



## Driver

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<https://www.storiesspace.com/stories/musings/driver.aspx>

This reminiscent story was inspired by the forum thread, "What kind of car did you drive in high school?"

When I was a young lad in Texas, my dad made me work weekends and summers for his construction company. He used to "pay" me a dollar a day to help my uncle clean up job sites in the hot Texas sun.

At the end of the week, he would deduct all my lunches and drinks. There were times I would end up with less than a dollar for the whole week of work. He used to laugh as he handed me quarters. He was a true jerk to everyone though, not just me.

I rode around with my uncle in a 1.5-ton stake side truck similar to the pic. It had a typical "W" shift pattern with a gooseneck stick shifter and a clutch that would grind no matter what you did. My uncle had put on one of those steering wheel knobs with a pinup inside it. To this day I still remember it was a red swimsuit.

Sadly, my uncle was a complete alcoholic and cigar chewer and he nearly killed us more than once. Riding with him was always a tense edge-of-the-seat-hope-I-get-home-alive trip. There came a final incident in which I had no choice but to begin saving both our lives.

We had finished for the day and he was driving us home. Drunk of course. I knew he was soused so I was watching things closely. We'd swerve off the edge of the road and I'd yell at him. Then he would swerve back onto the road. I never felt so helpless.

Suddenly, in the middle of our drive, still, 20 miles from home, my uncle passed out and fell over sideways towards me. The truck was still traveling at about 50 mph.

All I could do was push him off and grab the steering wheel. Luckily, his feet came off the pedals. I just kept steering as the truck lost speed and finally began clutchless lurching until it shuddered to a stop.

Back in those days, we had no cell phones or ways to communicate. We were still miles from anything. Not even a house around. I just sat there as the sun got lower in the sky.

I kept looking at the gooseneck shifter. Then the pedals. I tested the distance to the floorboard with my legs as I sat there. I had seen my uncle do it a thousand times. I thought if that ol' drunk bastard could do it...

I got out, walked around to the driver's side and pushed his ass out of the way. Not nicely. Then, I climbed in and took hold of the steering wheel. The pedals were further away than I thought, but if I slid forward as I clutched, I might be able to make it work.

I closed the door, started the truck, forgot to clutch, lurched forward and stalled.

OK. Started over. Clutch in, start the truck, grind shifter into low gear, let the clutch out slowly, and over-revved the engine before I could shift into second gear, but I got it done. Then third gear and we were now moving at a decent speed down the highway.

So, at 12-years-old, my adventure began.

I kept looking at my uncle to see if he was waking up. I was split between wanting him to take over driving and wanting to finish what I started. I was doing OK, rolling along the open road with no other cars.

There came a point though that more and more cars were around me and it became more city like. Stopping in traffic and at lights was a struggle and I was beginning to get rattled. Especially when people would stare and drive slowly by me. I just wanted to park this beast of a truck and go to my room. I cursed my uncle.

I was doing pretty good. Until I heard the siren. I looked in the side mirror and saw a police car behind me. There wasn't any place to pull over easily for me, so I had to keep going. The whole time the siren is blaring. I won't lie. I was starting to tear up when I finally pulled over.

Of course, when I pulled over to stop, I didn't get the speed matched up to the clutch and lurched like a bronco to a stop. All I could do was sit there and wait.

The officer strolled up to the side of the truck. He couldn't really see much of me from the ground, so he opened the door. He just stood there looking at me behind the wheel. I never felt so small. Then, he looked around me at my uncle passed out awkwardly on the seat.

My eyes were really beginning to get teary. I hated being in this position. My drunk uncle on one side and a police officer on the other. For a dollar a day. Less meals and drinks.

The police officer kept looking at me, never saying a word. He walked to the back of the truck, looked under the tarp, shook the stake side. Then, he walked back up to me. He stood there silently again, looking past me to my uncle.

Finally, he said, "How much further do you have to go?"

I said, "A couple miles" as I wiped my eyes.

Then, he just closed my door and went back to his car. Without saying a word, he gave me the confidence to make it home.

He followed me all the way to my home. As I pulled into my driveway, he "whooped" his siren once, and drove off.

I never let my uncle drive me drunk again.