

New York Times—bestselling author of *You Can Date Boys When You're Forty*

Dave Barry

Live Right and Find Happiness

A photograph of Dave Barry, a middle-aged man with brown hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a red patterned tie. He is smiling slightly and holding a white rectangular sign in his right hand. The sign has red text on it. The background is a solid bright yellow-green color.

**(ALTHOUGH
BEER IS
MUCH
FASTER)**

Life Lessons and
Other Ravings from
Dave Barry

ALSO BY DAVE BARRY

FICTION

Insane City
Lunatics (with Alan Zweibel)
The Bridge to Never Land (with Ridley Pearson)
Peter and the Sword of Mercy (with Ridley Pearson)
Science Fair (with Ridley Pearson)
Peter and the Secret of Rundoon (with Ridley Pearson)
Cave of the Dark Wind (with Ridley Pearson)
The Shepherd, the Angel, and Walter the Christmas Miracle Dog
Escape from the Carnivale (with Ridley Pearson)
Peter and the Shadow Thieves (with Ridley Pearson)
Peter and the Starcatchers (with Ridley Pearson)
Tricky Business
Big Trouble

NONFICTION

You Can Date Boys When You're 40
I'll Mature When I'm Dead
Dave Barry's History of the Millennium (So Far)
Dave Barry's Money Secrets
Boogers Are My Beat
Dave Barry Hits Below the Beltway
Dave Barry Is Not Taking This Sitting Down
Dave Barry Turns 50
Dave Barry Is from Mars and Venus
Dave Barry's Book of Bad Songs
Dave Barry in Cyberspace
Dave Barry's Complete Guide to Guys
Dave Barry Is NOT Making This Up
Dave Barry Does Japan
Dave Barry's Only Travel Guide You'll Ever Need
Dave Barry Talks Back
Dave Barry Turns 40
Dave Barry Slept Here
Dave Barry's Greatest Hits
Homes and Other Black Holes
Dave Barry's Guide to Marriage and/or Sex
Dave Barry's Bad Habits
Claw Your Way to the Top
Stay Fit and Healthy Until You're Dead
Babies and Other Hazards of Sex
The Taming of the Screw

LIVE RIGHT and FIND HAPPINESS

(Although Beer Is Much Faster)



*Life Lessons and Other Ravings
from Dave Barry*

Dave Barry

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CONTENTS

[Also by Dave Barry](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Introduction](#)

[BITE ME, DAVID BECKHAM](#)

[A LETTER TO MY DAUGHTER AS SHE BECOMES ELIGIBLE FOR A FLORIDA LEARNER'S PERMIT \(UNLESS I CAN GET THE LAW CHANGED\)](#)

[THE REAL MAD MEN](#)

[IN WHICH WE LEARN TO LOVE BRAZIL, AND TRY TO HATE BELGIUM](#)

[CABLE NEWS IS ON IT](#)

[EVERYTHING I KNOW ABOUT HOME OWNERSHIP I LEARNED FROM JOHNNY CARSON](#)

[GOOGLE GLASS: A REVIEW. I HAVE SEEN THE FUTURE, BUT I HAD TROUBLE READING IT](#)

[TO RUSSIA WITH RIDLEY: THE ADVENTURES OF CLOAK AND DAGGER](#)

[A LETTER TO MY GRANDSON](#)

INTRODUCTION

What makes us happy?

It's definitely not money. To quote the old saying that old people are always saying: "Money can't buy happiness."

How very true that is.

Oh, you might *think* money would make you happy. But would it really? Let's say you inherited a billion dollars. You could have a private jet, live in a mansion with a swimming pool, drive a Maserati. You could drive your Maserati into your swimming pool if you felt like it. That's how rich you'd be.

But would all that money really make you happy? Would your family and friends really love you any more?

OK, they probably would, especially if you let them ride in your jet. And if they *didn't* love you more, you could afford to have them professionally whacked and get a whole new set of family and friends. People would *audition* to be your friend. I would be one of these people.

So apparently the old saying is wrong: Money *can* buy you happiness. The problem is, you need a really large quantity of it. You have to be one of those twenty-three-year-old Internet billionaires that everybody would like to punch in the mouth.

So most of us have to seek happiness in other ways. Tragically, some people turn to drugs or alcohol. This is a big mistake. I realize that the title of this book seems to suggest that you can achieve happiness by drinking beer, but that is of course a joke. Beer is not the answer. Sure, when your problems are getting you down, drinking beer might *temporarily* improve your mood. But what happens when the beer wears off? You're right back where you started, still stuck with all the same problems. Sooner or later, you're going to have to face the harsh truth: *You need more beer.*

No! Strike that. The harsh truth is that happiness is an elusive thing. I speak from personal experience here. I should be a happy man. I have all the elements of a good life: a loving family, a nice home, a dog that doesn't pee indoors without a good reason. I have a full head of hair and several original teeth. I have no major health issues that I am aware of, thanks to a rigorous healthcare regimen of never getting within 200 yards of a known healthcare provider. I have a small group of really close male friends with whom I am not in touch because we are males, but I know I can count on them if I ever really need them, assuming they are still alive.

And if all of that isn't enough, I've had a long and rewarding career that consists of being paid to write pretty much any random idiot thing I want. You can put suspenders on a salamander, but it still won't make waffles. See what I mean? That sentence makes absolutely no sense, but *I got paid to write it*. It's printed right here in a published book! Unless you're a high-ranking federal official, there is no way you can do anything this useless and still have a job.

So I have been blessed with many blessings. I should be happy. And I am, sort of. But I can't

escape the nagging feeling that I'm not *really* happy, at least not the way I was when I was young and carefree and basically an idiot.

I especially have this feeling when it's my turn to drive the soccer practice car pool for my daughter, Sophie, and some of her teammates. This involves spending up to an hour in a confined space with a group of fourteen- and fifteen-year-old girls, all high school freshmen, listening to them discuss the concerns that girls of that age have, such as racism, bullying and global climate change.

I am of course kidding. Here are the top ten concerns of my daughter and her friends, based on their car pool conversations:

1. Boys.
2. The hideous totally unwarranted cruelty of high school teachers.
3. What this one boy did in this one class OMG.
4. Some video on some Internet thing that is HILARIOUS.
5. Hair.
- 6-10. Boys.

All of the girls discuss all of these topics simultaneously at high volume while at the same time (they are excellent multi-taskers) thumbing away on their phones and listening to the radio, which is cranked way up so they can hear it over the noise they're making.

So they're very loud. They're spooking cattle as far away as Scotland. But here's the thing: It's a *happy* noise. These girls are the happiest people I know. *Everything* makes them laugh. They love *everything*, except the things they hate, and they love hating those things. They literally cannot contain their happiness: It explodes from them constantly in shrieks and shouts, enveloping them in a loud cloud of pure joy. It gets even louder when the radio plays their favorite song—which is basically every song—and they all sing joyfully along at the top of their lungs. For example, recently, as I was driving them to practice, the girls—most of these are good Catholic girls who attend Catholic school where they receive religious instruction—suddenly, in unison, began belting out these lyrics:

My anaconda don't want none unless you GOT BUNS, HON!

This is the chorus to a song called "Anaconda," in which a man—Sir Mix-a-Lot—is declaring his fondness for large buttocks on women. The "anaconda" refers to one of his body parts. (Hint: Not his pancreas.)

I know what you're thinking: Why did I let the girls listen to such an inappropriate song? Why didn't I change the station? My excuses are:

1. It took me a while to figure out that the song was not about an actual anaconda.
2. If I changed the station, odds are that the new station would also be playing "Anaconda," or another song that was just as inappropriate. As far as I can tell from driving the car pool, all radio stations play the same two inappropriate songs in heavy rotation.
3. Young people have been listening to inappropriate songs on the radio for centuries, dating back to when I was a young person and we listened to "Louie Louie," which

everybody knew had dirty words, although nobody knew exactly what they were:

Louie Louie

[Something unintelligible but supposedly obscene]

Yi yi yi yi!

But getting back to happiness: I envy my daughter and her friends. I wish I could be as happy as they are, although I wouldn't want to have to go back to high school and deal with acne and the cosin again. I want to be happy AND be a grown-up, if that's possible. But as I say, happiness is elusive.

Which brings us to this book. It's a group of essays on a variety of topics. They may seem pretty random, but in fact there's an underlying theme, which is happiness. There's an essay about my parents' generation, which I believe somehow managed to be happier than mine, which was *not* supposed to happen. There's a letter to my grandson, imparting wisdom that I hope will enable him to have a happy and fulfilling life, or at least keep him from unnecessarily refrigerating his condiments. There's an essay on whether adopting modern technology—specifically Google Glass—can bring happiness (SPOILER ALERT: No). There's an essay on the never-ending funfest that is cable TV news, and one on David Beckham, who makes many people happy, but not me. There are reports on my trips to Brazil, which is basically a happy place, and Russia, which might be, but I had no idea what anybody was saying. There's some advice for my daughter as she reaches the age when she can legally drive in Florida, which makes her happy, although it terrifies me. And there's an essay on home ownership, which is the American dream, and a guaranteed way to not achieve happiness.

So that's the book. I hope you like it. I hope it makes you happy.

If not, there's always beer.

BITE ME, DAVID BECKHAM

* * *

* * *

I hate David Beckham. To understand why, take a moment to examine the picture below. It's my yearbook photo from my senior year at Pleasantville (N.Y.) High School, where I was a member of the class of 1965:



This photo has not been retouched. This is what I actually looked like when I was a senior in high school and desperate to be accepted by my peers, or at least not get beaten up by them.

Perhaps you are thinking: "Hey, don't be so hard on yourself! Back then *everybody* looked like a dweeb!"

I appreciate your thoughtful effort to console me, but no, not everybody did. Many people back then looked normal; some were actually quite attractive. I was not one of them, as you can clearly see. Remember: This was my *high school yearbook photo*, which means I was actively trying to look good

when it was taken. This was *the best I could do*.

Part of the problem was simple genetics. I was not a naturally good-looking male. Also I was a late developer puberty-wise. In the photo, I'm looking thoughtfully into the distance, as if I'm thinking: "I wonder what the future holds in store as I prepare to depart from high school and enter the next phase of my life." In fact I am thinking: "I wonder if I will ever develop body hair."

Speaking of which: Note my haircut. I appear to be wearing a malnourished weasel on my head. How did I achieve that look? I'll tell you how: *My dad cut my hair*. He was a Presbyterian minister. He had received extensive training in theology, but, incredibly, this training did not include a single course in hair design. Also he was bald.

Nevertheless, for years my dad cut my hair, and my brothers' hair, using electric clippers that he bought at a drugstore. In my opinion it is tragic that our elected officials, who are always making such a fuss about assault rifles, make no effort whatsoever to regulate the sale of electric hair clippers to civilians. In a sane world, my dad would never have been allowed to possess those things. He was a thoughtful, wise and kind man, but he had the hairstyling talents of an enraged barn owl. Consider, for example, this sector of my haircut:



What are we to make of these two strange, vaguely clawlike hair formations on my forehead? It's not at all clear what their role in the hairstyle is. Are they supposed to belong to the majority of my hair, drifting off to the side? Or are they supposed to be pointing down and forming bangs? Apparently they cannot decide! So they're just going to loiter there in the middle of my forehead, looking weird. *In my high school yearbook photo*. Which is the PERMANENT RECORD OF WHAT I LOOKED LIKE IN HIGH SCHOOL.

Not that I am bitter.

Now consider my eyeglasses:



I started wearing glasses in third grade. I was the first kid in my class to need them. I was also one of the smaller kids, which made me the ~~Puny Kid With Glasses~~, often sensitively referred to by the other kids* as “Four-Eyes.” My mom took me to get my glasses at the optical department of Macy’s in White Plains, N.Y., which offered basically one style of eyeglasses for boys, which should have been called “You Will Die a Virgin.”

Today, 1960s-style eyeglass frames are considered “retro” and are worn ironically by members of the hipster community. Ha-ha! How clever of you, hipsters! Maybe, to complete the “look,” you can also develop a case of retro 1960s-style acne, causing zits the size of hockey pucks to erupt randomly on your face, especially on those rare occasions when you had the opportunity to talk to an actual girl. Wouldn’t that be *ironic*?!

Not that I am bitter about that, either.

Anyway, my point is that in high school I was not physically attractive to the opposite sex, namely, girls.

“But Dave,” I hear you remarking, “looks aren’t everything! There are plenty of other qualities besides cuteness that girls look for in boys.”

Good point! And when I say “Good point!” I mean you are a stupid idiot. The girls of Pleasantville High School were not interested in “plenty of other qualities besides cuteness.” I know this because I HAD plenty of other qualities besides cuteness. Sarcasm, for example. I had a black belt in sarcasm. I went entire *years* without ever saying anything that was not basically the opposite of what I actually thought. Also I could make realistic farting sounds with my hands. These are just two of the many qualities other than cuteness I had in high school. None of them impressed girls. You will never hear a high school girl say about a boy, in a dreamy voice, “He’s so sarcastic!”

Here is an actual thing that happened to me in eleventh grade:

There was this girl I liked a lot, so I finally worked up the courage to ask her to go with me to the Halloween dance. Incredibly, she agreed, which meant I had an *actual date*. And it was a magical date indeed, right up until the moment when, as my date and I stood side by side watching people dance in the Pleasantville High gym, I happened to glance over to the *other* side of my date and saw that *she was holding hands with another boy*. Yes. Talk about an awkward moment! Talk about a long, horrendously uncomfortable ride home! Fortunately, I have totally gotten over this incident, and the hideous humiliating memory of it has not festered in my brain ever since, popping up unexpectedly at random moments to torment me like that alien creature that chased Sigourney Weaver around the spaceship. I’m over it! I’M TOTALLY OVER IT, YOU UNDERSTAND??

SO TO SUMMARIZE:

1. In my crucial formative adolescent years, girls liked boys who were cute.
2. I was not cute.
3. I am not at all bitter.

As far as I could tell, the only other quality, aside from cuteness, that girls found attractive in boys was athleticism. Guys who were good at sports, even if they were not cute, were a very big deal at Pleasantville High. In football season we had these Friday pep rallies where the entire student body would gather in front of the school at lunchtime and show their school spirit by sneaking off and smoking cigarettes.

No, that was only a small group of juvenile delinquents.* The rest of the student body participated

in cheers led by the PHS cheerleading squad, made up of peppy, attractive, popular girls who would have gone to the prom with a bag full of live tapeworms before they would have gone to the prom with me. This is another thing that I am not at all bitter about.

At the pep rallies, the football players stood on the front steps of the school wearing their varsity letter jackets and looking manly, while we civilian students urged them to fight, fight, fight for the Green and White. I would have *killed* to be standing on the steps wearing a varsity jacket and basking in the adoration of the student body, but I was not football player material. I was more the puny-kid-in-ugly-glasses-who-the-football-players-stuffed-into-the-trash-can-for-amusement material.

I was never good at sports. For a while I played Little League baseball, but I had very little interaction with the actual ball. I heard a lot of *yelling* about the ball, and I occasionally sensed that something—which I assumed was the ball—had just whizzed past me. But I almost never had any direct personal *contact* with the ball, which turns out to be crucial to succeeding in many athletic endeavors.

I was like that in every sport. I was not good at catching things or throwing things or even necessarily seeing things. I was not strong, and I could not run particularly fast. My main physical skill was wincing.

Nevertheless, at Pleasantville High I was so desperate to get a varsity letter and be adored by the student body, especially the girl members, that I went out for the track team. My thinking was that since there were many different events in track, I might find one that I was good enough at to get a letter. The event I finally settled on was the long jump, which seemed like a good candidate for me because it involved relatively little actual physical activity. You ran down a short runway, and when you reached this board, you launched yourself into the air, then you landed in a sawdust-filled pit. I figured, how hard could that be?

What I did not anticipate was gravity. Apparently some people contain more gravity than others, and it turned out that for a high school student, I had an extremely high level of gravitational attraction. I was probably affecting the tides. During track team practice I would run down the runway and launch myself from the board, then I would soar through the air for approximately the length of a standard matchbook cover before thudding back to Earth. *Sometimes I couldn't even jump far enough to land in the sawdust pit.* I possessed essentially the same natural leaping ability as the Lincoln Memorial. As a result I took a lot of good-natured ribbing from my fellow track team members. (“You suck.” “Why are you even on the track team?” “Who cuts your hair, an enraged barn owl?”)

So that was a discouraging time for me. But there’s an old saying among jockstraps: “When the going gets tough, the tough get going.” These words are very true. Sometimes, when we face adversity, instead of becoming discouraged, we decide to work harder, to show the doubters that they were wrong. This was not one of those times. The doubters were 100 percent correct: I sucked. So I quit the track team. The only way I will ever own a varsity letter is if I buy one on eBay.

(On a more positive note: I was elected Class Clown by the Pleasantville High Class of 1965. But that was not much consolation. Another thing you will never hear a high school girl say is, “When I lose my virginity, I want it to be with the Class Clown!”)

At this point I hear you saying, “But Dave, so *what* if you were an unattractive, non-athletic, four-eyed, hand-farting loser with zits and a bad haircut in high school? That was many decades ago! Since then you have gone on to enjoy unparalleled success as a minor humor celebrity. You have also made many friends, and apparently even had sexual relations with the opposite sex at least twice. Get over the past!”

Ha-ha! That’s easy for you to say, because, as we have already established, you are a stupid idiot.

The truth is, I will *never* get over high school. My self-image was permanently etched into my brain back then, and nothing that happened since has changed it. No matter how old I get, when I look in the mirror, this is what I see:



My point—and I admit this is pathetic—is that I am still insecure about how I look. *Deeply* insecure. And this insecurity gets much worse when there are good-looking, athletic guys around.

Which brings us to David Beckham. He is of course the world-famous former soccer star and underwear model who is considered to be the hottest man on Earth by essentially every woman on Earth, a group that unfortunately includes my wife, Michelle. I am not saying Michelle does not love me. What I'm saying is, when she says the words "David Beckham," she gets a certain look on her face that she does not get when she says other words, such as "delicatessen."

"But Dave," I hear you saying, because you apparently are unable to help yourself, "it's perfectly normal for a woman to harbor a harmless 'crush' on a handsome international superstar! It's not as though anything could ever come of it! How would your wife ever even have the opportunity to *meet* David Beckham?"

If you will be quiet for just a moment, I will tell you how. Michelle is a sportswriter. For her entire career, she has been going into locker rooms filled with large athletic naked men who are not wearing any clothes because—as I may have mentioned earlier—they are naked. I can live with that. My wife always tells me that she finds this situation to be very uncomfortable, and I believe her. I'm sure that if I were to walk into a room filled with athletic naked women, I would also be very uncomfortable, although in my case this would be because my eyeballs had fallen out of my head and rolled across the floor from staring so hard.

But here's the problem: One of the sports my wife covers is soccer. It happens that there is a business group seeking to bring a Major League Soccer team to Miami and build a stadium here. It further happens that the leader of that group—as you have probably guessed—is none other than: Danny DeVito.

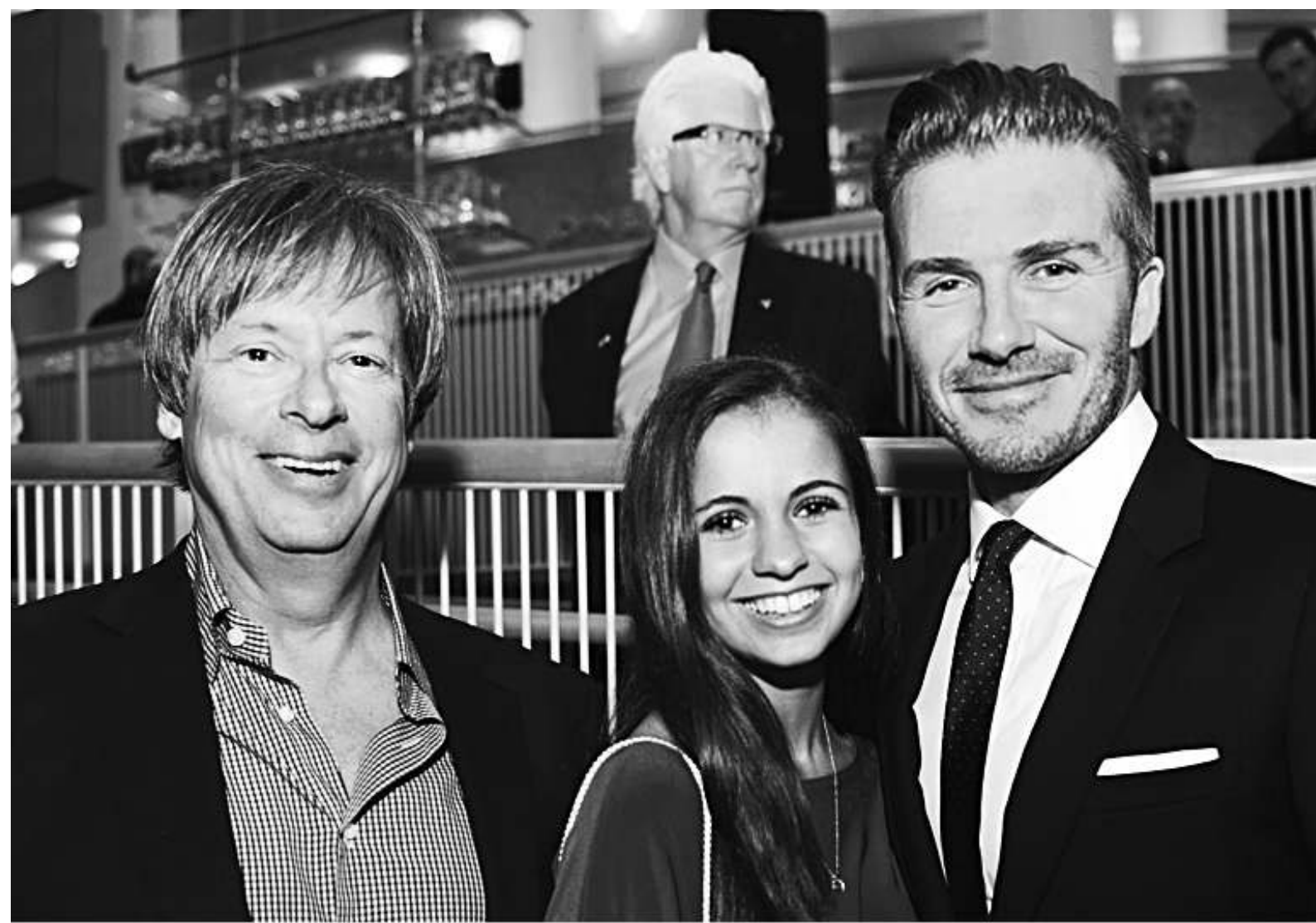
No, that's who I *wish* were leading the group. But of course it has to be David Freaking Beckham. As I write these words, he has spent the last few months ardently wooing Miami. Every time you turn on the TV, there's David Beckham in Woo Mode, attending government functions, meeting with civic groups, talking with students, rescuing babies from alligators, stopping hurricanes with his bare hands and just generally being handsome and charming and hugely popular in the greater Miami area.

This wooing process included a big downtown reception, to which Michelle, as the *Miami Herald* soccer writer, was invited. The good news was, she couldn't attend, because she was at the Sochi Olympics. The bad news was, she arranged invitations for me and our fourteen-year-old daughter, Sophie. Michelle thought it would be, quote, "fun" for Sophie to meet Beckham. That's right: *My wife deliberately arranged for her own daughter, who is female, to physically meet the world's leading sex symbol.*

So Sophie and I went to the reception. Many Miami dignitaries were there, including the mayor, and everybody was very excited. I knew this because people actually got there early, which *never* happens in Miami. This is a Latin town, and we operate on Latin time. If you're invited to, say, a July Fourth picnic scheduled to start at noon, you are considered on time if you arrive any time before Thanksgiving. Miami people are late to their own *funerals*.

But everybody arrived early for the reception. We stood around for twenty minutes in a fairly dignified manner. Then David Beckham came through the door, wearing a suit, and suddenly the dignitaries turned into a mob, swarming toward him as if he were the last lifeboat on the *Titanic*. I've never seen anything like it—all these alleged adults acting like teenage girls, desperately wanting to get next to Beckham, be photographed with him, touch him, and ideally bear his children. And those were the *men*. The women were even more aggressive.

Among those swarming toward Beckham was Sophie, who managed to get next to him for a photo. I am also in this photo, sort of:



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That's me, off to the left. I'm the one Sophie is clearly not even vaguely aware of. She wouldn't have noticed if I had been actively on fire. She is totally focused on David Beckham, Hottest Man on the Planet, who has his arm around her, causing her to beam with a look of ecstatic radiant happiness that I will never cause to appear on a female face.

Not that I am bitter!

In the photo I'm smiling, too, because that's what you do when your picture is being taken. Also I was happy for Sophie, because this was a big deal for her. But the truth is, when I look at that photo, this is what I see:



“But Dave,” I hear you saying because you will NOT SHUT UP, “so what if your daughter was thrilled by the opportunity to meet this handsome, charming international superstar with a much nicer suit than yours? At least your wife was safely in Russia and thus wasn’t there to be swept off her feet!”

No, that happened a couple of weeks later. After Michelle got back from Russia she received an email from one of David Beckham’s public relations people about setting up a meeting between him and Michelle. The email contained the following statement, which I am not making up:

I think David Beckham was thinking of a one-on-one with you, either in a small Herald conference room or your cubicle.

Yes! *David Beckham was thinking of a one-on-one with my wife!* Just the two of them, in her cubicle or a small conference room!

Needless to say, this email generated much excited discussion among my wife’s female friends, a few of whom voted for the small conference room. They also had many non-journalistic suggestions concerning pedicures, body waxing, etc.

For her part, Michelle, who knows I am deeply insecure, handled the whole thing very sensitively. She assured me that the meeting was going to be just another routine interview for her, although she did not explain why she wore a low-cut strapless evening gown.

No, really, she wore regular business attire to her meeting with Beckham, and when she got back she told me that it had been a strictly professional business encounter and, in all honesty, no big deal. She was obviously lying, but I appreciated the effort.

Anyway, that's why I hate David Beckham. I know it's not his fault that he looks the way he does, just wish he would go look that way in some other city. But as it stands now, he's going to be around Miami for years, and if I'm not careful, it's going to drive me crazy. I've given a lot of thought to what I should do about this, and I think the time has come for me, finally, to grow up—to get past my juvenile self-image hang-ups; to confront and overcome my insecurity; to stop obsessing pathetically over what I am not and instead learn to accept myself for who I *am*, which is plenty good enough.

So I've made up my mind.

I'm going out for the track team.

A LETTER TO MY DAUGHTER AS SHE BECOMES ELIGIBLE FOR A FLORIDA LEARNER'S PERMIT

* * *

Unless I Can Get the Law Changed

* * *

Dear Sophie—

So you're about to start driving! How exciting! I'm going to kill myself.

Sorry, I'm flashing back to when your big brother, Rob, started driving. You and I both love Rob very much, and he has matured into a thoughtful and responsible person. But when he turned sixteen and got his driver's license, he had a marked tendency to—there is no diplomatic way to put this—drive into things.

This was never his fault. I know this because whenever he drove the car into something, which was every few days, he would call me, and the conversation would go like this:

ME: Hello?

ROB: Dad, it wasn't my fault.

Usually what he had driven into through no fault of his own was the rear end of another car. Cars were always stopping unexpectedly in front of Rob for no reason whatsoever. Or possibly—we cannot rule it out—these cars were suddenly materializing from hyperspace directly in front of Rob, leaving him with no option but to run into them. Whatever the cause, it stopped happening when he got older and more experienced and started buying his own insurance.

My point, Sophie, is that just because the State of Florida thinks you can drive a car, that doesn't mean you actually can drive a car. As far as I can tell, after three decades on the roads of Florida, there isn't anybody that the Florida Department of Motor Vehicles *doesn't* think can drive a car. I cannot imagine what you would have to do to fail the driving test here.

DMV OFFICER: OK, make a left turn here.

TEST TAKER: Whoops.

DMV OFFICER: (*Writes something on clipboard.*)

TEST TAKER: Does that mean I fail the test?

DMV OFFICER: Nah, she's getting back up. You just clipped her.

You may think I'm exaggerating the badness of the drivers down here, Sophie, but that's because you haven't been at the wheel of a car on the Palmetto Expressway going 60 miles per hour, traveling forward—which, as you will learn, is considered to be the traditional direction for vehicular traffic on expressways—only to encounter a vehicle, undoubtedly operated by a licensed Florida driver, going

backward. And not on the shoulder, either. *In your lane*. This has happened to me more than once; it's how some Miami drivers handle the baffling problem of what to do when you miss an exit. When ESPN shows a NASCAR highlight in which drivers collide at 150 miles per hour and a dozen cars spin out in a whirling mass of flaming wreckage, my reaction is: "Big deal. They were all going the same direction. Let's see them attempt to drive on the Palmetto Expressway."

The State of Florida also does not seem to have a problem issuing licenses to drivers who are very elderly.

Q. How elderly are they?

A. Their first vehicle was a chariot.

I once had an eye exam during which the ophthalmologist was telling me about some of his older patients, who according to him were basically blind. He said: "I ask them, 'How did you get here?' And they tell me they drove. And I tell them, 'You can't drive. You can't see.' And they say, 'How else am I supposed to get here?' And I say, 'I don't know, but you can't *drive*, because you can't *see*. And then they drive home."

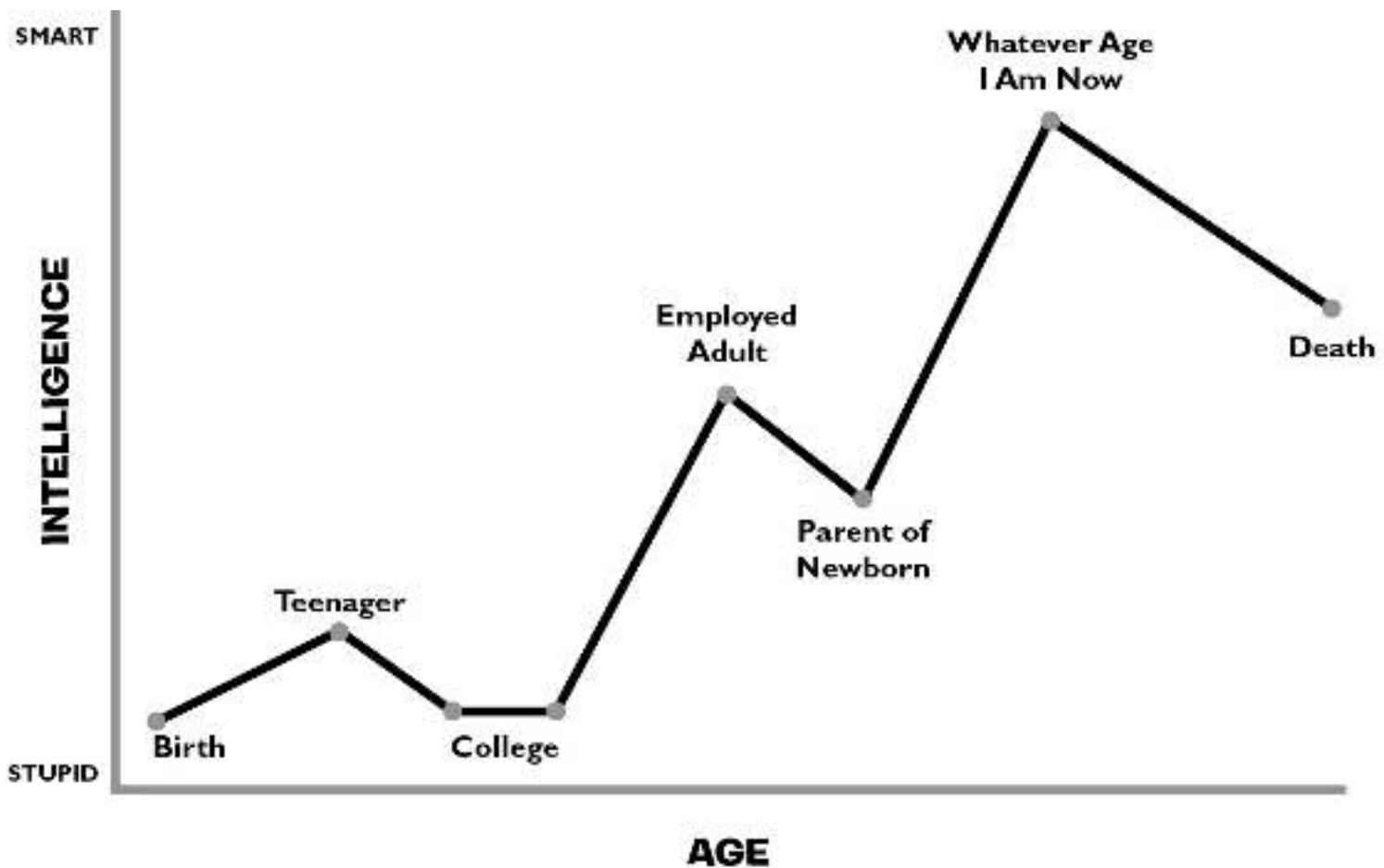
I believe him. I once had a short but terrifying ride on the streets of South Florida in the backseat of a car driven by an elderly man. He was a perfectly nice person, but he had basically the same level of visual acuity as a corn dog. So he outsourced the actual *seeing* part of driving to his wife, who sat in the passenger seat and did her best to keep him posted on what was going on out there in the mysterious region beyond the windshield.

"You have a green arrow," she'd say. "Go. Go. I said GO! No! Wait! Stop! STOP!!!"

I believe this Seeing Eye wife arrangement is not uncommon among elderly couples on the roads of South Florida. And if you're wondering why, if the wife can see, she doesn't just drive, the answer is: *The man drives*.

So to summarize, Sophie: Many people who lack the judgment and/or physical skills needed to safely microwave a burrito are deemed qualified by the State of Florida to operate a motor vehicle. When you get out on the road, you will be surrounded by terrible drivers. And guess what? *You will be one of them*. Yes, Sophie: You will be a bad driver, and not because you're careless or irresponsible, but because you're a teenager, and it is a physiological fact that at your stage of brain development, you are—to use the term preferred by researchers in the field of neurological science—"stupid."

There is no shame in this. All humans start out stupid, then gradually become more intelligent as they get older (with a few setbacks along the way) until they reach a certain age, after which they start becoming stupider again. Here's a scientific chart illustrating this phenomenon:



SOURCE: AMERICAN SCIENTIFIC ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

What does this chart tell us, Sophie? It tells us that according to science, even dead people are smarter than teenagers. Teenagers are barely capable of forming sentences. Allowing them to drive—especially if they are males—is insane.

“But Dad,” you’re thinking, “didn’t you drive when you were a teenage male?”

Yes I did. I got my New York State driver’s license in 1963, at age sixteen, and I spent many hours cruising on the highways and byways and occasionally the lawns in and around Armonk, N.Y. But that was different, Sophie, because I drove safely. I don’t mean “safely” in the sense of “carefully.” I was definitely your standard male teenage idiot. But I was a *safe* idiot, because I was driving the safest vehicle ever built: my mom’s 1961 Plymouth Valiant station wagon. It did not have modern safety features such as seat belts, air bags, antilock brakes or a computerized collision-avoidance system. What the Valiant had, which was better than any modern technology, was: *Inertia*. I would stomp violently down on the accelerator and basically nothing would happen for several lunar cycles, because the Valiant was no more capable of acceleration than a fire hydrant. This was the only car ever manufactured that traveled faster on the assembly line than under its own power.

You could not hit anything in a Valiant. Fully mature trees moved quickly enough to get out of its way. So it couldn’t do any damage even with me at the wheel. If I were in charge, today’s teenagers would be permitted to drive *only* if they drove Plymouth Valiant station wagons. Also I would require these teenagers to tune the Valiant’s AM radio to New York station WINS and listen to the late Murray the K play hit 1963 tunes such as “Da Doo Ron Ron” because THAT WAS MUSIC, DAMMIT!

Unfortunately, Sophie, I am not in charge, which means you’re going to be driving on roads teeming with modern high-speed automobiles operated by incompetent idiots such as (no offense) yourself. To prove that you’re qualified to do this, the State of Florida will make you take a test based on the information found in the official *Florida Driver’s Handbook*. For example, the test may ask

you to identify the Florida “standard” speed in business or residential areas. According to the *Handbook*, the “correct” answer, the one you should mark on your test, is 30 miles per hour.

But listen very carefully, Sophie: If you’re driving in Miami and do not wish to be the target of small-arms fire, **IN THE NAME OF GOD DO NOT GO AT A “STANDARD” SPEED OF 30 MILES PER HOUR.** Miami drivers go faster than that in a car wash. Likewise, the *Driver’s Handbook* will tell you that if you’re approaching a traffic light as it turns yellow, you should attempt to stop. But in Miami, doing that would cause your car to be instantly converted into a large sheet-metal origami sculpture by the seventeen cars immediately behind you.

My point, Sophie, is that there’s a big difference between how the *Florida Driver’s Handbook* says you should drive and how actual humans drive in Florida, especially South Florida. So to help you understand the mind-set you will encounter on the roads here, I’ve prepared this:

REALITY-BASED FLORIDA DRIVER’S Q & A

Q. If I arrive at an intersection at the same time as another motorist, who goes first?

A. You do.

Q. But what if . . .

A. There IS no “what if.” YOU GO FIRST.

Q. Florida law strictly prohibits texting while driving. Does this law apply to me?

A. Ha-ha! Of course not.

Q. If I stop at a red light, how will I know when it turns green?

A. You will hear honking behind you. This is your cue to start wrapping up your current text, unless of course it is important.

Q. I have noticed that some roads have more than one lane. What is the purpose of the extra lanes?

A. To provide a place for you to swerve into while texting.

Q. When I come to a stop sign, do I need to stop?

A. You personally?

Q. Yes.

A. No.

Q. How is the turn signal used in Florida?

A. It is used to indicate to other motorists that you do not realize your turn signal is blinking.

Q. Could it also be used to signal your intention to turn or change lanes?

A. Interesting! Nobody has ever tried that.

Q. What is the best kind of food to eat while driving?

A. Any food—such as a sandwich, turkey leg, oyster or Ding Dong—that can be eaten one-handed, so you still have a hand free for texting.

Q. What if an emergency situation arises that might require me to operate the steering wheel?

A. Use your forehead to honk the horn until the emergency has passed.

Q. My car's engine seems to have stopped and I hear a "burbling" noise. What could be causing this?

A. Are you a senior citizen?

Q. Yes.

A. You have driven into a swimming pool.

Q. I am a young male idiot who prefers to drive at a high rate of speed in densely populated areas while texting. How loud should my sound system be?

A. It should emit individual bass notes capable of killing a dog at 50 yards.

Q. I'm a middle-aged male, and I like to put on skintight, junk-displaying Lycra® cycling shorts and a skintight Lycra® cycling jersey covered with logos for corporations that don't actually pay me anything, then ride around with a large clot of other middle-aged pretend racers screwing up traffic. I don't have a question about driving, but I HAVE JUST AS MUCH RIGHT TO BE IN THIS Q & A AS ANYONE ELSE.

A. Everyone hates you.

Q. I've had a few drinks. How can I tell if I should drive?

A. Take this simple test: Are you wearing your underpants on your head?

Q. Not MY underpants, no.

A. Then you are good to go.

Q. What is all that shouting?

A. Are you a senior citizen?

Q. Yes.

A. You have struck a pedestrian.

Sophie, I know you think your old man is just kidding. I am not. Ask anybody who drives here: This Q & A reflects the actual situation on the roads of Florida far more accurately than the so-called *Florida Driver's Handbook*. But I didn't write this letter to make you nervous about driving here. I wrote it to make you *terrified* about driving here. Because I love you a lot, and I don't want anything bad to happen to you. I will do everything I can to make sure you're really ready to drive. I'm going

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