

Casual FridaysTM

It's not all about finance, even at WomensWallStreet.com. Each Friday we'll run an article or story about one of the many other aspects of women's lives. Some of the stories will tug at your heartstrings and some of them will tickle your funny bone, but all of them will hit a chord.



Good Night Sweet Princess

By Margie Goldsmith

9/15/2005

I'm driving in my baby, a 911 Porsche Cabriolet. We buzz past the exits for Newburgh, then New Paltz, slowing down to a sweet hum at Kingston, where we leave the New York State Thruway. It's our last drive together, and although the ride is perfect, my stomach feels like it's grinding gears as we approach Woodstock, where we will say goodbye.

She is a sleek sports car, bought new for me in 1986 by a man who would soon become my husband. He gave me the Porsche even before the engagement ring. On our first date, he told me his Alfa Romeo had major transmission problems, that he needed a new car and that he planned to buy a Mercedes convertible. I couldn't hide my disappointment.

"What car do you like?" he asked.

"A Porsche 911 Cabriolet. I've wanted one all my life."

Off we went to the dealership where he ordered an iris-blue metallic 911, the color of the Colorado sky. If I wasn't smitten before, this certainly sealed the deal.

He surprised me with vanity license plates that read "4 MARGIE," and I knew I was in love. She was my princess. I'd never driven a five-speed floor shift and couldn't believe I could accelerate to 100 in the same time it took me to say, "Go, Baby."

Living in the city didn't give this serious road machine enough exercise, so we cruised the turnpikes, taking turns at the wheel. One time, when I reached into the glove box for a bridge-crossing token, my fingers curled around a sparkling diamond-solitaire engagement ring. As I elatedly put it on my finger, the refracted light glittered like bursting sparklers on the leather steering wheel. Now I had two jewels.

For the next 11 years, my husband and I lived happily with our love child, the Porsche. In the fall, we turned on the heater, put down the top and drove the country lanes under tree canopies of bright red and yellow leaves. In winter, even though the 911 hated snow, we made it up icy hills. In spring, the top came back down and we cruised past irises and daffodils bursting in bloom. And in summer, we slathered on suntan lotion and sang Beach Boys songs at the top of our lungs.

But sometime during our 12th year, our marriage, like the little nicks and dings that appeared on the Porsche, began to lose its luster. It felt as though we'd begun to travel down separate roads. The front seat of the Porsche, once a place where we'd been completely vulnerable and admitted our deepest desires to each other, now felt more like an isolation cell. And one night, driving home from a party, I realized I didn't want to be with him anymore.

The parting was amicable and he was extremely generous, giving me full custody of the Porsche. The 911, accustomed to valet parking and garages, began a new life in parking lots and on streets. When I joined a hiking club, the gas pedal responded to my muddy hiking boots as easily as it had to my designer high heels.

I met a man who loved the outdoors, so we piled our backpacks into the car and took the Porsche to the Adirondacks for her first winter camping trip. We drove up and down rutted dirt roads, looking for the trailhead. When we returned to the city, my new man rubbed, scrubbed and Simonized the Porsche until she shone like a polished trophy.

But time had passed and my princess was becoming a bit of a dowager. First the automatic door locks broke, then the temperature sensor and then the air conditioning. Yearly maintenance jumped from a few hundred dollars to thousands. Finally came the catastrophic event: I pushed the button to put down the automatic top and the motor made a strange whirring sound. The top wouldn't budge. The mechanic said it needed new motors that would cost \$1,700.

"I don't even use the car that much. How could this happen?" I asked.

"It's an old car," he said. "You'll have it back in a week."

"A *week* to install new motors?"

He shrugged. "We don't keep old parts in stock."

Would the transmission go next? The clutch? The Porsche had been in my life for 17 years. She'd never ailed before, but I realized I was spending more and more time and money on repairs. It was time to let go.

I turn off the road and head into a driveway to meet the new owner, a 60-ish man with a white ponytail, who tells me the car is for his midlife crisis. I unscrew the "4 MARGIE" license plates, peel off my EZ Pass and open the glove box to pull out the title.

Suddenly I start to get cold feet -- how can I let my baby go? I tell myself that I left my marriage when it stopped working, and this is no different. I do a final inspection and pull out something stuck in the back of the glove box. It is a tarnished token. I hold it in my palm for just a minute and then toss it out.

New York City-based freelancer Margie Goldsmith is contributing editor of Elite Traveler and writes for National Geographic Traveler, Outside, Modern Bride, Healing Lifestyles, Distinction and Art & Antiques. She has hiked, biked, paddled, climbed, scuba dived, done marathons and triathlons, and luxuriated in 92 countries on six continents and written about them all.