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Crash on the Road

by Millard Johnson

The great thing about top-down motoring is that you get so close to the world. You put that top down and you are enveloped in the earth on which we live. You smell the new-cut grass. The morning air fresh with dew is on your hair. The summer sun warms your face. You feel the life, the birds in flight, the grasses and leaves waving in the breeze. It is all close up, enfolding you. In a convertible you are part of it. You are part of life and the living process washes over you. That is the magic of top down driving.

I am aware, however, that not all of life is daffodils and sunshine-there is a lot of pain, dirt, and ugliness. I think all of us have become very good at hiding and avoiding all the messy bits of existence. We deodorize, disguise and sanitize. We put walls around junk yards. Our roads run through meadows, not through strip mines. We put windows on our SUV's that roll up really tight to keep the odors of life outside and away from us.

Unfortunately, the dark side of life came close to us on our rally on September 8th. Just before the first cars of the rally turned onto Route 32 near Anderson, a highway accident ended the life of a stranger. That accident will not be remembered by many people. It was just another crash on the road. But for those of us who participated in the rally, it touched us.

Then, the rally itself, "The Drive Against MS" rally, which was a benefit organized by Beth McCoy for her friend Tara Lane. Tara, who was at the rally, is a vibrant and beautiful young woman, an athlete who is stricken with Multiple Sclerosis. MS is a chronic, debilitating, body-destroying disease. Tara fights that disease. She fights a fight that, without a breakthrough in science, she will lose. Her family and friends came down from Chicago and drove the rally in mini vans and other not-Miata things.

I wish I could say it was beautiful. Maybe it was. But, the truth is, I would rather not know that these struggles exist. Beth McCoy planned this event to benefit her friend. She was there, doing everything wrong: too much food, too many prizes, too much caring. Without perspective, she failed utterly to weigh the cost and benefit. Too much friendship, too much love, too much, too much - as if by caring too much, she could stop the disease from its horrible progress. It was as painful to watch someone caring too much as it was to watch the sufferer for whom friendship seemed to be as important as hope.

That Saturday, I crashed on the road of my own humanity. I saw what I wanted to hide from - a fellow traveler on the road of life being destroyed by a random killer. A killer who could have chosen me or one of my children. Feeling glad it struck someone else instead of me or mine, and then feeling guilty for feeling glad. Feeling good about doing something to help another, then feeling bad knowing that I did not do everything I could have done. Even the unbounded love of family and friends who gathered in support of that victim pulled me too close to my own fears, reminded me that even though each trip out in my Miata is a round trip, my trip through life is one way.

But, I survived this crash, and like every crash I have survived - I learned. I learned, through the presence of club members, that people can overcome their fears and revulsion to support a fellow traveler. I learned, through the eyes of the Tara's parents, that the support of family can be boundless. I learned, through Beth McCoy's actions, how deep a friendship can be. Most of all, I learned that ALL of life is to be lived, the bitter as well as the sweet. No doubt I will return to my flight from pain and suffering but for this time at least, I was forced to open up my existence to the full bouquet of smells and tastes, feelings and emotions of living.

Anyone wishing to contribute to Drive Against M.S. should make a check payable to "Tara Lane Trust" and please send it to Beth McCoy (Trustee) 16331 E. 101st St. Fortville, IN 46040.

The Open Road

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