she will not ever be put in a situation with cops where it could become violent. We both like to drive and enjoy the control it gives us, but we appreciate different aspects of driving because of the different levels of privilege that we have. While I was observing this privilege imbalance on a small scale, it speaks to the larger issue in American car culture. Because people of color always have to worry about what may happen to them while driving, they are not able to enjoy the fun of driving as freely as a white person. While they can still have fun driving, the fear of a police stop or other event will always linger in the back of their minds. To people that have privilege, this may seem like a silly concept because we cannot truly understand how greatly this fear affects their perspective of cars.