



You Want a Story?

It's always nice to receive fan mail, and now and then some does indeed drop into my mailbox (these days, usually the electronic mailbox of course). Here's one I got the other day: *"I like your writing style - more of a commentary on your daily life than stories, but good reading nevertheless."*

That's a pleasant comment to receive, and I'm happy he sent it. But it did make me think about what the word 'story' means. Checking with a major dictionary, I find this as the main definition: "A usually fictional prose or verse narrative intended to interest or amuse the hearer or reader."

'Usually fictional'? Well, that lets me out; everything in these stories of mine is true! As for 'intended to interest or amuse the hearer or reader ...' though, I think that applies to 'A Story A Week'. It seems that this person was thinking of story in the sense of 'a recital of an event or series of events', which is the next definition in that dictionary. Well, if it's that kind of story he wants, let's have one ... I have plenty of those available too!

* * *

Let's set the stage: I was 23 years old, and had just started a new job, working for a company supplying musical products to schools. The job required a driver's licence, which I didn't have, so one of the other employees had let me use his car, and the two of us had spent a few hours 'practicing' in the wide open spaces of a shopping center parking lot. When I felt I was ready, I took the driving test, and received my new licence. Actually, I failed the test the first time (I wonder why?), and had to try again a week later, at which time I passed, and was let loose on the roads.

The company dealt with schools all across western Canada, and the employees were constantly on the road, frequently driving quite long distances to visit the customers. Sometimes, one of them would drive ahead with a truck full of musical instruments, to be met at the destination by other employees who flew out later to meet up. One such trip was among my first assignments at the company; I was to set off one afternoon, and drive the company Winnebago (that we used for sales and demonstration trips) through the night to a school located many hundreds of miles away, for a sales meeting the next day. The vehicle was loaded to the top with stacks of musical instruments, along with shelf after shelf of heavy sheet music. It was very overloaded, but what does a 23-year-old care about such things?

The first hundred miles or so were basically uneventful. The vehicle had been having problems with the fuel filter, causing the engine to stutter somewhat, but it seemed to have fixed itself somehow, and was running smoothly. About the time that night fell, I left the flat coastal country and headed up into the mountains. It was a road I had travelled many times as a passenger, so I was basically familiar with it - the tight curves around the mountainsides, the narrow bridges that crossed most of the streams, and that long and steep (very long and very steep) winding section on the other side of the pass, where the road swiftly plunged back down to the lower country again.

It was fun! An overloaded Winnebago is not exactly a racing car, but it was still very enjoyable driving, with the headlights cutting a path through the pitch black mountains. There are no streetlights on Canadian

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mountain highways of course, so you have no idea what is coming up, and have to be constantly vigilant to stay on the road safely. The hours went by; the road climbed and climbed. Finally I crested the top of the pass, and a sign shone in my headlights for a moment as it flashed by: "Steep descent ahead. Drivers check brakes!"

And I suppose that a professional driver, or at least one with more experience than I, would have done exactly that ...

(continued next week)

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