

# **The McMorran Family 1923 - 2009: Driving Experiences and Licensing of 3 Generations**

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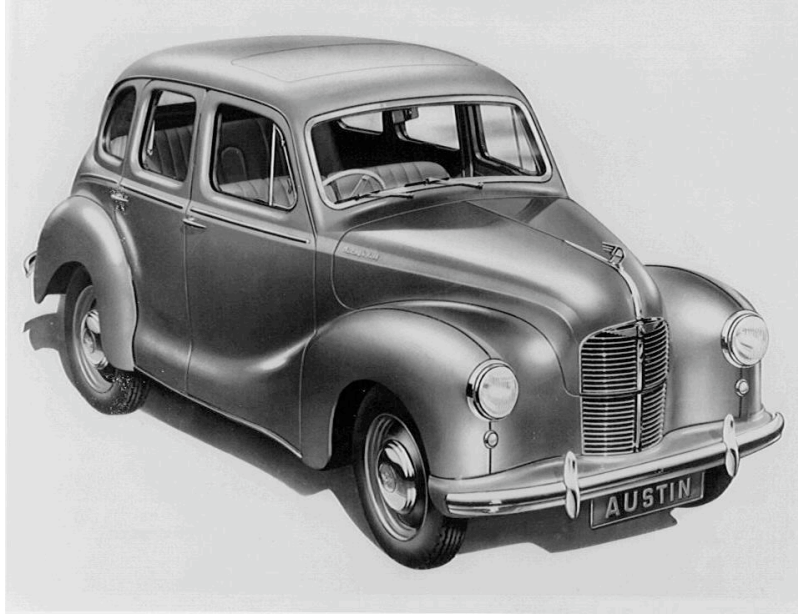
## Grandpa and Grandma: The Beginning

Edward Menzies McMorran was born in 1923 on the outskirts of Edinburgh, Scotland. At 86 years old he had a hard time remembering his childhood but was able to recall some memories. He used a story to explain how poor his family was. "Son, let me tell you about how we played football, soccer to you. We played in a field next to a crazy person asylum. One winter, one of our goals posts broke and we couldn't afford to replace it. There was this one fellow from the asylum that used to come and stand in the

middle of the field to watch us play. We thought he would make the perfect post, so we stood him there and I'll say he took his job very seriously. He wore all white and stood straight with his hands above his head. That's how poor we were son. Cars might as well have been bricks of gold<sup>1</sup>." His family never owned a car and used "foot power" to get around.

Grandpa would learn to drive a tractor in the military in order to move his Spitfire around. He was shown where the key was and then told to figure it out. That was the extent of his drivers training. He would have barely learned to drive when he was taught to fly the Spitfire during World War II. Needless to say, learning on the go was the motto. Moving to Canada in 1948 and using part of his military bonus he was able to buy his first car at the age of thirty<sup>1</sup>. The car, an Austin A40, was British because as he modestly says, "everything, and I mean everything made in England is superior, including me!<sup>2</sup>" He had learned how to repair all types of vehicles in the military and never trusted his cars to mechanics unless he was forced to. When asked how he got his license in Canada he says, "I didn't. I knew a lady who worked as a secretary at the transportation office and gave her the money to pick up my license. I could have been a bloody dog and they would have still given me a license.<sup>2</sup>" He needed the car for his work as a city manager of Edmonton. His wife rarely drove, "I was the man of the house. I drove and worked, she did the other house stuff. Why would a woman need to drive?<sup>2</sup>" She never had a license but did take the car out once and drove on the back streets.

Photo 1 – A 1948 Austin A40<sup>11</sup>



My Grandpa would own 17 vehicles over his life and explained that in the past cars needed to be exchanged every two or three years to avoid “rusting out the chassis”. The first five cars he owned were British and, “then I gave in to the cheaper local market, but remember British is better!<sup>1</sup>” Interestingly, he says his favorite car was his 1980 Lincoln Town Car, which he described as a limo<sup>1</sup>. It had all the “modern” features like leather, power lock, power windows, automatic transmission and shocks that “felt like floating on a pillow<sup>1</sup>”. He states that he has only had two tests for his driver’s license in his life. The first test was when he was 75 for his eyesight and the second at 80 for his physical condition, “I told the Doctor I was the picture of health and he still checked, I think he was an American!<sup>2</sup>”

Photo 2 – A 1980 Lincoln Town Car<sup>12</sup>



### Dad: The Middle

Edward and Margaret McMorran celebrated the birth of their first son, Keith Ian McMorran on June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1949. He was a healthy baby and took his first car ride in the family’s 1957 Chevy Bel-Air from the hospital to the family home on the edge of the Edmonton<sup>2</sup>. As my dad grew up so did the city around his house and by the mid 1960s their house was in the middle of the suburbs to the east of the city center. With his father being the sole source of income, his house was on the small side and he described his house as, “too small, especially with two annoying brothers.<sup>3</sup>” He thought of his family as belonging to the lower middle class, which may explain why they only owned one car.

Photo 3 – A 1957 Chevy Bel-Air<sup>13</sup>



My dad waited until he was 18 to begin learning to drive because before then he did not have a need for a car. He said he was able to walk to school, bike to his friend's houses and bus to anywhere outside that range<sup>3</sup>. To him vehicle ownership was financially outside of the realm of possibility and his dad was not going to let him use his car without strict rules. In my dad's house his father was the ruler and his mother the queen. When one of the subjects wanted to learn to drive the task fell to the ruler. Asking my dad what his father was like to learn from my dad started laughing and muttered, "strict, harsh, strict ... I understood why he had made a good military man."<sup>3</sup> He recounts that the 1957 Bel-Air was a "tank, a very unexciting car"<sup>4</sup> while the Chevrolet company described it as a "trim, clean, lean look."<sup>5</sup> He remembers that he got the modern equivalent of a learner's license at 18 after taking a written test, "we didn't have your multiple choice touch screen tests, and we used real pens and papers. Imagine that kid!"<sup>4</sup> On the test day my dad says, "I had learned to drive from Grandpa on the Bel-Air but had to take my test on Charlie's (family friend) half ton because Grandpa needed his car to go to work."<sup>4</sup> He tells me that the whole process took about 6 months because they owned only the one car. When I probed what he did after he got his license, he responded, "got in the passenger seat and was driven home by Grandpa."<sup>4</sup> Though he had his license he seldom got to drive but remembers on weekends he could drive it to the carwash after Grandpa had taken Grandma to do the shopping. He did not remember his mother ever driving it, "she was chauffeured by Grandpa"<sup>4</sup> for her chores and bussed to other social events.

After getting his license he rarely used a car but distinctly remembers one day when he was allowed to pick up Charlie from the airport. "Charlie always had several

nice cars. He owned this beautiful Rolls Royce, maybe a 55'. I got to pick him up and I pushed it to 100 miles per hour on the way there. I just wanted to see if it could do it and if you tell him that you're dead!<sup>4</sup> My dad looks up at the roof as he remembers that day, "the car had a wood grain dash, plush seats and a powerful engine."<sup>4</sup> One can almost see him re-experiencing that day, "For a 4 door it could really hustle. You felt like you were Superman flying down the road."<sup>4</sup> The power of a car on a teenager exemplified. After fifty years his first experience of automobile freedom is fresh in his mind.

Photo 4 – A 1955 Rolls Royce, not going 100 mph<sup>14</sup>



My dad would move out in 1969 to attend University of Alberta and bought himself a Yamaha 350 motorcycle. "It was cheap, about \$300, but my parents hated it, (laughs) that's how I got my 60' Simca, a French car."<sup>6</sup> He tells of one day being called to the house and in the driveway was the Simca. He didn't have any say in the matter, it was a car, it worked and most importantly wasn't a motorcycle. My dad did not complain, "it was a car," he explains, "it had four wheels and an engine that worked."<sup>6</sup> He had wanted a Thunderbird coupe because his friend owned one and, "you could get

girls with that car.<sup>6</sup>” However, he wasn’t a car person himself, “cars are just transportation<sup>6</sup>” but then my mom enters the picture.

Photo 5 – A 1960 Simca<sup>15</sup>



Photo 6 – A 1960 Thunderbird<sup>16</sup>



### Mom: the Middle

Diane Jean Harbin was born June 6, 1949 in Lloydminster, Alberta. At the time Lloydminster was a smaller town of around 10,000 on the border of Alberta and Saskatchewan. The youngest child of Jean and Walter my mom’s upbringing was the polar opposite of my dads. Mom was raised on a rural farm where her closest neighbour was 2 miles away and the closest family with kids was 4 miles away. Mom was isolated from the city by 20 miles and remembers her dad always had a truck<sup>7</sup>. He would use the



truck for getting to town for chores, getting to the fields and tending to his animals. She, just like my dad, considered herself lower middle class and money went towards tractors not cars<sup>7</sup>.

At the tender age of eleven my mom learned to drive on her dad's precious 1952 Ford 1 ton truck. She was tall for age being 5'6" at eleven and her dad felt it was time for her to help out with more chores. She already was responsible for milking the cows, tending the pigs, gardening, cooking and cleaning but being able to drive would allow her to do a whole new set of chores. She tells of how the, "the double clutch was horrific<sup>7</sup>", requiring great mental focus to conquer. All this while her dad, "who was more patient than Grandma but no Buddha,<sup>7</sup>" was breathing down her neck. Her father did all of the teaching because, "that's just the way it was.<sup>7</sup>" The responsibility of teaching the children to drive during this generation fell to the men of the family. They were considered the experts on automobile technology and women rarely drove. Three years after learning to drive she would apply for her beginners license, as she recalls, "Oh, I got that book and read it front to back; I could have quoted the entire book before the test.<sup>7</sup>" She was forced to "learn" to drive, though she had been driving for 3 full years, before she could apply for her full driver's license at sixteen years old.

Photo 7 – A 1952 Ford 1 ton truck<sup>17</sup>





With Alberta having given her unrestricted driving privileges, her dad wanted her to pass one final test. He took her to the steepest hill on their farm, at a ~15% grade probably the steepest hill in Alberta, and “made (her) drive up it then and there, without any time to think. And I did it too! I was a mess, sweaty and white knuckled because that road was really dangerous.<sup>7</sup>” Now with her father’s blessing she could drive to school when she had events after, a huge advantage over waiting for a bus home. The school was 12 miles away from home and if you missed the bus you had to wait for your parents or start walking. She suddenly laughs and admits, “There was a boy I liked. One day I let him borrow the truck while I was at school. Little rat took it to another town and someone spotted it, and then told my dad. Did I ever get a tongue lashing after that! It was our family’s only truck and I had lent it out without his permission. He wasn’t even that cute.<sup>7</sup>” The ability to drive had opened up my mom’s dating opportunities substantially but she knew there were better places than Lloydminster to find a husband.

In September of 1967 my mom was accepted to nurses training at the University of Alberta. Her proud father drove her and her luggage there in the 1952 Ford. She couldn’t afford a car at first and didn’t need one because everything was within walking distance. She utilized the same bus system that my dad had found so convenient but generally walked. In 1970 Mom met Dad after being taught a lesson in the operating room by a doctor because she had thrown the garbage into the laundry shoot. Dad was an operating room orderly and would tease all the student nurses. At the time Mom was in tears about being disciplined and Dad, the smooth talker he was, teased her until she told him, if he stopped she would go on a date with him<sup>8</sup>.

## Mom and Dad: The End

My Dad picked up my mom for their first date in his “parents approved<sup>6</sup>” Simca. The plan was to go for pizza but it was the journey to the store that my mom remembers the most. “His car couldn’t get into second gear. We drove under 20 the whole way there on the back streets”, my dad pipes up, “It was the transmission cable. It broke all the time. I think it was aircraft cabling converted to car cabling. I must have fixed it a dozen times.<sup>9</sup>” The rest of the date is lost in years of fog but that memory has stuck. Grandpa believes if his son had only listened to him and bought a British car that wouldn’t have happened<sup>9</sup>. My dad takes a moment to remind him that he forced my dad to buy the Simca<sup>9</sup>.

My Dad says he really learned the most about cars and driving from his roommates Lorne and Laurie. These two brothers played with everything on their cars and bikes, “they must have owned a dozen vehicles between them,<sup>9</sup>” recalls my dad. He would get instruction from Lorne on how to fix anything but Lorne would never assist with his hands, only his knowledge. Laurie was the wild brother, “he was sent to England by his parents to get away from drugs but that only expanded his drug horizons.<sup>9</sup>” My mom coos, “he could have melted butter. He was dainty and good-looking,<sup>9</sup>” to which my dad responds, “and me? What about me?<sup>9</sup>” They begin to reminisce about Laurie and a story comes out about a rock quarry outside Edmonton. Dad explains, “at the quarry we used to race our bikes and cars in circles. It was abandoned and Laurie had this 34’ Ford Coupe that he didn’t like anymore. We jammed it in gear with a rock, I think and used a cut broomstick on the accelerator...lined that sucker up for the quarry edge and ran.

Some poor guy probably found that car years later at the bottom of the lake. I think we had to walk home that day. Guess we didn't think that one out too carefully.<sup>9</sup>

Photo 8 – A 1934 Ford Coupe<sup>18</sup>



### Me: The Future

I was born at my mom's workplace, the Royal Jubilee Hospital, on January 16, 1986. We owned four cars while I grew up and when I went for my learner's license at 16 we owned two vehicles. My family would be in the upper middle class but as my mom put it, "at least we weren't DINKs; you know double-income-no-kids."<sup>9</sup> I took a 40-question touch screen test after reading the Young Driver's Roadsense<sup>10</sup> book the night before. I passed first try and left with my Learner's permit. There were several restrictions on my permit, I had to have an adult over 25 in the car, was only allowed one passenger, zero blood alcohol allowed and could drive between 11pm and 5am<sup>10</sup>. Both of my parents taught me to drive and though my dad claims full credit, I learned more from my mom than him. She was calm and having driven for 45 years was the more experienced of the two. I had to wait 1 year until I could get my class 5 drivers' license

and that required a practical road test. I again passed on the first try and with my parents gone for the next two weeks on vacation was able to drive a lot in those weeks.

My first day of driving was long, probably 12 hours of driving. I went and picked up four of my friends to cruise around with in my 1989 Mazda 626. I was the oldest amongst my friends and the only one with an available car. We drove around to all the places we had never been able to get to. We stopped at Shawnigan Lake, Thetis Lake and Sooke Potholes. I drove us all night with no destination in mind; we just drove for the fun of driving. I put 750 kilometers on the car in the first 4 days of being able to drive, all without my parents around or their permission. Six years later I look back on my driving experience and could not imagine changing a thing. I pity those who could not experience the joys of automobile freedom. Having learned so much from my family I think I'll take them out for a drive along the water front tonight and stop by the Beacon Drive In for ice cream cones.

Photo 9 – 1989 Mazda 626, exactly how I remember it<sup>19</sup>



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## McMorran Family Cars

### *Grandpa: 1923-2009*

1. P7350 Spitfire (airplane)
2. 1948 Austin A40
3. 1953 Ford Consul
4. 1956 Oxford Wagon
5. 1959 Austin A99
6. 1956 Austin A95 Wagon
7. 1963 Chevy Sedan
8. 1962 Volkswagen Camper Van
9. 1966 Plymouth Wagon
10. 1966 Dodge Van
11. 1976 Renault R5
12. 1978 Plymouth Volare Wagon
13. 1975 Jeep Wagoneer
14. 1980 Lincoln Town Car (favorite)
15. 1987 Jeep Cherokee
16. 1991 Dodge Minivan
17. 2000 Toyota Sienna

### *Mom and Dad: 1949-2009*

1. 1952 Ford Truck
2. 1967 Yamaha 350 motorcycle
3. 1960 Simca
4. 1963 Ford Cortina
5. 1963 Acadia Station Wagon
6. 1970 Dodge Fargo Van
7. 1977 Honda Gold Wing motorcycle
8. 1980 GLC
9. 1983 Dodge Maxivan
10. 1989 Mazda 626
11. 1972 Empress RV (favorite for my dad)
12. 1992 Acura Integra
13. 1990 Honda Accord
14. 2003 Mazda Protégé (favorite for my mom)

### *Kyle: 1986-2009*

1. 1989 Mazda 626 (bought off my parents)
2. 2002 Mazda Protégé (favorite and I bought it 1<sup>st</sup>)