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 The Ford Windstar was a vehicle produced and distributed by the Ford Motor Company between the years 1995 and 2003 (Wikipedia, 2013). It was created as the replacement model for the Ford Aerostar minivan, whose production was discontinued in 1997. In 2004 the Windstar line of Ford minivans was rebranded and relaunched as the Freestar, which continued to be produced until being discontinued in 2007. All vehicles in the Windstar family were produced in Oakville, Ontario, Canada before being distributed to dealerships across the continent.

*There is a scar on my left wrist. It has a slight crescent shape, with the far end tapering out as it travels the width of my hand. The inner end of the scar ends in a sharp point and is a deeper purplish pink. It feels unnaturally smooth compared to the rest of my skin.*

 In 2003, the last year that the vehicle was produced, my family bought a Windstar from a Ford dealership in the Hudson Valley region of New York, mostly likely in Hyde Park or one of its nearby towns. The golden-green vehicle was bought to accommodate our growing family and to replace our old minivan which was beginning to grow cramped and falling into disrepair due to years of abuse transporting a pack of rowdy kids to hockey games and other events over the years.

*Growing up, I never really liked snow that much. Sure, I liked having it around as when we got enough of it school would be canceled and we would have a snow day. I cannot remember actually like being in it though. I remember multiple times where I would be locked out of my house after school in the winter and having to find ways to entertain myself and keep warm until my mom or dad got off work, or my brother got home and let me in; the cold, wet snow certainly was not of any help to me then.*

 There is not a lot to say about this van. It served its primary function of allowing our family of six to get where they needed to go. We would take the van to the mall when we wanted to go shopping, and we would take the van to the grocery store when it was time to buy more food. We would take the van when we went camping and we would take it when we went fishing, something I never really enjoyed. We took the van when we went out to buy doughnuts after church. This is not to say that we did not have other vehicles, as we also had a car, but if it was a family event or the family was going somewhere, we took the van.

 My dad used to bring my brother and me to The Dragon’s Den, a local hobby shop in the Poughkeepsie area, to play Warhammer 40,000, HeroClix, and MageKnight, using the extra room afforded by the Windstar to transport our respective collections and armies stored in a large quantity of shoeboxes and tackle kits. We were well known there, my brother playing strange and rare armies and rarely losing a match. Our parents would drop us off there for hours while we played and entered into tournaments. I was never as good a strategist as my brother, but it was unusual for us to walk away with at least two prizes. At the end of a hard day’s fighting, we would load back up into the van and be whisked away.

*I always thought that having a scar would be kind of cool. I thought they made you look more interesting or distinguished. Sub-zero from Mortal Kombat had a scar and I used to imagine how I would look with a jagged scar running down my face and across my eye, just as his scar ran across his. Now that I have one, I cannot help but feel as if does not belong. It is foreign and weird and not right*.

 The van had a drop-down screen and onboard VHS player, which made long trips significantly more enjoyable. We would frequently watch those old tapes that collected one or two episodes of a show on drives as the 30 minute segments made them ideal for trips as you could easily watch a few and then be done, whereas if we started a movie we would usually not be able to watch the entire thing in one sitting. On the day we bought our first dog, we watched the entire previous night’s broadcast of Adult Swim on that small screen. That screen made the move from New York back to Chippewa Falls a lot more bearable and probably saved my parents a great deal of grief over that two day trip.

 The inside of the van had a strange smell. It was kind of earthy and somewhat musky. I always described as “smelling like night crawlers”, a reference to one of our fishing trips where one of us had spilt a container of them that we were using as bait, pouring worms and dirt all over the interior of the van. Over the years it gathered quiet the collection of smells. A lot of meals where eaten inside of that van, and with them came a lot of mess. The most recent I can remember is having a full bag of movie theater fall over and then no one cleaned it up, leaving it to sit there for a week, all the while having that buttery popcorn smell work its way into the cloth of the seats and floor.

 *Winter and summer were always my least favorite months, however while summer could get so ungodly hot there were still lots of fun things that you could do, but the same cannot be said about winter. The ice and snow ruin everything for me and I hate it. I hate walking in it, I hate the mud and potholes it makes when it melts, and I especially hate driving in it.*

 When I started my sophomore Viterbo University down in La Crosse, my parents gave me the Windstar. “Gave” is probably too strong of a word to use as they made it quite clear that they still owned it, but from then on it became my primary means of transportation and at that point was essentially mine. I used it like you would any other vehicle, to get place to place. I drove to work and to school, and I would take it and my friends to the beach practically every day in the summer. There really was not any special meaning behind it for me; it was just a tool to be used to go places.

 I did eventually come to like having the van. At first I would have preferred our old Nissan Sentra, another remnant from our lives spent in New York, but that was “given” to my sister to be her car. However, the van was large enough to be able to hold and transport most of my things, which was why my parents passed it along to me when I moved into an apartment in La Crosse, so that I could move myself in and out without them having to make the three hour round trip to come and help. I also found the digital lock to be very convenient as it allowed me to safely lock my keys inside the van in situations where I did not want to or could not have them with me, such as when I was at work, swimming at the beach, or floating down the river.

 *When I look at my scar, I think of many things. It reminds me to take things slow and carefully, something that is easy to overlook when you are running late or in a hurry. It makes me think of fear and how I would joke about getting into an accident to relieve my tension. It makes me think of how lucky I was that I was able to stop when I did, and how easily I could have plummeted off the edge. I think of how my much it burnt at the time and how sure I was that there would be a mark.*

As time went on and the kids in my family grew up, we started to buy more and more vehicles, which is part of the reason my parents were so willing to part with the Windstar. Each of us had a vehicle that we called our own. I had the Windstar, which we affectionately called “the van”, my dad had an Expedition, and later a Pathfinder when that broke down. My brother drove a little Ranger, and my sister drove that red Nissan from New York. My mother, who worked at home for the past many years, even had a vehicle in case she needed to go out during the day, a Pontiac Bonneville. The only person in my family who did not have something was my little brother who was too young to drive, but it is more than likely that he would end up with a hand-me-down car when he turned sixteen and our family rotated a new vehicle into our possession. It is a wonder we were even able to house all of the vehicles, our garage and driveway not being that big.

 *Driving in the winter is one of the things that stresses me out the most in my life. On a good day it is not so bad, but this is Wisconsin and in the winter the roads are usually covered in some combination of snow, ice, or slush. That feeling of the loss of control when you hit a slippery patch or get stuck in a groove is one of the most terrifying things I have ever experienced, but thankfully it usually does not last that long. Driving in those icy conditions had never been my strong suit and every year I would end up either in a ditch or stuck someplace, like the middle of the intersection. Thankfully nothing serious ever really happened and I would joke that I got my winter mishap out of the way and it would be smooth sailing from here.*

 The front windshield of the van became littered with stickers, registration tags, and passes for admittance to various state parks. Although the lower edges of the windshield became cluttered, my parents left those stickers there, or at least parts of them, as a way of remembering all the places it had taken us, a sort of trophy or badge proving that we were well traveled. We took the van across country, driving to Mount Rushmore every year for four years to meet up with my aunt who lived in Nebraska, stopping only when she also moved back to Wisconsin. We even took the van out of country on occasion, taking short-cuts through Canada on our way out of New York when we would come to visit family.

 *There was a big puff of smoke and a sharp pain in on my hand. I remember peeling of my glove and seeing where the heat of the explosion had melted the exposed flesh on my wrist. The pain had not really started to kick in yet, adrenaline having dulled my senses. After the initial shock wore off, I climbed out of the van to survey the damage around me. As I looked around, I could not quite make sense of what had happened; there was a pile-up of cars and there was no gap indicating where my van should have been, just a trail of mostly cosmetic destruction. I did not even realize how close I had come to flying off of the bridge until someone pointed it out to me, my only thought at the time being “do not crash”.*

That golden-green Ford Windstar was one of the few significant things my family brought back with us from New York. That thought had never really occurred to me until my mom pointed it out to me. All that we really have left from that time is the little red Nissan, our second dog Milly, and my little brother. Apart from those and our memories, there is only a smattering amount of objects that hold no real sentimental value to remind us of the lives we once had.

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 To my family, the Ford Windstar minivan itself did not hold that much value apart from the functionality it served. However it is the memories of the things that we used the van for that had meaning. Up until the point where we moved back to Wisconsin from New York, my family only had two vehicles, the Windstar and the Nissan Sentra. As mentioned in the story above, my family primarily used the Windstar for family functions while the Nissan was used for trips that only select members of the family would take. However, after we moved back to Wisconsin and started to acquire more vehicles, the Windstar took more of a niche role as the vehicle for long distance trips as it had better gas mileage than did the roomier Expedition and Pathfinder that would replace it as the vehicle used in the majority of our family outings. Up until the point where it was given to me, the van primarily sat in our garage collecting dust, and even afterwards its value was only significant to me because it was the only vehicle I had was able to take out on a whim. It is primarily because of the fact that the van itself did not hold significant value to our family, but rather the memories associated with it, that I would place our usage of it closer to how Maggie thought of the quilt in Walker’s “Everyday Use” (1973) than I would to how Dee viewed it.

 The passages about my scar are also somewhat in reference to Maggie in “Everyday Use” (Walker, 1973). Like Maggie, I gained my scar through an event that brought both change and destruction. Although the totaling of my car and wound from the airbag exploding pale in significance to of being severely burnt as your house burns down around you, the memories of both events became seared into our flesh and serve to remind us things that once were. The scar passages were also in part a reference to O’Brien’s “The Things We Carried” (1986), along with the passages about winter. My disdain for winter and fear of driving in the snow are emotional luggage that I constantly carry, much like the items and thoughts that the soldiers carried. Whereas before my accident my fears existed solely in my head and the jokes that I would make to relieve the tension I felt, my scare is a permanent reminder of the danger of driving in winter conditions. It is a sort of grim totem, mocking me, saying “all of your fears were right” and “you knew this was coming and you couldn’t do anything to stop it”.

References

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