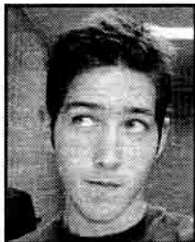


A Pedestrian by Accident

by Chris Ladd
MANAGING EDITOR

Things can change just like that. Just last week, for instance, I had a car. It wasn't the fastest, or best-looking car on campus. It wasn't 'tricked out' the way the kids like their automobiles these days. It wasn't sired of Audi or BMW, but it was nice. It had a left front tire, and exterior paneling all the way around it. It doesn't have those things now.



WHERE THE HELL IS WAYNE, ME

You see, somebody hit my car last week. I'm sure it wasn't the other driver's intention. But they hit it just the same. Some people get injured in accidents. Me, I got demoted, from a motorist to a pedestrian.

Losing your car is losing your independence. Where once stood a confident, outgoing person now stands a meek, watery-eyed remnant of that man, shyly groveling to his friends for a ride to the police station to fill out some forms. And all I lost was a car, and probably only for a couple of weeks.

But a car is so much more than transportation. A car is an excuse to break free from the societal fabric where we depend on each other. Driving, I am accountable to no one. In fact, a driver is a teenager whose parents have gone to visit relatives in Nebraska for the weekend. Certain rules have been set down, and there are accepted codes of behavior, but once Ma and Pa Police Cruiser are out of sight, it's a free for all. Cell phones become chic; speed limits and stop signs lose their respective heft. When "dad" comes home early because he forgot his electric toothbrush, we act



surprised, confused, and innocent - and pretend that nothing's wrong.

"Sorry, what seems to be the problem, officer? No, I don't know why you pulled me over. Really no idea. Yield? No, I didn't see it, where was it, back there? I did yield, didn't I? No? I didn't? Are you sure you told me to yield? Sure you can have my license and registration, why? What's that you're writing? A ticket? This is so stupid! Everybody's doing it! You always pick on me, when I'm not the only one, you know I'm not the only one! What's the matter with you guys! Give me your badge number, I'm telling Mom!"

And it's this adolescence that comes over us, this freedom, that I miss. I'm getting on in my teens now; in a few months I'll be 20, but when I used to get behind the wheel, I felt like I was 16, and freshly minted.

Now, since my car's been incapacitated by another, I feel like I'm fifteen, and waiting for my mother to pick me up outside the driver's ed clinic.

I am permanently stranded, and even though I didn't venture off campus often before, I sure do miss the option now. Ironically, they make you drive to the police station to file a report after your car is damaged beyond drivability. Hmph.

And the worst part is the waiting. When you have an accident, you have to deal with the other insurance company, which means an eternity of holding, listening to rejected Nintendo music from 1983 and a recurring message stating how valuable your business and patience and humanity is to the wonderful great super insurance giant. It means speaking with a disinterested claim manager and recounting, on the record, the exact course of events and your fathers' name, and your mothers name, and the favorite niece of your fifth grade teacher.

It means doling out your social security number, and your driver's license number, and insurance code number, and telephone number, and claim number. It means calling your

own insurance company, rinsing and repeating, and waiting some more while they play their own Mario music, and tell you in their own words how unique and special and important you are. It means waiting 3-5 business days while the people representing the person responsible for your new walking shoes decide whether or not they want to give you enough money to quit walking practice. Waiting for rides, waiting on hold, waiting for answers. Waiting is tough.

And waiting is all I've been doing; I really have no choice in the matter. When you're it, you're it. And when you're hit, you're hit. I'm like a dog now, a golden retriever if you will. I sit at home, sometimes I go for walks. I'm wholly dependent on the world, and I'm always up for a ride in the car. My life as a dog.

So, my thanks go to the folks at the United Services Automobile Association. Thanks for giving me a whole new outlook; a more pedestrian point of view.