

## Pre Trip

Believe it or not, the idea to write these stories came about some 20 years ago. I learned that an experience of my own had quite unintentionally developed into several legends along I-80 with the truck driving community. At 6'10", I was probably the biggest and tallest state trooper many of my truck driving friends had ever seen. There were stories—some true—and some, well, a mix of fact and fiction which placed me somewhere between Paul Bunyan and Bo Bo Brazil. Neither was correct.

The humor of these stories, as well as the scope and adventure they took on each time they were repeated, struck me as more than amazing. This was an actual phenomenon I could witness as it happened. Month to month, year to year, I could listen silently to the thousands of different men and women using channel 19 on their CB radios. Among their pointless rambling and endless chatter, there were some good stories about certain state troopers here in my state of Wyoming and, across the country. Countless other stories of cops they had encountered were shared freely and repeatedly over the scratchy treble of the 2" CB speaker, especially when they knew I was within radio range and could listen in. They knew I would.

Some troopers were described as "hard-core" and others were "Good ol' boys." Then I heard some stories about me! Like the others, they had been passed back and forth among the drivers—and had grown beyond any semblance of truth!

With each driver trying to out-do the other, the tales and reflections of the big Wyoming state trooper who lived in Wamsutter and worked between Rawlins and Rock Springs on Interstate 80 were shared endlessly.

Those who knew me understood ours was not a "good-guy, bad-guy" relationship, but more of a

competition. Each of us knew we needed each other, but could never admit it. Sometimes in coffee shops, with a table of two or three troopers on a meal break, sitting just a table or two away from a group of three or four truckers, comical stories about the other group would be told; in a volume just loud enough to be heard by the other group. Yes, there could be tension, but usually a friendly tension.

There were other discussions as well—at both tables. Often they were of family life with war stories of a harsh divorce or perhaps, troubled teens. Of lousy neighbors or home improvement projects—the same stuff everyone else talked about. Then, unique to this profession, there were tales of speedy or careless 4-wheelers and, of each other!

As winter here in Wyoming would come down and grab hold from October to May, the stories at both tables changed to hair-raising experiences they had known of “greasy roads, storms and jackknifed trucks. Sometimes, the trucker’s stories would take a darker turn. Government conspiracies were suspected as being used to shut down the roadways. No, not because the route was treacherous or too dangerous because of the blizzard, but so that local businesses could gouge and rip-off truckers who, because they couldn’t leave, were stuck in these communities by the thousands! (A sight one must see first hand, to believe.)

These discussions also filled the night air on CB radios as we troopers either manned the road closure gates or patrolled closed roads looking for stalled or crashed 4-wheelers caught out as the gate was shut.

Often, it was during these closures when thousands of trucks were stopped in the emergency lanes in both directions for miles on end, with nowhere to go and veins full of caffeine or perhaps, other invigorating substances preventing any sleep, when some of the best

stories could be heard. With nothing more to do than chatter, the air was thick with humor, politics, and meaningless conversation.

As the years of my career passed along, I came to understand another side to these men and women who choose the life of crossing our land with these massive machines. What they said and how they did things changed my perception completely. Sharing my life with these men and women on that roadways, I came to a place where I could understand and respect their legitimate gripes of too much paperwork, truly unjust cops, dishonest employers, cold-blooded dispatchers and getting ripped off from everyone possible—their boss, vendors, wreckers, truck stops and repair garages.

As time moved on, my regular route drivers and I came to a place of mutual respect and what I always hoped was genuine admiration. At least from my side, it was. I respected the true professionals out there who criss-cross this nation weekly in their pursuit of a living and who, with even more skill, quickness and accuracy than I, could instantly spot a drunk driver, road hazard, wildlife or other driving menace. Among their endless chatter, there were stories of strife, like when a company was slow in making payroll or backpedaled on a contract. There were ramblings about their experiences with smaller, mom and pop trucking companies and about how life was with this outfit or the next.

Truckers are sometimes paid by the load, sometimes by the mile and sometimes by the hour. Of course, depending on whom I listened to as they went on and on with their claims, none of these payment plans was flush and all in some way or another were a rip-off to the driver.

Even more stories came over the CB and sometimes in person, sometimes on the side of the road in my patrol car as we...uh...discussed their velocity or, perhaps, in a

roadside diner. Reflections of illness, loss or financial ruin. Of a wife who cheated or had simply had enough of the trucking life and never seeing their mate. A friend who had died on the road; or a child, a child they would see once or twice each year.

It wasn't long before I realized that other than the time spent away from home; truckers were a walkin' talkin' paradox—in a profession like no other on earth but then—no different at all, from the people they shared the world with. Just like the rest of the people in America—a country for which, I hasten to add, nearly every driver I ever met would instantly and proudly lay down their life—just like any state trooper.

Truckers were people of ages, political beliefs and parties and, of different regions of our country with completely different dialects, accents and expressions. But each and all, spoke trucker driver. Most were solid, hard working and driven by a solid work ethic. Even the unfortunate drivers who met me on the side of the road, were trying to do it right most of the time, but slipped up and occasionally, needed a reminder.

As more time passed and the end of my career was in sight, I started to notice that lately, many were not Americans at all—but were here illegally or, on work visas and student visas, learning the profession. Russian, Polish, Egyptian, Mexican. You name it.

All were here to learn the difficult job of an over-the-road truck driver, working sadly, for sometimes less than honorable employers who paid them only a portion of what the industry was offering. Honestly, after the events of September 11, 2001, I had my share of both warranted and unwarranted suspicion of Middle Eastern drivers. This came about because of what I had learned in my official capacity from terrorism briefings and training schools put on by intelligence gathering agencies—not by personal bias or prejudice. My

Russian and Polish truck driving friends would often spend extra time with me telling stories of driving in the old Soviet Union—and how driving a truck was one of the few cool jobs available but paid next to nothing.

My message on these pages is that men and woman of faith, honor, sacrifice, compassion and emotion, drive those big trucks. They want, need, love, and hurt— just like you. Many would deny having any warm and fuzzy human needs, but I have seen them in fear and alone— thousands of miles from home. I know better.

The one thing I know every trucker on the road would want you to believe about them is that they are caring neighbors and can be counted on to help if the need arises. There seems to be an unwritten code among most veteran drivers, to help whenever they can. The last thing they want, seems to be any accolades or credit. Their acts of kindness, caring and charity continued to amaze and befuddle me over the years.

And then there are the Cab Lizards. This is *not* a complimentary handle for truck drivers. Commonly, it is a slam. I have used it myself in that way—and meant it.

To use it; either as a sarcastic, tongue-in-cheek term of endearment, or with its true meaning, I think one must have earned the right. I think I have, by learning the true difference between the habits of a cab lizard and the class and decency, of a professional over-the-road trucker.

The cab lizard represents the very small, low-life segment of the profession; just as the very few overly aggressive troopers out there represent only a tiny fraction of the half-million cops in this country doing things correctly, fair and legally every day. Cab lizards are the outlaws who work harder at breaking the law than if they would just to follow the rules. They embrace another code—a disgusting and selfish mix of

self-centered greed for money and a “what have you done for me lately” attitude.

Sadly, for awhile, it seemed many of the younger drivers churned out in droves by truck driving schools popping up all over the country were leaning this way. Then, after a few years on the job, many finally realized what so many before them had—that we are all in this together. If they didn’t grab hold of this understanding, they sometimes fell too far to the “dark side” and embraced a lower and to them, acceptable standard.

To be a renegade, was like a badge of honor to this very small group of drivers. To be defiant of the law was admired—just as many admired Frank and Jesse James or, the flamboyant style of notable organized crime figures, of a couple of generations past. You will read a few stories of the amusing folly and comically failed attempts to cab lizards attempts at beating the system.

These were my people—those I was charged with protecting—both the good and bad. They were among the millions of users of Wyoming’s highways. As professional truckers, they were the far larger part of that community. Even in the cold, dark winter months, which in Wyoming rightfully deter any tourist traffic, truckers were more than my steadfast co-inhabitants of the asphalt and concrete and dirt—they were friends and associates. They will understand my intent.

It is my hope that through these stories you will see what I did—that faith, strength, human kindness, generosity and common decency run deeply in this profession of driving a “large car.” You may come to see, as I did, their moments of humanity, valor and of distinguished membership in one of the most demanding and roughest professions in the world. You will understand that these men and woman are often the

reluctant heroes many have been, the outlaws a few proudly remain and the American icons they are.

Along the way, you may also learn a thing or two about “Smokey,” their so-called archenemy! The state troopers, who share their road and the relationships they form over the years. I am confident you will be surprised, moved and occasionally tickled. I guarantee you will be surprised once or twice, as you kick back for a few minutes and read these stories.

Finally, it is my hope as you close the back cover and reflect, with what may be a new or refreshed understanding about truckers or troopers you will take away one final thought.

Read on, and learn what that final thought might be...