

FIRST PERSON

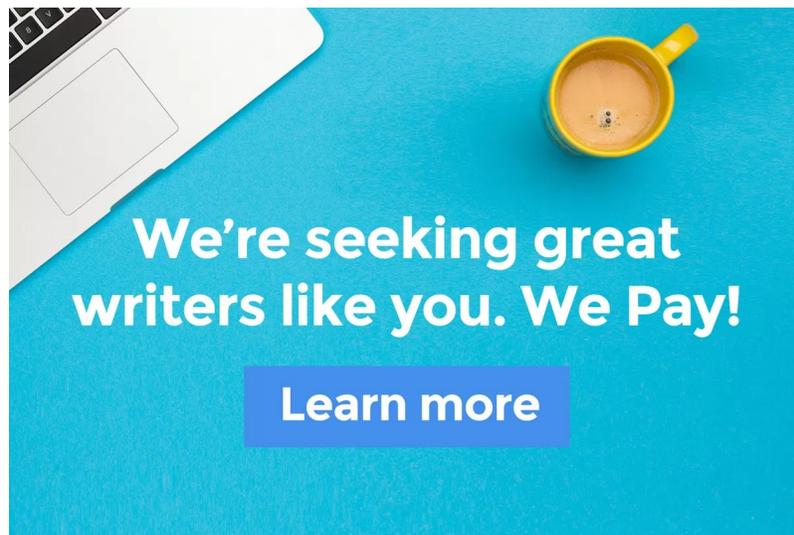
Challenging Myself to Pursue My Passion in an Electric Car

BY
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[April 18, 2017 \(April 18, 2017\)](#)

“It’s electric, boogie woogie woogie.” Yes, I played the Electric Slide song the day I first drove my kids to school in our new electric car, a Chevrolet Volt. I wish the other moms could see how excited my kids were to be bopping around to that energizing tune in our new fuel efficient vehicle. The reality is that I am totally the odd mom out by not driving a large gas-guzzling SUV through the school parking lot every day.

I feel like it was easier to be a mover and a shaker in college and during my twenties before I had kids. I have long been passionate about environmental issues. In high school I was inspired to protect the planet when I cleaned up a local river. That moment led me on a path of pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees in environmental policy, and working in the field of environmental communications.

I still focus on environmental issues through my writing, volunteer work, and daily choices. I actually wrote my master’s thesis on fuel efficient vehicles about 20 years ago, so there was no question in my mind that I would be driving a green car eventually.



Being a parent can sometimes make it difficult to still pursue our core passions and beliefs because we get so distracted by our kids' every need. I was a very overwhelmed new mother and I admit that the last concern I had was all the waste that my bundle of joy was producing. Can we say hundreds of dirty diapers filling up landfills? I was exhausted, stressed, and in my own parental world – not the best time to be focusing on protecting the world.

Now that my children are a bit older and more self-sufficient, I have returned to my environmental roots. By driving an electric car, I am walking the walk (well, really “driving the drive”) and doing what is in my control to help reduce my impact on the natural environment. Our personal vehicles are a major cause of climate change, accounting for about one-fifth of all United States emissions. Cars and trucks spew around 24 pounds of carbon dioxide and other global-warming gases for every gallon of gas. By choosing to drive an eco-friendly car like a hybrid or plug-in electric, we can really make an impact in reducing our carbon footprint to hopefully prevent devastation like extreme weather events and flooding from sea level rise.

I have used the electric car and other green choices such as recycling, gardening, and buying organic products as a teaching tool for my children. They are as revved up as me to know that we are doing something positive for the environment. They are growing up with messages about how they can help to make the world a better place, even if it is only one small step at a time.

Although I am proud and comfortable with my decision to drive electric, I definitely feel like I stick out in the parking lot as that “different” mom. Or maybe those other moms aren't even paying attention to notice my car isn't some expensive, fancy model. No matter what, my interests and views on this issue sometimes make me feel like an outsider. Do you ever feel this way as a parent? Ironically, parenthood can sometimes bring us back to those days of junior high when we felt so out of place and as if nobody understood us.

I have had to train myself to move past these feelings in order to pursue what I believe in, and to be a positive role model for my children. I know that I can't control which cars other parents decide to drive or how they raise their children, but I hope to serve as a mentor to my children – and possibly other parents in time – when it comes to making environmentally-conscious decisions. Maybe they will eventually start to see my “sticking out as a sore thumb” as something interesting to ask me about.

How Can We Challenge Ourselves to Pursue Our Passion as Parents?

1 | Don't be afraid to strike up a conversation about your interests with other parents.

I was pleasantly surprised last weekend at a birthday party when I discovered that another mom was trained as a scientist and believes as strongly in science education as I do. It may come to a shock to you, but many moms have a fascinating background once you peel away the layers that parenthood has buried them in.

2 | Seek out like-minded parents and teachers at your school.

Pay attention to t-shirts or bumper stickers that can indicate to you what someone prioritizes. I have connected with a parent in my neighborhood who also loves her electric car.

3 | Volunteer for a committee at your school.

I helped organize the environmental project for our school's community service day and I am doing it again next year. It was a truly meaningful experience that both of my children were involved in, and gave us a chance to work together with other families who care about the same issues we do.

4 | Ignore all the dirty looks and ridicule you might get for having an issue you care about.

I have had that moment standing in the grocery store when another mom basically laughed at me for caring about the environment. She clearly has very different beliefs than I do, and I learned to ignore her and move on. Realize that you do not have time for that type of negativity since you are trying to make the world a better place and raise the next generation!

When we work on something that energizes us, even if it does not make us the most popular mom around, we are teaching our kids the importance of working towards their dreams and standing up for what they believe in. This is how we really change the world – by successfully passing the baton to our children.



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