

# MOTHER TRUCKER

- Keepin' It -  
- Between The Lines -



- by -  
- Barbara Blaisdel -



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Dedicated to Michael

My husband, my teammate, my friend



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## INTRODUCTION

He's usually white, sorely in need of a shave, and wearing a baseball cap or cowboy hat over relatively unkempt hair. He has on a t-shirt or a cowboy shirt with blue jeans and a huge, if not ostentatious, belt buckle and he's wearing cowboy boots. If his arms are bare, you can usually see his assortment of tattoos including the requisite skull and naked woman. When he speaks you'll notice his missing tooth before you'll pick up on his extensive use of double negatives. And who is this picture of American manhood? Why the "American Trucker" the media always seems to foist in front of us when there's a negative trucking story. A friend of mine who has worked in the dispatch/management side of trucking for a number of years believes that "the press keeps this guy in cold storage" until they need him. No wonder the American public has such a questionable view of the trucker and his industry.

In reality, the average American trucker is white, male, about 38 years old, and married with an average of 1.2 children. Close to 44% have earned a high school diploma and at least 26% have some college education, a college degree or have done some postgraduate work. Fifty percent earn between \$20,000 and \$30,000 with thirty percent earning above the \$30,000 range. These figures come from a study of 3,910 company drivers done in 1990 by the Upper Great Plains Transportation Institute and is believed to accurately represent the general population of truckload drivers.



The idea of big trucks has fascinated me since I was a child. I remember going on family trips where my father insisted we leave at 5 am and run with the truck traffic. I remember him invariably stopping at diners or restaurants where big trucks were parked. He insisted that if truckers ate there, the food was bound to be good. Back then he always seemed to be right. But, at the age of 10 I didn't have much of a gourmand palate. My father always told me to watch the trucks when it came to keeping up with traffic. They knew what was going on. Again, he was usually right.

As an adult, I have only positive recollections of truckers especially in regard to assisting stranded motorists. In fact, one time when my husband and I were on vacation, a very friendly and courteous trucker pulled over and helped us change a tire on our camper. Over the years I've driven the I-95 corridor from Raleigh, N.C. to Washington, D.C. and New York running with the big trucks. I've watched all the *SMOKEY AND THE BANDIT* movies and *CONVOY* at least a half dozen times. Though I never really dreamed about driving a truck, I always found something romantic about trucking and the trucker.

It wasn't until I got behind the wheel of a big rig that I began to understand the hard work, the pressures and the difficult lifestyle these men and women have to put up with twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, for weeks and months at a time. I kept a daily journal from the time I began my training through my first year on the road. After that, I kept notes, recorded overviews of specific aspects of this lifestyle and talked to hundreds of drivers and people connected with the industry.

Once off of the truck, I was able to consolidate my thoughts and ideas and to do some sorely needed research. With a computer and a workbook on *WordPerfect* to guide me through the word processing machinations, I began to put together a look at trucking from the inside - from the driver's perspective in regard to how he lives and what he sees in his day to day travels across America's network of highways. I believe my observations and research help to project what it's like to be one of the 3 million people who bring us, among other things, our toilet paper, corn flakes, automobiles and construction materials.



## TRUCKING INDUSTRY FACTS

- *The American trucking industry employs 7.6 million people*
- *3 million are drivers*
- *The industry's gross freight revenue equals 5% of the Gross Domestic Product or a total of \$278 billion*
- *The industry includes more than 500,000 companies from single trucks owned and operated by individuals, to large companies with thousands of trucks*
- *In 1991, 47,890 businesses were authorized to haul goods for-hire interstate*
- *There are 100,000 to 150,000 individual owner-operators and 40,000 to 50,000 private motor carriers (non-trucking firms that haul their own freight).*
- *Commercial trucks logged more than 283 billion miles in 1991, equivalent to 1.2 million trips from the earth to the moon*
- *Trucks haul 2.6 billion tons of freight annually including 72.3% of all manufactured goods*

- *In 1991, commercial trucks made up only 8% of all registered vehicles, yet paid 37% (\$19.6 billion) of the total federal and state taxes paid by all motor vehicles*
- *Heavy single-unit and combination trucks consume 24 billion gallons of diesel fuel per year*



## IN THE BEGINNING

I'm one of those people who cannot chew gum and walk at the same time. I do poorly on spatial relations tests and am "mechanically reclined" according to my husband. Rube Goldberg couldn't compete with the mechanical machinations I can come up with. I know virtually nothing about the workings of an internal combustion engine or how my own car works. In fact, I always had problems backing up my car. Friends still remind me of the time I demolished their mailbox backing out of their driveway. So why, at the age of 49 did I decide to learn how to drive an 18-wheeler?

Call it boredom; call it the desire to take on something challenging. If my career path to date was any indication of a non-pattern, trucking certainly fit. After nine years of teaching high school English in the inner city of Philadelphia and the suburbs of New York City, I embarked with my family on a 2-year excursion into the woods of Alaska. We settled on 20 acres in Anchor Point, 240 miles south of Anchorage on the Kenai Peninsula and built an 800 square foot log house out of the trees on our land. We fought snow, frostbite and mosquitoes, killed a moose and lived off the land. We heated with wood, cooked with propane and read by the light of kerosene. Our water source was a creek and melted snow; our bathroom, an outhouse. We saw, smelled and "felt" moose, black and brown bear, porcupines, wolves, foxes and coyotes. It was heaven. But once we had

conquered the elements, we felt it was time to move on. In addition, our children were of an age (12 and 8) that they needed to get back into civilization. Mom, Dad and the kids in the woods was idyllic but not very realistic. So we sold our land and headed to wherever one of us got a job. Michael contacted a civil engineer he'd worked with in Wayne, N.J. who was now managing a sewer system evaluation study for an environmental consulting firm in Raleigh, N.C. He had an immediate opening so we headed south.

As Michael moved from technician to Regional Manager, I answered an ad in the paper and "fell" into the field of personnel search and recruitment (headhunting). In 1980 we consolidated his management skills with my recruiting skills and started our own business. In our ten years in business we achieved almost all of our goals: to buy a house, put our 2 children through college and buy a 100-foot yacht. The yacht is yet to come.

Again it was time to move on. When the last semester of our younger son's tuition was paid for, Michael decided to initiate the first part of a dream we'd always had - to drive a truck together. He went to trucking school while I continued running the business. He came in first in his class at Johnston Community College and immediately was hired by one of the largest trucking firms in the country. After 6 months he was in love with the open road. Now it was my turn. I shut the business down and prepared myself for the rigors of truck driving.

Little did I know what I was getting myself into. I'd patiently listened to Michael for eight weeks as he anxiously plowed through one of the toughest truck driving schools in the country. I bided my time at home during the weeks he was on the road anticipating each weekend he'd arrive exhausted and exhilarated, filled with endless stories. He was alive, invigorated. We were both counting on me to learn how to drive. We'd always done everything together. Truck driving was not going to be any different. Or so I thought.

Nothing I had done prior had prepared me for this task. Teaching had come easily to me. I loved my subject, believed anyone and everyone could learn, and I had the drive and determination to instill that belief into most of my students. They challenged my creative abilities and my techniques in getting them to think, read, write and express ideas properly and effectively. The mental challenge was invigorating.

Alaska became more of a physical challenge. I had to learn how to use a chain saw, a drawknife for barking logs, a pulley, a come-along. I even discovered the lever. In 6 months I could swing a ten-pound sledgehammer, chop wood, haul 80 pounds of water uphill and carry a 50-pound backpack with ease. I could cross country ski for miles on end and trudge through thigh high snow when necessary. I learned about wild mushrooms, wild berries, wild bears and giant mosquitoes. I also learned how to shoot a gun and pull cars and pick-up trucks out of ditches and snow banks. I participated in a moose hunt and helped to skin and gut both a moose and a brown bear. My body and my senses became honed for survival.



Recruiting, personnel consulting and co-owning a business presented other challenges I had not encountered before. In this case, I was able to draw upon my previous experiences with communication, research and people skills to accomplish a good many of my goals. I learned quickly by touring manufacturing facilities, talking extensively to engineers and technical people and religiously reading the *Wall Street Journal*. The real challenge came in learning how to "do business" in a predominantly male arena. Through the help of my husband and several patient mentors I was able to develop my own style and became very successful.

In each of the above cases, I developed a methodology and, through a step-by-step process of trial and error, eventually accomplished my goals. My success or failure, my processes and my time factor, were contingent solely upon my decision as to when to take the next step and which step to take. I worked alone and could always safely "try it another way".

Suddenly, or so it seemed, I was enrolled in trucking school. Decisions had to be made regarding our three pets, Tarja, Colby and Samantha. Tarja, our 13-year-old Siberian, slightly arthritic, mildly incontinent and an outside dog who slept much of the day and never wandered off of the property, presented no problem at all. I arranged for the two kids across the pond to come over and feed her everyday, make sure she had plenty of water, and play with her (as much as you can play with an old dog). Samantha, our elusive part Siamese part Manx the neighbors had never seen in her 8 years in residence, also

presented no problem. A free spirit, she roamed the fields, the woods and the barns keeping the rodent population in check. She came to no one but me anyway and that was on the rare occasion when she sought my lap in a moment of feline comfort.

Colby, our 2 year old standard poodle, however, proved the most difficult to deal with. She couldn't stay unattended as Tarja. She was the kind of dog that thrived on being as close to you as possible. She was "my" dog while Michael had been on the road and my attachment to her was a strong one. I couldn't give her to anyone! After much discussion and family consultation, it was decided that we would "lend" her to Michael's parents in Syracuse. All of us could handle that. She was housebroken, had been obedience trained, and had been around my in-laws on numerous occasions. So it was decided that I'd drive her to Syracuse. Though I was totally devastated when I left her, I knew she would be loved and cared for.

Now it was time to secure the house for those long weeks on the road. We lived on a dirt road with eight other families and a "community watch" system that consisted of two neighbor ladies in their 70's who knew when someone didn't belong on our road. In fact one day Elizabeth literally scared the hell out of a young schoolboy who had decided to use our road as a cut through. I don't know if it was her austere stare or that shotgun by her side that did it, but the young man quickly found another way home. Still, I couldn't depend on Elizabeth or even her son Danny for making sure nothing happened to our place. So, I investigated numerous security systems, settled on one, and had it installed.

Now alone in an empty house, I gathered my fears and anxieties, and once again convinced myself that I was ready for this next episode in my life. My only apprehension (as was Michael's) was my back. Skiing down the gentle slope outside Jerry and Stephanie Migdal's cabin in Alaska, I lost my balance, slipped and landed on my rear end. The Army pack board I was wearing on my back, jammed into the base of my spine as I landed. I never felt a thing. I regained my composure and caught up with the others skiing the five miles across the muskeg flats to our waiting pickup. Another 20 mile ride over bumpy 2 lane and dirt roads landed us at our cabin in Homer overlooking Kachemack Bay. I couldn't get out of the truck. My body had frozen in sitting position and I couldn't unlock it. After days and weeks of rest and slow manipulation, I was able to sit for short periods without pain. Walking was the only thing that seemed to ease the pain and lengthen the periods without stiffness. I walked and skied for miles at a time. I got into Yoga and eventually was able to "transport" myself into the center of my lower back. In Alaska, this was easy.

However, once we returned to civilization and I began working at a desk job on a daily basis, my muscles lost their tone and the pain returned. After nearly a year of Chiropractic, I finally decided that the only way to be pain free and keep my back muscles strong and toned was to establish a swimming regime. I swim a mile a day three days a week.



My back hasn't bothered me in almost nine years. Still, there *is* no cure for degenerative arthritis and a deteriorating lumber disc. What will happen when I stop swimming? Will the pain return? Will my back muscles weaken? Will the bouncing of the truck exacerbate my present condition? I guess there's only one way to find out. I told Michael that if and when the moment came that I felt even a twinge of pain, I would get off of the road. I promised!

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The last thing I remember was Michael handing me my second (or was it my third) vodka martini. I was in the bathtub, bubbles up to my chin, murmuring between tears something about the tachometer. It was the end of week two of school and Michael was doing his best to calm and reassure me that things would get better. I wasn't so sure.

I had left my first day of trucking school in a state of mild hysteria all too cognizant of the things I did not know and all too aware of what others did. One of the instructors assured me that my concerns were unwarranted. "Everything will eventually be covered," he said. "Just take one step at a time."

The North Carolina Truck Driver Training School, sponsored by the North Carolina Trucking Association, has been a part of Johnston Community College in Smithfield, N.C. for twenty of its forty-four years. The school has 4 sites in the state, 20 instructors and has

been run by Ron Nichols since 1979. The program, a tough eight weeks of 11-hour days, consists of a daily combination of class work, field exercises and road driving.

In the first three days, Ron defines the highly structured rules, regulations, testing and grading procedures, time factors and curriculum. These do not change. Points, or demerits as we called them, count against you. You receive points for missing questions on quizzes and tests, for hitting barrels or anything else during field work, for not warning someone if he's about to hit something, for "losing" your mirror during backing, and for missing specific elements during the final class, field and road tests. The most points you are allowed are 180. People do not graduate with 181! By the end of week 5, you must qualify (display your ability) to drive a 9-speed and 10-speed tractor-trailer or you are out. This means either the end of your trucking career or, if you choose, you can retake the entire course or attend another trucking school.

The regimen is strict and you must be able to master each skill level as you move from one to the next. The timing is theirs, not yours, and you either succeed within this framework or you don't.

By the end of the first week I was filled with doubts, apprehensions, moments of exhilaration and incredible stress. I couldn't sleep; I couldn't eat; and I found myself doing something I never do - crying. I cried on the drive home, I cried when I got home and I cried the minute Michael walked in the door every weekend. I was overwhelmed by frustration.



Confused by my lack of control, I tried furiously to gain some sort of perspective. I'd always loved new challenges approaching them aggressively and unflinchingly. Frustration had always been invigorating; now it was debilitating. I was daunted, intimidated by this machine - its power, its size, its anatomy.

To enter the cab of a tractor, you have to grab two hand rails, figure out where to put which foot on the two outside steps and precariously fling yourself onto the seat. You are now 10 feet off the ground. To climb out, you reverse the process and "dismount" backwards hoping you'll feel the right step. My initial attempts found me dangling by one arm with feet flailing about for a secure niche.

However, the climb turned out to be the easiest part of the course. Once securely situated in the cab of the tractor, I looked at the dash - stunned. I felt like I was sitting in the cockpit of an airliner. There were more gauges, buttons and toggle switches than I'd ever seen in one place. My car had gauges. But who ever cared about anything but the speedometer, gas gauge, and odometer. There was always a buzzer or idiot light that told me if the car needed to be checked. On a truck you need to constantly watch your temperature, oil pressure, two air pressure gauges, voltmeter, tachometer and, of course, your speedometer. If any of these goes above or below a certain level (and you have to know what all these levels are) the engine could blow or the brakes could lock up and shut you down. There was also a switch for locking your trailer brakes, one for sliding your fifth wheel, and a power divider to be used on icy, snowy or muddy roads. It took me

almost ten minutes to figure out where the switches were for the headlights and the windshield wipers. I wondered when I would have time to watch the road and concentrate on my driving.

Once back on terra firma, I learned that there were more than 46 areas of the tractor and trailer we were supposed to check prior to taking the rig on the road. Words like springs, brake drums, brake shoes, wheel oil, lug nuts, tire tread and sidewalls, air lines, landing gear, glad hands, flooded my already panicked mind. I feared there was no way I was going to be able to learn how all these things worked and what to do if they didn't.

The field exercises, carried out on an oversized parking lot, merely became another set of obstacles I had to overcome. Set up to simulate just about any type of maneuver one might encounter in the real world, their purpose was to hone your skills in steering, backing, coupling and uncoupling a trailer, proper use of your mirrors and judging distances. It all looked so easy on the videos and when the instructors ran through the exercises. But once I got into the truck, I found the doing something else.

In the forward exercises, we were required to maneuver a truck around barrels and tires and through an offset barrier, button hook (make a wide swing) into a simulated alley and drive to the end of it without hitting any of the tennis balls that lined each side and were inches from our tires. Spotters along the route yelled, screamed and gesticulated if we were about to hit something.

Backing up proved to be the most difficult maneuver for me to learn. Besides being uncoordinated, I also have problems with mirror images. If you can't use your mirrors, you can't back up. In addition, to back up a trailer, you have to turn the steering wheel the opposite direction you want the trailer to go. Anyone who has backed up a boat trailer knows what I'm talking about. The first backing exercise was an "easy" one. All I had to do was pull forward from between two trailers and straight back to the original position without hitting the rear barrier. Initially, every one of us felt like one of the Three Stooges. It was amazing how many different positions we all managed to maneuver that trailer into. And this was the easy one! Eventually even I mastered it. The other exercises involved backing around barrels, 90 degree backing or docking between two trailers, and backing 100 feet out of an alley lined by tennis balls into a jackknife. At one point, while backing up the alley, I steered the tractor-trailer into such an awkward position that even Ron wasn't quite sure how to extricate me. One of my classmates suggested a wrecker. With infinite patience, Ron did manage to guide me out of my predicament. I don't remember ever docking the trailer without some assistance from an instructor. I just couldn't get it. My frustration level continued to rise.

Driving. That would be my salvation. I was a good driver. I'd driven cars, vans and pick-up trucks. I loved shifting gears. This I could master. Then I encountered the tachometer and something called rpm's. For the uninitiated, I will try to simplify what is involved in driving a tractor-trailer. Most of your rigs have anywhere from 7 to 15 gears. I've driven 9 and 10 speeds. In a car, in order to shift gears, you engage the clutch and



shift. In a truck, you double clutch. In other words, when you reach a specific speed (revolutions of the wheels as read on the speedometer) and a specific rpm (revolutions of the engine as read on the tachometer), you shift into neutral, wait for the rpm's to drop to a specific point and then shift into the proper gear. Each gear has a specific ratio of speed and rpm's and cannot (should not) be forced. These ratios vary according to the engines and transmissions in each truck.

An experienced driver cannot only feel when he has to shift, but which gear he has to shift to. However, for the beginner, this is not so simple. To begin with, I was now 10 feet off the ground in a vehicle that was eight feet wide (a car is about six feet wide) pulling a 45-foot trailer. I had to remember not only which gear was in which position, but what the tach and speedometer had to read in order to shift into the right gear. At the same time I had to steer, watch for overhead and side clearances, be aware of traffic, prepare for turns properly, and make sure I didn't hit anything along the way.

Coordinating the brain with the correct body movements became a momentous task. Every night I'd sit in the kitchen and recite aloud the gears with their speeds and rpm's. I even used a toilet plunger to simulate a shifter while I ran through the numbers for the 9 and 10 speeds. I went to bed shifting gears. I dreamt about shifting gears. And when I'd get into the truck, my mind would go blank. I was beginning to lose control. As hard as I tried, nothing seemed to work consistently. One day I'd think I'd finally gotten it; and the next two days I'd grind every gear I tried.

The instructors were wonderfully patient. They explained, they demonstrated. They told me to go slower, to relax, that it would happen. "The truck's only a machine", one instructor told me. "You take your time and *you* control it!"

Week five, qualifying week came all too quickly. The tension was infectious. If you didn't qualify on the 9 and 10 speeds you were out. Five weeks of long days, of hours of practice, of sleepless nights, of intense concentration and stress would all culminate in a period of 5 days.

By the end of three days most of the class had qualified on one truck and at least half had qualified on two. I was still batting zero. I couldn't sleep; I couldn't eat. I'd already lost ten pounds worrying. I decided to call it quits. My gut had been telling me that something was not right. I'd tried to work my mind into understanding why it could not make certain connections - jump those synapses that get the body to do what it is told. I called it a mental block, poor coordination - whatever I could come up with to try to understand, to surmount my problems.

Exhausted, worn down, I decided that maybe truck driving was not for me. I stayed home that Friday, wrote a letter of explanation to Ron, and told Michael on the phone that night that I was quitting. I slept peacefully for the first time in over a month.

Michael understood. He was disappointed because we had planned to go on the road together and now we had to regroup. He would continue to drive and I would find something else to do. Then my younger son called.



Parents never fully know the effects and influences they have on their children as they are rearing them. They may never know those key statements or actions their children remember. Well, I got hit square in the face with my own words reverberating from my child's mouth.

"Quit! Mom, you never quit anything in your life. You always told me that I could do anything I wanted to and I believed you. You were always my example and my proof that this was true. That's why I've been able to get through the tough times. You can't quit! You can do it!"

What's a mother to do when her own son jolts her back into reality? I returned to school on Monday much to the relief of my classmates and instructors. In the end, I didn't make it. I qualified on the 10 speed but not the 9. But I knew then that "come hell or high water" I was going to learn how to drive a truck. I couldn't disappoint my son; I couldn't disappoint myself.

Three weeks later, I was back in class. This time I was part of a two-week training program run by the company Michael worked for. I was determined to succeed. With the help of a wonderfully patient instructor who probably ate more Tums and smoked more cigarettes than he had with any previous student, I began to conquer those obstacles I thought were insurmountable. When I finally got my license I was far from being a truck driver. Though I still couldn't back very well, I understood the principles of what I had to do and knew that with practice I could do it. I still missed gears and ground a few on

occasion, but I knew that all that would fall into place as I spent more and more time behind the wheel.

I learned more about myself during those 5 weeks at Johnston Community College and the 2 weeks of company training than I could ever have anticipated. I was excited and scared about driving one of those "monster" trucks. At the same time, I was pleased and proud that I was able to accomplish what I had once believed was impossible.

## ON THE ROAD

Sometime between trucking school and getting on the road, someone had narrowed all the lanes on the interstates. I no longer fit safely between them. They were supposed to be twelve feet wide. But now that I was driving a vehicle between eight and eight and an half feet wide instead of six, I felt incredibly vulnerable. Trucks flew by barely missing my mirrors; cars, ant-like in size, kept missing my wheels. I clung to the steering wheel, eyes darting left to right, right to left, from mirror to road to mirror and back. The white lines seemed to squeeze closer and closer as I tried to guide the truck between them. "Aim high!" they kept telling us in school. "Keep your eyes at least a quarter mile ahead. Don't look down in front of you or you'll lose your perspective". Run off of the road was more like it!

So, I aimed high. Interstates, at least, had wide shoulders and median strips if you erred. Two-lane roads, however, were another story. "These had to be less than twelve feet wide", I told my road trainer, Joe, after my first drive over country roads. "Some are, some aren't", he casually replied. "Just stay on your side of the white line and you won't have to worry." Sure, I thought. Easy for you to say!

Joe, a red haired, tattooed "ex" marine with ten years of trucking experience, had a reputation for being one of the toughest trainers at Schneider. "You listened to Joe, or else", I was told. I had been assigned to him for 2 weeks of over-the-road training before I



could go out with Michael. What I encountered, was an incredibly intelligent, patient and intuitive teacher who loved his job and drove a truck as if it were an extension of his body.

On my second night on the road, Joe told me to take US 35 through Ohio and wake him when I crossed into West Virginia. With those words, he moved into the sleeper and left me to experience the first harrowing drive of my trucking career. For three hours, my hands glued to the steering wheel, my eyes never leaving the road, not even to look in my mirrors, I drove over windy, sometimes hilly 2 and 4 lanes. Eighteen-wheelers, their headlights glaring in the darkness, came at me like attacking monsters. I "aimed high" and prayed that the road was wide enough for the two of us. Cars passed me on the straight-a-ways. I held my own, scared, focused, intense, working to keep every ton of that truck under control. Exhausted, arms and hands aching from tension, I finally crossed safely into West Virginia and woke Joe. He chuckled at my reaction to the drive. Of course he'd been monitoring me all along and never once doubted my capabilities.

"There were moments," I admitted, "I wasn't sure I could hang in." "It gets easier with time and practice", he guaranteed me. He was right, of course. Now I run US 35 and just about any "cow path" without anxiety. Gradually, the interstate lanes got wider. Even the extra-narrow lanes through Chicago's construction seemed to expand. Michael kept reassuring me it was not the lanes that made the difference. It took a while for my skepticism to abate.

Learning how to see ahead or "getting out of the cab" as Michael so aptly put it, proved to be one of the most crucial aspects of driving a truck. It involves everything

from following road and street signs to anticipating how and where to turn to sensing traffic patterns and changes to backing and parking. That skill took time, along with a lot of mistakes, to develop.

Following interstate signs is relatively easy because they are consistent throughout the country. However, once you get on US, state or county routes, there is generally no consistency. Each state and county varies as to how and where it places its route signs. Sometimes three and four routes come together at one junction with only a quarter mile notice as to which goes where. In many cases signs are obscured by a bevy of lights, traffic is heavy and you're usually in the wrong lane to make your turn. To an experienced driver, this is all in a day's work. To a new driver, this is chaos!

In addition, every day I found myself in an unfamiliar city, state, or town looking for companies I'd never heard of on roads and streets without signs. I traveled to and through such exotic places as Coosa Pines, Alabama; Paris, Texas; Conway, Arkansas; Goshen, Indiana; Rayville, Louisiana; Camp Hill, Pennsylvania and Mill City, Nevada.

When you consider the fact that I had to constantly remind myself that there was 65 feet of me to turn or pull down a road, and that I still wasn't totally comfortable with the mechanics of driving, you can understand why I was likely to miss a turn. The first time this occurred, I was on a curvy two-lane and had to drive 17 miles before I could find a place to turn around. Thirty-four miles after my mistake, I was finally headed in the right direction.

The second time proved to be more dramatic. The minute I set myself up for my right turn, I knew I had made a mistake. I was still glowing with pride at having



successfully covered over 150 miles, at night, of Mississippi two-lane state and county roads without missing a turn. I was in the process of turning onto another state route when I realized that I had set up to turn one street too soon. Once committed, all I could do was keep on going and try to find a way back to the main thoroughfare. Within five minutes the road not only narrowed but it became dirt. In the headlights, all I could see was more narrow dirt road. I slowed to a crawl looking for a place to turn around. Nothing. It was time to pull the park brakes and awaken Michael. Suddenly, two men stepped out of the darkness. They just stood staring at the truck, arms folded, not moving. Visions of the movie, *Deliverance*, flashed through my mind. This was it! My life was about to end somewhere on the back roads of Mississippi. A string of expletives spewed from Michael's mouth as he, half asleep, peered out of the sleeper. "Lock the doors! Don't move 'til I talk to these people!"

By now, the number of observers had increased to 5, including several women. No one had a shotgun or a pistol. I began to relax.

"Nope, you weren't the first truck to turn down here by mistake," one gentleman assured me.

"Yup, you were lucky the over hanging branches had recently been cut and cleared from the sides of the road."

"Don't worry", another said. "Just go right at the second fork in the road and you'll see the highway. "

We apologized for disturbing their tranquility, profusely thanked everyone for their help and proceeded two more miles on dirt road. Relieved to finally see pavement,

we turned onto it and headed for the lights of the town and the turn I should have made.

When I first started driving, the idea of backing terrified me to such a degree that I would put myself into a state of apoplexy two or three hours prior to reaching a supplier or consignee. By the time I'd arrive at my destination, my stomach would be in knots and my hands would be so sweaty I could barely hang onto the steering wheel. How you position the truck, or what we call the set-up, is the key to good backing. And the set-up is dependent upon the ability to *very quickly* see the entire area you're taking the truck into - determining the best way to enter, planning how and where to turn the truck (if you can), noting any obstacles that have to be avoided, and establishing how you plan to exit. If you just drive into a docking area without "seeing", you can find yourself in an untenable predicament.

Because he could "see" better than I in our early weeks on the road, Michael always sat in the "jump" seat issuing instruction after instruction as I backed. The more mistakes I made, the more he yelled and the more mistakes I made. He had honed his backing skills as a solo driver before I came on the road and was frustrated watching me constantly "screw up". But I was both stubborn and determined. I was going to learn how to back no matter how long it took me. I had to ignore his frustration and deal with my own.

Finally, I kicked him out of the truck. I had taken us into an electronics supplier in Seattle to pick up a load that was still being packaged. The lot was empty of trucks, cars and anything else that might get in my way. I told him to stand outside and not say a

word unless I asked him for assistance or if I was about to hit something. I was going to find my way, not his, of backing. He agreed and not only left me alone, but went inside the plant. In the half hour it took me to successfully dock the 53' trailer, in addition to drawing a crowd of dock workers and other drivers, I learned a lot about what I was doing wrong, how to correct many of my mistakes and how to catch them as they were happening. I was also ready to ask Michael how to resolve certain problems that I couldn't. When I finally slid that trailer between the white lines and up to the dock, everyone inside applauded.

My consistency at successful backing was always contingent upon how frequently I backed. Like everyone else, I had my bad days. But I no longer worried myself into a frenzy every time I had to back a trailer.

As a new driver, I found truck stops initially intimidating because of their sheer enormity and the numbers of 18-wheelers in one place. Because I was still self-conscious about my capabilities, I considered it a major accomplishment just to find the correct exit off the highway. I was thrilled if I had the truck in the proper gear to make the turn without stalling. Upon approaching a truck stop there are so many signs and, at night, so many lights, it was sometimes difficult to distinguish the truck from the car entrance, to determine where the different fuel islands were and to figure out how the parking was set up. The activity and noise were confusing and deafening as trucks pulled in, backed in and zoomed around.

It took me almost a week before I was able to tell Michael about one of my earliest embarrassments. As I turned into a truck stop to fuel, I inadvertently pulled into



the fuel island for cars. There I was, in an 18-wheeler, the restaurant directly in front of me, a pick-up truck parked to my left and only one way to go - backwards. I felt a million eyes on me as I assessed my situation. Not only did I feel stupid, I was apprehensive about backing up without hitting anything. Slowly, carefully, I maneuvered the truck around the fuel pumps backing my way out of my problem. Mortified, I made it to the truck fueling area, fueled and quickly left. It wasn't until later that I realized I could have destroyed the canopy over the car fuel island and damaged the top of the tractor and trailer. Fortunately, or should I say luckily, the canopy was over 13' 6", the normal height of a semi.

Though I'd mastered backing in general, it took me 6 months on the road before I was confident enough to back up in a truck stop. My usual m.o., if I was parking, was to drive around the rows and rows of trucks until I found a spot I could pull forward into. Sometimes it would take me twenty minutes of circling until I spotted someone vacating a place. Other times, after a careful check and finding no available openings, I would move on to another truck stop even if it meant another half hour of driving. There was no way I was going to attempt to back between two trucks with the thought that 100-200 truckers' eyes were scrutinizing my ineptitude and broadcasting it over the CB. Experience, confidence and expediency eventually changed all that. I also realized that there were plenty of experienced truckers who had problems backing.

I undertook my "virgin" back in one of the busiest truck stops on the outskirts of Los Angeles. I'd driven around the lot 3 times, each time passing a spot I thought was "doable". Finally, on the 4th go around I took a deep breath, put on my flashers and

moved into my set-up. I tried to ignore the two trucks that were sitting to my left and the two on my right waiting for me to park. I felt comfortable. I knew what I was doing and slowly guided the trailer into the spot with only two pull ups. The trucker next to me gave me a big grin and a thumbs up. The others waved and went on their way. I felt like "Billie Barb Big Rigger"!

Trucking took me into cities and towns all over the country at all times of the day and night. In the beginning, the idea of going through Chicago, DC, Los Angeles, Philadelphia or any other major city during rush hour terrified me. But after I'd survived the chaos numerous times, I became more and more comfortable with the insanity and uniqueness that characterized each city's commuter problems and road systems. The curves in Indianapolis and Detroit, the construction in St. Louis and Chicago, the sudden loss of lanes in Dallas and the numerous highway "splits" in Nashville, Knoxville and Los Angeles confused me initially. I learned to anticipate which cities were easy to get through and which were always congested. St. Louis is still one city I'd rather go around than through. Los Angeles and Denver never bothered me during rush hour because the traffic almost always moves and I could usually anticipate what people were going to do. In Atlanta, Miami, Raleigh and Seattle, however, the traffic is generally unpredictable and erratic. Since I usually had no choice but to pass through these cities to reach my destination, I was never in a great hurry to push and shove my way through traffic like the locals were. I could always make up my time once I left the cities, so the stopping and starting never bothered me. I learned to sit back, take my time, and watch everyone else jockey for position. Given the choice, of course, I'd



rather go through any city at three in the morning than three in the afternoon. Nevertheless, I learned early in my driving career to always figure traffic jam/accident wait time into my estimated time of arrival.

Over the period of my first year, I, like every new trucker, had to conquer the legendary mountains everyone hears about and fears - Donner (Ca.), Cabbage (Or.), Ashland (Or.), Fancy Gap (Va.), the Grapevine (Ca.), Elk (WY). I approached each with great trepidation, my head filled with tales of lost brakes and trucks careening over mountain cliffs never to be seen again. I scaled the long miles of 5%, 6% and 7% grades gear by gear, my foot and calf muscles aching from the constant pressure on the fuel peddle. I descended them at a snail's pace, my engine compressor on, proud that I never once smoked my brakes. Each mountain became another notch on my ego.

As far as I can remember, I'd never had problems driving at night. But I also never had experience driving an 18-wheeler for six to eight hours at a stretch in the darkness. Initially, this was the most difficult time for me. I had to really work at concentrating yet not becoming mesmerized by the white line or by the taillights of the vehicle in front of me. I found the monotony hypnotic. I'd open and close my window a dozen times, play tapes, change radio stations, eat candy bars or cookies and drink lots of coffee. I'd do face, neck and shoulder exercises. One night, while making my way across the flat, empty panhandle of Texas, I sang every Christmas carol and childhood song I knew just to stay awake. I'd heard the horror stories of truckers falling asleep at the wheel, of truckers' driving over imaginary roads and through imaginary buildings, of seeing trees growing in the middle of the highway. Like every over-the-road driver, I

began to learn my limits and spot the signs that it was time to "pull it over". I have to admit though, I scared the hell out of myself on a couple of occasions.

My first year on the road included everything from getting lost in the fog in California to getting shot at by a drunk in Alabama. There were moments when I wondered what I was doing driving a truck at all hours of the day and night, constantly fighting sleep and exhaustion, eating at odd hours, sleeping (or trying to) in a bumping excuse for a bed, with unkempt hair covered by a cap and wearing the same clothes for 2 or 3 days.

Cars, trucks, buses became obstacles to keep away from, to pass, to be passed by. There were times I would crawl into the sleeper after my drive and not remember where I'd been. Towns, cities and truck stops began to look the same. All we seemed to do was eat, sleep, fuel, and drive - eat, sleep, fuel and drive. Some weeks I never saw the sun.

When it came to driving a truck, I found that there were very few dull moments. I began to thrive on never knowing where our next assignment would take us or what the weather would be like or what the traffic would do.

There were times I felt like an explorer. I discovered the windmills in Tehachapi and Palm Springs, Ca. I followed the miles of signs to *Wall Drug* in South Dakota and to Pedro's *South of the Border* in South Carolina. I found the birthplace of John Wayne, John Glenn, Elvis, Garth Brooks and even Presidents Carter, Reagan and Clinton. I walked on and tasted the salt flats in Utah and watched spectacular sunrises over the Flaming Gorge in Wyoming. I saw falling stars, meteor showers, and the northern

lights. I watched thousands of ducks, geese and cranes anticipate the change in seasons as they followed their migratory paths. Sometimes, late at night, as I'd drive across the desolate highways of Wyoming or Arizona or Montana, I'd feel like the last person on Earth - or the first.



## LADIES OF THE HIGHWAY

So what's a nice middle class Jewish girl like me doing driving a tractor-trailer back and forth across country? Maybe my wanderlust and sense of risk and adventure can be explained through the way I was raised. I was born in Philadelphia, PA, the first of three girls to a father who only wanted boys. He was the second of two boys to a mother who only wanted girls. His brother had two boys. This really galled him. A football hero and major high school and college athlete, my father often referred to me as "butch" (an affectionate name back then, not a slang gender designation) and dragged me to as many baseball and football games as he could during his times at home (He had his own business that required his being on the road for one to two weeks at a time). His wanderlust was merely an extension of his teen years when he hopped freights and frequented the hobo camps during the depression. I loved listening to the stories of his travels across country and dreamed about doing the same. I even wrote a short story about running away from home and hopping freights. Every time something went wrong at home and I grew frustrated with my parents and my general existence, I'd think about the hobo camps and the freight trains and, like my father, almost hear that whistle beckoning me. At the same time I was being educated in the ways of baseball, football, and the wonders of travel, my grandmother was pampering



me with every girl item she could come up with. She used to bathe and dress me as if I were her own little doll.

As I grew into adolescence I played on the girls high school basketball and volleyball teams and joined the neighborhood boys in touch football until they began to "touch" too purposefully. At this same period of my life, my mother pulled me out of trees and sent me to social dancing classes to learn the foxtrot and cha-cha and tango and the social graces of being a proper young lady. I hated the social protocols although I did eventually become a fairly good dancer. When she insisted I try to lose in ping-pong because it wasn't "right" to beat the boys, I had a real problem. I loved a good game and a good challenge and figured that if a guy couldn't take it then he wasn't worth my time. She never did understand this attitude of mine.

My passport to freedom was my driver's license. From the minute I got behind the wheel of a car, I fell in love with driving. In lieu of hopping freights, I eased my frustrations and anger and sense of suffocation by hopping into my mother's powder blue Ford Fairlane (with fins and push button controls) and headed for the Pennsylvania Turnpike. I'd drive for an hour or two - just long enough to relax and short enough not to be missed or worried about. I became the family chauffeur, carting my sisters from activity to activity and doing errands for my mother. I'd use any excuse to drive the car. My mother loved my taking some of the driving burden from her. My father, however, saw my love of driving for exactly what it was and always knew how to exert his control - by periodically wresting that freedom (the car) from me as a form of punishment.

Not only did I love to drive, but I was one of those kids who loved to ride for long distances in a car. I relished our one and two week family trips to New England and Canada. My father could drive forever and I could gaze out of the window at the countryside, my mind whirling at 55 and 65 miles per hour.

The dichotomy I experienced being raised female in the forties and fifties was akin to the differences I felt between freedom and repression. I saw freedom as male, repression as female. Though I approached life with somewhat of a reckless abandon, no matter how I tried, I always ran into gender specific worlds. An incident I experienced at age 11 made me sadly but consciously aware of the differences between the sexes. As the only female member of the "tree house gang", I joined the boys after school and on weekends to help build and clean our little getaway. I was just one of the guys as far as I was concerned - until one afternoon. I climbed the tree house in a skirt (not having bothered to change after school). All was fine until one of the boys decided to see what was under my skirt. As he tried to lift it, another member of our group ran at him and punched him. Things were never the same after that. It was then that I became wary of hopping freights, of hopping them alone. My short story always ended with the wailful cry, "If only I was a boy, if only I was a boy, then..."

The conflicts perpetuated throughout my teens with a profusion of "do's" and "don'ts". While I was being told to keep my knees together and my ankles crossed, I was also allowed great latitude to travel unsupervised for weeks at a time during my summer vacations. I was raised to be independent with the expectation of ultimate dependency. A definite problem when you're trying to figure out where your place is in

the male/female strata. I finally gave up caring and went about doing what I was comfortable with. Although this attitude made me a bit of a nonconformist, I felt greater comfort in who I was.

When I began my recruiting career, I entered a world dominated by men very reluctant to allow women entrance. I was not out to break new ground or to prove that I was better than men. I was out to make money! But so often I sensed awkwardness or discomfort or uncertainty from men who did not know how to respond to me in a work, rather than social, environment. Most men were still conditioned to the all male assumption that coffee making, typing and running their errands were women's functions in the office. Unfortunately, most women at that time viewed their positions similarly. However, I was doing the same job as the men and this made them uncomfortable. While it was very important that I know my job and know it well, it was also necessary to find the best ways to facilitate a work environment that was productive and professional. In my 13 years as a recruiter, I felt I gained the respect of my colleagues and never once encountered harassment of any kind.

As a truck driver, I've tried to approach the job similarly. However, truckers are a bit more difficult to deal with than engineers and management personnel. Truckers are a chauvinistic lot and, like construction workers, firemen and machine operators, they have maintained that cohesive "men's room" mentality and camaraderie regarding women. They're also a lot more honest and up front about their attitudes and feelings towards women. You might say most are not very "politically correct". I guess since I always hung out with guys and never personally took offense at their attitude or



language, I never had a problem with truckers' behavior. The only problem I've ever had is when I confront the attitude that women can't or shouldn't *do* certain jobs. Then I get a bit defensive.

The most frequent question asked of me by women is what it's like to be a woman truck driver out there on the road with all those men. I've been queried about the "woman" thing more times than I like. Since I was far from the "first" woman to break ground in the trucking industry, I ran into very little opposition.

As an over-the-road truck driver, I learned very early that trucking was not only a lonely profession, but a difficult and challenging one for a woman. Because this has been a male oriented, male dominated profession from its inception, women enter it without a history. A man hops on a truck and he instantly acquires a clearly defined role and a clearly defined peer group. Over the years, he has been characterized as everything from independent and rugged, macho and chauvinistic, to foul mouthed and boorish - a slightly tarnished knight of the highway who loves God, mom, apple pie and country music. The question always is, "Where and how can a woman fit into all of this"?

Once other truckers see women doing the same jobs as they and get used to their being around, most respond positively. Still, many want us to "go home and make babies" as one rude trucker screamed at me over the CB. Others feel we can do the job but only with "their" help. Most are incredibly protective, and quite gentlemanly and well-mannered around women. Many truckers accept the woman as driver but can't get beyond her sex. She's someone to flirt with, someone's anatomy to dissect, someone's



clothes to discuss, and someone's facial features to describe. "Hey, that's the best lookin' Schneider driver I've seen all day!" or, "Hey, good lookin'. I need me a co-driver. How's about dumping that truck and comin' with me?" or "Check out that baby doll drivin' that 18 wheeler." I've had drivers admire my earrings - at night! They seem to have radar vision when it comes to looking at women. A female can't walk into a truck stop without getting "eyeballed" from top to bottom. Women are still "baby dolls" and "sugar cakes" and "honeys" no matter how well they back or how much freight they unload.

Being a woman on the road has its advantages and disadvantages and, given the type of work a truck driver must do, a woman has to learn to find a balance. On one hand, most drivers assume she either cannot do the job or, if she can, she cannot do it successfully without their help. Their gallantry, so to speak, is sincere though misplaced. One night, while talking on the CB with another driver I told him I was headed for a rather perilous seventeen mile stretch of highway with 10 mile per hour hairpin curves. He told me he'd done it a bunch a times and blatantly suggested that I "pull it over" and let "my better half" take the wheel. Doing my best to maintain my calm, I firmly informed him that *I* was doing the driving and would get us safely to our destination. Obviously put off by my rebuke, he went on his way without comment.

However, if a woman does need help, she can usually get it. But, like any other professional, she's comfortable with the fact that she knows how to do her job and has established a way of doing each task without any help. I've seen many women become indignant, angry and downright nasty to men who offer help they don't need. One driver

told me about a time he offered to help a woman driver tighten the straps on her flatbed load. Without a word, she charged after him with a tire iron. Needless to say, he now thinks twice about offering help to women drivers.

Admittedly, there are times when strength is the only solution to a problem. However, I, like most drivers (male and female), have learned how to use tools and logic to overcome physical obstacles. One day I could not latch the trailer door after I'd gotten loaded. Determined not to waken Michael, I grabbed the sledgehammer and began pounding away at the resistant latch slowly getting it to budge. After about five minutes, another driver offered to help me. I knew he could have moved the latch with virtually no problem. But, I was determined to do it myself and informed him of this in no uncertain terms. Sheepishly he backed off and left me to my task. In another instance, as I was checking my trailer before leaving a supplier, I noticed that the air lines under the trailer were hanging too low to the ground. I grabbed some tape and some wire and crawled under the trailer to fix this rather simple problem. Before I knew it, there were three drivers under the trailer with me offering their help. The situation was so comical, all I could do was laugh. Another time, I backed up to a dock and proceeded to drop the trailer. One of the dockworkers watching me immediately ran up to the trailer and proceeded to unhook the air lines. He ended up crossing the lines and creating twice the work for me.

There have, however, been times when no matter what I tried, no matter how many tools I used or how many angles of approach I took, nothing but brute strength would work. In most cases, I have had little problem commandeering another driver for

assistance. My usual dilemmas involved sliding a stubborn trailer tandem or unhooking a misaligned fifth wheel. When we pulled flatbeds I could fold and roll the 50 and 65 pound tarps but I couldn't lift them. I also didn't trust my strength to tighten the chains that kept the cargo from falling off the truck. Michael handled those areas and I assisted where I could.

I do believe that both men and women feel that a woman is genetically incapable of backing up a truck. I have had entire offices and plants (small ones) empty out just to watch me dock a trailer. This, of course, is an endless source of amusement for Michael since their expectation is always that he would be doing the backing.

Many times when I set up to back into a spot, another driver seems to feel he must assist. A number of women have told me story after story of male drivers assuming they can't back and insisting on "helping". They know full well that if another man were backing up no one would even think twice about helping him unless he asked. Sometimes it's difficult to be nice. A friend of mine, a road trainer with 15 years of driving experience, has lost her patience more than once with guys trying to tell her how to do things. However, one day, she finally got her payback.

Trish was supposed to deliver a load of aluminum siding to a customer at his home in a suburban subdivision. The customer assured her there would be sufficient room to back a 48' trailer into his driveway and that there would be men there to unload the cargo. As she pulled onto his road, she realized that the customer had no idea about the maneuverability of a big truck. She carefully scoped out the situation, decided the best way to approach the driveway, and had the owner remove his mailbox



(concrete and all) from the road. When she climbed back into the truck she noticed the two helpers exchanging money. Slowly, she backed the trailer into the driveway between the house and the shed. The space between her door and the shed was so tight she couldn't get out. So she climbed into the jump seat, opened the window and squeezed out between the truck and the house. As she hit the ground, she saw the two lumpers exchanging money again. Finished with her part of the job, she approached them smiling and asked, "Were you guys betting I couldn't back this thing up without hitting anything?" Of course, they nodded in the affirmative. "Would you have bet if I'd have been a man?" she continued. "Of course not!" they responded. "Well, in that case, how about I get 10% of the take?" They looked at each other, laughed, counted out the cash and handed over her percentage.

Nowadays, there is very little overt discrimination toward women truckers other than an occasional wisecrack over the CB. However, there are still a number of areas where women do encounter problems. Truck stops tend to be the biggest culprits. Historically, truck stops have been strictly a man's domain. Until about ten years ago, the only women seen at truck stops were waitresses, prostitutes or trucker's wives and girlfriends. Some truck stop employees still haven't adjusted to the fact that thousands of women drive trucks today. I have talked to women who have been refused service in the truckers' area of the restaurant because a waitress would not believe they were a driver. Other women complain that waitresses ignore them or give them generally lousy service when they are alone. A few women I've spoken to have been accused of being "lot lizards" by truck stop security men and forced to show ID. One woman told me she

was actually taken to the local police station because an over-zealous security guard, thinking she was a prostitute, refused to even look at her identification. Her company bailed her out of jail and she ultimately sued the truck stop. I've had motel desk clerks ask to see my Commercial Drivers License in order to get a trucker's rate. No one has ever questioned Michael.

I guess I'm kind of old fashioned because I thoroughly enjoy working around most men. Truckers, especially, seem to appreciate women in a way that I usually find more amusing and flattering than offensive. However, with more and more women out there on the open road, the stereotypical barriers are slowly breaking down.

## CHRISTMAS IN SYRACUSE

November 26

There's nothing like looking at the world from the cab of an 18-wheeler. Two in the morning and five hours into my drive and I'm already trying to figure out how I'm going to occupy the other three as I check my mirrors and gauges for the umpteenth time.

After four days of R & R at home, we picked up a load in Beech Island, S.C. and delivered it in Neenah, WI. We're now headed for New Milford, Ct - ETA noon tomorrow. Then it's on to Fullerton, California for a Friday delivery. Final destination for this run will be Syracuse, NY and the Blaisdell's for Christmas. Can't wait to see the circuitous route that finally gets us there.

The highway is relatively empty of traffic; the CB crackles with static. AM stations from Atlanta and Raleigh come in sporadically as do the talk shows out of Chicago and Cincinnati. About every 50 miles I seem to lose a station. I scan the dials. No continuity. I try the country stations. Nothing but slow, sad love songs to lull me to sleep or annoying "cross-over" stuff. Enough radio. I listen to the engine and the myriad noises inside the cab. Every once in a while I pick up a partial conversation on the CB as other trucks pass me.

My mind starts to wander. Tonight I've already visited childhood memories, replayed my most embarrassing moments, done math problems, solved world issues,



carried out silent dialogues of what-I-should-have-said's and resolved conflicts with eloquence. On other long nights, I've worked out the routes for our next pick-up, made mental lists of things to do when I get home again and talked to myself just to make certain my voice still worked.

In about two hours I'll figure out the number of miles I have left to go and then decide which truck stop we'll stop at to make our switch. That should kill at least ten minutes. In the meantime, I stare into the darkness and let my mind continue to wander. Another long, lonely night on the road.

November 27

I can't figure out what I ran over. Whatever it was doesn't really matter. Right now we find ourselves sitting at our operating center with two flat drive tires on our tractor that can't be repaired. They both have similar slashes on them. Strange.

We reached New Milford with two hours to spare and headed southwest on our way to California. Michael even commented on how well everything was going - until we noticed the tires. Better to never comment on our progress, we decided.

The ride over I-84 and I-81 through parts of Pennsylvania and New York was, as usual, hilly, bumpy and under construction. In fact, whenever truckers are asked about the worst roads in the US, Interstates 81 and 84 in Pennsylvania are always at the top of their list. Even from the darkness of the sleeper, I could always feel a distinct change in the vibration of the truck the minute we crossed into Pennsylvania.

On one of my earliest excursions over these roads, I feared the hills would defeat me. All I remember was the constant exertion of heavy pressure on the accelerator to get up hill, my nervous down shifting to keep up speed, then using the jake brake on the down hills to hold back the truck and keep from speeding, over and over again - accelerate, shift, jake, accelerate, shift, jake. My right leg and knee felt numb. Each time I pressed the peddle to the floor I feared my thigh and calf muscles would cramp, that my foot would give out. Each hill required that I put every ounce of bodily force behind my right leg and foot. My shoulders ached and my right arm was sore from shifting. When I hit the sleeper at the end of my run, I lay there, stress and tension slowly seeping from my limbs and back, the irregular motion of the truck acting like a huge vibrating massager.

Six hours and two new tires later we're finally leaving Carlisle, Pa. and heading west.

November 29

Texas. Flat, flat, flat. I followed a three quarter moon through the last 100 miles of Oklahoma on I-40, leaving it at the border as I entered the Texas panhandle. The lights of occasional small towns quickly absorbed into the emptiness. It was one of those nights where I really had to work at concentrating and not getting mesmerized by the continuous white line. I opened and closed my window a dozen times, played tapes, ate ginger snaps and drank coffee.

On the road at night, lights float slowly towards you, build to luminescence, then ebb, fading into the darkness. The night conceals the steepness of mountains, the world beyond the shoulder of the road.

Cities rise from a glare on the horizon and grow into abstract forms shaped by reflecting light. I love driving through a city like Charleston, West Virginia at night with its illuminated capitol building. And through Dallas! There's nothing like Dallas at night with its green, red and multicolored lights outlining its skyscrapers.

And the bridges, mysterious, eerie, unforgettable. The darkness always distorts a bridge, removes its definition, suspends its lights from the sky and creates a sense of detachment from the earth. Crossing bridges in an 18-wheeler in the daylight is frightening enough, but crossing in the night can be terrifying.

And the towns that seem to exist only on the billboards and along the roadsides with their single restaurant and motel, grow expansive at night merging their lights with the stars and overtaking the landscape as household upon household lights up the night. Conversely, I always wonder who resides on that distant mountain with the single torch blinking in its solitude.

Holidays, especially Christmas, are always best celebrated at night. Even in the vast flatness of Texas, people deliberately allow strangers a glimpse of their living rooms and of that tree they're so proud of. Santas climb houses, lead sleighs of reindeer across roofs, and prance with children and elves over lawns. It never matters what part of the country you're in or the temperature outside; Christmas outlines office buildings, porches, barns, and factories. Every city and town has its Star of Bethlehem.



I love the night. It mesmerizes and hypnotizes. It inspires imagination and creates monsters. Eighteen-wheelers become giant snakes of light slithering along highways and maneuvering through curves. Its quiet enhances sounds. Its darkness empties cities of traffic and gives you anonymity.

At last, the lights of Amarillo loomed ahead. I knew better than to awaken Michael yet. From the point I spotted the Amarillo skyline to the time I would pull into our fuel stop, would be at least another half hour. Texas was always so frustrating, so damned endless.

While Michael grudgingly roused himself from the sleeper to take his turn at the wheel, I fueled in the chilly 20° dawn.

It looks like we're going to make it to LA on time. We've been driving steadily except for fuel stops and one meal. Michael did the rest of Pennsylvania, Indiana and most of Oklahoma, and I drove Ohio, Missouri and the Texas Panhandle. 1,000 miles left to LA.

November 30

It's 5:30 am Pacific time. We're both smelly and exhausted and sorely in need of showers, clean clothes and sleep. But we delivered our load well before the allotted time despite our tire repair stop in Carlisle. We've already dropped our loaded trailer of sanitary pads at Kimberly Clark and are waiting at Santa Fe Plastics to get our empty 48 footer loaded. Then we're headed back east to Bucyrus, Ohio.

We thought we'd get the weekend in LA and spend some time with Jerry, Steph and their kids. They're now in LA after spending a few years in Seattle. Strange having friends who we spent much of our Alaskan wilderness years with now just a stop off of the interstate. This time it looks like we'll be there long enough for a shower, a meal and some "catch-up" conversation. One thing nice about this job is that we can occasionally get together with friends all over the country by timing our runs so they coincide with the weekends. One couple I talked to likes to pick a different part of the country to spend their days off just so they can "vacation" with relatives and friends.

December 2

Sunday, 12:45 pm. I've just used up my available hours and can't drive again until after midnight. Have to keep my log legal for now; can't afford a fine or a shutdown. We're heading toward Effingham, IL to a truck stop for food, showers and to recoup our hours so we can make our 8am delivery in Bucyrus, Ohio.

Our visit with Jerry and Steph proved to be a short but welcome respite. Then it was on the road again, retracing our steps - back through California, Arizona, New Mexico, the Texas Panhandle, Oklahoma and at present Missouri.

We're both exhausted. Driving has been more than a chore at times. We definitely need a day off!

December 3

8 pm and we're laid out on a bed in the Comfort Inn in Seville, Ohio waiting for our truck to get its 16,000 mile maintenance check up or PM. As we figure it, if we can run the miles we've been doing on a steady basis, we can expect to be PM'd and motelled at least once a month.

We left Effingham around 11 pm yesterday in the pouring rain. The CB resounded with the news that much of the Midwest had been hit with snow the night before and that it was headed our way. As of the evening weather report, we were due to be in the middle of it sometime tomorrow afternoon. Hopefully, we'll be out of here by then. We'd love to head south (who wouldn't with a snowstorm on the way) but I guess we'll have to wait until morning to get our next assignment.

December 7

We lucked out and got a load to Orlando, Fla. (20,000 lbs. of Cheerios) beating the snow as it hit Ohio. I ran with the flurries to the Virginia border but experienced good weather from there on. We made it to Orlando by 9 am, unloaded and picked up 47,000 lbs of aluminum can lids in Gainesville, Fla. headed for Busch Gardens in Williamsburg, VA. With lots of time to spare before delivery, we decided to "run through the house".



When we first went on the road, we did it "footloose and fancy free", our grown children comfortably ensconced in their own apartments in Brooklyn, NY. We looked forward to seeing the country and to being away from home. Yet, every 21-26 days when we pull the tractor into the driveway for our 4 days of R&R, we are always overwhelmed by the comfort and security we feel in the familiar, even though our vacant house usually greets us with spider webs, dust and thirsty plants.

No matter what arrival time - 2 am or 2 pm - our tradition has become to throw a frozen pizza into the oven (because it's easy), open a bottle of wine (even easier) and sit in front of the TV set for several hours of decompression. Next we tackle 3 weeks of mail! The two of us can usually get the foot high multi rubber banded stacks down to about five inches of bills, bank statements, magazines, newsletters and payroll statements in about 10 minutes. With the trash basket overflowing with junk mail, the retained stack gets placed neatly on my desk to await another level of sorting and in-depth perusal.

By now our minds and bodies have caught up with the fact that we are no longer in the truck. The 3+ weeks of erratic sleep patterns, long hours behind the wheel, stressful traffic situations and engine noise finally hit us. We fall into our non moving bed and sleep like the dead for 10 hours. End of day one!

Over a period of two days we slowly empty the truck of clean and dirty clothes, bed linen, books and magazines we've read, uneaten and partially eaten food, dirty mugs and thermoses and anything else we accumulate during our time out. Once

deposited in the house, items are sorted, sifted through, cleaned if necessary, thrown out and, whatever is left moved to appropriate places in the house.

On day two I pay all the bills, balance the checking accounts and go over all our computerized pay roll statements making sure we got paid for all the miles we ran, for loading and unloading, for holidays and for correct bonuses. Then I check that we got reimbursed for all our road expenses. This process usually takes anywhere from 2 to 3 hours.

Next I'm off to the supermarket. I've always kept a well-stocked kitchen with just about everything I need on a shelf or in the refrigerator. Being on the road changed that. I found that nothing but canned goods kept from spoiling. Oil went rancid, flour (opened or not) acquired little black bugs, butter, milk and vegetables spoiled, potatoes and onions got soft and gooey. Eventually, I began to leave my shelves bare and my refrigerator virtually empty before I left for the road.

Because our time at home is always so compressed, four days (or 96 hours) never seem to be enough to take care of everything: hair cuts, shopping, laundry, bill paying, catching up with friends and relatives, business, and relaxing. Business, which most people who work nine to five can usually take care of over a period of weeks or months, has to be tackled in the one business day we have. So if we have questions for our accountant or lawyer or doctor or insurance agent, we sometimes have to wait 3 weeks to get an answer. We've learned how to anticipate, make lots of long distance calls and write lots of letters.

Eye exams, dental and doctor appointments are almost impossible to schedule because we never know exactly when we will be home. In most cases, we have to schedule an appointment a month in advance and put in a request to our company to get us home on that date.

Another problem we found was being able to keep our house clean and organized. The last thing I want to do in my only 4 free days out of each month is dust, vacuum and clean out closets and drawers. Just unloading and reloading the truck is enough work. Needless to say, most of the house remains neglected for a year. Every once in a while we'll get so disgusted that we go on a cleaning rampage and fill 4 or 5 huge trash bags with our accumulated "debris". Otherwise, most things wait until our two-week vacation.

Before we went out on the road we installed a security system with a 24-hour a day monitoring set up. We know it works because it has gone off on several occasions bringing my brother-in-law Danny and the local police to the house. Fortunately, nothing has ever been taken. Danny drops by about once a week to feed the cat, pet Tarja and check on the house.

After six months on the road we considered selling our house. Many drivers who stay out as long as we do or longer use their parents, a motel, or a post office box as their residence. Our logic was that we rent an apartment somewhere in the continental United States. We're flexible. Our children are gone and we can live anywhere. But each time we get home and look at what we have, we realize we just can't do it. We live in a 20 year old tri-level house on 3 acres with an acre pond on a dirt road about 12



miles east of Raleigh, N.C. To say our place is idyllic is an understatement! So we continue to put up with the problems of home ownership in-absentia and pay the price.

Relaxing always seems to come last in the list of "have-to-do's". Occasionally, we rent a couple of movies or visit with friends, play with our computers or just sit and watch TV. Sometimes we manage to do all of the above.

The day before we go out, we clean the truck, do last minute laundry and shopping, go to the bank to get some cash, clean the cooler and reload the truck. With the coffee pot set to go, we fall into bed for our last non-moving sleep for 3 weeks. So be it for 4 days off.

Occasionally, like today, we get a chance to "go through the house" as we truckers call a few hours at home. We use the house as a truck stop: eat, shower, do laundry and catch a few hours of sleep. Knowing we can't stay longer is sometimes frustrating.

December 9

We awakened at 6 am in a rest area about 50 miles east of Nashville. Frost covered the windshield. I sank deeper into my down bag as Michael reached over the front seat and turned on the ignition and the heater. We lay ensconced in our bags, our clothes now stuffed inside them slowly warming. Gradually, we worked our way into our jeans and shirts, grabbed our jackets and made the mad dash to our respective rest

rooms. I shivered through a cold seat and even colder water and headed back to the warmth of the truck.

We're now on our way to Modesto, California on what we refer to as the "rag run" (i.e. 11,000 lbs of sanitary pads). I always find it a source of amusement to watch the faces of the California and Arizona DOT guys turn red when we declare "sanitary pads" or "tampons" as our load.

To back track a bit, we made it just in time to Anheuser Busch in Williamsburg only to sit for 40 minutes in a line of trucks until we could dock and be unloaded. What a zoo that place is. Hundreds of trucks everywhere loading and unloading everything from cartons to beer cans to lids, kegs, and pallets. Inside the plant, high speed machines fill, seal and package millions of cans of beer. Typical organized mass confusion.

From Williamsburg we went to Greenville, N.C. where we picked up our 53-foot trailer full of pads. This is one of our easiest and fastest pick up and drop spots. Unfortunately it has no indoor bathrooms - only an outside port-o-let used primarily by men and overwhelmingly foul. One of the problems we women drivers have to put up with! Unlike the men, our plumbing is not as adaptable as theirs to "cooling down the tires" (as some truckers so eloquently put it) or using a soda bottle. So if emergencies arise where facilities are not available, I just do what I have to in order to accommodate the situation. Some women have rigged special spill-proof "potties" in the sleeper. Others use the side of the road squeezing themselves between the tires so as not to be seen. I'm not particularly comfortable doing this because I always feel I can be seen.

However, at night, I'd rather pull off to the side of the road than take a chance at a dark secluded rest area at 2 am. Another problem women drivers have regarding bathroom facilities is that in many cases, especially on docks and in warehouses, there are only MEN's rooms. On numerous occasions Michael (and other drivers when he's not around) has stood guard while I've taken over a two or three stall bathroom. I must admit that men's rooms, on the whole, are pretty gross. Frequently, when I'm making a pick-up or delivery and I need a bathroom, I'm ushered through the plant and into the office area where there are clean, well stocked facilities for both men and women. One day I think I'll do a thorough dissertation on the bathrooms I have known and hated throughout the United States.

We're headed west and should be in Modesto Tuesday with plenty of time to spare. If we pace ourselves, we can stop for a longer period of time and both catch up on some non-moving sleep.

There is nothing that compares with sleeping in a moving 18-wheeler. More than once I have awakened feeling bruised and battered. My shoulders ached; my right arm and hand were asleep. My pillows were askew and my covers disheveled. There have been times in the sleeper I thought I would have to peel myself off of the ceiling.

In fact, there are many drivers that run solo merely because they can't sleep in a moving truck. Unlike the consistent lulling motion one gets on a boat, a big rig's movements are erratic, inconsistent and asynchronous. The bouncing and bumping of a truck is such that there is never a rhythm one can fall into. Just as you begin to ease into the first level of sleep, the truck hits a series of ruts bouncing you around and jolting



you awake. Too tired to think or care, you begin to doze in spurts, lapsing into twilight sleep, never quite knowing if you've actually slept. You wake, you relax, you sleep amid jostling, stops, starts, traffic noises, shifting gears. A seven hour sleep may actually consist of four to five hours of deep sleep. You're constantly readjusting covers, changing positions, accommodating yourself to the irregularities of the road and trying to block out all the intrusive noises. At times you curl up into a fetal position to stop certain parts of your body from jiggling around. At other times you find yourself clutching your pillow and covers just to keep them in place.

Last year we drove 235,000 "paid" miles or close to a quarter of a million actual miles. The astonishing thing is that we, along with several thousands of other over-the-road drivers, lived all those miles in the cab of a truck. Unlike an RV or a camper, a tractor is built for pulling a heavy load. The fact that most tractors are also designed for driver comfort, reliability, safety, aerodynamics, and sufficient storage and sleep space for on the road living is a testament to driver persistence, company accommodations, and modern technology.

The sleeper is the place where we can exercise our creativity. Owner operators or independents can customize their vehicles with everything from convection-microwave ovens, to running water, a refrigerator, full pantry and storage cabinets and a mounted coffee maker. The accouterments are obviously dependent upon affordability. However, company drivers like us live in rather Spartan conditions with only a bed, storage space and maybe a couple of shelves for clothes and a TV set.

We drive a cab-over or short nosed truck. So in order to get to the sleeper we have to climb over what we call the dog box into an 8'x 5' cubbyhole behind the cab. Our home on the road has no standing room. It consists of a single queen sized mattress on top of which we store our clothes, reading materials and bedding. A heavy-duty curtain, fabric covered to match the cab interior on the outside and a dark faux leather material on the inside, can be snugly closed with Velcro and magnets to block out all light and muffle sound. The sleeper also consists of a dome light, a reading light, ashtray, side pockets and two vents. We can sit up but we have to lie down in order to put on our pants. It's just one of those things we get used to. You can stand in many conventional or long nosed trucks. These larger sleepers are traditionally designed with a bed, sometimes an additional hanging bunk, and storage compartments.

After several years of teaming, Michael and I have developed our own methods for assuring we get sufficient sleep. Because we are on an eight-hour sleep/drive cycle, we find if we get at least five to six hours sleep at a stretch we are well rested and alert. The best times for sleeping are when we are on a cross-country run. This is because there are few if any stops and we plan our fueling and eating to coincide with driver changes. Also, we run primarily interstates so the ride is generally smooth. Short runs create havoc with our sleep cycles. These runs include lots of stopping and starting, going through small towns, dropping and hooking or backing into docks and getting loaded or unloaded. All of these disturbances make consistent sleeping virtually impossible.

On occasion we have the luxury of sleeping without moving. This usually happens when we arrive early for a pick up or delivery or when we've been shut down due to bad weather and can't get to a motel. It's amazing how rested we always feel after a few hours of non-moving sleep. In fact, some couples have told us that they make a point of stopping for four hours a night just so that they can sleep. We find we can't make the miles we like if we do that. Also, our bodies are so attuned to eight hour cycles that breaking that rhythm actually makes sleeping more difficult.

Of course, the best sleep we can get on the road is in a motel. This luxury may occur once or twice in a 3 week run. There's nothing like having a king or queen sized bed with clean sheets, a bathroom and shower at your immediate disposal, a TV with remote control, and the option of a wake-up call. An additional amenity may include an in-room coffee maker. For \$26.00 to \$42.00 for two for a night (which your company usually pays for), you feel like a millionaire and sleep like a baby.

There have been times, however, when I never made it to the sleeper and pulled onto a safe shoulder or into a rest area for a short nap. Late one night, I pulled into a rest area to use the bathroom and walk around the truck a couple of times to revive my stiff limbs. I climbed back into the tractor, fastened my seatbelt, turned on the ignition and quickly glanced at my watch. The next time I looked at my watch, it was two hours later and I was still sitting bolt upright in the seat.

I've seen many a driver hunched over his steering wheel, his head nestled on folded arms or a pillow sound asleep. While sleeping, other drivers pull in for the same purpose, parking in front of him. More than one has recounted awakening in sudden



horror, seeing a truck in front of him and, thinking he's still driving, grab the steering wheel and jam on the brake.

December 12

We arrived in Modesto with plenty of time to spare. We even got a bit of Christmas shopping done along the way at two of our favorite truck stops, one in New Mexico and the other in Arizona.

The snow and ice finally caught up with us in the mountains northeast of Sacramento. The going wasn't too bad last night as road crews were out doing their jobs even before anything really began to stick. Our ride over Donner Pass was spectacularly beautiful with the snow-covered mountains as both backdrop and foreground.

December 13

Boy did we hit it coming out of Idaho and into Wyoming - all night long! I was driving when it started - just flurries on and off. Then the snowfall became heavier and started sticking. I remember the first time I hit heavy snow coming through the mountains of California. I was terrified. I couldn't see two feet in front of me. The CB was silent. You could feel the tension of nervous truckers as they slowly maneuvered their rigs over the slick steepness. I woke Michael from a sound sleep and, after finding

a relatively safe place to pull over; he carefully took the wheel and drove us to more level ground. Tense from the concentration needed to drive on the ice and snow, we pulled into a truck stop and waited for the sun.

One of my first tests of winter driving came early in my career. As I left Nebraska on I-80 heading west and crossed into Wyoming, the yellow caution signs were furiously flashing warnings of ice and snow on the roads over Sherman Pass and Elk Mountain. I queried the DOT folks at the port of entry as I showed them my permits and was again warned about traveling beyond Cheyenne that night. As I pulled out of the inspection station I turned up the CB. Drivers coming from the west described the passes and mile markers that had been "greasy" but insisted that all was passable if one was careful. Plows were out there sanding and there were no backups. Of course, it was 3am, so traffic would be light. I figured, if these other drivers had made it, so could I.

Without hesitation and in total ignorance of what was ahead, I passed under the third set of yellow warning lights and proceeded into 70 miles of ice and snow covered mountains. The moon was wondrously full as I crested Sherman and slowly began to descend this 6% grade. Two of the four lanes had been narrowly plowed with just enough room for two trucks to pass each other. I was praying that event would not occur until I had reached the bottom of the hill. In front of me another truck slowly wended its way down the windy steepness. As I looked at what lay ahead of me, I held my breath, kept my distance, and wished I had stopped at that last truck stop in Cheyenne. Too late now, I was totally committed. There was no turning back. I slowly descended the hill at 25 miles per hour barely touching my brakes as the truck began to

gain momentum. This was definitely not a car I was driving! I kept watching the truck ahead of me checking to see how he maneuvered, if he skidded or if his trailer began to jack. After what seemed an eternity, I watched his rig level out. My destination was imminent. What a relief. I'd made it! However, that proved to be merely the first of many heart-pounding moments that night as I slowly proceeded over the notorious Elk Mountain range.

Even with years of experience you're never totally prepared for driving on treacherous roads. On a run to Maine, we ran into what we were later told was the *big* one. "Line shut down if we don't get there on time," our instructions said. With Michael asleep in the back, I kept on moving through Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and into Maine, stopping every 30 to 50 minutes to clear the ice off of our windshield and bang the wipers. The snow in Maine was falling at a rate of 2 inches an hour - too fast for the snow plows to keep up with. Visibility was about a foot. The road, what I could see of it, was empty except for an occasional 18 wheeler trying to make its destination. When I finally turned the wheel over to Michael I was exhausted and relieved. He got us safely to the motel in Portland after having to back down an icy hill twice before he could turn into the parking lot.

I've also done my time through the snow-covered mountains of Wyoming and California, through the hills of Pennsylvania and through ice storms in Iowa. During those drives I worried about black ice, glare ice, highway shutdowns, freezable loads, frozen fuel lines, frozen wheels and gelled fuel. I stay glued to the CB and to local radio stations for the latest weather reports.



I always hope for a load that will take us across I-10 or I-20 (the southern routes). Some winters we've lucked out (like this one) and find ourselves either ahead of or behind a major storm. But usually we can count on snow, ice, highway shutdowns and chain laws in effect. That's when we pull into the nearest truck stop; commiserate with the hundred or so truckers sitting out the storm, and wait.

When the yellow warning signs stop flashing and the gates used to close the interstate reopen, we and the other impatient truckers wary of hidden ice carefully work our way east or west along the single plowed lanes, anticipating the next storm. The roadsides are littered with 18-wheelers and cars that did not make it. The 8-foot high snow fences are almost obscured by the latest infusion of white stuff.

One winter it took us two days to get across New Mexico when it usually takes us seven hours. We've sat in Wyoming on numerous occasions, in Nevada and California - waiting. Some drivers have waited up to a week for their trucks to unfreeze. One bull hauler told me about pulling into a rest area during a snowstorm. When he awakened the next morning, the snow was up to his door. Not only did it take 2 days before he got plowed out, but he lost most of his cattle.

Ice is the bane of the truck driver. The highway is our skid pad. It is the place where we do our best to avoid jack knifing or skidding into another vehicle. Icy roads are where we try to remember to use our clutch and not our brake; where we try to remember how to counter steer. One November day, it took us close to eight hours to go 150 miles from Walcott to Des Moines, Iowa on ice covered I-80. I videotaped the ride, taping every half hour and indicating the time and mile marker. The experience

was so harrowing we still have difficulty watching the tape. Twenty-eight big trucks and 122 cars lay in the median and road shoulders by the time we reached our exit. That was the last time I ever thought of Iowa as being flat!

I remember one icy night running with two other trucks and a pickup truck that had taken refuge among us along I-80 in Nebraska. We were headed east and all the west bounders kept warning us about black ice - ice you cannot see. With the other two trucks in the lead, the pickup behind them and me bringing up the rear, we cautiously moved along the highway at about 25 to 35 mph. We chatted nervously over the CB, the trucker on the front door meticulously describing the road ahead of him. The next thing I knew my entire rig was situated in the adjacent lane (I was still headed east and I was still between the lines). Somehow I had slid sideways into the next lane. I never lost control of the truck but the thought that there could have been a car or another vehicle where I ended up scared the hell out of me. I also knew that there was no way I could have prevented the skid from happening.

Yet, there is nothing more beautiful than driving through the snowy mountains of Wyoming with the light of the full moon giving the world around you an ethereal quality. Or going through snow covered Nevada, Colorado or Northern California on a clear, sunny day with the snow glistening like shards of crystal and the tracks of deer and antelope clearly imprinted on the hills.

Winter is always a sure test of my skills, my stress level, and my patience. It is never a time to look forward to. I watch for the days to get longer, for the temperatures to rise, for those late storms to abate and hope that Spring will come early.

December 14

Had about 30 more miles of icy road, passed three tractor-trailers that had slid into each other the night before and a tanker that had gone off of the road. From there on it was smooth driving through the rest of Wyoming, Nebraska, Iowa and Illinois.

Managed to get myself another pair of earrings - much to Michael's chagrin. This time I spotted a pair of copper earrings in the Little America Truck Stop in Wyoming. Michael, I think, has finally given up on trying to distract me from this addiction. I told him I could probably track the history of our life on the road through the earrings I've purchased. My more recent pairs have come from the West-To-Go Truck Stop in Abilene, Texas (silver with red bugle beads) and the Burns Brothers in Mill City, Nevada (a two pair for \$5.00 bargain on cloisonné ones) .

It looks like we might relay this load in Seville, Ohio.

December 16

California, here we come again! This time we're carrying 80 rolls of foam to a consignee north of Bakersfield. We left Seville, OH about 12:30 pm yesterday after a night in a motel, a shower and a couple of hours at the laundromat. So far, all we've hit is some rain in Oklahoma. Spent almost an hour riding around Amarillo looking for a supermarket to buy groceries. All we could find were shopping malls and fast food



restaurants. We were beginning to think that no one in Amarillo ate at home. Finally, after almost giving up, we found one, stocked up on drinks, cold cuts and cookies and continued westward.

One thing we both miss is home cooking - food with that bit of spice and flavor and variety that can never be duplicated at a truck stop. Hamburgers, soups and salads along with breakfast are the safest meals to consume. Eating out gets old fast, but we have no other options than the occasional sandwich. And that gets old even faster!

Trying to get a decent meal on the road can be a nightmare. No matter what the signs say, there is no such thing as "home cooking" on the road! Every once in a while I see truckers try to replicate home cooking by pulling out small cookers or hibachis, throwing some steaks or chicken on them, and announcing a cookout in the middle of a truck stop. Otherwise, they eat what they can get whenever they get the opportunity. These relatively unsatisfying options include carrying rations in a plug-in cooler/refrigerator, consuming "mass quantities" of junk food, pulling into an unfamiliar restaurant or fast food/convenience store because it has truck parking or going to a truck stop.

Each time out, I try to stock "good" foods like carrots or apples in our refrigerator. But somehow the sodas, Snapple, lunchmeats, bread, mustard and mayo usually take over most of the available space. Other consumables I stock in the truck include Michael's three-week supply of chocolate candy bars (which only last two weeks), chips, pretzels and cookies. For emergencies, we store a carton of canned soups with spoons, a can opener and a plug-in heating element in the side box. We make

sandwiches and eat in the truck if we're on a tight schedule. But, for the most part, we eat at truck stops at least twice within each 24-hour period. It's important to get out of the truck.

Because obesity seems to be the trucker's bane, I'm determined to keep an eye on my weight. However, I find my inactivity affecting my waistline. Not only am I slowly gaining weight (ten pounds at this point), but I'm getting flabby and developing something I've never had before—a belly. I even have to lie down on the floor of the shower room to zip my blue jeans. And on occasion, I've had to ask Michael to zip while I sucked in my gut and held the fabric together. Several older pair of pants won't even zip. Vain as I am I'm determined *not* to buy larger jeans. That would be an admission of defeat. Instead, I plan to try to figure some way to find comfort in my present ones. Though Michael, too, is adding bulk to his 6'4", 260 pound frame (especially around his midsection), he doesn't seem to be as concerned about gaining weight as I. He is, however, curious as to "what" he's actually eating.

Because our erratic schedule of running around the clock and eating at odd times of the day and night makes it difficult to determine what, how much and when we are eating, I decided to write down every morsel that crossed my lips, what time I ate that morsel and its corresponding calories. I did this for 11 days and then sat down and evaluated my data.

I knew ahead of time the overall average would be high and that I would definitely have to cut back. So I scrutinized the 11 days of meals and snacks to determine which items could be replaced with less fattening foods and which could be

eliminated completely. Again, but with the intent of eating less in mind, I kept a complete list of everything I ate for the next 11 days.

Wow! I'd cut back my daily intake of calories by 229 and my calories per drive by 65 - certainly not enough to make a dent in my blue jeans. This amount of calories was sufficient to maintain my present weight but too many for losing weight. My metabolic rate seemed to have dropped to "0".

The problems I encounter - eating cheese burgers at 7 am and cheese omelets at 7 pm - are indicative of the job. I really try to cut back by eating smaller and less fattening meals and by watching what I consume during my 8-hour drive. But there are times during the drive, especially in the last few hours, when I start to get a bit tired. That's when I reach for a slice of lunchmeat or a candy bar or a sweet bun to revive me.

At mealtime it's not always easy to be selective or to convince myself to turn down local specialties. Mexican food or Texas bar-b-que are usually my undoing. As soon as we get into the southwestern part of the country all thoughts of dieting fly out the window. We have our specific restaurants and truck stops we head for so we can devour that "great" Taco Salad or that Texas ribs/beef/chicken combo or those spicy enchiladas and burritos. Though the larger truck stops have salad bars and a variety of grilled rather than fried foods, the smaller and mid sized ones do not. More times than not, we're stuck with a greasy hamburger steak, french fries and greens cooked in fatback. I've finally resigned myself to the fact that dieting is virtually impossible for me to do on the road. I'll just have to live in tight blue jeans.



The turn around on this trip should bring us close to Syracuse and Christmas. It's been three weeks since we started out on the road and we've been "out of the truck" 3 times. It will be four weeks by the time we hit Syracuse.

December 17

I started our drive at 3:30 am after dinner and 4 hours sleep at the Santa Rosa, N.M. T/A. The pouring rain had subsided and falling temperatures had turned patches of road to ice. I wended my way slowly across New Mexico in dense fog, heavy snow and extremely icy roads. I wasn't unhappy to finally climb into the sleeper and leave the driving to Michael.

When I joined Michael on the road, he'd already been driving for about 10 months. We were excited about driving together. We figured we wouldn't have any problems adjusting to life on the road. We'd been together for 20 years, had lived elbow to elbow for two years in Alaska in everything from a two man tent to an 800 square foot log cabin. We'd run a business together for 10 years. We didn't anticipate that there would be too many more kinks for us to work out.

Little did I realize that I was invading *his* territory. I didn't shift gears correctly, I didn't turn the way he did, I couldn't back, I couldn't drop and hook fast enough and I couldn't even close the trailer doors fast enough. When I moved the trash bag from behind "his" seat (the driver's) to the floor in front of the jump seat, I thought for sure he

was going to divorce me. Deep down he trusted my driving. But I was new and inexperienced and not yet tuned to seeing through a trucker's eyes.

He was an impatient, short-tempered teacher. And I was stubborn. After much yelling, screaming and shouting (our way of handling verbal communication), we gradually managed to work out our places in the truck. He loves to trip plan and hover over the map, calculator in hand, trying to anticipate our fuel stops and switching points. I handle all of the paper work (of which there is a surprisingly large amount) and verify his conclusions or suggest other options. He keeps the outside of the truck clean, I the inside. We each fuel, check and add oil and handle any maintenance or emergency problems that occur on our particular watch. We share the driving and pick-up and delivery responsibilities equally and, on numerous occasions, act as the others navigator in finding hard to locate companies. When backing into tight situations, we always spot for each other. We know who handles a particular shipper or consignee better. We know, based upon the type of problem, which of us is better at confronting our dispatcher. Michael always prefers the overview; I, the details.

And we really work hard at keeping our personal lives separate from our lives as on-the-road partners. We're each other's mood barometers attempting to keep our highs and lows in perspective and our driving unaffected. While we're with that vehicle, our lives, our marriage, our total relationship becomes intrinsically bound to the safe and efficient operation of the truck and the delivery of its freight. Sometimes this is difficult to do. But we try. And sometimes we get so lost in the efficiency of running the truck that we start to lose sight of our own relationship. The balance is tough to maintain.

People always ask me what it's like to live 24 hours a day 7 days a week in the cab of a truck with the same person. I tell them to imagine themselves locked in an 8' by 12' compartment with one other person for three to four weeks at a time. All you have inside is a bed, a plug in refrigerator, a radio and tape deck, a CB and an allotted amount of storage space. You trust each other with your life, primarily while you sleep, and tolerate each other's good and bad moods, habits and idiosyncrasies. There is little that either person won't know about the other as they experience both the proximity associated with over-the-road living and the general stress and pressures that are involved with the job itself. Over a period of weeks, months and years you become privy to your partners sleep habits, breathing habits, eating habits, and even bathroom habits and schedule. If you're both married, you know more about each other's personal lives, insecurities, dreams and problems than each of your spouses do. You know when your partner's too tired to drive or when he's depressed. You know when he's angry and when he's *angry*. You know who's better at trip planning, keeping the paper work, and dealing with dispatchers and dockworkers. One thing nice about having a partner is that you always have someone to eat with, someone to share those long hours of waiting with, and someone to talk to.

Every driver out there has teamed at least once - as a trainee or with a relative or friend. And every one of them has a story about "the team mate from *hell*!"

Michael's first teammate had excellent driving skills but, as he found out, poor judgment. Not only did he take his frustrations out on the truck by grinding gears and speeding, he was colorblind as well. One night he mistook a blue business route sign for the green interstate one and ended up on a dirt road headed for a hand built wooden



bridge. Michael had to dissuade him from backing into a farmer's field (who knew how soft the ground was or if the farmer would come after them with a shotgun) and from continuing down the dirt road until he knew what was ahead of him. That's when he discovered the bridge. With daylight they were able to back their way out of their situation. His teammate also had a habit of speeding down hills in "Georgia overdrive" or with the transmission in neutral. He'd brag about doing this while Michael slept. Needless to say, my husband informed his company that he was getting off the truck and taking the next plane home if they didn't get him another partner. The company complied and the original teammate left the company shortly afterward.

Other drivers have talked about waking after 8 hours and finding their partners parked in a rest area or on the shoulder of the road sound asleep with only 150 miles of driving completed. Others have awakened to find themselves 200 miles out of route or going in the wrong direction. Some had teammates that fell asleep at the wheel as soon as it got dark, and others had partners who couldn't follow interchange signs, read maps or follow written directions. Some drivers have lasted only 2 or 3 sleepless nights with a partner, while others have persisted for several weeks or months until they finally resign themselves to the solo life.

Because one of the major attractions of trucking is its independence and freedom, just the idea of having another person constantly with you can be stifling. In an industry as highly regulated as trucking, the last thing a driver wants to do is "regulate" the way he lives and works in order to accommodate another person. Personality conflicts, hygiene problems (too neat, not neat enough; smokes, never

showers or washes clothes), distracting personal problems, talking too much or too little, hating the other's choice of music can all be contributing factors affecting a driver's decision to team or solo. One other reason mentioned by truckers regarding their preference for running solo is their inability to sleep in a moving truck. This, of course, is a major problem that can never be remedied by remaining a part of a team.

However, I've read that at least 15% of drivers do team and many have done it for years with the same partner. I sometimes wonder if I would ever do this job alone. I know I could handle the driving, the trip planning, and the lifestyle. I just don't think I would want to do it without Michael.

December 18

We made it to our favorite truck stop in Kingman, Arizona after a rather treacherous ride over the snow-covered mountains that bypass Flagstaff. It took Michael one and a half hours to go 35 miles at 25-35 miles per hour on the interstate. Once we reached the flats, the ride was relatively smooth to Kingman.

We showered and ate and finished our Christmas shopping as well. Bought ceramic wind chimes (Native American) for the Blaisdells and a miner with his mule on a piece of pyrite for Danny. At this point, our side box was stuffed with presents we'd picked up along the way.

Slept four hours and drove the first shift towards Porterville, Ca. Another quiet night pleasantly broken up by a rather amusing incident. I had the CB on as usual when

I heard two drivers attempting to sing Christmas carols. Much as they tried, neither one of them could get past the first line of any song. I sat there chuckling as they ran through "Silent Night" and "Jingle Bells" and "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" never getting much beyond the titles. I knew all the words and was dying to sing them to them. But I hesitated. I felt like an intruder. They were having so much fun. So I drove on silently, listening to their animated voices as they gradually faded into the distance.

Michael finished the run and we picked up 14,000 pounds of disposable diapers for Kmart in Lawrence, Kansas. Another "rag" run!

December 20

We each spent a day and a half working our way through some sort of bug. When I'm too sick to move and I'm 2,000 miles from home, all I want to do is gather the covers around me in my own bed and "die" for about two days. However, for now my only means of comfort and shelter is the sleeper of a truck. So I lie there and sleep the sleep of the sick in parking lots and truck stops and over smooth and bumpy roads.

There's no TV, hot tea or chicken soup. There's no kitchen or bathroom. To eat or go to the bathroom, I have to dress for the weather and drag myself out of the truck and into the nearest truck stop, rest area or restaurant. Then it's back to the sanctuary and comfort of the sleeper.

One of my more virulent bouts with the flu lasted about 5 days; Michael's about 7. Luckily, our illnesses were staggered so that he was on the way to recovery, as I got



sick. Somehow, we managed to pick up and deliver loads amid coughs, congestion, headaches and fever. We exhausted our supply of Kleenex, Seldane, Tylenol and cough syrup within a period of a week.

There are times however, when we've been too sick to move. Then, we just "park it" and get a motel room until we can function again. At least once a winter, we have to go that route. Folding tarps outside in Minneapolis at  $-11^{\circ}$  with a  $-33^{\circ}$  wind chill factor did it for me. Even with a long-john top, heavy sweatshirt, insulated coveralls and a heavy jacket and cap, I was cold. That, in addition to taking over an hour to add steadily freezing water to the truck radiator, chilled me to the bone. I was so spacey, my judgment so impaired; there was no way I could walk or drive. It took me days, including a night in a motel, to get over the cough, cold and runny nose that resulted. Being sick is never any fun. But it's even worse when you have neither the time nor the place to be so.

We slept and drove and slept making it to Lawrence, Kansas with time to spare. They accepted the loaded trailer and, after a two-hour wait, we got our next assignment - to Brookhaven, Mississippi! This sure doesn't look like the way to Syracuse. We had better be going north from Mississippi to get there by Sunday. Guess we'll find out tomorrow.

Believe it or not, we're driving with the air conditioning on. With the winter front right behind us as we left Kansas City, we headed south to sunny, 70° weather. Dropped and picked up in Mississippi and dropped and picked up in New Orleans. We're now headed for Charlotte with expected arrival around 2 am. And then it's home for a day, take care of some business, exchange gifts with Danny, Eileen and the kids and then head for Syracuse for Christmas Eve.

For a while we were concerned about getting the loads that would take us to Syracuse. This Christmas in particular is important for us because Michael's father has been so sick and we're not sure he's going to see another Christmas.

Most drivers and their families learn to accept the fact that missing important occasions is part of the job. However, there are times when there is no such thing as compromise. And getting to Syracuse for Christmas was certainly one of those times for us. One driver we spoke to had made arrangements with his dispatcher weeks ahead of time to be home in Memphis, TN last 4th of July weekend for a big family reunion. People he hadn't seen in years were coming in from all over the country and he definitely planned to be there. And where was he on July 2nd? Why in Minneapolis, of course! The word was that there was no freight going south. In four years with his company he had put up with missing some important family events. But this time he was determined to get home. The next phone call his dispatcher received from him was from the Minneapolis/St. Paul Airport. The driver told him where the tractor, trailer and

keys were, that he was taking the next plane to Memphis, and that he would call him in a few days. He never had a problem getting home after that.

Even when we think we have our plans under control, we find more times than not, that fate, a shipper, our company or dispatcher or the weather, has a tendency to wrest that control from us. A perfect example of this was when I turned 50.

Now, I'm not one to dwell on birthdays, but I felt 50 was a rather significant milestone. Half a century on the planet was something to celebrate. In fact, as luck would have it, my birthday coincided with our scheduled four days off. Unbeknownst to me, Michael had made arrangements through his brother to hire a limo filled with champagne and flowers, and chauffeur me to one of the more elegant restaurants in Raleigh where he and several of our close friends would help me celebrate.

As it turned out, I never did get to celebrate my 50th birthday. Instructed to pick up new tractors at the International plant in Springfield, Ohio by our dispatcher, Michael and I had to postpone our time at home by two days. Consequently, I quietly entered my 51st year on the road from Springfield, Ohio to Charlotte, N.C. as the lead driver of three vans that had to be returned to our operating center. Where was Michael? In one of the new tractors we and four other teams had picked up, on his way to somewhere in Ohio to get a load for Charlotte. I was to meet him at home sometime on the 12th. Fortunately, I knew nothing about the plans he'd had to cancel in lieu of a new truck. Accepting my fate, I decided that somewhere in this 13 hour drive there was a Denny's with that birthday meal I kept seeing advertised. When we stopped to gas the vans, I told my two followers to keep their eyes open. If nothing else, I was determined to



celebrate with a free meal. I couldn't believe it. Not one Denny's anywhere along the route we traveled! I think my two friends were more disappointed than I. Exhausted after more than three weeks on the road, I arrived home to an empty house and went to sleep. I must add that Michael did wine and dine me on Valentine's Day as a way of making up for my non-birthday celebration.

+++++

We're tired and dirty and haven't showered since the 18th. But we're headed home and don't care.

December 24

By the time we arrived at the Blaisdell's in Syracuse, we had driven over 20,000 miles in 29 days. We'd been to California three times and encountered every type of weather condition except tornadoes and hurricanes. We had even driven through a mild earthquake in Bakersfield, California.

We end our month on the road in the middle of a snowstorm in upstate New York an hour from Syracuse. The trip home was horrendous. After messing around with trailers in the Charlotte lot, we hit fog so thick in Greensboro that I missed my entrance onto I-85 from the truck stop and ended up on a one lane dead end street. Unable to see the edges of the road, I cautiously tried to turn around. Frustrated and certain that I

would eventually find myself in a ditch, I woke Michael who, though perplexed at how I had gotten myself into such a predicament, was happy that I had had the sense to realize I would have been in real trouble had I continued what I was doing. Undaunted, he appraised the situation, and with me as his eyes outside the truck, he skillfully backed us out of the mess and I proceeded on my way home.

We left Raleigh on noon of the 23rd after a delightful brunch and a pre Christmas exchange of gifts with Michael's brother Danny, his wife Eileen and their kids. Now it was time to head north and hopefully stay ahead of the winter front that was moving in from the west.

Other than a lot of rain and heavy fog on parts of I-81 in Pennsylvania, we did stay ahead of the snow. Until Cortland, N.Y. Then came the sleet and, by the time we hit Syracuse, snow. I had driven us to just south of Binghamton, N.Y. Michael lucked out this time and got all the "good" weather. We made it to the consignee in Oswego by 4am - not bad considering the adverse conditions we had had to deal with.

Besides the cold, wind and snow to contend with, Michael had to almost blind side back over railroad tracks to get into the dock. Our load delivered, we slowly headed for Syracuse at 35mph, snow still coming down and our now empty trailer dutifully (though reluctantly at times) following behind us.

December 25

Christmas Day! What a pleasant respite from the hectic schedules of the past month. We dropped our trailer in the parking lot of the local mall and cautiously

bobtailed to the Blaisdell's. Our journey was more than worth it to be able to sit comfortably in their living room and, for a day at least, enjoy the holiday. My in-laws were so thrilled to have us, even for such a short time.



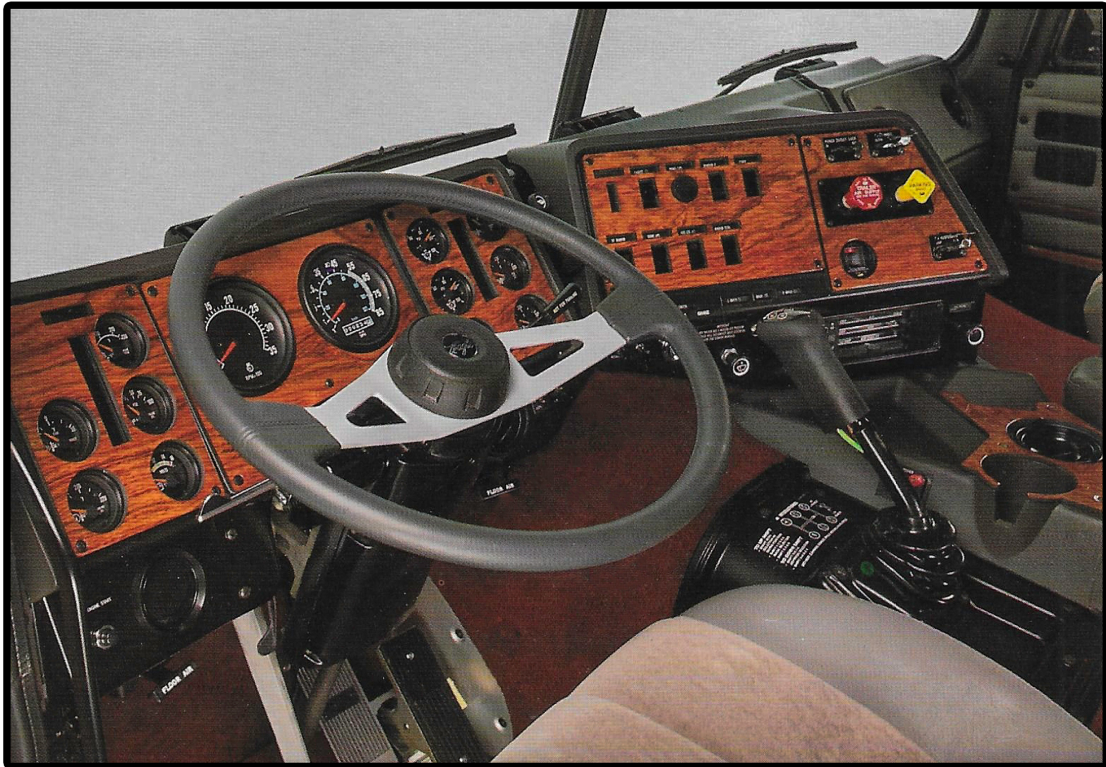


November 1990, Graduation Day at Schneider National Carriers, Inc.



A leisurely stop along the Salt River Canyon in Arizona





A standard dashboard with its assortment of gauges and switches\*



A standard single sleeper in a conventional tractor\*

\*courtesy of Navistar International Transportation Corp.





“Modern Art” Actually a broken crane we carried from Miami, FL to Jonesboro, AR



Unloading the “Modern Art”





Trailers of glass ready for pickup



Our load ready to roll





Unloading the rooftop AC units in Miami, FL



The crane operator swung them right over the top of parked cars!





Mirror image (the air conditioning units)



## BORING IS GOOD

December 30

Christmas gave us a pleasant though brief respite from the hectic schedules of the past month. We could see how the emphysema was gradually taking its toll on Michael's father. His mother had moved one of the recliners into the living room along with anything Greg needed. He commanded the TV from his perch in the leather recliner, remote in his hand a nebulizer and table full of pills at his side. Colby sat obediently at his feet.

Unfortunately, we didn't get the four days off we had expected. By noon on the 26th we were out in 16° temperatures trying to unlock the frozen wheels of the trailer. After an hour and a half we were finally on our way to Canandaigua Winery in upstate New York to haul 40,000 plus pounds of New Year's cheer (mostly champagne) to Milwaukee. Then it was back to upstate New York where we picked up 47,000 pounds of disposable butane lighters for Torrence, California.

We're always fascinated by the variety of products we carry across country and the diversity of our destinations. But there are occasions when the logistics of the total picture confounds us. This was one of those times. It seems that the lighters were assembled in Mexico. We were picking them up in Rochester, N.Y. at a graphics company that had put logos and artwork on them. Now we were transporting them back west to California. Somehow, we wondered, there had to be a graphics company *in*

California that could have done the work. Obviously, neither the logistics nor the expense was our worry. Our job was to get the lighters to Torrence by a certain time and date.

The load was a HAZMAT one and required *FLAMMABLE GAS* placards on the trailer plus adherence to all DOT restrictions for this particular classification. We pulled out our booklets on hazardous materials to make sure we were on top of everything we needed to know. NO SMOKING WITHIN 25 FEET OF THE TRUCK. NO DRIVING THROUGH TUNNELS OR CITIES. NO LEAVING THE TRUCK UNATTENDED. KEEP ALL INFORMATION AND BILLS OF LADING ON THE FRONT SEAT OR IN THE POCKET OF THE DRIVER'S DOOR. We were ready!

For some reason we had decided to take I-70 west through Colorado. To begin with, this was not the best time of year to drive through the Rockies. Also, we had totally forgotten about Eisenhower Tunnel. As we got closer to the tunnel it dawned on us that we were restricted from going through it and would have to take Route 6, otherwise known as "the scenic route" over the mountains. With Michael behind the wheel, we snaked our way up the circuitous mountain. There were no pull offs or guardrails. As we slowly moved higher we found ourselves eye level with the ski lifts, their passengers becoming specks in our mirrors. At last, at 12,000 feet we found a pull off. We were both dizzy from the terrifying ride, the spectacular beauty of the snow covered slopes and the altitude. After snapping a few pictures, we took a couple of deep though difficult breaths in the thin air and cautiously headed down hill and back to

I-70 and the other side of the tunnel. It will be a long time before we take that route again!

January 9

We made it to Torrence with little or no mishaps and spent a delightful and relaxing day and a half with Jerry and Steph and her parents who were visiting from Chicago. It looks like Jerry and Steph are seriously considering a move back to Alaska. Who will we visit in LA if they move?

Since leaving LA on the 3rd, we've been to Laurens, S.C., Goshen, Ind., Hawthorne, NJ and Camp Hill, PA. (Harrisburg). In the interim between LA and Laurens S.C. we stopped overnight in Atlanta to visit some close friends. Now it's on to Jacksonville if we can make it through the icy roads of Virginia. With a good night's sleep, a big breakfast and daylight, we're on our way again.

January 17

We are in Gallup, NM on our way to Palo Alto, Ca with a load of Attends for the VA Hospital. I guess you can say we're doing our duty for the military. We actually hadn't planned on stopping here but Michael decided to run the truck through the wash. Strange things happen to wet trucks in -5°. First, the driver's door froze so we couldn't



close it. Then the throttle stuck as a consequence of the below zero temperatures. With a stuck throttle, the engine revs at a constant speed making it almost impossible to shift gears. We somehow worked our way back to the truck stop, and sat in the garage bay until everything finally defrosted.

We are definitely getting used to breakdowns and long waits. One of my more memorable experiences happened in Pennsylvania. It was 3 am and the voltmeter was registering in the red. As I covered the bumpy miles of construction on I-80 in Pennsylvania I noticed the lights on my dash and my headlights gradually dimming. I was hoping to make it to our operating center outside of Akron, Ohio and have the alternator checked. The truck was now losing momentum earlier and earlier into each uphill climb. As I approached the latest of a dozen one lane construction signs, the red "idiot" light on my dash came on and the truck began to lose power. Nervously I looked for a shoulder or a place to get safely off of the highway. An emergency pull-off sign loomed ten yards in front of me. Relieved, I slowly maneuvered the rig onto the shoulder and watched as my dash and headlights dimmed to blackness. Trying to salvage whatever power I had left, I used my flashers only when I spotted vehicles coming up behind me. I turned off the CB and radio as they began to fade and prayed that my messages over the computer detailing my problem and location were getting out to road service.

By the time the wrecker arrived, the only thing working was my flashers. The computer, CB, radio and headlights were dead. After several futile attempts to jump-

start the battery, the mechanic hooked the entire tractor-trailer to the wrecker. Michael and I squeezed into the single passenger seat beside the mechanic and we headed to the repair shop. In the dim light of morning the joined tractor-trailer and wrecker looked like two giant Tonka toys.

Safely parked in the driveway of the repair shop, we dozed in the sleeper until they opened at 8 am. We were finally back on the road by noon.

Driving the same truck day in and day out, I've gotten to the point where even a slight change in a rattle or a hum or a shudder tells me if something is amiss. I know that any extreme deviation in the air or oil pressure, temperature or voltmeter can cause the truck to shut down or the engine to blow. Whenever we fuel or drop and hook up to a trailer, we instinctively look at and kick the tires, glance at the fifth wheel, double check the pigtail and glad hands, peek under the trailer, and do a quick "walk around".

Because every trucker is so aware of his own rig, he's always checking out everyone else's. Invariably someone will come on the CB to let another trucker know his right signal isn't working or he has a headlight out or a flat tire on his trailer or his mud flap is loose. One night another trucker came on the CB to tell me I had sparks coming out from under my trailer. Even after I was aware I had a problem, I still couldn't see the sparks. I thanked the driver, pulled onto the shoulder and tied up a piece of metal that was dragging.

Flat tires, especially on your trailer, tend to be the most common and most solvable problem a trucker will have. We've had more than we can count. In most

cases, if your load isn't too heavy, you can usually run for a while with a flat trailer tire if it is tubeless. However, the one tire you hope won't ever blow is the steer or front tire. If it does, you can lose total control of the tractor and trailer many times ending up in a jackknife or worse. I count my blessings that I've never had it happen to me. But I've seen the sad results of a blown steer tire and heard the stories of truckers who have thanked lady luck, a cool head and experience for getting them safely through the harrowing experience.

I don't know if the problem is indicative of the trucks we run, but a clogged fuel filter seems be our next most common problem. When the fuel filter clogs, which usually is about 2,000 miles before a PM (preventative maintenance), the fuel cannot get to the engine. You gradually lose power, especially on hills, and eventually the truck refuses to move. I've "died" on Elk Mountain in Wyoming several times, and in Idaho in the middle of one lane construction (though I did manage to maneuver the truck onto a pull off).

Electrical problems tend to be the most insidious. You either find the problem immediately, or you spend hours, if not days, trying to figure out the source of a short or power failure. On a number of occasions, electrical shorts in our trailer have shut us down for the night. Other times we've lost our headlights and couldn't run until daylight. One time, we lost our headlights about 40 miles from the Utah border just as the sun was setting. Unable to go any further, we had to sit out the night at a truck stop in Ft. Bridger, Wyoming. The next morning we headed to the nearest International repair



place which was in Salt Lake City. It took the repair folks four hours to locate the short. Several times we broke an air conditioning or fan belt and had to sit overnight until a repair place could locate the part. One summer, we had to drive across the Arizona desert in 100°+ without air-conditioning because the nearest belt was in Los Angeles. We had already searched for one in North Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas and Alabama before our company found us the one in Los Angeles.

We've unlocked frozen trailer brakes at 16° and poured freezing water into the radiator at -20°. We've pounded on trailer tandems that wouldn't slide and helped other truckers do the same. We've adjusted loose "pigtails" and bent the electrical connectors to keep our trailer lights from flickering on and off. We've adjusted brakes when necessary and taped air lines as a temporary measure to keep them from leaking.

This time fortunately, an hour of sitting out of the wind and cold was all we needed to be on our way.

January 18

The final stage of this trip to Palo Alto - through Southern California and north was a partial nightmare for me. The gorgeous weather slipped into thick fog as I made my way west on California Highway 58. As soon as the road became 2 lanes, the fog set in. Not only couldn't I see more than a few feet in front of me, I was totally unfamiliar with the road. Signs for the left and right turns appeared so suddenly out of the fog, I

barely had time to react. Another trucker, who I couldn't see, tried to guide me to the interstate over the CB. But I lost him in the night. Somewhere along the way I missed the entrance to I-5 north. Panic started to set in as I squinted into what looked like a slowly moving opaque wall. My head began to pound. Finally certain I was well beyond my exit, I woke Michael. I had to turn around. With the two of us now squinting into the fog, I carefully turned the 53 footer around in the middle of the two lane using part of a parking lot we discovered. All the time we prayed that no one would suddenly come upon us. We found I-5 south, took it, came back on to the north side at the first exit and continued to Palo Alto. It took an hour after the fog finally diminished for my headache to do so as well.

Fog probably terrifies me more than ice and snow. I'm always fearful that either I'm going to run into someone I can't see or vice versa. It never fails that when fog sets in (and it does frequently on I-81 in Pennsylvania and in California) all the four wheelers come to a virtual standstill. As soon as they spot a big truck they queue up behind it and follow like lemmings. I guess they figure they can at least see us. I hope they realize that we can't see any better than they can.

Today, after early morning fog, the San Francisco area looked breathtakingly beautiful and sunny.

January 21

Yesterday we slowly worked our way up I-5 toward Seattle, the day beautiful and sunny, the mountains - Hood, St. Helens and Rainier - sparkling in the distance. With 6 hours to kill before delivery, we tracked down an old friend from our Rockland County New York days, Bernadette, whom we hadn't seen in 15 years. We met her and her daughter Kirin (now 16 years old and lovely) at a truck stop in Tacoma. It was a pleasant reunion; we filled in the spaces, gossiped and brought each other up to date.

Got to the consignee in Seattle two hours early and still had to wait until the appointment. Finally, we unloaded our 25,000 lbs of Kellogg's cereal and, with no immediate assignment, headed south on I-5 to our truck stop, took a motel and kicked back, watched TV, ate and slept. This was the first layover we'd had in a long time.

One thing we've learned how to do in this job is wait. Waiting, like driving, is definitely a major part of the workday. There are days we break our necks to pick up a "hot load" that's not ready when we get there or to deliver one that the dock workers can't get to for three hours. We've sat 20<sup>th</sup> in line at 4:30 am at a grocery warehouse in hopes that we'll get our 40,000 pounds of corn flakes unloaded by 4 pm closing time.

We waited for four hours one time for specially made vending machine-sized cans to come off of the assembly line. The plant manager kept apologizing for the delay and eventually took us on a tour of the plant explaining the step-by-step manufacturing process. That was one of the few times we didn't mind the wait. We've waited more



than three hours for 2,000-pound rolls of paper to be manufactured and dried before they could be loaded. On other occasions we've arrived on time for scheduled appointments only to find that the company operates on a first come first serve basis. We've waited overnight because a company couldn't load or unload us until the next morning. We've sat for hours at truck stops waiting for our next scheduled load. We've fumed with impatience when other drivers fail to arrive within a reasonable window of their ETA with a relay we're responsible for delivering on time. We wait at truck stops when the highways shut down due to weather conditions. We wait in traffic for accidents to be cleared and construction workers to move their equipment. We wait, sometimes for days, for our tractors to be repaired or parts to be located and replaced. We don't get paid to wait.

Since there's not much you can do about the wait time you try to find ways to fill it and fight the boredom. When we're waiting to be loaded or unloaded we'll sometimes crawl into the sleeper and doze until someone pounds on the door. If we're well rested, we may join the other waiting drivers in the "drivers' lounge", if there is one or, if the weather is nice, hang outside the docks and swap lies. Other drivers sit in their trucks and read newspapers, books or magazines and listen to the radio. I figured in one year, I read over 60 books, did hundreds of crossword puzzles and double acrostics, got my daily dose of **USA TODAY**, and perused the local papers of most places I waited at.

When we're stuck at a truck stop we have all kinds of options to choose from besides eating, sleeping and telling stories. One winter we were stuck at Truck Stops of

America (known as the TA) in Gallup, NM for a day and a half because the highway was shut down. We spent hours playing pinball and watching TV. Over the years, we found pinball to be one of our more entertaining distractions from the road and a great way to kill time. About every two months a new game comes out with more and more electronics and challenges to shoot for. Most game rooms have their video buffs and their pinball aficionados. For some reason the twain never meets. In fact, some large truck stops have a separate room for each. Other times we've caught a free movie, done laundry and gotten our boots shined. One afternoon while waiting for a shine, we ended up in a friendly argument with a flat bed driver over where to get the best boot shine in the country. He swore by the TA in Shreveport, La. We favored the TA in Knoxville, TN. Though nobody won the argument, we all did walk away with shiny boots and a lot fewer hours to kill.

Sometimes we've been able to parlay the negative aspects of waiting into productive, positive experiences. Even though we've been to just about every major and minor city in the lower 48 states and Canada, we rarely get to see any of them as a tourist. We're usually too busy watching traffic, living in our mirrors and reading road and street signs to see the sights. So, when the occasion arises that we have the opportunity to play tourist, we do so. One such chance came about when a shipper in Cincinnati told us we couldn't pull our trailer out of the dock until 5:30 pm in case there was a last minute change in the freight. The time was 12 noon. So we unhooked our tractor and bobtailed to the Cincinnati Zoo where we spent a relaxing and enjoyable

day. Another time we got stuck in Salt Lake City and had to wait until the next day to pick up our load. Again, we headed for the local zoo for a relatively pleasant afternoon. The most fascinating zoo we ever visited was the Chaffee Zoo in Fresno, Ca. with its special exhibits of endangered species.

On occasion, if we know we'll have some "wait time" at the delivery end, we plan our run so we can relax for a day or so. This way we've been able to visit with many of our west coast friends in Los Angeles and San Francisco and with relatives in Syracuse, Pittsburgh and Madison. One time, we gave ourselves a relatively inexpensive and relaxing 24-hour vacation in Reno. In the summertime, when we know we have some extra time, we'll stray from the interstates and leisurely drive the scenic routes across country. We've seen some spectacular sights including the Salt River Canyon in Arizona and the Redwood National Forest in California. On occasion, we've driven across "the loneliest road in America" as US 50 in Nevada is otherwise known. It even has "the loneliest telephone in America" situated in a booth along the highway in the middle of nowhere.

For the most part, however, the waiting drains, exhausts and bores you. One miserable day in January, ten of us from the same company sat in a small restaurant in Modesto, Ca. waiting for loads. During the 3-5 hours we sat around, we all gorged ourselves on platefuls of Mexican food and told trucking story after trucking story until we were hoarse and exhausted. As we each finally got our "hot" load assignments, we



dragged ourselves to our trucks not certain we had the energy to move. Our sleep/drive schedules totally disrupted, we had to now "run" as if we'd never broken our rhythm.

Now on our way back up to Seattle to pick up a load of toys from Hasbro - destination Indianapolis. Our route will take us through Montana, Idaho, South Dakota, Nebraska and Iowa, the coldest states in the country this time of year. All we can do is pray for good weather!

January 28

Took us to the New Cumberland Army Depot outside of York, Pa yesterday where we picked up armored vehicle treads for APC's. We're headed for the Oakland Army Base just outside of San Francisco.

We allowed ourselves a relaxing side trip to my sister Jane and brother-in-law Bill's in Belle Vernon, Pa. Nibbled on cheese, hummus and pita bread and dined on wine, steak and baked potatoes. Nothing like home cooking. Then we kicked Back - Bill, Michael, Ben and Alex watching the Superbowl, Jane and I listening to it while working on a jigsaw puzzle in the next room. To bed by 11 and back on the road by 6:30.

Now it's on to San Francisco with a maintenance stop in Des Moines to get our Jake brake fixed. California here we come, again!

January 30

Our drive from Des Moines was beautiful. During the day, invigorated by the sunshine, we moved quickly over the clear roads. At night, the full moon and clear skies created an eerie luminescence on the snow capped mountains, the Great Salt Lake, the Salt flats and the highway. Both day and night driving were pleasurable and easy - a trucker's dream. Just at sunrise, as I crested a steep mountain, I encountered a breath-taking panorama of vast mountain ranges tiered against a sky of pink clouds, the full moon overseeing all. What a sight! I almost stopped dead in the middle of the highway I was so overtaken. And my camera, of course, was in the sleeper.

January 31

Delivered our load of armored vehicle treads to the Oakland Army Base. This was my first military load so I found all the procedures interesting to watch. Both depots, California and Pennsylvania, were tightly secured with guards and military police. The Oakland depot required a check of our tractor and trailer on the way out.

Picked up 43,000 lbs of canned peaches for Florida. Are now headed east on I-20 after spending a couple of hours with one of my former students from New York and now a very good friend, Batel, and her 22 month old daughter Miya. We hadn't seen

Batel in almost five years and had only heard about the baby. It's so nice to be able to keep track of old friends.

February 3

A harrowing and hopefully one time experience the other night. It was about 2am and I'd just come on to the interstate in Montgomery, Alabama. I noticed the car ahead of me swerving and changing lanes. So I slowed down and kept my distance knowing it wasn't worth messing with what I figured was a drunken driver. Fortunately there was no other traffic on the road. I bided my time and as the inebriated motorist moved to the right lane and slowed to a crawl, I carefully passed him, signaled my way back into the right lane and regained my 55 mph speed. Suddenly, he was beside me. I heard five loud noises. I thought the car had backfired. Michael, who had been sound asleep, threw open the sleeper curtain and shouted, "We've been shot at!" "You're crazy!" I shouted back. "It was a backfire!" Being shot at was beyond my comprehension. It wasn't a part of my frame of reference.

"Pull it over! Pull it over!" he yelled.

I was now shaken by the reality of the incident and pulled onto the shoulder to examine the truck. There they were, three bullet holes in the cab not far from where Michael had been sleeping. I was incredulous. I couldn't believe a drunk in a moving vehicle could have done this. By now, of course, the culprit had disappeared from the interstate. It had all happened so quickly that there was no way to identify the vehicle -



no license number, no make of car. I couldn't even remember the color. The reality of the incident began to sink in with even greater intensity, as did my paranoia. I spent the next several nights behind the wheel pushing myself back against the seat every time a car came up on my left side - waiting for the sound of gunfire.

Finally tasted some Cajun food last night at a funky truck stop in Louisiana. We dined on sausage, which looked like kielbasa but was considerably hotter and spicier than the Polish variety and ate some "homemade" chili, which opened all of our sweat glands and mucous membranes. We capped the meal with several gallons of iced tea!

The weather has been gorgeous all the way across country warming as we've moved east. It was 66° in Dallas when I fueled yesterday afternoon and it has been in the 60's all day today in Georgia.

As soon as Michael moves a couple of trailers around (a task which just *thrills* him), we'll head to a truck stop. We're filthy and smelly after days of hot weather with no shower. The dirty clothes are taking over the sleeper and we're on the verge of running out of clean underwear and jeans. It's either abandon this cubicle before we asphyxiate from our own odors, or throw every thing into a washing machine and us into a shower. The choice is obvious.

February 5

Michael keeps telling me, "Boring is good!" Maybe after a week like we just had I might even agree with him. And what a week it was! To begin with, we apparently got

some dirty fuel in Dallas. As I got into Shreveport, La. the truck started to lose power. We ended up on the shoulder of the highway and had to call road service. After two hours and a careful check by the mechanic, we were on our way with a new fuel filter.

Our problem was solved, or so we thought. In Mississippi the truck almost died on me twice. But I kept it running and got us to our drop. All went well until shortly after we picked up a 42,000 lb load in Aberdeen, MS. This time Michael was at the wheel when the truck virtually died on a two lane near Gordo, AL, definitely the middle of nowhere. He had tried desperately to get to our fuel stop in Tuskaloosa, just 30 miles away, but the truck refused to cooperate. We were going so slowly up hill that a local police officer pulled us for impeding the flow of traffic. Resigned to the fact that we weren't going anywhere, we contacted road service over the computer. They told us to change the fuel filter ourselves. So, we jacked up the cab and, improvising with a screw driver in lieu of the filter wrench we didn't have, we removed and replaced the old filter. We ended up with our clothes and hands reeking from fuel.

Our fateful sojourn into the deep south was now about to be topped by a mishap in North Carolina. We made it to the Charlotte, N.C. operating center and picked up 2 spare fuel filters. We weren't taking any chances. We figured we'd spend about 7-8 hours at home before heading to Jersey to drop this load. Exhausted, I climbed into the sleeper hoping to catch a few hours sleep before we reached the house. Suddenly I heard a thud. Michael yelled we'd been hit and quickly pulled the truck onto the shoulder.

Apparently, a young man in his wife's Ford Probe GL had attempted to pass us at 65 mph. Coming from behind us and forgetting that he still had his cruise control on, he misjudged his distance and his speed and hit our ICC bar. His car flew into the median doing a 360 and stopped just short of the southbound lane. The driver was lucky. He walked out of the badly damaged car shaken but unhurt. Our ICC bar (the trailer bumper) was barely scratched. Under the supervision of a North Carolina State Trooper who had arrived at the scene within minutes, everyone including two corroborating witnesses filled out the paper work and we were again on our way. Needless to say, I was now wide awake and looking forward to some boredom in my life.

February 10

We're supposed to be at home on our 4 days off. But instead we're on our way to Springfield, Ohio to pick up new trucks.

To backtrack a bit, we spent four hours at home after the accident - sleeping. Dropped our load outside of Philly, headed for southern New Jersey, got loaded and headed for Indianapolis, Indiana. At this point we got the load we thought would take us home. And then our dispatcher hit us with a surprise - a new truck straight from the factory. We'd have to delay our time off in order to catch a van out of Charlotte for the trip to Springfield.



This time out has been a long haul. With a tour that included breakdowns, an accident, getting shot at and a lot of short runs to get us home, we are burned out. I even got to a point where I almost couldn't drive. I was tired, shaky and depressed - I had to get out of that truck. It was well past the time to take a few days off.

Once back in Charlotte we unloaded all our belongings from the tractor and packed them into my car to eventually be reloaded into the new vehicle. Every time we get a new truck it's like moving out of and into a house. The whole process, including the thorough cleaning of the inside of the tractor, took us about two hours. By 4 pm we were home and, after a great dinner and some TV, we fell into bed.

When the clock went off at 4 am I wasn't sure where I was. I knew we weren't moving. I felt around in the darkness reassured that I truly was in my own bed--at least for the moment. Then it was back to Charlotte and the trip to Springfield.

## NAKED FROM THE WAIST DOWN

February 18

I'm in the sleeper having just finished my time at the wheel. We went back on the road the 16th after 4 very relaxing days at home. We both got a lot accomplished and caught up on household business. Spent some time with Tarja and even got Samantha to come to me a few times. Nice to know our animals still remember us.

On Valentine's Day, Michael wined and dined me at one of the classier restaurants in Raleigh as a belated birthday celebration. We dressed "to the nines" - in sequined dress and fur cape; Michael in his black suit. We had such fun watching people's reactions when they found out we were truck drivers. Their initial response was a polite smile, an "Oh really, how interesting", and then they went on their way. I guess we don't seem to fit their stereotype. Overall, it was a lovely night of champagne and dancing.

We left the frigid east coast after picking up a Proctor and Gamble load in South Carolina headed for Modesto, CA. The new truck has been a dream to drive. It's quiet, comfortable, shifts easily and rides smoothly. It was worth giving up the time to pick it up.

Time to try to get some sleep. We have a pick-up in Northern California at an Army Depot. Delivery is to Nellis Air Force Base in Las Vegas, Nevada. Can't wait to see what we'll be carrying.

February 20

We are sitting outside Nellis AFB waiting to be escorted into the munitions area with our load of radar jamming aluminum. Yesterday we spent 7 hours at the Sierra Army Depot in Herlong, CA. We arrived at this desolate base at 6:30 am greeted by guards armed with M16's and security police. After an hour wait while we were put through a security check and our truck was searched, we were then directed through several well-guarded checkpoints. At one point, the guards asked that we turn over all fire producing implements such as lighters, matches, etc. We were a bit embarrassed as we handed over about fifty lighters we still had left from our load to California. The guards asked no questions though they did look at us quizzically. Our lighters were placed amid a cache of 20 or so shotguns and pistols temporarily confiscated from the other teams.

This depot supplies ammunition and explosives for bombs and has hundreds of bunkers and supply buildings everywhere. We were routed from one holding area to another not certain what we would be carrying. Directed to one of a series of damp, chilly, concrete buildings, the eight teams settled into a room with a long conference table, one telephone, a couple of outdated magazines and an electric cigarette lighter in the wall which we all sucked at continuously. And we waited. The other teams specialized in the transport of explosives and knew what they would be carrying. We'd



never carried explosives and I wasn't even certified to do so. Michael and I pulled out our hazmat books and nervously studied the pertinent regulations. Fortunately for us, we ended up carrying aluminum "chafe" which is stored with explosives but is not considered one.

Our wait at Nellis was only about 4 hours. At least this time we spent our time in a lounge of an administration building instead of a cold concrete bunker-like building. We also had a chance to talk with different Air Force Noncoms who wandered in and out to smoke, eat and just relax. Security here, at least for us, merely involved an escort to and from the unloading site and the wait in a building we were not permitted to leave.

Nellis too is a rather desolate place surrounded by incredible mountains. This is where the Stealth bomber was tested. A soldier atop a tank guarded the main gate with a machine gun aimed at the entrance. As we drove through the base we saw staging areas with all types and sizes of bombs and missiles, hundreds of bunkers with who-knows-what stored in them and jets taking off constantly. It was eerie seeing these bombs.

Now we sit in the truck waiting for our next assignment. So far, we've been told there are no loads going out of this area. We may have to lay over in Vegas. At least I'll finally get to see it at night.

February 22

After a rather relaxing four hour wait during which I completed the fifth of the Len Deighton Spy series, we got an assignment to pick up at General Foods in Chino, Ca. We ate, blew \$10.00 on a slot machine (I couldn't resist) and headed south. I finally got to see the tacky splendor of Vegas at night - a display of gaudiness unsurpassed anywhere in the world!

We're now headed for Memphis to relay this load, pick up another and head back to California (Anaheim, this time) for delivery on the 25th. A recurrence of Morton's Neuroma in Michael's foot has started to really hurt him. The last cortisone shots didn't seem to work like the others. It looks like he may now need to have the tumor removed as the pain has become so excruciating at times he can neither walk nor drive. He'll get it checked out next time we're home.

February 27

Lucked out today when I got pulled by a DMV Officer. Apparently my trailer tandems registered way overweight when I went over the scales. The officer, preoccupied with paper work, noticed my illegal weight at the last minute - after he had already given me the green go-ahead light. Five miles later, he caught up with me and pulled me over. Out came the portable scales and an eventual \$48.00 fine.

I wasn't so lucky one of the times I went through LA. I'd heard the rumors and grumbles about the California Highway Patrol, but I'd never encountered one of these law enforcement officers personally until that day. He had suddenly appeared from behind my trailer flashing his blue light and signaling to me with his arms to pull over. And he'd spoken only once when he waved me out of the truck and onto the shoulder.

"No!" he yelled as I started to open my door. "Climb over the jump seat and come out the shoulder side."

I looked at Michael sitting in my way and carefully climbed over him, opened the tractor door and descended to the gravel below. This beautiful sunny weekday afternoon on I-10 in Los Angeles would become a bad memory.

My eyes surreptitiously darted from his spit shined boots to his glistening motorcycle as he concentrated on his paperwork. The officer, a California Highway Patrol Motorcycle cop, had little resemblance to the one Eric Estrada portrayed on the CHIPS TV show. He reminded me of a young soldier on a poster for the Hitler Youth Organization as he stood sternly in front of me, his face frozen in a perpetual sneer, recording the pertinent information he had requested from me - driver's license and tractor registration. He was impeccable from his tucked in brown shirt to his tight tucked-in-the-boots brown jodhpurs. And his motorcycle was mesmerizing. I couldn't keep my eyes off of it.

"How long have you been driving a truck?" he barked.

"A year."



"Where are you going?" he barked again.

"To Neutrogena by the airport," I replied still not knowing why I had been stopped.

"Was I speeding, Sir," I politely asked knowing full well that I was only doing between 45 and 54 mph in a 55 mph zone.

"No."

My mind jumped hoops trying to figure out why I had been pulled. I wasn't speeding. I had been in the proper lane for trucks. California is infamous for its treatment of truckers and extremely particular about which lanes big trucks can run in. I had spoken to several drivers who wouldn't come to "the Shaky" because they still had outstanding tickets for driving in the \$1,000 hammer lane. I knew I hadn't made any improper lane changes and that all my lights and signals were in working order. It made no sense to me.

Meanwhile, Michael sat patiently in the cab of the truck watching the scene below also trying to figure out what was going on.

"Excuse me, Sir," I finally sputtered. "Can you tell me why you pulled me? I really have no idea."

A glower. "You were following too close to the car in front of you!"

My mind stopped my mouth from blurting, "I was what!" and silently I took the neatly written ticket. Instinctively I felt like saluting him and clicking my heels but my better judgment prevailed as I turned and headed back to the truck.

"You won't believe this one," I told Michael as I climbed over him and into the driver's seat. "According to the cop, I was following too close to that car in front of me."

Michael's reaction duplicated mine. "He's full of shit!" he exclaimed. We both knew I was keeping a safe distance. Also, we wondered how a man on a motorcycle could judge the distance between a 65-foot long, 102" wide tractor-trailer and the car in front of it from behind the tractor-trailer. I was livid. WE were livid!

I was prepared to go to court and fight the ticket. However, after numerous letters and phone calls to my lawyer in LA, he advised me that my only option was to go to traffic school. It was the cop's word against mine he said, and the judge I was to get invariably favored the law enforcement officer's version. Angry and disappointed, I accepted the fact that there was no way I was going to "have my day in court". Michael and I figured that between the court costs, school costs, lost miles over a period of two days and motel costs, my supposed infraction cost us close to \$1,400. My only consolation was that I had no moving violation on my driving record. I still fume when I think back on the initial incident knowing full well that I had done nothing wrong and really had no recourse to prove it.

In my 33 years of driving, I have had virtually no association with "the law" until I started driving a truck. In fact, I have never had a ticket for a moving violation and can recall being stopped only twice in all those years and given verbal warnings. I'd heard truckers bitch and complain constantly over the CB about the cops and the harassment they received. I assumed that most of the complaints were merely "sour grapes" for the

inconvenience of getting legitimately stopped. But, once I'd been stopped a couple of times, I too began to develop "trucker's paranoia".

Feeling free while working in one of the most regulated industries in the country is the trucker's paradox. His body, his belongings and his truck are constantly subjected to inspection and intrusion by federal, state and local authorities all in the name of safety. He gives up his blood and urine in mandatory and random drug & alcohol tests, he gives up his radar detector while states do not require passenger vehicles to do the same, he puts up with surprise inspections and never ending safety checks. In addition, at every state inspection or weigh station he must pass through, and that could amount to three or four in one day, officials may decide to check his logs, permits and freight bills as well as his axle and gross vehicle weights. In some states he has been subjected to discriminatory law enforcement procedures and questionable cab searches. He has to put up with a different set of laws, speed limits and fines in every state, county and town he enters.

According to law, we truck drivers can't drive more than ten hours following eight consecutive hours off duty or in the sleeper or for *any* period after having been on duty fifteen hours following eight consecutive hours off duty or in the sleeper. We also cannot drive and/or be on duty more than 60 hours in a seven day period or 70 hours in an eight day period. While on the road, we have to account for every minute of our time recording all on-duty-not-driving, driving, off duty and sleeper time in a logbook, frequently referred to as a "funny book". This legal document is subject to the scrutiny



of our company as well as federal, state and local officials. As long as we remain a commercial driver, we must maintain this log even while on vacation or at home.

For years the trucking industry and the federal government have attempted to reregulate this rather outdated "hours of service" schedule and adapt it more to the realities of a trucker's work world. If you talk to drivers, at least 70% will admit that they keep two log books running at the same time or practice "creative" logging. Most solos don't even touch their logs until the end of a week or if they know log checks are being done at a "coop".

Realistically, ten hours on and eight off does not coincide with the demanding and erratic shipping and delivery schedules we truckers must adhere to in order to make a living. Activities such as loading and unloading, sitting in the jump seat while the truck is moving and pretrip inspections are supposed to be recorded as on-duty-not-driving. However, these kinds of activities eat into your workday restrictions and limit driving time. So, instead of recording the six hours it took to unload, a driver will instead record one hour on-duty-not-driving and five off duty. This may give him five more hours of legal driving time, which he will need to get his load delivered on schedule. Other times he knows it will take him thirteen hours of straight driving to make his delivery on time. If he leaves his pick-up point at noon, he'll eventually log that he left at three. Or he may play with the hours in other creative ways so he logs the legal ten. Consequently, he plays the odds and runs illegally hoping he won't get caught. When or if he does, the fines can be overwhelming. In some states, log violations such as

being behind by even fifteen minutes can run as high as \$1,000. I've heard of drivers being fined \$100 and \$200 for having the wrong date on one log sheet.

Many truckers feel a general paranoia that they may be subjected to discriminatory treatment by law enforcement officials because of their vulnerability. Their being on the road for weeks at a time makes it difficult for them to contest alleged violations and fines in states far from their homes. Consequently, they are easy prey for officials who know the trucker will pay and be on his way. California, Ohio, Virginia and Tennessee are the four states most truckers consider "unfriendly" to big rigs. They feel law enforcement personnel in these states see trucks as nothing more than a source of revenue. And they sure weren't kidding about California.

March 2

We've been back and forth on I-40 so many times that I sometimes think if I put the truck on auto pilot (if there was such a thing), program in the fuel stops and climb in the back, the truck would get us anywhere we need to be. I have so many favorite spots along this 2130 mile highway that goes from Barstow, CA. to Wilmington, N.C. that it's difficult to pick just one. But the section of highway from Barstow to the Arizona border is perhaps the most spectacular. I've memorized the irregularly shaped mountains and rock formations from east to west and back again, at sunrise and sunset and most especially when the moon is full. I always feel so totally alone out here.

What's amazing about traveling the country the way we do is that the Interstates become like the roads in a small town and the major cities seem like local landmarks. The mile marker becomes our point of reference. After a few trips across and around the country, we can locate specific truck stops, major construction problems, and even dips in the road by their mile markers - the same way we know familiar aspects of Raleigh, N.C. The entire country becomes a large city. Our favorite roads span 500 to over 2000 miles instead of a block or two. Our favorite restaurant is not on the corner of Elm and 3rd but at mile marker 138 on I-40 in Arizona. Most over-the-road truckers know exactly what and where in the country the best showers and the best truck stops are.

"Have you checked out the West-To-Go in Abilene, Texas recently? Their Tex-Mex is super!"

"Nah. But the Texas combo at the Longhorn in Shamrock is even better"

"The best taco salad's still at the 76 in Kingman, Arizona though! It's what they do to the beans that makes the diff."

And so it goes about the biggest and the best, the cheapest and the most expensive, the showers and parking lots, the coffee, waitresses and fuel, laundromats and service. If you've been over-the-road, you've probably been to all or any of these places.

And the news. It travels the truckers' network from New York to California as fast as the drivers of these 18-wheelers can move their loads. What happens in Dinwiddie,



Georgia is transmitted over the CB from city to city until it has circumnavigated the country and arrived back in Dinwiddie in a different form. It's like an interstate "whisper down the lane"! A major accident involving a tractor-trailer, a flood or snowstorm, a trucker running the coops in Ohio, a bridge collapse in Missouri - all the news travels with the gossips of the road like old biddies chatting over tea. Cars, buses, vans all travel the same highways we do, but without that extra dimension, without seeing that small town called the USA as it is defined by truckers over their CB's.

March 3

From Columbus to Cincinnati, Ohio then on to Albany, Ga., Atlanta and now what we call a KC (Kimberly Clark) tour - Coosa Pines, AL to Paris, TX to Conway, AR to New Milford, CT to Beech Island, SC - all in 32 days. We carry everything from rolls of plastic liner to finished product from distribution center to distribution center. It's all drop and hook and we're on to the next place - quick and easy.

Had a very unnerving experience today. It was a generally miserable rainy day and I found myself in bumper to bumper traffic outside of Washington, DC. Weekend travelers along with the influx of local residents compounded the already congested highway. As I maneuvered my way over the wet road, a car pulled up beside me in the left lane maintaining the same speed I was doing. I checked my mirrors and casually glanced down into the vehicle. To my amazement, the man was naked from the waist

down and playing with himself. I checked the traffic around me and gave a quick sideways glance to see if he was still there. He was. I sped up; he followed. I slowed down; he did also. I couldn't seem to get rid of him. Between the rain and the squirrely drivers, I did not need this obnoxious man distracting my attention from the road.

It wasn't as if I hadn't seen anything like this before. In the early weeks of my driving, while just outside of Harrisburg, Pa., Michael (in the jump seat) spotted a man in his car, naked from the waist down playing with himself. The man obliged me by moving to the left lane so that I too could see him. I was aghast that someone would actually do what he was doing in a car. I was also aghast at the sheer size of his equipment. After my single glance he moved on down the highway--probably looking for new admirers.

This man today, however, seemed to have fixated on me and was determined to exhibit himself indefinitely. My first thought was to get on the CB. But what would I say--"Some guy is jerking off in the car next to me! What do I do?"

I thought of the conversations over the CB for the last hour and remembered the crudities, the electronically generated howling Tarzan and panting women. I doubted if I would find a sympathetic "Sir Galahad" among the group of truckers out there.

Also, if the male truckers had spotted a naked or semi naked woman in a car, the word would have flown over the CB so quickly that truckers 10 miles away would be requesting location and vital statistics. How would they react to a naked male?

I tried to figure out what kind of car the man was driving. But he was positioned next to the truck so that whenever I looked down, all I could see was his nakedness. The car

was black, two door, and foreign with mud flaps that said 4 wheel drive on them. That's all I could discern.

I'd reached the point where my feelings of repulsion for the situation were distracting me from what I had to do - concentrate on driving. I thought if I could get someone to read me his license number I'd relay the information on to channel 9, the police monitoring channel on the CB. I picked up my CB mike making certain the man saw my gesture and glanced once more at the car. In less than a second, the vehicle moved into the next lane and was quickly lost in the rain and traffic. I never saw it again.

I have found that the preponderance of naked men seems to occur during the summer months. The time of day or the part of the country doesn't seem to matter. On an LA freeway, on I-85 outside of Charlotte, N.C. and on I-76 outside of Akron, Ohio, I encountered situations similar to the one in Harrisburg. In each case, the man, realizing that I was a woman, sidled his car next to my truck and went about his personal business. Fortunately, his exit usually came up in a few minutes and he was gone. I must admit that the young man in the pick-up truck I spotted outside of Akron was *something*. He had absolutely nothing on and kept blowing kisses at me. I did my best to ignore him, gave him the finger, and stared straight ahead. The next time I glanced down, he was gone. The only instance that truly upset me involved another truck driver. One pleasant afternoon while heading east on I-40 on my way into Oklahoma City to fuel, a bull hauler pulled his truck next to mine, waved, smiled and pointed to his lap. I waved and smiled back at him and, without even thinking, looked to where he was



pointing. He had his pants unzipped and was waving his penis at me and grinning. I was so taken aback I didn't quite know how to react. Men in four wheelers exposing themselves were bad enough; but a trucker doing it truly disgusted me. I guess because I was a trucker, I figured other truckers didn't do those things. Camaraderie and all that sort of rot. Anyway, I slowed down so he could get by me, deliberately ignoring him. For the next several miles he would pull into the left lane and slow down, leer at me and point to himself. My initial thought was to run him off of the road and hope that the cops would find him stuck in his tractor (unhurt, of course) with his pants open and fully exposed. But I didn't have the guts to take that chance. I wavered with the idea of waking Michael but I felt that I should be able to handle this situation myself. And besides, he needed his sleep. The bull hauler continued slowing down and then pulling up beside me so I could get a good view of him. As a last resort, I got on the CB in hopes that he might be embarrassed by his perversity being made public. I told him he was gross and disgusting. He continued his antics unperturbed. I searched for a smokey, ready to have him arrested for sexual harassment and indecent exposure. But there were none around. To my relief, he finally moved on down the road. My imagination ran rampant with the thought that he too might end up fueling at the TA in Okie City. I envisioned myself spotting him on the fuel island, grabbing the tire iron we keep under the seat and quickly and decisively taking care of his "plaything". Fortunately for him and for me, he was nowhere to be found.

His particular actions affected me more than I had realized. For a couple of days I neither smiled nor waved to other truckers as they passed me on the road. I must admit that that was the one and only time a truck driver behaved so obscenely towards me. And, of course, I gradually put that into perspective because I knew that 99% of the drivers were real gentlemen. Unfortunately it's the one pervert that can screw you up.

I'm definitely not alone in seeing strange and lewd people on the highways. One night - about 2 or 3 am - Michael was cruising on an interstate going 55 in the granny lane when a Cadillac pulled up beside him. Naturally, Michael glanced down into the car. The dome light was on revealing the driver - a blond-haired woman - naked from the waist down, her skirt pulled up over her hips. She stayed next to him for several minutes and then moved on to the next truck. She was not a natural blond.

Drivers have told me stories of women flashing them, of bare breasted women hanging out of sunroofs, of limousine orgies and of women accommodating their male drivers with hands or mouths. One trucker told me about a car that pulled up beside him with a man driving and a woman asleep in the passenger seat. The man pulled up the woman's shirt revealing her bare breasts. He then fondled them while looking up at the trucker. He seemed to be waiting for something. So the trucker nodded his head in approval and gave the man a thumbs up. The car then sped away.

I know truckers' stories are like fishermen's - filled with hyperbole and imagination. However, I know what Michael and I have seen and I'm continually amazed when I see people in cars specifically exposing themselves and displaying

sexual activities. I suppose this is just another form of exhibitionism - one for truckers' eyes only. The motivation still confounds me.

March 10

Home. It's 10pm and Michael has gone to bed after a day of codeine induced sleep and general frustration at not being able to do anything but lay or sit with his foot elevated. On Friday, the doctor removed the tumor from his foot leaving him laid back and pain free for two days. As he gradually weans himself from his painkillers, he more and more tries to go about doing normal things (like walking) only to get angry and frustrated at his incapacitating condition. The trauma of the surgery is over. Now the rush for recovery is on. Unfortunately his mind is far more ready for movement than his foot. Hence, the frustration. Tomorrow we change the dressing. One more day of home cooking and we're back on the road. Michael will ride shotgun until the doctor says he's okay to drive. Have a feeling his recovery will be an amazingly quick one.

March 12

On the road again - or so we thought. This tour started out as messed up as any could. Spent from 9:30am to 5pm playing "find an empty trailer" again only to arrive at



the supplier too late to get loaded. Only 25 miles from the house, I fueled at a local truck stop, we ate and I drove home for the night.

Tomorrow we're on our way to Ontario, Canada. If we're loaded quickly, we may have time to spend a couple of hours with the Blaisdell's in Syracuse. Looks like Michael's ready to drive. He still limps and has to watch where and how he uses his foot, but on the whole he feels ready to drive. With my "solo" load delayed because of no trailers, we should be back to running as a team by tomorrow.

## TURN SIGNALS NOT REQUIRED

March 15

We're somewhere between St. Louis and Oklahoma City on I-44. We made it to the Blaisdell's on the 13<sup>th</sup> and spent a pleasant morning with the two of them and Colby. Greg is not doing well. You can really see how his last bout with bronchitis and the shingles have weakened him even more. He uses a walker and a cane and generally spends his days in the bedroom now. Shirley has moved the recliner up there along with a TV set, an intercom and a CD player. It's always so difficult for us to leave.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> I took us into Canada. This time the custom procedures, though lengthy, went smoothly. This was in contrast to the time we carried TV sets from Otay, California (on the Mexican border) into Canada. We hadn't realized we were carrying a bonded load (our freight was actually being shipped from Mexico). The Canadian officials threatened us with a \$100,000 fine and promptly escorted us back across the border to the United States. There we had to "unbond" the load so to speak and go back through Canadian customs. The paper work was horrendous, mind boggling and time consuming. No problem this time. As usual, it was fun converting kilometers into miles as I took us to the consignee and then back into the US at Ft. Erie.

Everything went so smoothly; we were on our way to our new pick-up in Buffalo a good two hours ahead of schedule. Looks like we'll get to spend a day with Jerry and Steph before we deliver in LA.

March 18

Spent a very relaxing and pleasant 24 hours at Jerry and Steph's. Met Jerry's mother this time. At this rate we'll get to know all of their family. Ate like pigs - ribs and chicken, cheese, wine, popcorn, and dips. You name it - we ate it. They have their house up for sale, which means their return to Alaska is imminent. In fact, Jerry flew up to Homer about two weeks ago to check out jobs and land.

Made our delivery in LA and picked up a load for Hampton, VA. We're now heading back across I-40 in beautiful, sunny weather. One thing nice about this part of the country is that there is virtually no traffic to contend with.

Most over-the-road truck drivers average 110,000 miles of driving a year. Not only do they see a lot of highways and byways, but they see a lot of traffic. From rush hour in Chicago and LA to lonely two lane country roads, drivers encounter just about every type of vehicle violation and idiotic maneuver imaginable. Consequently, they find themselves driving for everyone else on the road - and griping a lot as they do.



Sometimes I think the isolation-booth effect created by the confines of an automobile numbs most drivers to that 35/55/65 mph world around them. Whatever it is, it still amazes me that there are not more accidents.

I truly believe that most motorists do not know what the word "yield" means. For example, when I'm traveling in the right hand lane of an interstate with vehicles flying down the left lane, a car entering the highway invariably moves into my lane assuming that I am the one who is supposed to yield or get out of their way. I have been given "the finger" on numerous occasions for failing to decelerate and "yield" to another driver's whimsy.

For some reason, most drivers believe a semi can stop on a dime because it has 18 wheels and airbrakes. Not so! On a dry road at 55 mph, it takes a tractor-trailer 300 feet to come to a complete stop. That's the length of a football field! It takes a car about 100 to 120 feet to stop. If most drivers were aware of this fact, they might think twice before they cut in front of a big rig.

Following too close behind a truck is another major gripe we truckers have. Somewhere in the annals of driving mythology there is the belief that if you stay close enough to a truck you can get caught in its air stream and save gas. However, in the annals of reality, you can end up underneath it. As a warning to drivers, many trailer mud flaps have printed on them, "If you can't see my mirrors, I can't see you. **STAY BACK**". One day I saw a less subtle but certainly more effective warning on a trailer: "Unless you're a hemorrhoid, get off my butt!"

On one of his morning rush hour drives, a friend of ours who works in the New York City area mentally devised a melon gun to vent his frustrations regarding cars that constantly cut him off or tailgate. While working my way along a busy interstate, I came up with a way to adapt his "invention" to a semi. First, you would need to build a retractable cannon with a chamber onto the front of the tractor. Load the chamber with melons and set the cannon's trajectory so that the melons hit the rear window of the offending vehicle. A button inside the cab extends the cannon; another button releases the melons. The same type of device can be built onto the rear of a trailer with the cannon aimed at the tailgating vehicle's nose. This way, the melon's splatter will get the driver's attention without obscuring his view. Ripe melons are preferred. All I need now is to get a good engineer to draw up the blueprints and build the device. I think the idea has great market potential.

During the long hours on the road, truckers have come up with innumerable solutions to resolve the cut-in/tailgate problem. These include: running over the culprit (too much paperwork); tailgating (an expensive moving violation); and, cutting in front of the vehicle and slowing down (too dangerous). I heard one trucker on the CB discussing the possibility of tossing marbles or ball bearings onto the highway to dissuade the tailgater from following too closely. Others try putting on their brakes and slowing down. To date, no safe solutions have been found.

It has always been my contention that car manufacturers put turn signals in cars so that everyone on the road would know everyone else's intentions. However, the

intent of turn signals seems to have eluded far too many drivers. A woman I once worked with, in discussing the need to use turn signals, adamantly declared that it was no one's business what she was going to do with her car. My response was an incredulous stare. I must admit that her attitude is definitely a shared one. If not, then far too many cars have either broken or no turn signals at all!

My favorite non-signal maneuver is when the car in front of me suddenly brakes and makes a left or right hand turn. I'm usually still recovering from the sudden brake by the time the vehicle disappears into the intersection. Another favorite is when a car moves from the left lane of an interstate across one or two lanes in front of me and either slows down or exits. As a truck driver, if you have not at this point jack knifed the truck or caused a chain of rear end collisions behind you, you are shouting expletives over the CB and counting your blessings. I cannot even enumerate the number of cars that have cut perilously close to me as they flew across two lanes. They should probably be counting *their* blessings.

Nighttime driving seems to bring out the worst in some drivers. One of the biggest gripes truckers have regards the guy behind him who keeps his bright lights on. Because we virtually "live" in our mirrors, we find nothing worse than constantly staring into a blinding light. And, of course, this same vehicle, which is preventing us from seeing out of our mirrors, is also blinding oncoming traffic. Another favorite maneuver involves the driver who misses his exit. Panic seems to set in and he becomes oblivious to everything else around him. The only thing on his mind is getting back to



his exit as quickly as possible. I have seen drivers cross the grassy section of a median strip or make a U-turn in the "Official Use Only" section of an interstate and fly into oncoming traffic. I have also seen cars backing down an exit ramp onto the highway because they had taken a wrong turn. It never seems to occur to them to go to the next exit and turn around or to continue exiting and then reenter the highway.

In city driving, there's at least one car that, suddenly realizing it must make a left hand turn and unable to get into the turn lane, sits in the through-lane of a busy intersection with its left signal on blocking an entire lane of traffic. Rather than find another place to turn around, the driver sits there determined to make that left. Honking horns and near accidents don't seem to break his misplaced concentration.

Then there is the driver who forgets that his turn signal is still on. Usually he's either chatting to his passenger or totally absorbed with his favorite rock or country station. Whichever, those around him have no idea what his intentions are. Do you keep your distance? Do you pass? Do you turn into that intersection? Do you take a chance?

Most truckers complain that four wheelers have no concept of how to share the road with a big truck. A continuing problem that truckers face is trying to make that right or left hand turn when vehicles are stopped well beyond the white line at a stop sign or signal light. I decided long ago that the majority of drivers don't realize that in order for a trucker to turn a corner without damaging or destroying a light pole or fire hydrant or a traffic light or the corner itself with his trailer, he must make a wide swing. If cars stay

behind the white line when they stop at a light, the trucker can usually maneuver his truck around the corner with ease. I have had many occasions where I've sat in intersections waiting for drivers to back up so I could make my turn. Sometimes I've actually pulled my park brakes, rested my elbows on the steering wheel, my chin on my hands and patiently waited until they realized that I wasn't about to back up. Other times, I've had people overreact and back a quarter of a mile down a street to make sure I wouldn't hit them.

Most trailers have painted on their rear lower right side the statement: *THIS TRUCK MAKES WIDE TURNS*. Along with this statement is usually a drawing of a four wheeler sideswiping an 18-wheeler as it makes a right hand turn. The combination of impatience ("gotta get around that big truck") and not looking at a truck's turn signals is the usual cause of some very serious and many times fatal accidents. Though the trucker signals prior to making his swing, he is still considered at fault in 99% of these types of accidents. Another problem a truck driver has to contend with is the vehicle that decides to dash behind him as he's backing up. Impatience on the part of the four wheeler is usually the culprit in most of the accidents that involve tractor trailers backing over vehicles. The driver of the passenger car never seems to have the time to wait the minute or two it will take the trucker to back into a dock or off of a street. The other culprit, as in most cases, involves not looking. One trucker told me he had inadvertently run over a BMW. After he'd set himself up to back into a dock, he pulled forward, went to the rear of his trailer, opened his trailer doors, climbed back into his truck and

proceeded to back into the dock. Suddenly, he felt a strange bump. He got out of his truck and found a crushed BMW behind him. Apparently, not realizing the truck was about to back up, a woman had parked behind it. In the meantime, the trucker had returned to his truck, checked his gauges and mirrors and, not seeing the car because it was directly behind him, proceeded to back up to the dock. He was considered at fault.

Other driving oddities continue to confound me. These include: the reader (newspaper, book or notes resting on the steering wheel); the yoga (usually a young woman sitting yoga style in the driver's seat going 65 mph); the great communicator (dialing or talking on a car or cellular phone); the eater (usually juggling a bacon cheeseburger, fries and coke while searching for that napkin that fell on the floor); the irate parent (trying to swat, yell at or cajole his or her unruly children in the back seat); and the music aficionado (bouncing, tapping and/or singing to whatever is emanating from his snugly placed headphones). As I look down into these cars from my perch high in the tractor, I wonder how the majority of these drivers continue to make it safely to their destinations day after day, year after year. Maybe one day we will have programmable automobiles that run along electronic tracks. Speed, turn signals, and braking distance will be controlled by a combination of computers and sensors. Then we can just set our trip plan and read, exercise, eat, talk on the phone, yell at our children or listen to music without worrying about "the other guy". For now, I will continue to worry about "the other guy" especially as I head for the hectic northeast.



March 23

Guess it's catch up time again as we head back to LA after delivering in Virginia. We picked up a load of paper in Virginia, dropped it north of Milwaukee and picked up our present load in Oshkosh. We met my Aunt Rose and Uncle Leonard for a late lunch at a truck stop in Madison. They pulled into the lot just as I was parking the rig. Needless to say, they were duly impressed with their niece "the truck driver".

Yesterday both of us were up all day and were totally exhausted by early evening. At 8pm we pulled into a rest area at the Iowa border, heated up some soup and ate soup and crackers as the wind howled, the rain poured down, lightning flashed and Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique* played on the tape deck. Sated and exhausted, we slept.

Woke to reports of tornadoes all over the area and southeast of us. The constant changes in weather and temperature are starting to get to us. Michael is achy all over and can't seem to feel rested even though he gets plenty of sleep. I've got a sinus headache and feel dragged out even with 8 hours sleep. And my left shoulder has been bothering me on and off. Guess I slept on it wrong. A little sun and a lot less humidity would help.

Not only am I feeling lousy, I had to put up with another gross, cold water rest area. One thing I have become an expert on is bathrooms and showers. Out on the road, one encounters the very basic natures of men and women as defined by their

bathroom habits. Women's bathrooms both in rest areas and truck stops are generally clean except for the toilet seats. Women seem to have abhorrence for toilet seats or a fear of contracting some incurable disease by touching their bare bottoms to the seat. Either that or they have an inherent need to see how effectively they can or cannot pee in a straight stream from 2-3 inches above the seat while holding their skirts, pants and/or underwear out of the way and standing in a rather ungainly semi squatting position. Ninety-nine percent of the time they *miss* the hole. My option, because I like to sit down to take care of nature's call, is to either wash the seat or attempt to struggle with one of those despicable paper covers that move off of the seat with the slightest of breezes (the mere attempt to sit is one cause).

Men's rooms, on the other hand, are probably one of the grossest places in the universe. Again, I haven't figured out the psychology of why men tend to urinate on the floor, toss toilet paper and towels about and decorate the walls and stalls with obscene graffiti and drawings. I also haven't figured out why they seem to take pleasure in using the urinals for trashcans. Unfortunately, I've had to be subjected to these cesspools of humanity on various occasions because women's rooms were not available. Even Michael has driven the extra 20 or 30 miles to avoid a filthy bathroom or relied on the side of the road.

When you live on the road for one to five weeks at a time you can understand why other than fueling and eating, showering is one of the most popular activities at a truck stop. If you put 80 or more gallons of fuel in your tank, your shower is usually free.

Otherwise, it will generally cost you \$5.00 with a \$5.00 to \$10.00 returnable towel deposit. Most truck stops have a separate area of the building with anywhere from 3-20 private shower rooms. They provide you with towels, soap and floor mats. The large rooms include a sink with vanity, a large mirror, a commode and shower stall. Some even have blow dryers. We usually rate the showers by their cleanliness, by the number of hooks, racks and benches as well as the height of the showerhead, the water pressure and the amount of hot water.

The most unusual shower we ever took was at a truck stop in Ogden, Utah. When the woman behind the fuel counter pointed us in the direction of the car wash we thought she was joking. Once inside one of the three shower rooms attached to the side of the car wash and opening on to the main parking lot, we knew she had been serious. We'd managed to shower in small rooms with meager fixtures before. However, we had never experienced a problem such as this one. The water temperature switched from scalding to frigid every time someone ran their car through the wash. Needless to say, we showered quickly and were on our way vowing next time to shower before Ogden or not at all.

March 26

We're sitting in the truck watching the snow accumulate around us. All information coming over the CB is negative - reports of terrible road conditions ahead of



us over Flagstaff. We're vacillating as to whether to take off now or wait until the snow subsides and the roads are cleared. So far it looks like we'll sit for a bit.

Yesterday was a long one starting at 3am and ending at 2am. We hit snow at Cajun Pass on the way into LA at 7:30am. Once we found the consignee, we found out we had to hand unload and sort 15,600 lbs of napkins, place mats and tablecloths - 48 different kinds, sizes and colors and stack them on pallets according to the ID# on each box. It took us almost 5 1/2 hours and numerous calls to our dispatcher about the treatment we were getting from the warehouse personnel. She ultimately cajoled us into completing the job.

When it comes to delivering to food warehouses or large distribution centers, truck drivers tend to be treated as the lowest people in the work chain. Besides putting up with the myriad laws he must contend with, the trucker must also subject himself to the demeaning treatment imposed by many shippers and receivers. Although there exists an "anti lumping" law, its effectiveness and enforcement are all but negligible. If shippers insist that drivers load or unload, they do so unless they or their companies are willing to pay for a lumper. Otherwise, the freight does not move from the dock to the truck and vice versa and the trucker and his company do not get paid. Truckers and many of their organizations have been fighting this practice for years. They feel they are professional drivers, not lumpers and that lumping merely compounds the fatigue and stress already so much a part of their jobs.

One day at a consignee Michael ended up in what our dispatcher called a "pissing contest". We had arrived early to our destination only to find that no one from our company had scheduled a delivery appointment. Since no other deliveries were scheduled for at least two hours, the receiving personnel agreed to unload the solid wood pieces of office furniture that filled our trailer. However, they insisted that Michael help. He refused stating that it was not his job to unload. So we sat, the dockworkers sat and the furniture sat. Unable to get hold of our dispatcher, Michael talked to another who insisted that he unload. Again he refused. Customer service sent him a message on the computer demanding he unload and he told them "No". Messages flew over the computer and the telephone lines for at least an hour as tempers flared.

"That's it! If this company can't back me up then I'm quitting!" he shouted to me as he again stomped to the phone to try once more to get in touch with our dispatcher.

"Heard you've been in a pissing contest", Bob calmly said. "And it sounds like you're winning."

Michael chuckled.

"Don't worry about unloading. I'd say lifting and moving 300 to 500 pound pieces of furniture by hand is a definite safety problem. Wouldn't you?"

"Sure would", Michael replied.

We don't know what Bob said to the customer or to customer service. What we do know is that the truck was unloaded within an hour and we were on our way.

When we finally got all the paper products unloaded and got to our second drop in LA, the consignee refused the load. So we trekked back through rush hour traffic to another part of LA to drop the remainder of the load at a trucking firm. From there we headed for western LA, still bogged down in traffic to pick up our present load headed for Chicago. We were tired; we hadn't eaten and were just plain worn out. Michael finally pulled it over at 2am at the rest area outside of Barstow, Ca. and slept. I took us on to Kingman, AZ. this morning, which is where we continue to sit until the snow stops.

March 28

We made it safely over Flagstaff after a five-hour wait. The snow stopped and the sun came out melting most of the snow on the roads. Other than some ice around Gallup, NM the trip to Illinois was generally uneventful.

We are now headed for Lodi, Ca. just south of Sacramento. We'll have to take I-80 this time. It was shut down yesterday in Nevada due to heavy snowfall. Maybe we'll luck out and get across between storms. It's almost April. You'd think spring was around *one* of these corners!

Easter Sunday

Just spent a "pleasant interlude", as Michael calls it, in Sparks, Nev. just east of Reno. Yesterday we checked into a motel (at \$26.00 a night) and dined on excellent



Mexican food at the casino. I'm always fascinated by the mesmerizing effect Nevada casinos have on people. Sometimes I'll just listen to the noise of the slots, the clanking of coins, the din of the constant running commentary of the players, stare at the stroboscopic flashing of the lights on the machines and get caught up in the frenetic activity of the patrons. Not to be out done by the big spenders, we split \$50.00 and watched the slot and poker machines swallow our quarters. At 2am we ambled back to the motel, \$50.00 lighter. This morning Michael breakfasted on steak and eggs and I on eggs benedict (\$12.00 total). With some time to kill, we decided to throw \$20.00 more into the poker machines. We walked out with \$10.00. Total loss: \$60.00. All in all, it was definitely a "pleasant interlude". Though we stop in Reno or Mill City, NV. about once every couple of months, we seldom throw more than \$20.00 at the machines. In most cases we lose it all. I guess I have to admit that even I sustain the hope that one day I'll hit the jackpot. However, the one time we did win any money was on Michael's 44th birthday. He'd been dying to play the dollar slots but I'd continued to nix the idea. On his birthday, I gave him \$44.00 with the stipulation that he would *not* play his credits at all. Michael's *modus operandi* is usually to play all his credits until he has nothing left. This time, I set the rules. In the end, he cashed out and walked away with \$76.00, a \$32.00 gain which we promptly spent on 2 enormous steaks.

April 4

Here we go again! Trying to work our way home! And where do they send us?

To western Mass.

We picked up a load in Bothell, WA. after delivering in Seattle. After a stop in Des Moines for a PM, we delivered the Bothell load in Galesburg, Ill. Now we're headed to Chicago to pick up a load for Westfield, Mass. A strange route to get back home. Some how neither of us can believe that there's nothing going south out of the Midwest! If we calculate our miles correctly, it looks like we won't be home for another two to three days.

April 6

On our way to Charlotte and then home. This tour out we did over 18,000 miles in 26 days. We've been to or through 39 states plus Canada. We went to California 3 times and, except for one snowstorm in Arizona and one on Cajun Pass in California, we had relatively good weather. We even had time for a "vacation" day in Nevada. Though we're looking forward to our four days at home, we don't feel as tired and stressed out as we did at the end of our last tour. Time to take care of business, relax and get ready to go out again.

## CB'S, TRUCK STOPS AND SPRING

April 11

We've been sitting in the dock at TRW's suspension and steering parts division in Greensboro, N.C. for over an hour. They haven't even begun to load us. In fact, we heard they're still manufacturing the parts. Hope we'll be able to make our Madison, WI. delivery at 3 pm tomorrow. If not, we'll have to lay over another day.

Got a lot accomplished this time home. Finally was able to schedule in a haircut and a perm. Michael doesn't seem to understand why I get so upset about how my hair looks. "Put on a hat or shave your head!" he always tells me. I do have a great looking leather cap I wear on "bad hair days" but still, I like my hair to look good. There's nothing like rolling out of the sleeper after a bouncing six hours and walking into a truck stop or a rest area or even a customer with my hair looking like Alfalfa's of the Little Rascals. I guess because I live out of a duffle bag like a vagabond and wear a uniform of blue jeans and boots, I find the only thing that makes me feel good about my appearance is when my hair is neatly coiffed. Other than a pair of earrings, a smattering of lipstick or occasional eye shadow, my attire is generally spare and practical. So for me, having my hair look decent is my one statement of being neat and feminine.



Again, our tour out started with trying to locate a trailer. This time it only took us about 3 1/2 hours. However, our inauspicious start of this tour actually began in our driveway with a dead battery. Our plan to depart at 5 am turned into a 7 am departure, with our neighbor coming over to jolt our truck back to life.

April 14

One hundred miles into Montana and it's snowing. My day began yesterday when I was awakened by Michael talking on the CB to another company driver he'd picked up in South Dakota. They'd decided to drive together into Washington State. What a talker this guy named Gary was! For hours he told story after story, cracked a continuous assortment of jokes and even attempted to convert us to born again Christianity. I made a futile attempt to dissuade him from his proselytizing when I told him I was Jewish. Undaunted, he proceeded to expound on a group called Jews for Jesus. At that point, I gave up trying to silence him. For the most part his tales proved entertaining and interesting.

A native of Portland, OR, Gary had driven the Northwestern routes frequently and knew a way to cut out about 70 miles of Montana. Reluctantly, I left the surety of the interstate and allowed him to lead me over 200 miles of two lane roads, most of which were under construction. Thank god there was no traffic! We drove through miles of muddy, potholed, one lane dirt road with no shoulders, precarious looking mud slopes

on each side and snow coming down at a steady rate. We hit hills where I had to drop to fifth gear and curves I had to maneuver at 10 miles per hour. This was a road for a four-wheel drive pick-up, not an 18-wheeler. Awakened by the constant bouncing, Michael clung to the sleeper and cursed. It was one of the longest shortcuts I'd ever driven.

Once back on I-90, the snow came down heavier and heavier and the highway narrowed to a barely distinguishable one lane. At this point I told Gary that it might be a good idea to pull it over and regroup. Our first attempt at shutting down at a truck stop proved futile. There wasn't a spot to be had. So we headed down the road for another 20 miles and found an almost deserted rest area. With the snow still coming down, we climbed into our respective sleepers for the night.

At about 6 am, we awakened to find a third company truck that had sought and found refuge in this rest area. Now three Pumpkins were slowly wending their way to our fuel stop on the other side of Bozeman, about 150 miles from the rest area. An east bounder told us the roads were clear at about the 300 mile marker - 92 miles to go. The snow has abated a bit and we are moving at about 45 mph. As long as we don't have to stop we should be OK.

April 15

The snow stopped, the roads cleared, the sun came out and the caravan, CB's humming on Channel 15, worked its way along I-90 past the rushing rivers and beautiful

mountains of Montana. We developed an instant rapport with "Desperado" and "Redliner", the team we picked up at the rest area. In fact, I never did learn their given names.

The first thing you notice about the CB is that nothing is called by its real name. This can be confusing for the uninitiated. When I first started driving I thought I was listening to a foreign language. I had no idea what anyone was talking about.

As anyone who's seen a trucker movie knows, every driver has a "handle". Joe, Sue, Don, Alice won't do. It has to be "Concrete Cowboy", or "Lady Blue" or "Nervous Wreck" or "Butterfly". Most handles have a story behind them and/or reveal some aspect of a driver's character, physical description or interests. In fact, (and I was amazed to find this out) there's an actual "National C.B. Handle Registry" where you can register your handle. Some of my favorite handles include: "Out-House Mouse" (even he couldn't give me a reason why); "Toe Jam" (he loves looking at women's toes - especially if they're polished); "Lick'em 'n Stick'em" (he drives an 18 wheeler for a post office contractor); "Bull Shipper" (he hauled cattle for 10 years and loves the play on words). Michael calls himself "Pinball" for obvious reasons. My handle is "10 Pin" because I used to bowl a lot before I went over the road. Some drivers have asked me if I'm shaped like a bowling pin. Other interesting handles I've heard are "Blabber Mouth", "Hobby Dog", "Orange Bowl", "Hobo", "Tightwad", and "Wrongway".

Even cities and states have their respective handles. There's "the Buckeye" (Ohio), "the Keystone" (Pennsylvania), "the Windy" (Chicago), "the Mile High" (Denver),



"the Shaky" (California), "the Queen City" (Charlotte, N.C. or Cincinnati, Oh.), "the Gay Bay" (San Francisco), "the Guitar" (Nashville), "the Gateway" (St. Louis), and "the Nickel" (It took us a while to figure that one out!). You drive a "rig" or a "buggy", a "parking lot" or car carrier. You pull a "reefer" or refrigerated trailer. You park at your terminal or "junkyard", and get your assignments from your dispatcher or "tour director".

You're not a real trucker if you haven't gone down "the grapevine" or "Donner" in California, been down "Cabbage" in Oregon, down "Fancy Gap" in Virginia or through the "gorge" in North Carolina. Other challenging hills or mountain passes include "the Flag" in Arizona, and "Sherman", "Elk", and "the sisters" in Wyoming.

You check whether "the coops" are open and keep on the lookout for "Smokey Bear", "the County Mounty" or "Evil Knieval armed and dangerous". If the "bear" is in a "plain wrapper" then you need to know what color. There's nothing that compares with the imagination of some of the truckers out there when it comes to handles.

Gary, who goes by the handle "Sporty", hooked up with another company driver called "Brain Dead" who he was to swap trailers with. In the meantime, Michael and I and the Milwaukee team stayed together to the outskirts of Seattle. There are times I really love the CB. Late at night or on those long, boring drives across Nebraska or through Texas it's nice to find someone to "run with", someone to talk to and while away the long hours. You switch to a quiet channel and talk about everything and anything. You share confidences and gripes; you talk about your favorite music, movies and TV shows. You talk to a voice over the air that belongs to someone you might not meet face

to face or probably never speak to again. But for the hours you're together, you're friends.

"Redliner" and I took over in the early evening from Michael and "Desperado" and filled the night hours with talk and nonsense. He told me about his wife and new baby and how he misses not being home and watching his son grow up. We enumerated all the places we'd been and griped about the problems of living on the road and about other drivers. I found out he had picked his handle from the red line on the speedometer (going too fast) and not (as I thought) from putting red lines through writing errors. We both had a good laugh over the ever-present English teacher in me. It was a pleasant way to cover the long and sometimes foggy miles. On the outskirts of Seattle we parted ways, thanked each other for the nice chat and voiced a mutual desire to run together again.

I was totally exhausted when I reached the truck stop and even more exhausted when I realized I'd have to drive another 50 plus miles to the consignee in Kent, WA. because there was no place to park. We're now on our way to Knoxville, TN. and Abingdon, VA with 44,000 lbs of canned salmon. Salmon from Seattle - now that makes sense! First we'll head for a truck stop in Ellensburg, WA. for a good meal and long needed showers.

The two days of company were definitely enjoyable and time filling. But Michael and I both agree that it's nice to have our solitude back.

April 18

Got to Knoxville about 5:30 this morning and realized there was no way we were going to make it to Virginia by 1 pm. Ended up at another grocery warehouse with "sub humans" that treat us like the scum of the earth. Michael got pissed off and left, heading to the T/A for breakfast and to see if we could at least relay the Virginia part of our load. Toni is working on it.

Meanwhile, we're back at the warehouse waiting for a dock to back into. Our trip here from Seattle was a good one. We drove over 1,000 miles a day for two days, saw elk, antelope herds, thousands of sheep and lambs and more beautiful countryside. The weather was warm and clear - Spring at last!

This is the most subtle of seasons. Its changes are both imperceptible and sudden. Calves, lambs and foals seem to suddenly appear in Wyoming, Colorado and the southeast. Daffodils, forsythia, and dogwoods infuse color into the starkness left by winter. I'll round a bend on a two-lane road in North Carolina and be overwhelmed by the miles of fuchsia and pink flowered fruit trees. I'll catch a glimpse of buds on the still bare trees. I watch the farmers turning the soil and planting in Iowa, Illinois, California and Indiana. Temperatures vacillate all over the country. One day it is 75 and sunny in Denver; the next it's 37 and snowing. I hit ice storms in Illinois and rainstorms in Tennessee. I never know what to wear. The days are getting longer. Construction signs are starting to appear more and more frequently. I can feel the tension from



anticipated snowstorms lessening. Another few weeks and the whole country will be warm and green.

April 20

Things were going too well. The rain we'd been ahead of for days finally caught up with us. The streets we needed to maneuver in Buffalo, normally an obstacle course for truckers, were even more complicated by construction. The trailer we hooked to at Nabisco had an air leak in the glad hand and a missing slider pin. Road service replaced the glad hand and Michael was able to "borrow" a slider pin from another trailer and put it on ours. Wet and tired, we finally headed west - three hours behind schedule.

Showered, with clean clothes in our packs, a good meal and a good night's sleep, we're headed for Portland, Ore. It's still raining. But that's OK.

April 23

On our way to Pineville, Oregon in the central part of the state and then to Dallas for a PM. The trip to Portland proved to be relatively smooth and easy. We hit some wet snow and rain in Wyoming but nothing to slow us down.

I lucked out with a beautiful day and finally got to see not only the Columbia River and Gorge but snow covered Mt. Hood. The way the highway winds, you feel as if you are headed straight toward the mountain. I wanted to pull off at every scenic viewpoint. It was spectacular. Michael got his thrills going down "Cabbage", one of the infamous Oregon mountains that consists of 6 miles of winding 7% grade. He did it in 6th gear at 20 to 22 miles per hour and didn't come close to smoking his breaks. I remember coming down Cabbage one night at about 35 miles per hour with my lights flashing to warn other drivers of my slow speed. Another trucker flew by me and chided me on the CB for going so slowly down the mountain. When I finally hit level ground, I noticed a truck sitting on the shoulder with its breaks smoking. It was my "friend". I just chuckled to myself, waved, and went on my way.

We got our layover in Wilsonville, restocked our refrigerator and stayed at the motel next to the Burns Brothers Truck Stop. I'm so comfortable at a truck stop that I tend to regard the ones we frequent most as my homes away from home.

There are over 3,800 truck stops in the U.S. and Canada to choose from with parking facilities for anywhere from 5 to 500 trucks. They include national chains such as Petro, Flying J, Truck Stops of America (TA), Texaco and Union 76; regional chains such as Burns Brothers, Little America, Sapp Brothers and Speedway; and local mom and pop stops.

When we first went on the road, we used to eat where we fueled. But we began to tire of the same menus. We also realized that we needed a place to pull into when

we changed drivers. And this could be anywhere in the country at any time of the day or night. Other times we needed to scale out a heavy load to see if we were legal to run. For \$7.00 we purchased *The National Truck Stop Directory* subtitled, "The Truckers' Friend". This directory, arranged by state and city, includes names and locations of truck stops, parking information and services at each location (i.e. restaurant, motel, laundry, scale, maintenance and tire facilities, showers, etc.). For the most part we have found some very nice and unusual places with wonderful local color and surprisingly excellent meals. We have also found some real "holes".

One thing I can say about truck stop food is that, if nothing else, it is always reliable and basic. Forget about chicken cordon bleu and veal parmigiana. Meat loaf, hamburgers, steak and sandwiches are always available. In most places, breakfast is the best and biggest meal of the day. No matter what the meal, portions fall off of your plate. One of my more entertaining moments is watching the larger truckers return to the buffet two and three times with plates overflowing with food. It amazes me just how much some of these folks can consume.

One thing you never have to ask for at a truck stop is coffee. Huge drip machines hold three to four perpetually filled pots as waitresses juggle empties and keep drivers placated with cups of hot java. Cluttered tables hold mugs, jugs and thermoses ready to be filled and carried to the truck for later enjoyment.

Most truck stops have restaurants that cater not only to truckers but to motorists and local clientele as well. The larger restaurants generally have a separate section for



"Professional Truck Drivers Only". In this section, each table usually has a telephone, a convenience that is utilized by just about everyone to make calls to family, to dispatchers, to customers or to take care of general business. Most members of my family are still fascinated by the fact that I can order and eat my meal while talking to them.

I think what fascinates me most about truck stops is how unique many of them are, especially the small chains and independents. If it's local color you're looking for, truck stops will not disappoint. Many display and sell the paintings, artwork and pottery of the local and regional citizenry. Truck stops in the southwest are replete with silver and turquoise jewelry, Indian artifacts, pottery and handmade leather goods. Some truck stops display a diversity of items and collections garnered by their owners over the years. At Sierra Sid's in Sparks, Nevada you can view the largest collection of commemorative guns in the country including Elvis' collection. In other truck stops, gas station and truck stop memorabilia from before 1950 are on display as are miniature trucks and cars that date back to the 1920's and '30's. In many places sepia tinted photographs depicting the history of the area cover the walls. The General Lee Truck Stop outside of Cookeville, Tennessee is akin to a museum with its dark wood paneled walls, photographs and paintings of Civil War soldiers in battle and at rest, and rifles, riding paraphernalia, clothing and artifacts of the period in abundant display. A truck stop in Illinois has a unique display of antique toys hanging from the ceiling and colorfully attired automated marionettes in a glass showcase that play music and dance.

Another thing that makes truck stops so appealing for us and other drivers is that they provide a diversion from the long hours on the road. They're a place where we can get out of the truck and relax. Almost all have game rooms with the latest video games and pinball machines. Most have TV lounges to stretch out in and catch up on favorite shows, watch the latest news or check out the weather channel. Some even have small movie theaters where you can watch full-length features on video while munching on free popcorn. You can do your laundry, get your boots shined and your knives sharpened and get your hair cut at the larger truck stops. You can fax, phone and copy just about anything you might need and get permits and cash when necessary. Some truck stops even have mini malls where you can browse through a variety of stores for anything from clothes to boots to jewelry.

The most famous of the "monster" truck stops is the Giant Travel Center in Jamestown, NM on I-40. Situated in a 38,000 square foot area, it has a 62-foot high mall, a 30-seat theater, television and reading lounges, digital weather and travel information, a 290 seat restaurant and 18 full service fueling islands. The place is so huge that vans shuttle drivers from their rigs to a private truckers' entrance.

The Wilsonville Burns Brothers we just left is more toward the homey, with old fashioned food, incredible breakfasts and unassuming hospitality. It's an older stop with a crowded convenience store, a small laundry area and an overcrowded dirt parking lot. Showered and refreshed, we are now headed back through the mountains of Oregon. Looks like rain is on the way.

April 29

On the 23rd, coming out of Jake's Truck Stop in Bend, Ore., we witnessed what could have been a tragic accident. The truck ahead of us pulled onto the four lane to make a left and a car in the right hand lane with two teenagers went right under its trailer, just missing the wheels by a hair. The top of the car was almost sheared off. Michael and another trucker, the first people to get to the car, just looked at each other. Afraid of what they might find, neither wanted to open the door. Suddenly the driver door opened and a bent over, glass covered young man crawled from the wreckage. The other door slowly opened and another teenager brushed the shards of glass from his head as he too crawled from the vehicle. Needless to say, everyone was relieved to see these two walk away from what might have been an horrendous accident. We realized that it was the quick reaction of the two boys that saved their lives. Had the occupants been older, they may not have responded as quickly and been killed or seriously injured. There was no question that the trucker whose trailer had been in the lane was at fault. I still get flashes of that car going under the trailer. It was a chilling sight.

I'm constantly amazed how few accidents we've seen considering the amount of time we're on the road. The bad ones you remember! I guess that's why humor is the trucker's safety valve. And he uses it with incredible agility to deal with just about any



situation he encounters on the road. I remember sitting on the southbound side of I-85 outside of Greensboro, N.C. one night for over three hours waiting for an accident to be cleaned up. Apparently a young man had fallen asleep at the wheel, crossed the median and ended up under a tractor-trailer. Both the driver and his passenger were killed. The trucker suffered some minor injuries but was okay. The mess was unbelievable. CB's vibrated with activity as the gory details flooded the airwaves. The northbound truckers broadcast an explicit play-by-play of events. Once the bodies had been removed and the tow truck had arrived, a discussion arose as to the make of the car. Macabre cannot describe the conversations that followed. North bounders again attempted to describe the mangled vehicle as the wrecker winched it onto the rollback. The only thing anyone could agree on was that it was red. This was definitely one of those times that the humor ran to the really sick. As bizarre as the scene was, the accompanying humor somehow did help everyone to maintain some kind of perspective or equilibrium.

Anyway, after the accident in Bend, Ore., we struggled our way over mountains with our 77,000 plus lbs gross weight to Dallas for a PM. Delivered this morning. Will pick up in Dallas and head for Kimberly Clark in New Milford, Ct.

May 1

On I-77 south in West Virginia working our way home - we think. Are both tired, weary and ready for a couple of days off. And my left shoulder is still hurting me.

We've been running hard - Niagara Falls to Memphis, Memphis to Michigan and now Michigan to North Carolina. Did get a few hours in Syracuse to see Shirley and visit Greg in the hospital. He's been there for about a week and is not doing too well. Michael's trying hard not to worry but I can tell by the way that he looks at his father that our being so far away is really eating at him. At least we know if anything happens we'll know almost immediately. The last time he was critically ill, Danny (Michael's brother) reached us through Schneider and its satellite system. Miraculously it took only 15 minutes from the time Danny called Green Bay from Raleigh to the time we got the emergency message on our computer and called him back from a truck stop in Ontario, California. Michael got hold of the doctor, then Schneider, and we were turned around and headed for Charlotte and Syracuse. He pulled through that incident.

Got a chance to go to one of our favorite Syracuse restaurants for some excellent German food - sauerbraten, potato dumplings, and red cabbage. Besides the food, it was good to get Shirley away from the hospital and see her laugh a bit.

It's been drive and sleep, drive and sleep, drive and sleep. This present load, a particularly heavy one on a 53 foot trailer, is headed for Maxton, NC, about 100 miles southeast of Charlotte. We're hoping we can deliver early and go home. No word yet on this.

## A DEATH IN THE FAMILY

May 5

Waiting to see what our assignment will be as we get ready to begin our next tour. This four days off was one of the most relaxed we've had. We lazed around, watched movies and ate. Spent some time with Tarja who followed me around as I worked in the garden and cleaned out the flowerbeds. She's really getting old. Missed most of my daffodils and tulips this year but the neighbors said they were beautiful. Well, at least someone was there to appreciate them.

May 7

One of those CB days that runs from the poignant to the pornographic. Listening to the CB is sometimes akin to eavesdropping on a men's poker game or at a bar where "the boys" have gathered. This crudity and chauvinism, which many find offensive, tends to be more evident to the casual CB listener who lives in proximity to a city or major metro area.

However, I have found after hours of listening that, if you can persist through the crudities, you discover a language and a perspective that belongs only to the trucker.



Amidst the double negatives and the four letter words, there is an underlying humor rife with puns and double entendres and, in some cases, unexpected subtlety. There is a quickness, a sharpness of response I've heard no where but on the CB. There have been times that Michael and I have almost driven off the road laughing at some of the comments and stories coming over the air.

One day I heard a trucker telling another driver about how he had lost a leg in a trucking accident in 1976. He said his prosthetic leg has been worth a million dollars in fun. He talked about how he likes to "freak out" waitresses at truck stops by sticking a knife in his leg and watching their reactions. He also told about taking his leg off and hitting some guy who was hassling him. There was no end to the stories "Bad Leg" told. His tone was one of unabashed humor and sincerity.

The CB also becomes the conduit through which anger is expressed. The impatience, exhaustion, and irritability that develop from long hours on the road and maneuvering through heavy traffic sometimes trigger challenges and threats that permeate the airwaves. A driver may make a nasty comment to another and then you might hear, "Pull it off the road you mother fucker and I'll show you!" or someone may not like what he hears another trucker saying so he chimes in, "Shut up, stupid!". Usually other truckers jump in, try to calm the two adversaries or ridicule them for their childishness. Things generally return to normal fairly quickly. Anyway, for today at least, the raucous CB drove me to quiet contemplation.

May 8

We picked up our first load at Proctor & Gamble in Greenville, N.C. and dropped it about 60 miles south of St. Louis at Cape Girardeau, Mo. This particular location always gives me a slight shiver when I think about crossing the Mississippi that August when the floods were raging.

Hours before I had to cross the Mississippi, I began to tense. I'd been listening to reports all day.

"Raging waters careen through levees, exploding gas tanks. Oil fueled flames rise above the waters".

"Thousands of acres of wheat, corn, soy beans turn into lakes".

"Towns, homes under nine and ten feet of water".

Images from the radio, TV, newspapers, voices over the CB - constant reminders of imminent, cresting flood waters. I'd seen the fields of water, the tops of inundated houses, the Mississippi challenging its banks. But, I'd yet to cross.

A strange, surreal night on a windy two lane I'd never driven before. Bugs raining like a pestilence onto my windshield. Washer fluid smearing them, clearing them, giving way for more. Oncoming headlights diffused by the ever-clearing muck. Fires sporadically lighting the darkness - fires tended by National Guardsmen and volunteers sitting at barricaded, flooded, impassable roadways.

"Back it down," came over the CB. "Flood water on the road. Crews out there pumping".

Lights glared as I slowly drove past vans, pick-ups, and men moving water. Bugs constantly bombarding my windshield, blackening the lights that guided the workers.

Camera crews with camcorders and klieg lights flanked the narrow two-lane bridge that spans the Mississippi - capturing the rising waters.

I crossed slowly; fearful of my closeness to the river, happy the darkness obscured my view. I reached the other side to find the ground dry, the river still contained. Relieved, exhausted, I quickly climbed to higher ground.

Though the river was now at its normal level the eerie feeling of that night still haunts me.

We're now headed for Reno over our *favorite* route, I-70. Gluttons for punishment, we decided that the weather would be decent and it would be a perfect time to see Colorado and the progress being made in the construction of Glenwood Canyon. Beautiful doesn't even describe the snow-covered mountains. Taxing doesn't even come close to describing the climbs and descents and curves we had to maneuver. I know for a fact, I don't plan to drive this route again. For one thing, the altitude really gets to me.

We're still trudging up and down mountains and will probably continue to do so through Utah and Nevada. It looks like this route is going to eat up most of our extra time.



May 9

Yesterday we were bombarded by thousands of mayflies in Colorado. This morning, snow fell in Nevada. So far it's been a hell of a trip and we're not even four days out. Michael decided to try US 50 again (the loneliest road in America). Guess neither of us ever learns the easy way.

With all the delays - an hour wait in Vail, Colorado when a pick-up overturned and a 45 minute wait in line at the canyon due to construction - still looks like we'll deliver on time.

May 12

Spent most of today either driving or waiting to be loaded. To backtrack a bit, the 46,000 lbs of diatomaceous earth (what a great sounding word - *diatomaceous*) that we picked up outside of Reno for relay in Denver ended up, after much shunting about, in West Memphis, Arkansas. We're now on our way to Green Bay, WI. And I sometimes wonder why I don't know where I am half the time and in which direction I'm traveling.

Today was one of those days when you almost believe in biorhythmic cycles. Mine was at a definite low. From the minute I got up this morning nothing seemed to go right. I couldn't shift, I couldn't back and I missed a turn and had to go 35 miles out of

my way (no place to turn a big rig around on a two lane). I even had problems opening and closing the trailer doors. I guess yesterday's incident seemed to trigger today's string of mishaps. I misjudged a turn and ran over a curb leaving tire tracks on the grass at a consignee. Though no damage was done, the company complained to Schneider and I was charged with a preventable accident. As a result, I'll have to go to Charlotte and take a skills/driving test.

This unwelcome episode along with today's problems merely exacerbated my growing depression and lack of confidence. I felt as if I'd never been in a truck before. Unable to disengage myself from this vehicle and its overwhelming possession of my total life, I decided I'd better conquer my debilitating low and be done with it. Or, it would be done with me!

I don't remember much of the drive. But I do remember battling with my ego and reevaluating what I was doing on the road. For a moment I felt like I was back in trucking school. "No way," my mind shouted. Through a combination of tears, self-deprecating words and reassurances from Michael, I slowly pulled myself out of it. I reached the shipper with time to spare and backed into the dock without a problem. Even closed the trailer doors correctly. It's been a strange couple of days.

May 17

Michael said he was beginning to feel like a solo driver with all the 24 hour pick-ups and deliveries, the daily stops and short runs we've been getting. After numerous phone calls and several cryptic messages over the computer, our complaints have finally been dealt with. Thank goodness for Toni. Our relationship with her, in fact any relationship between a driver and his dispatcher ("tour director"), is key to the driver's relationship with his company. It is through his dispatcher that he gets his work assignments, sets up his time at home, deals with safety, maintenance and personal problems and keeps up to date on company business. His dispatcher (a misnomer to say the least) is his fire fighter, his mother/father-confessor, his disciplinarian and his immediate superior in the company chain of command. If this fundamental relationship does not work, then it is usually the driver who severs ties with the company.

Toni runs interference when customer service puts the customer's needs above what we feel is the safe disposition of our responsibilities. She's the one whom we call when we can't get unloaded or loaded within a reasonable period of time, if we need permission to "buy" a lumper, are delayed due to traffic or weather conditions, need special permits or if we've had an accident. We feel very lucky to have a responsive person at the other end of that phone and satellite line. It makes our job a lot easier.

Finally got some good sleep last night after three nights of restless, erratic dozing. Nothing like a long haul to get you back in shape.



We dined at a Hardees for breakfast and for dinner - one of our gourmet days!

May 22

Yesterday, or was it the day before (they all seem to roll together), was another one of *those* days. After we dropped our load outside of Yakima, WA. we deadheaded to Wilsonville, Ore to pick up a relay for San Francisco. We spent over 3 hours and 5 phone calls discussing and fiddling around with overweight tandems only to run illegally anyway (in violation of California's "bridge law" regarding overall length of tractor and trailer). We squeaked through two chicken coops without being spotted and made it to our stop in San Francisco.

Now on our way back on I-10 through the southwest to San Antonio. I love the desert. It always evokes a strange sense of isolation with its vast array of cactus, sage and light brown soil surrounded by craggy, treeless mountains. Right now the cactus is in bloom adding spots of color to the omnipresent browns and greens. The miles of saguaro cactus always lend an element of humor to the starkness of the desert. For some strange reason I can't look at them without imagining an army of Martians in caricature marching into New Jersey in *War of the Worlds*.

Finally got DOT'd yesterday in California. In fact, I almost blew the coop entirely. Saw the sign last minute and made it into the inspection station. Out came the man in coveralls who waved me into a bay. I knew my time would come. The inspector was as

nice as can be chatting away as he checked my lights and brakes, steering mechanisms, trailer and paper work. Both the tractor and trailer passed with flying colors and I was on my way within a half hour.

June 1

This tour ended in 18 days with 15,700 miles under our belts. We were both tired and irritable and glad to be off of the road. Tarja didn't greet us as she usually did. I found her on the other side of the pump house, her coat spread around her, her mask still recognizable, obviously dead for a couple of days. She looked like she had just gone to sleep, peacefully ending the fourteen years of pleasure she had given us. We stood quietly looking at this strange wolf-like creature who had been so much a part of our lives for so long. Michael dug a hole around her, we cremated her, and covered her with soil. Her death marked the close of our time in Alaska. We'll miss her.

June 2

Rested, we delivered our load in Henderson, N.C. and headed to New Bern for a pick-up. On the way, we stopped at Johnson Tech and talked to Ron and some of the instructors. A dozen or so students came out to see the truck and queried us on the computer and on Schneider in general. We felt like a PR team.

Next we headed on to Charlotte for what turned out to be a day and a half of classes, driving tests and conferences. By the time we reached the OC, I was incredibly nervous and beginning to feel like some kind of criminal for having run over a curb. I fought my anxiety and got through the skills and driving test despite the somber attitude of my tester. Michael and I then sat through a certification class in A & B explosives and got recertified in HAZMAT.

After two nights in Charlotte, we were glad (elated would be a better word) to be out of there. We headed to Greeneville, TN, then Madison, WI and Salt Lake City, UT. It's good to be on the road again, to clear our heads and to move!



## SEASONS IN THE SUN

June 6

Hot, hot, hot everywhere! - Virginia, Indiana, Massachusetts, South Carolina and Georgia and back across the country. Temperatures in the low 90's. Intense sun. Night is almost refreshing. Summertime and the drivin' is easy - or should I say easier. There's a definite calm about driving in summer. Through the seemingly never ending days, I drive over bridges hardly noticing those "may be icy" signs. My eyes catch the 6 and 8-foot snow fences in Wyoming and Montana now camouflaged by tall grass and grazing cattle. They look so out of place. I cruise by the open gates along I-70, I-80 and I-90 knowing I won't be stuck in some forsaken little town without a motel or at a truck stop for two days until the road reopens. I go up or down Cabbage, Donner, the Grapevine, Cajun, and Fancy Gap with care, but without that growing knot of tension and fear that I may skid or jackknife or end up on the side of the road. In fact, I can actually loosen my grip on the steering wheel and enjoy the view a little.

The roadsides are red, orange and golden with wildflowers. The desert is rich with white, blue and fuchsia blooms. The corn, wheat and soy fields of the Midwest grow higher each day. In California I want to reach out and pluck the ripening oranges, lemons, tomatoes and almonds. There's an excitement in the air.

The highways fill with a profusion of campers, trailers, RV's and cars headed for the Grand Canyon, Mammoth Cave, the beaches, grandmother's house. They fill the rest areas day and night walking their dogs, running their children, picnicking and using up the toilet paper. Their oversized vehicles take over the truck parking areas leaving few spaces for us road weary drivers.

They line the shoulders of interstates with overheated engines, blown tires, and broken axles. They drive while reading maps, missing exits and turns, and miscalculating their trailer's weight, width and sway.

In summer, I wend my way through an obstacle course of barrels and cones, jersey barriers, heavy equipment and flag waving road crews. I chuckle at the four wheelers as they try to squeeze their six-foot wide vehicles through the construction. At night, I squint as I approach those glaring blinking yellow arrows that warn me that the right lane will end in 1500 feet and wonder why they have to be so bright.

And the bugs! I think every category of insect and butterfly found in the United States has collected on my windshield. My tractor bonds with the mating May fly, the glowing firefly, the Monarch butterfly. More than once in an eight hour run, visibility totally obscured, I have to pull over, grab the bottle of Windex, and remove this accumulated mess.

My left arm tans from the intense sun that pours in through my expansive windows. Roads shimmer from the heat. I watch my temperature gauge, crank up the AC, and enjoy the relative pleasures of summer.

June 11

On our way to Sacramento to drop 44,600 lbs of Tide. Then it's on to Modesto, Ca. to pick up a P&G load for Missouri. We've been doing about 850 miles a day.

I'm still not used to all the activity on the roads, that incredible milieu of humanity motoring their way to, from and in participation or celebration of innumerable activities and events. They travel in two's or in hundred's, in caravans and in buses to their varied destinations.

The great migrations seem to start in early spring and continue into late summer. One summer day we got caught up in an improbable combination of travelers - participants in the *All American Road Race* and *Deadheads* headed to their namesake's concert in Denver, Co. We passed, and in some instances were passed by, spit shined cars from the '20's, '30's, and '40's, with their waving and grinning passengers and drivers proudly attired in historically accurate costumes. At the same time, hand painted Volkswagen buses and vehicles that looked like they hadn't run since the '60's and '70's slowly trudged their way across the interstate. Long haired, multi-earringed young people sporting bandannas and vibrantly colored costumes, filled the rest areas and the roadsides with their cats, dogs and broken down vehicles. Locals and tourists set up their lawn chairs in the rest areas facing the highway, well stocked coolers of beer at arms reach, and watched the continuous parade. It was quite a spectacle.



The warm weather also brings out the bikers on their way to their annual bacchanals. We've run with bikers on I-95 headed for Daytona's bike week. We've driven in awe as hundreds of bikes flew by us in Memphis, TN, women on the back carrying stuffed animals and colorfully wrapped packages for the Children's Christmas Run. Everyone from Hell's Angels to the Christian bikers to senior citizens was part of this police escorted parade. In Texas we stared at the hundreds of Harleys rumbling by on their way to Sturgis, SD for their annual bike run. Leather jacketed bikers sported their colors. Skulls and club mascots hung from their "hogs". The noise was incredible. In California, hundreds of bikers headed for Los Angeles for their annual run for Multiple Sclerosis. This one particular year, Jay Leno was the Grand Marshall. We missed seeing him.

Throughout the year, "weekend warriors" in mile long convoys of camouflaged jeeps, tanks and trucks carrying more trucks, slowly move their way across the interstates on their way to war games and reindoctrination. They take over the rest areas and the truck stops with their caravans and fatigues and fill the restaurants. Sometimes we'll see a mile long convoy sitting on the shoulder of the road waiting for one of it's vehicles to be repaired.

Fall brings college football and its traditional rivalries. Getting caught up in the mass movement of vehicles headed to the "enemy's" turf is a nightmare. Driving from Oklahoma City to Ft. Worth, Texas on I-35, I found myself in the midst of the migration from Oklahoma University to the University of Texas. A blur of red flags, red attired

students and alumnae, cars and pick-up trucks emblazoned with vindictive and sometimes obscene words on their windows and drivers who believed that the sooner you got to Dallas the sooner the fun would begin, whizzed by me. I was passed by eight busses carrying the OU band; I was passed by impatient drivers who saw trucks as nothing but a blockade to their destination. Many flashed their middle fingers as a protest to impeding their movement. Rest areas and even some convenience stops sporting red flags and "pit stop" signs were filled with animated fans pouring out of Oklahoma City. At the I-35 E/W split, I happily headed toward Ft. Worth, relieved to know that I was going to be nowhere near Dallas when the mobs descended upon it. Radio reports catalogued the traffic tie-ups of the 100,000 plus entering the city and the 91 arrests that evening. I calmly headed west.

For now, I plan to get out of the traffic in Kingman, AZ for a badly needed shower. Then we'll head on to California. Besides, my shoulder doesn't seem to be getting any better and I need a break.

June 26

Got pulled by an Illinois State Trooper for "speeding" through a construction zone. He claimed I was going 50 in a 45. Actually, he was quite nice (unlike the California Trooper). He explained that this particular road project was federally funded and that his job was to "generate" a certain amount of paper. After chatting a bit about

North Carolina (he knew someone in Greensboro), he handed me a warning ticket and sent me on my way. Though thankful I hadn't gotten a real ticket, I was still perplexed as to why I had gotten pulled in the first place. It didn't make sense since I had been one of about 15 vehicles including at least 7 big trucks running through the construction. Michael, who had observed my encounter with the trooper from behind the sleeper curtain, assured me that if he had had to stop *someone*, a good looking woman would have been his choice too. I gave him one of my nasty sidelong glances, grumbled something about "Men!", checked my mirrors, put it in gear and slowly moved back onto the interstate. Through the noise of the engine, I could still hear Michael chuckling in the sleeper.

We're waiting to get unloaded - 47,000 lbs of sugar (22 bags) for McNeil Consumer Products, the Tylenol folks. Don't have any idea where we're headed next. Hopefully in the direction of North Carolina.

July 2

Delivered our sugar to McNeil (pretty hairy dock to get into but very nice place). Picked up a load in Easton, Pa. (lousy directions) and headed onto Rincon, Ga. Our next assignment was a Kimberly Clark pick-up in Beech Island, S.C. for New Milford, Conn. Relayed the Connecticut load in Charlotte and picked up this load for Baltimore. Now we sit in muggy Baltimore waiting to be unloaded. Tough to sleep on



those bumpy east coast roads. Certainly doesn't help my shoulder any. Need to do something about it. Next stop South Jersey and then on to Denver.

July 12

Drove into Pittsburgh today, a city of narrow streets, tight turns and hills - certainly not designed for 18-wheelers. We were picking up shredded waste paper from a facility deep in the heart of downtown Pittsburgh. I had to back up a narrow street and then into a building. It was tricky and tight, but with Michael spotting for me I did fine. Felt like I button hooked my way out of town with every other guy giving me a thumbs up as I made my turns. It's cities like Pittsburgh that constantly put your driving and maneuvering skills to the test.

July 15

A week with lots of miles coupled with lots of aggravation. Twenty-four hours of waiting to get loaded or unloaded, 5 1/2 loads in 7 days. Too many stops. Too much waiting. Too little sleep. Drove through Chicago's morning rush hour or what I refer to as a trip into bedlam. Every time I come through here (which is more often than I would like), I am still perplexed as to how anyone can do this every day. Watched all the four wheelers weave in and out of traffic getting nowhere. Just sat back, kept up with the 5-

15 MPH speeds, listened to the truckers spew expletives over the CB, and enjoyed the organized confusion in front, behind and on the sides of me. Finally broke loose from the melee and headed on to Milwaukee and Green Bay.

July 17

Spent a pleasant day yesterday touring the National Railroad Museum in Green Bay. Armed with camcorder and camera, we road on and walked through old passenger trains and Pullmans, viewed exhibits and watched a 20 minute film on the history of the railroad. Even got held up by an armed, handkerchiefed train robber named Bart. What a welcome change from waiting at warehouses.

So, of course, here we are again - waiting. We've been here in Columbus, Oh. since 5am and expect to sit until at least 1 or 1:30 pm when our trailer is supposed to be loaded. Then it's off to Jacksonville, FL. It's hot and we keep moving from the truck to the air-conditioned break room in the plant just to cool off.

August 9

The last run exhausted us with its short loads of 700, 800 and 900 miles, lots of stopping, waiting to be loaded and unloaded. Only one trip to the west coast. We were more than ready to come home. This time the kids would be in from New York and we were anxious to get some rest before the onslaught of energy and incessant

conversation. And, of course, our trip home was delayed by a misplaced trailer. It took us 3 hours of back and forth conversations with extended operations on the pay phone outside of the Atlanta drop lot to finally locate our trailer. Somehow, it got dropped at the wrong lot south of Atlanta. No one knows who screwed up. Whatever, we were at long last on our way home.

I don't even remember who drove. Anyway, we arrived at 7:30 am on the 2nd exhausted. All I had time to do was shower and run to the supermarket. David and Mark arrived at 2. It had been at least six months since we'd all been together, and even though we talk on the phone once a week from various truck stops around the country, we still had much to catch up on. What a hectic 21/2 days of meals and guests and laundry and dishes. It was great seeing all of the kids' friends and finding out what they too had been up to. Danny, Eileen and the kids popped in to visit and chat. Poor Michael came down with a sinus infection and was out of it for most of the weekend.

In fact, he was too sick to go back on the road. After a visit to the doctor and the ingestion of antibiotics, cough syrup and nasal spray, he began to feel well enough to drive.

Once back in Charlotte, we found out that we had been selected as one of two teams in the company to carry a monitored load for an automotive company outside of Nashville to Laredo, Texas. Schneider and two other companies were vying for a multimillion-dollar contract. We and a team out of West Memphis, Ark. were to be the Schneider drivers to show them that the delivery (1114 miles) could be made within 24



hours. The presidents of the two companies as well as the heads of Customer Service and Marketing were to be monitoring our moves over the satellite system and reporting on our whereabouts periodically.

We met the other couple at the automotive plant and, after a four hour wait for the shipping papers, we were on our way. Lloyd and Stacy drove pretty much like we did so we were able to run together for most of the trip. Even with taking over 2 hours in stops for eating and fueling, both teams delivered in less than 23 hours. A big "Thank You" came over the computer.

Spent the afternoon "cruising" the truck filled streets of Laredo. This border town is a zoo filled with bonded warehouses and drop lots overcrowded with trailers on their way to or from Mexico. Now getting loaded with Christmas ornaments (yes, Christmas ornaments in August) for a run to DePere, WI. Michael's asleep in the tractor with the AC doing battle against the high 90-degree temperatures. I just spent the last half hour using every bit of Spanish I could muster from my very distant college days and any kind of gesture that made sense to me to explain to our non-English speaking lumpers how I wanted the trailer loaded. My biggest problem, however, was trying to tell them that I needed their assistance in taping a plastic drop across the top of the rear of the trailer. In order for me to reach the top, I had to have them lift me up on the forklift. We consumed more time laughing at our communication problems than we did achieving any kind of linguistic understanding. Anyway, it looks like the truck is loaded and ready

to go. When I finish up my paperwork, we'll be on our way to Neenah, WI and then San Francisco.

Definitely peopled out. Looking forward to a few quiet, solitary nights of driving.

## THE END OF THE LINE

After two years nine months and twenty days, I am off of the road. Strangely, I don't miss it until I see a truck. Then I crane my neck, search for the driver in his mirror, and check out the truck and where the tandems on the trailer are. I make sure the pigtail and glad hands are ok. Enclosed in my four-wheeler I try to convey my "truckness" to them. I grasp for the camaraderie - I know who you are, what you do, what you go through day by day, week by week. I know the kinds of things you see when you look down from that perch. I anticipate your moves and try to signal that I do. But to you, I'm just another four-wheeler. I'm no longer a part of your exclusive club.

I feel so vulnerable, so close to the ground. I can't see what's going on. I can't aim any higher than the car in front of me. It frustrates and aggravates me. I want to drive like a trucker but the car won't respond and grow. I'm resigned to the world of four wheelers.

The excruciating pain drove me reluctantly from the truck. For months I played mind and body games with my shoulder, cajoling it, exercising it into submission, anesthetizing it with tylenol or aspirin. I tried to rationalize the pain away by telling myself, "It's tolerable". "It keeps me awake while I drive." "It's intermittent, therefore it'll go away soon." Eventually the pain became enervating, sapping my energy and my concentration. I could no longer ignore it. "Inflammation and slight arthritis", the doctor



said. "Take these and keep moving it." And beneath the shoulder pain were the slight twinges I began to feel in my lower back. It was time to get off of the road.

Sometimes I feel like a deserter. Every rig I look into I see a man. It always pleased me that I was a *woman* truck driver. With so few of us out there, I feel that if one of us leaves the ranks it diminishes our exposure. People always looked twice, did a double take when they saw me turn a corner, drive down the road, pull into a company or back up. I always got grins and waves and thumbs-up from the men and looks of astonishment and incredulity from the women. It felt good. I'm still too close to the road to romanticize it. I don't miss the long nights, the bad weather, the traffic jams and inconsiderate drivers. I don't miss the waiting for freight or the bumpy nights in the sleeper. But I do miss the power and control I felt behind the wheel of a tractor-trailer. I miss the ability to see from 10 feet above the traffic. I miss the fun I used to have maneuvering a 65-foot rig around corners, down narrow streets and through whatever obstacle courses presented themselves. I miss being in Wyoming and Los Angeles and Seattle and Phoenix and Coosa Pines and Mehoopany. I miss the time warp trucking throws me into. I miss the uncertainty, the not knowing where I'm going to be in the next 12 or 24 hours.

On a bad day, I'd wonder what I was doing out there on the road - eating at a different place every night, working sometimes 15 hours a day, driving over 110,000 miles a year with little contact with other people. But on a good day, and most days were good, the grueling lifestyle became mere background to that inexplicable love of

the road. Driving a truck gets into your blood; it permeates your entire system. One day I heard two old timers chatting on the CB.

"Where does the road end?" one asked, legitimately inquiring about a specific highway.

"It doesn't", the other responded. "Just follow the white line 'til you die of old age."

There was a pause and then the other trucker chuckled, "A big 10/4 on that!"

## TRUCKER AND CB GLOSSARY

*10/36* - time of day

*10/33* - an accident

*10/4* - "OK", "I agree with you", "I hear you"

*20* - location (What's your 20?)

*alligator* - tire tread in the road

*backdoor* - last truck in a line of trucks running together

*bear* - general term for a police officer

*bear in the air* - helicopter police

*bed bugger* - name for a household moving company trucker

*big road* - an interstate highway

*Big "R"* - a ROADWAY driver

*Big "O"* - an OVERNITE driver

*bird dog* - a radar detector that *barks* when a *bear* is nearby

*bobtail* - a tractor without a trailer

*book mile* - mileage between two points as calculated by the Household Movers' Guide (used by majority of trucking firms)

*brake check* - when traffic suddenly stops

*the buckeye* - Ohio

*bull hauler* - general term for a livestock hauler



*Buster Brown* - a UPS driver

*cash box* - toll booth

*check your tires (or cool your tires down)* - relieve yourself by the side of the road

*chicken coop* - inspection or weigh station

*The Circle* - Indianapolis

*city kitty* - local cop

*The Communist State* - Virginia

*copy* - confirm what you hear on the CB, i.e., "I copy that."

*Corn Flake* - CF (Consolidated Motor Freight) driver

*county mounty* - sheriff

*covered wagon* - flatbed with side kit and tarp over top

*deadhead* - pull an empty trailer

*drop and hook* - drop one trailer and hook up to another

*ETA* - estimated time of arrival

*ETD* - estimated time of delivery

*Evil knievil armed and dangerous* - motorcycle cop with radar

*front door* - truck leading a convoy of trucks

*four wheeler* - a car

*full grown bear* - a state trooper

*garbage hauler* - trucker who carries produce

*Garbage State* - New Jersey

*The gateway* - St. Louis

*Georgia overdrive* - driving with the gears in neutral (a nono!)

*glad hands* - connectors that hook air lines from tractor to trailer

*good buddy* - reference to someone gay or homosexual

*granny lane* - slow or right hand lane

*greasy* - icy

*guitar (music)* - Nashville

*hammer lane* - fast lane or left hand lane

*handle* - person's name

*have your ears on* - have your CB radio on

*The Hillbilly* - West Virginia

*home 20* - your home location

*junkyard* - terminal or operating center

*K - ville* - Knoxville

*The Keystone* - Pennsylvania

*landing gear* - the 2 legs that hold up an unhooked trailer

*local yokel* - small town cop

*lot lizard* - prostitute that frequents truck stops

*lumper* - person who loads or unloads freight for a fee

*meat wagon* - an ambulance

*momma* - how truckers refer to their wives

*movie star* - MS Carriers' truck or driver

*The Nickel* – Buffalo, NY

*on your donkey* - behind you, i.e., "There's a bear on your donkey."

*parking lot* - a car carrier (aka, portable parking lot)

*pickle park* - rest area

*pig tail* - electrical line from tractor to trailer

*plain wrapper* - an unmarked police car

*Pumpkin* - SCHNEIDER National driver or truck

*pup* - one of two or three smaller trailers hooked together

*Queen City* - Cincinnati, Ohio or Charlotte, North Carolina

*reefer* - a refrigerated trailer

*rocking chair* - truck in middle of 3 running together

*roger* - see 10/4

*seat cover* - a good looking female in a car, truck, van, etc.

*The Shaky* - California

*smokey bear* - a state trooper

*tour director* - a dispatcher (aka, travel agent)

*wiggle wagon* - a tractor pulling 2 to 3 smaller trailers

*The Windy* – Chicago, IL



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