**Kats Eye View** [put this slug in red font like sports does on its stories]

Run with her mugshot please. It’s a column

**HL: The Importance of Regular Maintenance**

By Katharine Lotze

Of all the cars I’ve ever owned – three of them total – my Toyota Matrix is the only one my dad hasn’t ever worked on.

Growing up in eastern Washington, my dad took care of all my family’s cars. After work and on weekends, he changed oil, replaced brake pads, and attempted to solve intermittent issues that, of course, never appeared for him.

I’d call him from wherever I was stranded, frustrated to tears, and Dad would instantly become my own personal AAA. He’d drop whatever he was doing, and come to change my tire, or jump my battery. And he wouldn’t just do this when my car was giving me trouble: he’d drop whatever he was doing to come get me out of any situation I didn’t want to be in.

Even though we’re now more than 1,000 miles apart on any given day, he still does that – just via phone. I still call my dad when I have a car problem, or personal crisis. Diagnosing car problems over the phone is nearly impossible, but my dad has been my go-to car fixer for most of my life; it seems like the logical thing to do when my car starts making a clunking, squeaking, or chirping noise. And though I didn’t always come to Dad with my personal troubles when I was younger, when I hit a bump in life’s road, I figure Dad might have some advice about that too.

There were many weekends as a child Dad and I spent going to the auto parts store or the wrecking yard. With several cars to care for, keeping up on the regular maintenance was a constant endeavor. Dad kept a chalk board with each car’s stats on it, planning out when he’d need to replace the struts on the truck, or when the Camry needed new tires.

It was usually just Dad and I running these Saturday morning errands. We’d listen to CarTalk on NPR, and I’d imagine Click and Clack, the Tappet Brothers, looked something like Statler and Waldorf, the two cantankerous old man Muppet characters, another staple of my childhood.

I’d sit in the back of the car, and play a game where I’d try to catch a glimpse of the car behind me, then lay down, still tethered by my seatbelt, across the bench seat, and look up at my dad in the rearview mirror.

“There’s a car behind you, Dad,” like I was providing him with valuable information he could use to make better driving decisions.

He would always smile and listen, like it was the first time I’d ever said that.

“There is? What color is it?”

When I got older, there were less weekend trips to the auto parts store and instead of laying across the backseat, I was in the driver’s seat. I’d listen to songs on my iPod through the stereo I’d saved up to purchase, and my dad had installed himself. He offered to show me how to do it, and how to change my car’s oil, but I never took up him up on it.

In college, I’d drive two hours home on Friday nights, delivering my old Chevy Lumina to my dad’s workshop, a structure bigger than our house, for its regular maintenance. I told myself I’d wake up early the next day, go out and finally learn how to change the oil.

But sleeping in always beat waking up early on Saturday to go out to the shop, while the wood stove was still working to heat the huge open space.

I never did take my dad up on his offer to teach me how to change my own oil before I moved to Southern California. And instead of driving to the auto parts store with Dad on weekends, I call him on the way home from work, sometimes to talk about cars, but mostly to talk about life.

When I ask what he’s doing, his answer is often the same.

“Oh I’m just out in the shop.” He’s still changing the oil and brake pads on my mom’s and brother’s cars, and he still answers when I call, though now at least he knows I don’t need rescuing (I did get AAA). Still, he always takes a break to talk to me for a bit, letting me vent about whatever is bothering me.

Oil changes come a lot more often now with the hundreds of miles I drive each week. I still fit my car maintenance in on Saturday mornings, and now I wake up early to make sure my mechanic can fit me in same-day. And even though he can’t solve my problems, mechanical or personal, over the phone, Dad still picks up and listens, and like Click and Clack, makes his best guess about what’s ailing me – after all, he did teach me that regular maintenance, and phone calls, are still the best way to prevent a breakdown.