

TRUCKIN' TIME WITH GRANDMA

IN OUR FAMILY, we've always been into the transportation business since the mid '50s. I am the third generation, working as an airline pilot, and my name is Siobhan Patterson. The two generations before me are my mother, train engineer for the Union Pacific Railroad, and my grandmother, who started the tradition by being truck driver.

Marsha Rosenbaum Zieztinski, my grandmother, had chosen to be a truck driver back in 1955. Those times were hard for women at work, and she had chosen the least female-opened working environment : the road transportation industry. Grandma was born on the 27th of February 1933, from a blue-collar Jewish family of Denver. Eldest daughter of a sibling of six (she have five younger brothers), she had always wanted to find herself a job to get out of a family which was always running short of money and, sometimes, being enough in dire straits to have no food to put on the table some days...

That was in the decade after the Great Depression and before World War II and her father, who had only low-wages jobs when he could find one, had finally being able to work on the payroll by being trucker, six months before Pearl Harbor. With the help that the United Kingdom needed to fight against the Nazis, military equipment was manufactured in large quantities and sent to Great Britain from the US, increasing the need for workers all along the industry supply line. And, of course, the need to increase the transportation capacity.

My grand-grandfather had finally found a job as a trucker and that changes everything for the family. Being able to buy enough food to have more than one meal a day or less, for instance, changes everything at home. Then after Pearl Harbor, that was the turn for my grand-grandmother to have a war job in a factory, and put more money on the table with her weekly wage, and help to pull out the family from misery.

Grandma gets married at the age of 17 and she had my mother one year later, in 1951, and my aunt Rachel in 1953. When her daughters were old enough to go to the kindergarten, she looked for a job to bring more money back home. My grandfather, Abraham Zieztinski, had a decent pay by being a cook for the mess of the General Motors factory of Denver, but when you're a blue collar family, you're always short of money with just one pay and four at home to clothe and feed.

Grandma took part-time unqualified jobs anywhere she could find one, and fastly got sick of being only a salesgirl in a department store, a cleaning woman for the headquarters of a insurance company, or other dead-end jobs that you can get when you have no other choice because you have no graduation. One day, when my mother was three years old, and my aunt had just reached her first birthday, Grandma had left her last job, line working for a canned foods factory, and she was highly reluctant to take another low-end occupation, but she was forced to do so by my grandfather's low pay.

Her Dad went at her home after a long journey back from California and she talked with him. Grandma was stuck between a rock and a hard place, being forced to work to avoid misery, and finding nothing else than shitty and underpaid jobs. She was far from being satisfied with this life, and she wanted to have a better one, even if working hard to get it was required. As she told my grand-grandfather :

“Dad, you know that I ain't a lousy whiner, and hard work ain't frightening me. Scrub the shit out of floors, or count tin cans on a packing line, that ain't a life.

— You're fuckin' right Marsha, replied my grand-grandfather. You ain't a lazy gal, and you're tough enough to smile when some shithole kicks your ass for fun. Ain't thinking of doing the same job as me ?

— Why not... Think I've got the guts to do it, Dad ?

— Ain't just thinking, sure you got 'em.

— Yep... Need to have my driving licence for trucks, think I'm gonna start to work for it from now... So, Dad ?

— Yep. Do it.”

Then, Grandma took less than two days to book herself to the vocational training offered to people without any professional qualification by the City of Denver Chamber of Commerce. She waited in the line of the ticket window for the professional training for the transportation industry. When she reached the window to get her form to fill in to have her place in the truck driving class, the young girl who had the task to register the candidates thought at first sight that my Grandma had took the wrong lane :

“Excuse me Miss, I think you're at the wrong window, this is the one dedicated to the transportation industry...”

— That ain't the good one to book for a training class to get a truck driver's licence ?

— Uh... What ?

— I said I'm here to get a truck driver's licence, do you have the form to book me in right here or shall I go to another window to do it ?

— Uh... Miss, uh... Excuse-me, but I have something to check with my supervisor...”

Asking to be truck driver when you were a woman in the mid fifties was more a proof of insanity than an ordinary request to get a decent job, and the employee of the Chamber of Commerce was close to fall down from her chair when my Grandma told her she was here to become a truck driver. She took half an hour with her supervisor to finally being legally obliged to reluctantly book my grandmother in. And then, a better life began for her.

She had then a three months course to have her licence as a truck driver, and she was the only woman in a class of 26 men. Most surprising, none of them even mention the fact that she was at the wrong place, and all of them treat her as one of their equal. They all had a spouse, a sister or a mother who had to work to make ends meet, and looking at a young mother of two who was working hard to do the same job as them did not even disturb them. The driving instructor was a former enlisted petty officer of the army who had a decade of military experience behind him, and he had this job as a veteran's professional reconversion training.

At first sight, this WW2 and Korea war veteran looked at my grandmother as she was a casting error, barely talking to her, and not even looking at her in the classroom, an attitude that some other male students found offensive toward my grandmother. But everything changed upside down after the first two weeks. What rang a bell on the former petty officer was the fact that my grandmother was a good learner, and a straight disciplined one : never late, never missing a single minute of tuition, always doing what she was told to do, never complaining, and here to do her work and nothing else.

The instructor then understood that he have his best student with my grandmother, and he took serious care of what she was doing. Highly motivated, Grandma did not spare her efforts and gave the best of her in this course. Three month later, she got what she deserved from her hard work : being ranked first at the qualification session. She told me once that when she had to fill the form to get her trucker's driving licence, there was no possibility to mention "Mrs." or "X spouse Y" on the Colorado Department of Transportation form ! Something unbelievable today, even my booking form at the flight academy had a Mr./Ms. choice for the last name back in 1987. Even my mother had this in the early '70s when she filled for a railroad fireman's course...

Then, Grandma was presented to employers by the Chamber of Commerce, and lots of them turned back when they saw that the initial M. in the name of my grandmother was not standing for Michael... Finally, an independant trucker with a small fleet of four vehicles, called Jeremy O'Brien, was cornered by the Chamber of Commerce : he had no other choice left to hire my grandmother if he really needs someone for his business, the other graduated drivers were all hired. Reluctant, he gave a steering wheel to my grandmother, thinking she will only last one month in the job before going back to her kitchen. Grandma only left the road four decades and an half later, just because she gets retired.

In this hot summer of 1974, I was a little girl, having celebrated my fourth birthday the 19th of July. With two young daughters, my Mom and my Dad were cutting corners on everything to make ends meet, which means sorry, no holidays this year. Mom had change from her job as a lathe and milling worker at the Chrysler factory on December last year to take her chance as a fireman in the Union Pacific Railroad. She had the help of Denver's Chamber of Commerce to have her six month course paid and she finally get the job she wanted. She had started to work only from the last week of July '74 and she had just received her first paycheck.

Dad, as a Vietnam war veteran from the US Navy, had his university studies paid by the veteran educationnal program and he was entering his last year of training to become a teacher, following the university's program to get a master in educational

sciences, the mandatory graduation to become a teacher. As a lumberjack's son, the only way for him to have any kind of graduation above high school was to have it paid by the Department of Defense. That is why he enlisted himself in the US navy at the age of 17, in 1965. Thinking he will legally avoid to be sent in frontline by being in the Navy, he managed to have a radio operator training. And unluckingly, he was assigned to a river patrol boat in the Mekong delta. . .

Father of my elder sister Linda two years after, he only married my mother six month before my birth in 1970 to gave her the possibility to have a widow pension if he got killed in Vietnam. Mom and Dad were highly reluctant to get married, being both non-religious and thinking about this as a waste of money and a useless paperwork. Failing to have a safer assignment and highly concerned by his growing family, Dad decided to married Mom as soon as possible in the beginning of 1969, seeing from the frontline the Vietnam War turning bad for the US. Rejecting every religious things, he managed to have a civil wedding in the navy tradition, the officer commanding the patrol boat he was assigned to, being a good friend, had managed to ask his own Dad, a battleship commander for the Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor, to be the captain in charge of the wedding.

Then, seaman Vance Patterson with his bride, Ms. Claire Zieztinski, married aboard the destroyer USS *Waddell*, anchored at San Diego, on the 2nd of March 1970, wedding celebrated by Commander Edward Jamieson, father of Lieutenant Garreth Jamieson, commanding officer of Dad in Vietnam. That changed a little Dad's assignment in Vietnam, he was then on duty at the US Navy station of the military harbor of Saigon for the remainder of his tour of duty before being discharged in August 1971 with honorable mention, a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star.

After his return from Vietnam, Dad has his university education paid by the military and Mom her job at the Chrysler factory. She made the ends meet with Dad's holidays jobs and the help of Dad's parents, who provided a home for us until the fall of 1974, when my parents finally found a flat to hire before buying their house in the neighborhood of Conway Hills one year later, when Dad found his teacher's job there.

So, in the summer of 1974, these were the shoestring years for my family. Dad and Mom were living at my father's Dad flat with my grandmother, sharing Dad boy's sleeping room, when Linda and I were sharing our uncle Harvey's room. Younger brother of Dad, uncle Harvey had found a job as a fireman in Austin, Texas, and had married there, leaving Denver. With my aunt Rachel living in Washington D. C., that provided us the possibility to spend holidays with our cousins all over the country without spending lot of money, youngsters of the Patterson/Zieztinki families being sent by their parents to other relative's homes depending on bed and adults availability.

For this summer, Mom had passed a deal with her younger sister, my aunt Rachel, to send us to D. C. to spend a couple of weeks with her, our cousin Carolyn and her new boyfriend, Garreth Parker, an Afro-American divorced policeman, father of two boys, Kyle and Winslow. Then, we would go back to Denver with my aunt and her new family by road, aboard uncle's Garreth's van. But, for the travel from Denver, Mom and Dad had to find another solution.

That's when Grandma Marsha came to the rescue. As an interstate truck driver, she could bring any member of her family everywhere in the continental US. What

she only needed was a cargo to deliver at the right place in the right time, and her boss approval. For the second, truck drivers, especially independant small business owners like Jeremy O'Brien, Grandma's boss, have families and low money and don't let their employees waste the opportunity to ferry a family member in need of traveling aboard a truck's cab when it did not disturb the business.

Jerry O'Brien had said yes to Grandma's proposal to bring us both to the federal capital aboard her truck, and he was looking for a cargo to bring nearby D. C. to give her a go for the journey. On the 3rd of August, 1974, the deal was sealed, and Grandma Lisa, my father's mother, had a call from Grandma Marsha to get the confirmation for the ride. Grandma Lisa, a professional sewress, was finishing a summer gown for me, doing the final adjustments, when Linda rang off the phone for her :

"Lindy, can you answer for me ? I'm on your sister's gown.

— Okay Grandma... Good afternoon, Linda Patterson's speaking... Yeah, she's finishing Sibby's gown, I tell her... Grandma ! It's Grandma Marsha, her boss have found her goods to deliver on the East Coast ! She'll come home tonight to tell ma about it !

— That's a good deal, send her my regards Lindy, I can't come now."

This evening, my both grandmothers, my Mom and my Dad were at home for dinner to discuss what to do to send us to D.C. Grandma Marsha was driving back to Denver a three-axes flatbed truck empty after having delivered a batch of John Deere tractors to a dealer in the little town of Lamar, south-east of the state of Colorado. Our both grandpas were missing, Abraham Zieztinski had invited friends at home to watch a baseball match on TV, thing he used to do when Grandma had some drive to do on weekends, and Grandpa Lawrence Patterson was in the mountains with his lumberjacks team for the whole month.

Grandma Marsha had brought us her favorite dish : Jewish oven-baked eggplant and tomato, for dinner, one of my favorite. Dad had cooked us a meat loaf and Mom had provided us a peaches with tea fruit salad. Grandma Marsha used to provide us food for two reasons. First, as a trucker, she sometimes made deliveries to department stores or supermarkets.

When she met a storage manager or a farmer who's one of her friend, the guy use to put her aside some products not good-looking enough to be sold but still fresh enough to be used : packed foods with damaged box, uncalibrated fruits and vegetables, or poor-selling items who were marked to be put into the trash bin. Grandma collects those products condemned to the garbage can and she made barthers with other friends, truckers or not, taking her share and usually giving it to her elder daughter's family, or to Dad's family. That was a good deal to use what is usually treated as a waste.

Second reason, gramdma Marsha was the most well-paid of us all. Grandma Lisa, as a seamstress, used to earn between \$200 and \$300 bad times/good times with her work, depending on customer's demand. Dad get the same for the summer jobs he can get. Mom, as a fireman beginning her career, had a \$500 a month pay from the Union Pacific, \$100 more than she gets as a qualified worker at the Chrysler factory. Grandpa Lawrence, as a lumberjack, gets \$4,000 a summer for four month of work, because he is a chief lumberjack, and he gets additional \$300 to \$500 a month for jobs

in the wood industry depending on what he can find the rest of the year. Figures given here in 1974 dollars, multiply by four to roughly adjust for inflation for the year 2013.

Truck drivers are highly qualified workers, the top of the blue-collar occupations with train drivers and mechanics. In 1974, a truck driver beginning with a basic Chauffeur's Licence started at \$400 a month. Semi-trailers drivers gets \$650 a month when beginners, a more hundred bucks for interstate work, or special duties like tank or hazardous material transport. And good drivers with a respectable mileage hit a four-figures monthly pay. With nearly 20 years on the road in 1974 and a qualification for semi-trailers, tanks and airbrakes, Grandma Marsha had a slightly over \$1,000 paycheck monthly since the last summer. To give you an indication, my Dad started as a teacher at \$750 a month in 1975-1976.

So, Grandma paid for us many things, food, clothes, household items... saying she was giving a hand for her granddaughters this way. She also did it for aunt Rachel, dropped with a crappy job of salesgirl by an irresponsible boyfriend who fled away from being cousin Carolyn's Dad. And, this time, Grandma Marsha was providing us a way to go in holidays in the other side of the continental US, as she told us :

"Jerry had found me some cargo to deliver to the US Navy at Norfolk, and D. C. is on the road. I can stop there to drop Sibby and Lindy at your sister's home and drive the last leg to Norfolk without any problem. It does not makes a diversion and Jerry is OK with it.

— Mom, how long would it takes to makes the journey ? Linda can stand a long travel but Siobhan is only four years old. You drive up to twelve hours a day, that could be a very long and boring time for her.

— There's three days and an half on Interstate 70 to drive to reach D. C. Claire. I use to stop every four hours for safety, that would be a good way to entertain the little ones. And with our new R series, I've got air conditioning in the cab, they won't suffer from the heat. If you want to cancel the travel, I will comply.

— Well Mom, if your boss is OK... Siobhan and Linda are hardly waiting for the occasion to go to Washington aboard their Grandma's truck, let's give them a good ride. When would you start from Denver ?

— Tuesday morning. I delivered the empty trailer to Honeywell Systems in Arvada to let them fill it halfway with electronic hardware for the Navy. Then, I have to pick other military stuff at Hartford's Precision Parts, in Aurora. I can come here inbetween to pick Sibby and Lindy, drive to Hartford's, load the cargo and then, go on the 70 and drive straight eastward. Hartford's does not open before 7 am, I can hook the trailer at Honeywell at 5.30 am and be here by 6 or 6.30 am. They have everything ready at Hartford's, they just need the truck, and we will be out of Denver by 8.30 am at last. Ain't a lot of traffic at dawn, especially outbound from the city. You're OK with it ?

— Vance, nothing to add ?

— No, we can trust your Mom, she knows what is it to have two daughters. That's good for us, Siobhan and Linda will be ready at dawn Tuesday the sixth of August. Thanks a lot for the ride Marsha."

So, the first great travel of my life was settled. Mom had to call her sister in D. C. to give her an estimated time of arrival for us both, Linda and I, and Grandma went back home before the great day when we traveled to Washington with Grandma and her truck. That was the beginning of a great adventure for the little girl I was then. And one of my most beautiful travels.

For my eldest sister Linda and I, two days was a very long time to wait before going to Washington with Grandma Marsha. She had carefully checked if we can both be seated on the passenger's seat of her truck, designed for one adult and, luckily, broad enough to sit two little girls like we were. Especially my sister Linda, who was very skinny when she was seven years old. That's hard to figure it out because she is now a tall and muscular woman, thanks to ice hockey at middle and high school, combine with later USMC, commando and paratrooper intensive physical training. It is surprising today to know it but Linda was a puny red-haired and very shy girl in her early years. You wouldn't bet on her to be an USMC officer and, later, a stiff-upper-lip and hard-to-defeat attorney in law.

You also wouldn't bet a nickel on a round-faced chubby little black-haired careless and wandering girl to be an airliner pilot, and that was what I looked like at the age of four. Always absent-minded, I was barely listening to people around me, and my parents had to tell me things twice to be sure that I had catch what they told me. And, lots of times, I forgot what they told me only five minutes later. . .

I had hard times at the elementary school later by being unable to focus on what to do, and had to rely on the help of the school's psychologist, mister Avedon, to find tips to made me able to listen and take care of what was happening all around me. And that worked : when you're flying an airliner, the difference between life an death is a question of awareness, not only of the plane's data, but also, if not mainly, of what the pilot or the commander seated besides you is saying and doing. That's not the kind of occupation you can expect from a little girl caught between two daydreams, like I was at the age of four.

Today, with such a behavior, lots of parents would give their kid some Ritalin™ to mask the problem and that's all. . . You need to be a strong-minded parent to avoid turning your kids in legal junkies at the first sign of psychological problems like that. That what my sister and her man did with my nephew Nelly, Linda's eldest daughter. She is suffering from anxiety and Martin, who is a doctor, answered blatantly "No chemical junk for a 14 years-old teen having psychological problems" at the request for a medical treatment from the psychologist of Nelly's middle school. With the approbation of my sister, they find her a psychotherapy. A good thing for her, which let her ease her anxious mind without using compulsively her cellphone to call all her friends anytime all day long.

In the seventies, psychological science began to be a concern in every school, and that was positive both for my sister and me. But for now, we have to wait for the next morning to go in holidays with Grandma. The sixth of August 1974, Mom woke me up at dawn, at 6 am, with my sister Linda and prepared us for the travel. She had packed everything we needed in a travel bag, which was a gift from a company that had used Grandma services for delivering some of their products to department

stores in Denver, and she gave us our breakfast. As planned before, Grandma arrives shortly before 7 at home to pick us up for the great ride :

“Grandma’s here, said Mom, looking downwards from the lounge bay of our flat after having heard the truck braking in the lane below. Put your plates in the kitchen sink, I’ll wash them later.

— She’s here with her truck ? did I asked.

— Yes Sibby, get ready, she’s got a tight schedule with her job... Hi Mom, the kids are ready, they can go now.

— Hi Claire, don’t rush ‘em, got some time before loading. Hartford’s had phoned my boss yesterday in the evening to tell him to not send me too soon at their factory. The night shift misses one dude, who’s in medical leave, and they’ll only have the cargo packed and ready to load not before 7.30 am... Hi, Sibby, your great sister’s here ?

— Hi Grandma ! She’s in the kitchen, helping clean the plates we used for breakfast. I have to clean the forks and the knife, that’s my part of the job.

— Yay, good idea sweetie... Claire, I let the engine idling below, I can’t stay for a while, the neighborhood will complain about the noise... .

— Don’t worry Mom, there’s some truckers living there in our projects. The girls use to look at their trucks when they parked them nearby the buildings... I’ve put everything they need in this bag, that won’t take a lot of volume in your trunk. I’ve got some tea ready, if you want a cup... .

— Thanks Claire, but I have to go. I want to get me some margin today, the dudes told me on the radio that the troopers are on the run for controlling trucks on the I-70 between Denver and Kansas City. I’m sure to get a stop or two from ‘em before entering Missouri. But don’t hurry the little ones, there’s only a dozen minutes of driving between here and Hartford’s factory.”

Without haste, Mom brought us in the alley below where Grandma’s truck was parked, its engine idling to get some pressurized air for the brakes. In the mid ‘70s, Grandma had a great improvement in her working conditions from her boss, who had been obliged to buy new tractors for his semi-trailers business due to the skyrocketing fuel prices after the oil crisis of ‘73. And the fact that his old B series were becoming worn out and outdated. And he hadn’t done the job halfway. He bought for his interstate truckers what was then the Cadillac of semi-trailers tractors : R series Mack, model R-700, powered by the most powerful engine available then, the E9-998 cubic inches 400 horse-power Maxidyne® V8 diesel.

Today, 400 hp is the basic power output for semi-trailers tractors and heavy single-chassis trucks, and you can have engines up to 600 hp for highway trucks if you need a large power output. Truckers working in the highway transportation business, or in harsh conditions like mountain roads or all-terrain duties for construction works for instance, use to choose the higher power output available for both comfort and safety, leaving low power engines for commuting or city traffic where you can’t drive faster than 30 mph. But in the mid-70s, engines over 300 hp were classified as heavy power output prime movers.

Grandma had started in the business in the mid-50s, when typical engine power for trucks was between 150 and 200 hp, the highest power output available was 255 hp with the Mack Thermodyne® 6 cylinders in-line diesel engine. Grandma’s boss,

Jeremy O'Brien, had started his business in the late '40s with two L series Macks, gasoline-powered trucks with a 150 hp engine, one with a flatbed, the second one with a box body. He bought two other ones in 1951 and 1952 before expending his business with a fleet of six brand-new B-series diesel-powered Mack.

Experienced truck driver himself, Jeremy O'Brien had seen, with the expansion of his business from small commuting deliveries to state-wide freight transportation, that Colorado got mountains and, to climb mountains, you need both a good power output and a high torque at low engine rpm. Two basic features of then-new proposed diesel prime movers for trucks. That's why he bought B-series diesel engines equipped Macks instead of then-current gasoline powered ones, and choose the higher power output available. A good choice that lasted until the late '70s.

His two initial L-series, with their lower power output, were limited to commuting and city traffic before being phased out in the late '60s and replaced by diesel-powered R series. Grandma had driven the Ls, and like her coworkers, she was very pleased to see them phased out. Underpowered, noisy (gasoline engines have a higher rpm to get the same torque as diesel engines), lacking power steering, they were limited to city delivery duties, replaced in regional deliveries by the better and more powerful diesel-powered B series.

That reminds me one little thing about Grandma's work. One unknown contributor to women's liberation was the Bendix Corporation, supplier of power steering for trucks and, later, cars. Before World War II, turning the steering wheel of a truck required a non negligible amount of physical strength, de facto barring women and low-muscle men from being truckers. But, with the increase of weight and power of the standard commercial truck following the end of WW2, even big muscle dudes began tired of turning rock-hard steering wheels. Then, power steering came to their help, and became an industry standard.

Nowadays, even a subcompact car have a power steering as a standard equipment out of the assembly line but, in the '50s, power steering was just beginning to be proposed to truckers. For the Mack corporation products line, the L series did not propose such a feature and the B-series was the first product to be sold with this feature as an option, back in 1953. When he expanded his trucking business out of the limits of Denver, Jeremy O'Brien, skilled truck driver himself, began to look for everything that would ease the workload of his truckers on the western Colorado mountain roads. Diesel power was the first thing, and power steering was the second one. After the salesman from Mack trucks showed him how he can turn the steering wheel from stop to stop with a single hand, Jerry O'Brien signed for this option on his six B-series, clearly understanding that this feature will prevent aching arms after a day at work for him and his employees.

So obviously essential, power steering became a standard feature for all trucks in the first half of the '60s and, as an unwanted social benefit, opened wide a breach for women at work. Then, physical strength to drive a truck fell from mandatory to optional, and lots of socially low-ranking women get a career opportunity and changed the face of the transportation industry. A good example of this trend was the blooming of husband-and-wife independant trucking businesses in the second half of the '70s, Jeremy O'Brien's son and daughter in law are running one, for instance.

By this cool morning of August 1974, Grandma made us benefit from her 19 years experience as a truck driver, and also of her brand-new Mack truck. Her R series was the archetype of the American truck : tractor with three axles, one steering on the front and two coupled for driving at rear, long hood in front covering the huge V8 diesel, with the chrome dog, hallmark of Mack trucks, bolted atop the hood, over the radiator grille (used as a grip to open the hood by swinging it frontwards), the driving cab with the complete dashboard, magical galore of lights, switches and levers for a little girl like me, with the two round meters in the middle, the speed and the RPM indicators, the bare steering wheel with the Mack brand on the hub and its three spokes, and the switch lever commanding the gearbox.

Even four decades later, it is still amazing for me to imagine my grandmother seated behind the steering wheel of her truck, actioning on purpose all those levers and switches, and doing it to drive her truck smoothly to its destination, with 70,000 pounds of freight in the trailer behind her. Before putting our bag in the trunk below the bunk in the sleeper, behind the driving cab, Grandma helped us to climb in her truck. Linda was tall enough to do it by herself but the high step, the handrail and the door's climbing handle were out of my reach and the huge chassis clearance of the truck required the help of my grandmother :

“Okay sweetie, your sister's up here, I'm gonna grab you up. . . Lindy, hold your sister's arms when she'll be at your level, and don't release her before I shut the door.

— I'm ready Grandma. . . Sibby, you're ready ?

— Yes, Grandma, you can hold me up now.

— Okay, here we got, one, two. . .

— Got her Grandma !

— Sibby, put your feet on the floor, you'll seat only when the door will be shut. . .

Okay girls, watch your fingers, I'm closing it !. . . Okay Claire, we can go now, I've store the bag with my stuff in the trunk.

— Thanks Mom, call me if something goes wrong, I'll do trunk lines duty this month and I'll be at home after dusk.

— Don't worry, my granddaughters are good girls like you were, Rachel and you. They'll gonna have lot of fun travelin' with Grandma.

— Have a good ride Mom !

— Thanks sweetie, and keep on rollin' too !”

We said goodbye to our Mom and started our journey by a nice ride in Denver's street. Traffic was low and Grandma had no difficulties to drive her huge truck in the streets, smoothly. The V8 purred like a big cat, only cut off by switches changes, marked by the puffing of the compressed air clutch actuator, followed by the thud of the gearbox when Grandma moves the gear lever to the right speed in two times, with the engine set at its good rpm before the clutch is softly engaged back with the usual puffing sound of its actuator, and with a slight touch on the throttle to increase its rpm when downshifting. The magical music of a running truck, fascinating for a four years old girl. . .

Grandma started our journey by visiting a customer who had cargo for her to deliver for the Navy at Norfolk. Hartford's Precision Parts is a company that makes

high quality metal parts for industry, from heavy-duty valves for chemical factories to airplanes parts like landing gear legs, or marine equipment. This day, Grandma had a cargo of three sets of propeller blades to deliver to Norfolk Navy Base, and those parts were manufactured at Hartford's Precision Parts. The factory workers had just finished the work during the night and the propeller blades were packed in their crates when Grandma arrived with her truck at the main gate of Hartford's Precision Parts :

"Our last customer before the Interstate, girls. We have cargo to pick here, I would ask you to not leave the cab. It's a factory with lots of dangerous things running all around the place, you'll be at the safest place possible in the cab.

— Okay Grandma. Would it be long ?

— Shorter than one hour Sibby, everything is in crates, I just have to hook it properly in the trailer. . . Here's Dennis, the gatekeeper. . . Hi dude, on the nightshift ?

— Half-way Marsha, I'm doing some extra hours to pay me a new TV set, old Frankie is retired and his job is vacant, I share the shift with another dude. You're doing some nanny work to pay you an extra, ain't you ?

— That's a kinda thing. My granddaughters, Siobhan and Linda. I drive them to D. C. for the holidays. Rachel, my second daughter, can handle them for two weeks. Jerry found me a truckload to deliver on the East Coast for the ride.

— Rachel, is it the one who's fireman for some railroad or the firefighter ?

— The firefighter. Claire is the railroad's fireman. . . Got some early deliveries ?

— Aluminum bars for the foundry. We have a contract with Lockheed to manufacture some main landing gear legs for their L-1011 airliner. You can park besides the dude from Alcoa right there.

— Thanks dude, see ya later !"

Grandma's advice was a wise one, and we stayed in the cab after she elegantly put her truck on the right position to have the rear door opened directly on the factory's wharf. When she was lowering the tailgate to provide a loading access for the freight, she asked to the foreman if she had something else to do :

"Good morning boss, I'm Marsha from O'Brien's, I'm here for the freight to Norfolk. My boss told me to not come too soon, your dudes had to finish the packing first.

— You're just right in time, they're nailing the last crate. Harvey, bring your lift here, we need you to load the cargo for the lady here !

— Yeah dude, I'm coming. Mornin' ma'am.

— Mornin' dude, if you need a straight horizontal floor, I can put my trailer on its legs if you need.

— Thanks to think about it, but that ain't necessary. I'll drove directly into your trailer with my forklift, got enough clearance to do that.

— Okay, I've got the straps ready, four for each crate.

— I'll pick the crates ma'am, won't be long."

The Hartford's factory was a very entertaining spectacle for Linda and me. On our left side, a flatbed semi-trailer from Alcoa, carrying huge silvery aluminum bars, was unloaded by the factory's workers, using powered forklifts. On our right side, a huge area was dedicated to the storage before transport of giant parts, and we could see the overhead cranes rolling bridge beams out of the assembly hall nearby, and putting

them on rest over huge crates before being transported by road to the construction site where they were needed. Then we saw a van with a machine tool on a trailer, protected by a tarpaulin, entering the facility. It was a crew sent by the manufacturer of the machine who was delivering and installing it there.

Meanwhile, Grandma was helping the factory's dude to rig properly the five crates with propellers blades she had to transport to Norfolk. Even if this cargo is an heavy load, it should be rigged properly to prevent it from moving sideways, back and forth into the trailer. There is rigging loops on the floor of the trailer designed to hold the straps needed to prevent the freight from moving. I saw the crates in the rear-view mirror, they were seven feet tall and five by five feet broad wood rigs, holding vertically the propeller blades.

Underneath, they were supporting beams designed to give enough clearance for the fork of a powered forklift, permitting to the crate to be easily handled. Grandma had two inches wide straps with huge hooks to hold the freight into her trailer, and we can hear the sound of the mechanical forklift coming into the trailer with the crates, leaving them on the floor and going outside backwards. Then, Grandma, with the help of the dude driving the forklift, strapped on the floor the crate with her heavy-duty straps, and then get out to let the dude load the next crate. Grandma had finished her work in an half hour and she went back to the cab to see if everything was okay with us :

“Job done girls, I have to sign some papers and we can go... Not bored of waiting ?

— No Grandma, we had seen lots of things, Sibby and I... They do a lot of work here !

— That's one of the largest metal factory in the state, they manufacture everything heavy down there.

— Look Grandma ! There's a very long truck coming here !

— Which way Sibby ?... Ah, that's dudes from Harrison's Oversized Hauling, they surely come here for the bridge's beams right there...”

A long empty lowboy had entered the factory's yard, and it was obvious that they'll soon turn around to put their trailer in position to be loaded with some construction elements waiting for them in the big sized parts yard besides us. Grandma went to ask the drivers of the oversized convoy if they needed to take a long time to do their move. She went back a few instants later, discussing with one of the crew :

“Ain't no problem for me dude, less than an half-hour, that suits me well. Tell your driver he can do what he have to do, I'll wait here doing a second check on my dog before going. I have a transcontinental drive ahead of me, I ain't hurry.

— Thanks for the help Marsha, Bill will be happy to have a broader time clearance. Okay, we're at it, hope we'll finish it soon.”

The oversized truck had to come into the factory's main yard turning on our left side, then drive slowly backward to be lined with the bridges beams waiting for it under the overhead cranes in the heavy parts yard, on our right side. Grandma was facing the entrance gate and she had no complicated turn to do before driving outwards the yard. She had shut the tailgate and she was ready to leave but, having some time ahead of her before leaving, she did a second check on her truck's engine, opening the hood and checking carefully oil and water levels, the ventilator belt tension and other mechanical things, as she used to do everyday.

That is why she has been fastly considered as one of the best assets of O'Brien's trucking company. Because driving a truck is not only be seated on the driver's seat, turning the steering wheel and pushing levers and pedals when needed, Grandma had fastly shown that she had all the qualities required for the job. The first thing your employer looks, it's if you take care of the trucks or not. Grandma is naturally someone who carefully uses the hardware she needs, from cooking appliances to eighteen wheelers. She's got the sense of detection and she lets nothing aside.

Jerry O'Brien had hired a friend of him, Tyler Carleotti, a good mechanic, to do the casual maintenance work and the light repairs day by day. With a fleet of eight trucks running all year long, you've got wear and breakdowns and, to save cleverly money, you have to detect the problems as soon as possible, and cure them before something goes really wrong. That's how Grandma got her reputation of a reliable professional.

At this time, in the mid-'50s, truck drivers were divided in two categories. The old school of I-don't-care-until-it's-broken of old truckers who had entered the job before Pearl Harbor, with minimal professional formation, a culture of general laxity, or even no culture at all, about prevention, security, maintenance and functional daily overview. The skills required in the '20s and '30s to drive a truck were minimal knowledge of the highway code (then very lax in the US), how to do properly a double clutch and the basic ability to move a truck without bumping on fixed obstacles. That led to many crashes, and millions of dollars lost in repairs that could have been prevented.

With the war, the need for a better qualification of the truck drivers was great, and the first one to provide a complete professional training that matches the needs for qualified truck drivers was the US Army. On the frontline, a broken truck is a gift to the enemy : supplies not delivered, workforce stranded for repairs, garages clogged with unusable vehicles... So, the military had set up a complete method to train and qualify their truck drivers, with the help of the truck manufacturers and their engineers, and define all the complete tasks a trucker had to do. Including mechanical survey and elementary maintenance.

So, after V-Day, the standards for truck driver occupation were risen, due both to safety concerns with the increase of traffic in the late '40s, and the larger and more mechanically complex trucks used for commercial traffic. The state of Colorado had been one of the firsts to enforce strict laws regarding the abilities needed to have a Chauffeur's Licence. That led to many old school drivers been obliged to follow a supplemental course to stay tuned with the new technologies, or find another job.

The then-new generation of truckers was more qualified and more technically-aware than their elders, and that changed lots of things : increased security at work, better maintenance and preventive repairs. The casual standards of trucker's work today : do more than just drive your truck, manage it. The notion of personal investment in the daily care of your work tool was the main motive for my Grandma to choose this occupation and, as we always do in our family, she did it at her best, having done everyday a by-the-book drive and maintenance of her trucks. And, for Jerry O'Brien, that was the first step towards changing is mind about my grandmother, from seeing her as an anomaly in this occupation to consider her as the best asset of his company.

At the end of 1955, Grandma had been accepted as one of their kind by the other truckers, youngsters in their '20s and good tempered old-timers in their late '40s to early '50s, the two dudes out of the three one but the boss who were old school truckers. Change of times : young truckers had seen their moms go to work in the factories during wartime and a female truck driver was something they expected to see sooner or later. And Grandma remembers the two words of one of her coworkers when Jerry made the presentations for her first day at work : "At last !".

When you do the same job, and do it well, good tempered dudes appreciates you. As her boss said her once : "Square workers complains about dumbasses, and they're fuckin' right. Only dumbasses complains about straight workers, and I fire 'em as soon as I can." And, at this end of the year 1955, Jerry O'Brien, who was still reluctantly my Grandma's boss, had another proof that Marsha Zieztinski was one of the squarest trucker in activity. It happened after Grandma went back from a mining facility after delivering some mining equipment with the 6x4 flatbed B-series of the company. She had noticed something wrong with the engine and, back in Denver, her first concern was to see Tyler, the mechanic, to have his opinion about what was going on :

"Hi Tyler, got five minutes for me ?

— Yep Marsha, something wrong ?

— Hope not, but I need your to check it. I drove the three-axles B today, and I have noticed that it was dripping motor oil. I know that there is always oil dripping from engines anytime but this one seems serious.

— Mmmm... Tell me more...

— I had stopped at Wegener Mine for two hours to unload their stuff and, before starting, I checked the truck, the usual stuff : brake temperature, tires pressure, oil...

— The usual stuff ?

— Yep, that's was you always have to do before driving, ain't it ?

— It's the theory, dudes skipped this one one out of two times, glad to hear you do it properly.

— Ain't want to kill me in a truck crash, got two girls and a hubby back home, so I check the truck everytime I have to do it... So, I have seen a puddle of oil, around two to three inches in diameter below the truck. Dark black, that was oil. I checked the oil level before starting and went back here. The level was OK but I suspected something wrong and I made a second check on the maintenance log of the truck.

— Damn you, it's gonna rain beer tomorrow ! It's the first time I hear that someone else but me read those fuckin' maintenance logs !

— Jerry yells at us if we don't fill properly this stuff. So, I checked if the dudes had to put fresh oil in it before me... Tell me, does it requires a quart of oil every week ?

— WHAT THE... A QUART A WEEK ?

— Yep, Harry, Mal and Pete had noted they had to put a quart in the engine to have a proper oil level those last three weeks, one can per week. I did not seen any of our trucks sipping so much oil.

— You're fuckin' right girl ! A quart *a month* is normal, but not a quart every week.

— I've got a lamp with me if you want to see where the oil is dripping.

— Okay, show me that right now..."

The mechanic had not listen to my Grandma in vain. With her help, he immediately saw that he had to fix something critical immediately. This evening, he took three extra hours to have the job done and, next morning, when she came at the garage for her usual day at work, one of her coworker told her that Jerry wanted to see her right now :

“Hi Marsha !

— Hi Garry, what’s the work today ?

— There’s some truckloads to department stores for you, but the boss wants to see you first. Tell me, you asked him for marriage or what ? He told me that he wants to see you before doing everything else today.

— Uh, ain’t asking such a thing to Jerry, but I’ve got an idea. You’ve seen Tyler ?

— He’s with him. See ya later Marsha !”

Jerry O’Brien had a good reason to see Grandma. When she arrived in his office, the first thing he showed her was an oily part that Tyler had replaced on the 6x4 truck the evening before. He asked her about it :

“Marsha, you know what is it, ain’t you ?

— That’s the head gasket of one of our trucks, ain’t it ?

— Correct, this one is the part that Tyler replaced on the three-axles B series flatbed you drove yesterday. As you can see, it is completely rotten and it would had not lasted more than three or four hundred miles before being dead, and killing the engine at the same time. Tyler told me the good job you have done by checking your truck and telling him what was going wrong. You save us at least a thousand bucks from buying a spare engine for this truck by doing properly, and by your own, what the hell I am requiring to do to the other airheads I have as drivers. You’re scoring one point, keep on trucking this way !”

And, with her next paycheck, Grandma had a \$15 extra for good care done to the trucks she had to drive. That’s the rule with Jerry O’Brien : every good initiative deserves a reward. And that was not the last one Grandma gets from him.

By this cool morning of August ’74, we did not had a long time to wait before the oversized truck, blocking Hartford’s main gate, did a pretty decent job by swinging back and forth until it’s drivers parked him besides the oversized parts storage area. Grandma had run the engine in idle, needing it to get her mandatory 90 PSI pressure for the brakes before going, and she went in the cab to check the gage :

“That’s pretty good sweeties, we have the pressure ! I have to sign the cargo bill and we go.”

Hartford’s foreman had set the usual documents ready, and my Grandma signed the waybill for the propeller blades, then she went back at work behind her wheel. The way out was clear, and, with a smooth drive, Grandma drove us out of the factory. That was the real beginning of our journey. The traffic had increased and we have to cope with the usual commuting movements of people going to work, utility trucks bringing garbage to the incinerator, or materials for the construction works, and delivery vans bringing goods for sale to the shops and stores downtown.

Our first leg had to bring us nearby Topeka, a long drive, nearly 500 statute miles. After some stop and go drive from red light to red light, we finally reached the main

avenue that brought us straight to the famous Interstate 70, the road to the East from Denver. Within Denver City limits, the traffic was limited in speed to 35 mph, but the straight Interstate with no crossings allowed it to roll smoothly, especially outbound. Then, the magical sign that gave us clearance to run at top speed appeared straight in view through the windscreen :

*WELCOME ON THE INTERSTATE 70
THE CITY OF DENVER WISHES YOU A PLEASANT JOURNEY*

*KANSAS CITY 604 mi
Topeka 540 mi
Salina 434 mi
Hays 340 mi*

Next exit Bennett 20 mi

*SPEED LIMIT
ALL TRAFFIC DAY 55
NIGHT : CARS 45 TRUCKS 40*

That was the point marking the true interstate traffic, and the limit where Grandma was allowed to pin the double nickel on the dime, meaning speeding up to 55 mph with her truck, speed marked by the position of the pin on the indicator, midway between the 50 and 60 mph marks. The huge eighteen wheeler answered obediently to the delicate but steady push downward of the throttle by my grandmother and roared forward up to its cruise speed, only tempered in its efforts by two upshifts ordered by my grandmother. In front of us, more than seven hundred miles of the most boring landscape of the continental United States : the Great Prairie.

The Prairie, seen from Denver towards the Mississippi valley, it's nearly nine hundred miles of complete flatness, with only crops as an entertaining feature... Grandma had planned to stop from time to time, both for safety reasons and avoid my sister and I to get bored to the limit. This morning, the non-landscape out of Denver had taken its toll : Linda had fell asleep only ten minutes after we left Denver City limits, and I was silently staring at the fields outside, trying to find some diversity on the crops there.

Nothing looks like more than a crop of wheat as a crop of barley, and only, from time to time, dark green beet leaves, high-stemmed corn, yellow-flowered canola or buckwheat or brown freshly plowed ground changed the view outside. I lasted awake just a few minutes better than Linda, and I also fell asleep. With the increasing temperature outside, Grandma had switched on the air conditioning, thus helping us to fall asleep, Linda and I. She had switched on the radio on one of her favorite radio to have a background music and she was listening to the CB, expecting traffic news from her fellow truckers.

In the early '70s, the CB radio had become a feature that every trucker in the country have aboard his truck. It had begun to be widespread in the '60s, Grandma had bought her mobile radio in 1965 for a very good reason : with her extra licence for semi-trailers, she had the possibility to drive along the forest gravel roads to reach the

logging works. That is a good job for a trucker, but you cannot know exactly where your destination is, logging works use to move depending on the trees available for cutting, and the work done. So, the best thing to do to warn the truck driver coming here to pick the logs is the use of two-ways radio, and the CB is fit for such a job.

This had prevent my Grandma to run on a flooded dirt road, be obliged to go back by lack of fording place, or to find the right road to follow to reach the logging works she had to go. And, in her job as an interstate driver, it had became an helpful link to have traffic information, news from friends on the road, good tips of the day from truck to truck, and so one... Even in commuting traffic, she always took with her her faithful Motorola CB, calling truckers and other road travellers about traffic jams, speed traps, bad weather, road crashes, diversions and other daily events you find on the road.

CB is something highly useful when you're driving across the Prairie, nicknamed "The Realm of Infinite Boredom", "Anti-Rockies" or "Flatness Madness" by the truckers. With a straight line from west to east, and no noticeable changes in altitude between Denver and Saint Louis, the I-70 is the blessed place where the highway police can deliver speeding tickets by the dozen every day, especially in this year 1974, when the National Maximum Speed Law became mandatory, limiting maximum speed at 55 mph all over the US. And creating many problems within the trucking community. For instance, some truckers were paid by the mile driven (not my grandmother, paid by the hour with a mandatory medium mileage per hour to drive, depending on her job, commuting, state local or interstate) and a speed limit implied a lower daily income, or an higher workload for the same income...

So, the temptation to push the throttle all the way down was great among truckers, including my grandmother, but her boss, who works the same ways as his employees, had put a reasonable limit of 12 hours maximum drive a day with a 450 miles as a mandatory minimal for interstate traffic (less for local, no mileage for commuting but with an 8-hours shift time driving hours a day), following the recommendations of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the infamous trucker's union he was a member of, like my Grandma still is at the age of 80 today.

That let my Grandma a good margin to get close to Topeka from Denver before the nightfall, with three stops on the road. Our first stop of the day was planned at Burlington, Colorado, 170 miles east of Denver, just before the state limit with Kansas. Driving at the mandatory speed, that made us straight three and an half hour to be there for lunch. Grandma had an idea for us, and she made calls on the CB to have a point about it :

"Hi dudes, here's Marsha the Mountaineer, I'm driving eastward on the trail of the absolute boredom, I'm thirty miles east of Denver and I need a tip. Does anyone knows if Pete Deli's dinner in Burlington have ice creams for sale ?

— *Hi sista, Freezy Mama calling. I can tell you that they have a complete batch, got your kiddies in your truck ?*

— My two granddaughters Freezy, vacation travel. Thanks for the tip, I didn't remembered if ol'Pete have something for youngster on his menu. You're a customer ?

— *Yeah, sometimes, but I use to make deliveries for him with my reefer. Tell me, no bears in sight ?*

— Nope shiksa, I've seen a blue light special five minutes ago, driving inbound of Denver, but nothing more. I've been told by one of Crazy Garfield's minstrel show dude that you've got a picture-taker on the valium highway outbound from Denver, three miles out of Aurora. Got something more about sedation state crossing ?

— *Yeah sista, can tell you that the bears are out for feeding time there. You have a picture-taker out of Colby, another in Hays, and a third one at Salina west entrance.*

— Mazeltov ! That's all around the place across sedation state !

— *Yeah sista, they have received orders to pin anyone over the double nickel without any mercy, energy crisis they said... Five bros from my minstrel show have already feed 'em. I take care with my throttle. Do ya know if Happy Chester is truckin' around ?*

— Hear him two days before on the air, he's got an interstate cargo to Chicago, he was stopped for the night in Colorado Springs, I've got him when I drove thru the town with a cargo of logs from the mountains. Might be in Illinois by now.

— *Got some greenbacks for him, I hope he'll be back soon. I've got my deliveries to do all along the valium highway east of Denver, I'll meet him someplace here. If you've got him on the air, tell him about it.*

— Won't forget shiksa. Have a nice day !

— *You too, and take care of the bears !"*

As you can see, Grandma, like every trucker, made a broad use of CB radio slang interlaced with ethnic words. . . "Trail of Absolute Boredom" and "Valium Highway" are nicknames for the I-70 between Denver and Kansas City, due to the absolute lack of any landmarks there. Also, "Sedation state" refers to Kansas for the same reason. "Bears" refers to highway police officers, enforcing speed limits with "picture-takers", speed metering radars with photographic equipment taking a photograph of your vehicle if you're exceeding the 55 mph speed limit.

For the ethnic background, when a trucker calls men and women brothers and sisters, he or she is an Afro-American, a latino will use the words *hombres* and *chicas*, and a Jewish one the words *shkutzin* for men and *shiksa* for women. Afro-American truckers use the term "Minstrel Show", referring originally to racist music-hall shows of the XIXth century, shows exploiting the racist stereotypes of black people towards an all-white audience to talk about an all-black trucking business. And there is lot of trucker's slang words I had learnt from Grandma Marsha.

Talking about Afro-American truckers, at this time, they coined the term "funky truck" to describe a truck driven by a rookie Afro-American trucker. Latinos called their own trucks "piñatas" and, even if I didn't hear this one by myself, Jewish truckers called sometimes their big rigs "deli with eighteen flavors of bagels". And that was for the most polite part of this lingo.

Like in any vocation, you have nice people and jerks. For this second category, there is also terms specific to describe them. For instance, you have to figure that, on a eighteen wheeler like Grandma's dog, the truck's air horns are fixed atop the cab. That is why you can call a truck driven by a unsympathetic driver a sitting bull : like the animal in this position, you have the horns on the top and the asshole right below. . .

Other nice offensive name, call a racist trucker a triple-klown (this spelling is mandatory), term made from the usual three-letters designation of a Dixie folkoric group well known for is night shows. . . Other offensive terms towards ethnic minori-

ties had sometimes been taken and turned upside down as humoristic designations by the targeted groups. A Afro-American trucker who's a friend of my Grandma had, for instance, chosen a CB callsign that gave no dubious indication on his ethnicity. He was crossing our way on the I-70 this morning, and he called Grandma on the air :

"Hi everybody's on the 70 at the KS-CO border, that's Superniggah calling ! I need a tip about what's goin' on the seventy between the state border and Denver, not too many bears down there ?

— Hi Superniggah, Marsha the Mountaineer calling, I've just zoomed across Flagler, and I can tell you that you have some bears here that makes you play the irish bagpipe. They stop all the big rigs and you have to blow the tinwhistle. Your slave driver lets you go northwards the Mason-Dixon line or you're escaped from your plantation ?

— *Hi sista, nice to hear you, second answer right... I'm kiddin', got some cargo to deliver in Colorado. You're truckin' eastwards ?*

— Yep, Norfolk, VA, some cargo for the Navy. Got something to deliver in the mountains, or just passing towards California ?

— *I'm going Elvis with a John Deere harvester to deliver to a local dealer in Denver. I've pick it at their factory at East Moline, IL.*

— That's a fuckin' long way from Alabama !

— *Yeah, I hitted the road northwards from Birmingham with a hot dog from Dupont, something to deliver to a chemical plant in the suburbs of Chicago. Then, I had another cargo to deliver at the Fairbanks-Morse factory at Beloit, and the luck to have a milk tank to deliver in Daventport, pickin' it at Rockford. That makes me avoid blank miles.*

— Got a fuckin' good shipper dude, I ain't know yet if I'm gonna drive empty between Norfolk and Charleston or not. Got a cargo back to Denver there.

— *Ouch ! That's a fuckin four hundred and fifty miles ! Hope you won't have 'em blank sista !*

— Hope so shkutzin... My boss call our shipper daily to have a cargo there. An empty van trailer with a 70,000 pounds capacity, hope some Dixie dude will be interested.

— *Know how the shippers works sista : they always made a last minute offer that prevents you from having blank miles on your log book.*

— My own slave driver won't let one of his truck drive empty for 450 miles, you bet it ! I've never get more than a dozen of blank miles a day, won't change a lot with our shipper.

— *My slave driver have a contract with National Road Shipping, very efficient dudes too. You're with 'em ?*

— Nope. Mine is Western Shipping. They're specialized in all states west of Mississippi River, but they also have overland shipping to handle. That's how I've got a truckload of canned fish from Charleston to drive to Denver on my return journey.

— *Tell me sista, ain't some fish from the Oakridge Foods Factory ?*

— Got it dude ! They're famous in Dixie, ain't they ?

— *Yeah, a cousin of mine works on a trawler in Florida, his captain have a contract with 'em. They're demanding, but they pay well, and they're not working with anybody. Quality products, my family bought canned tuna fish from 'em for Christmas, twice the price of ordinary canned food, but ten times the quality. They're selling in Colorado now ?*

— Yeah, a department store had bought the complete cargo, it's for their gourmet fine foods store. They asked me to do the job, I'm supposed to not shake the freight when I'm driving... I'm with my granddaughters now and they're both sleeping. I drove 'em to meet their aunt in D. C., my youngest daughter, Rachel.

— *Okay Marsha, have a good ride with your huskie... Got some bears takin' pictures west of Burlington, check your speedometer carefully !*

— Thanks for the tip dude, and have a nice trip ! From Marsha, over and out !"

Some translation is needed to clearly understand what my Grandma said. The Irish bagpipe and the tinwhistle (typical Irish musical instrument, of course) are the nicknames given to the alcohol breath detectors, especially for the single-use chemical one you have to blow into to check if you're not drunk. Irish-american people are supposed to be drunkards in the US, another ethnic cliché, with the stupidity of Polish-American people. So, when your father is an Irish-American and your mother a Polish-American Jew, it's sometimes hard at school...

As a joke, Afro-American blue-collars call their white bosses "slave drivers", and their factory or corporation their plantation, joking about what were the US before the Civil War, when the Mason-Dixon line was drawn on the maps to set the northern limit of slavery. Also on the trucker's slang, the variation on the dog concept. A Mack eighteen wheeler hauling a lowboy is called a hound dog, and to go Elvis means to drive a Mack semi with a lowboy in tow, taken from the interpretation of rock'n'roll hit *Hound Dog* by Elvis Presley, whose first occupation, before being a rock star, was truck driver...

Then, you can guess that a hot dog is a Mack truck with a cargo of hazardous materials, for instance chemical products in a tank trailer. And a huskie is a Mack truck like my Grandma's one : long range highway truck for interstate traffic, pulls hard, fast and long, like this sled dog breed. I've already told you that truckers are sometimes paid by mileage driven, or have a contractual mileage to drive for a certain amount of time to have their pay, like Grandma. It applies with a loaded truck and when you're empty, you're not paid. Blank miles are miles driven empty, a thing that everyone wants to avoid, an empty truck means money lost by everyone.

That's why trucking business relies on shippers, professionals whose work is to put the right cargo into the right truck. Empty mileage chasers, they typically have contracts with trucking businesses, like my Grandma's boss, and they have a database of cargos waiting for a delivery and trucks waiting for a cargo, and their job is to make both needs meet. Before the explosion of small computers for business in the '80s, this job was done by hand, with cardboard files and boxes, and every communication was made by telephone, from the customers to the truckers. Only great shipping corporations can afford the price of a full size mainframe computer, like IBM 360 models, to do the job without human input.

The phone and cardboard files method was used from the early '30s when this business began to be a promising one. With the great depression, factories which did not get bankrupted had not enough freight to fill a railroad car, and they have to rely more and more on road vehicles. Truckers had also to face a decrease of local traffic, and they had to look more and more far away from their main business area to have something to transport. And, with the New Deal, interstate roads began to be built, easing road transportation across the whole continental US.

Then, the interstate trucking business began, and the need to match trucks journeys with cargo waiting for a way of transportation all around the US gave a broad opportunity to the shipping business to start from scratch and grow. And, in the '50s, the increase of investment on roads (the National Highway System was created in 1956 by the Eisenhower administration) and the complete automation of telephone, started in the second half of the '20s, boosted this business.

A new kick upwards was given to shipping business by computerization, beginning in the '60s with mainframe computers for big corporations and, in the '80s, desktop PC computers for every shipping business, giving local offices the ability to manage truckloads all over the country, a feature only possible for big corporations before, high cost of mainframe computers limiting their use to million-bucks investors. An IBM PC with its software, beginning in the first half of the '80s, gave the ability to a small local businesses to do the same shipping management job as big corporations, which were the only ones to be able to handle such a workload ten years before.

It's obvious that, now, in the 2010s, you do the same job with Internet and cell-phones, giving you the ability to manage trucks and cargos in real time, talking directly with your drivers on their cellphones, having direct orders from your customers on your internet site and warning your drivers that they have a cargo to pick via smartphone dedicated applications. Some small trucking businesses are nowadays managed in real time by their boss, working in his truck cab with a smartphone and a laptop computer, being directly in touch with the others drivers via emails or direct phone calls on their smartphones, wherever they are, and having a picture in real time of where his trucks are and where there is cargo for them. A feature unthinkable, even for big corporations, twenty years before, and now a part of the US trucking landscape.

But, in 1974, the main equipment my Grandma had as an improvement of her working conditions was an air conditioning unit for the cab, aftermarket equipment added on the 6 interstate big rigs fleet of Jerry O'Brien's business, a interstate 60" sleeper back cab extension with two bunks, one atop the second, and some extra storage. That is how you can see that the boss is doing the same job as you with, as the only differences with his truckers is that he owns the business and signs the paychecks.

Grandma entered the interstate trucking in 1962. Jerry O'Brien had then an opportunity to expand his business and he bought for it six Mack B-Type tractors with an interstate cab. The comfort was the standard of the times : 48" extension with one bunk, some storage and nothing more. On summertime, truckers had to sleep with open windows and use a small petrol stove and a mountaineer sleeping bag in winter. And those dogs, all three-axes B61ST, had the most powerful engine available at the time : a 255 hp V8 diesel. Today, such a low power is only available on two-axle medium sized trucks, typically for city and commuting use, but it was a top grade prime mover for big rigs in the early '60s.

But driving an eighteen wheeler required an extra training, and Jerry O'Brien cannot pay it for all of the 18 truckers he had as employees. So, beginning at the spring of 1962, he began to look carefully for the best ones he had. My Grandma had a point for her, she already had from the beginning a training for the use of air brakes,

which became the de facto standard for braking systems on trucks during the second half of the '50s, replacing the classical pulley and cables used before, system phased out because it became outdated in the '60s due to increased vehicle weight and power. And three-axles B series have air brakes as a serial equipment. . .

One day in spring 1962, Grandma went to the office for her daily routine after the work, put back in its tray the truck maintenance log, check for the deliveries she had to made the next day and see which truck she will drive. She met Jerry O'Brien doing some paperwork and she took a minute to tell him about the news of the day :

"Evenin' boss, dunno if you have to drive to downtown Denver but if you do so, take care of the public works on Logan Street between the 11th and the 13th avenue. Half of the pavement is wide open, the city services are replacing some kind of pipes there, and it's a drag to drive here. . . Uh, you can also thanks Dennis, this time, he had not forgot to empty the ashtray before giving me the BK-8913, the three-axles flatbed. . .

— You'd threaten him to make him swallow the content of the tray next time he'll forgot to clean it, that'd helped. . . More seriously, I'm going into the interstate business and I'm looking for drivers who want to do this job.

— Talked about it with my man before, if I have the opportunity, I'll be in. . . But that ain't depending only on me, you might have others dudes than me on this job.

— I have some on my list, but your name is number one.

— Sign me in, I'll do the job.

— Semi-trailer training begin next month, I'll get you a place, you'll be notified as soon as you're booked."

And that was the beginning of the interstate big rig trucker career of Grandma. She was sometimes on her own, with no direction home, like a rolling stone, but she can get now satisfaction. And only the bankruptcy of her employer, in early 1980, had forced her to look for another job as a trucker. First driver of all kind of utility trucks for the city of Denver from 1980 to 1987, then dump truck driver for a construction company up to 1992. She had participated to the construction of the new Denver International Airport, and I'm taking off and landing on tracks built with Grandma's participation.

In 1992, Grandma was tired to drive dump trucks on construction sites and, before retirement, she took a job as an interstate trucker again. She had a seat now aboard Mountain Trucks Special Deliveries, a business that carries into semi vans or other kinds of trailers high value cargo, from airplane parts to issues of blockbuster books, medical hardware like scanners, microchips for computers and even cars for the then-new light rail transit system of the city of Denver. She retired in 1998, aged 65, but she had later some opportunities to drive a truck again. I'll drop you a word on it later, if you mind. . .

For lunch, Grandma had planned to stop at her first milepost on the log way to the east coast, a deli dinner in the small town of Burlington, east of the state of Colorado, just a dozen miles from the border with Kansas. With a three and an half hour first journey leg from Denver, we were here at 12.30 and Grandma had a good surprise for us. Instead of the usual truckers dinner she used to stop when driving

here, she had found us a good family restaurant with a truck parking nearby where she parked her big rig besides two other interstate semis. Across the street, a good deli was waiting for us. A good one with bagels, salads and ice creams :

“Here we are sweeties, I know this place, they have good stuff for sale. Salad bowl for three, bagels and ice cream for dessert ?

— Sound great Grandma ! answered Linda. They have peanut butter bagels ?

— Yep sweetie, and a cheese cream one for Siobhan.

— Thanks Grandma, did I answered. Do you have others places like that 'till Washington ?

— Sure I have, you'll see more on the road... Mornin', got a table for three for a lunch ?

— Yes ma'am, you can seat next to the window here, you'll be in a quiet place. Do you want to see our menu ?

— Yes, please, I need to see what you have for ice creams. Your delivery trucker had told me on the CB that you have new stuff today...

— Ah, you're a trucker ? Pardon me but I didn't guess that, you're driving one of the eighteen wheeler parked across the street ?

— Yep, the R-700 dog with the van trailer, just across the street, on the parking place. Interstate job today... Got someone in your family who's trucker ?

— My brother in law, he's making regional deliveries for Amtruck. He just have a two axles Ford L series, not a impressive truck like yours.

— Amtruck is not the worst employer you can find, especially for commuting, local and regional traffic. I know some dudes working there by the Brotherhood, they've got a decent pay and correct bosses. Hope your brother in law have the same.

— He ain't complainin', the job is good, and he have good coworkers with him... Here's the menu, I let you choose. Your daughters ?

— Thanks to remove me a decade and an half in age. No, they're my granddaughters. I stopped here especially for them.”

Like in every business open for customers in North America, you have a TV set on with some local or national channel broadcasting general audience shows. In this dinner, the set was an old black and white item dating back to the '50s and still working there, maybe the private set of the shop owner put there after his acquisition of a brand-new color TV. The most important was the broadcast itself : it was the mid-day TV news on NBC, and the most important breaking new of the day was broadcast now :

“...direct from Washington D.C., a stunning new from the White House, where the constitutional crisis surrounding the Watergate affair is still going on and on. The White House had just release a recorded tape proving that president Nixon had been planning himself the break-in into the Watergate Building in 1972. Live from D. C., we have our political commentator, James Mc Kendrick... Jim, it seems that all support to President Nixon is falling apart, and that an impeachment is near. A full house vote supporting this kind of motion is now on his trail, do you think that President Nixon will still deny his role in the scandal and add perjury to the criminal charges he's facing ?

— That seems less and less plausible Gary. President Nixon is facing an overwhelming wave of criminal evidences against him, and this tape sounds like another nail in the coffin for his second term at Pennsylvania Avenue. Neither congressmen and public opinion are

supporting him anyway, and the Congress would have a clear path ahead if an impeachment had to be voted.

— So, we can consider that President Nixon is doomed anyway ?

— It is obvious now. The main question which remain is what will do the President, wait for the impeachment or resign. It is the most important issue in our politics now, and for the forthcoming week.

— Granny, is President Bulldog going to jail ?

— Hope this quack will go there sweetie, answered me Grandma. They have a lettuce, tomato and cheese salad, you're both in for it ?

— They have sweet onions with it ?

— Lemme see Linda... Yep, want some apart ? Siobhan don't like onions, you know.

— Yes Grandma, and I'll get a peanut butter bagel !

— Sibby, still on cream cheese ?

— Uh, tell me Grandma, what's Hungarian paprika cream ? Is it spicy ?

— Yes, and you like spicy things, I think you can try it. It tastes like red peppers, but it's like a thick tomato sauce. I take a cream cheese bagel as a backup in case you don't like.

— It it's like peppers, I would surely like it Grandma !

— Mmmm... We'll see. We will order the ice creams later. Let's start with this."

Untill now, I am unable to swallow any kind of onion. Even the smell of onions drives me sick. But I like everything spicy, especially peppers and paprika. The then-new for me paprika cream was a delight, and Grandma had not to replace it by her backup cream cheese bagel. On the TV, pictures of President Nixon were broadcast for the great new of the day. The Watergate scandal was plaging the political life of the US since the beginning of 1973 and, more and more, President Nixon's "Read my lips : fuck you" attitude became unsustainable.

For me, President Nixon was a man who looked like a bulldog and, asking to my Mom why do we have a president who look like a bulldog, she told me that it was because donkeys voted for him... But, on this summer of '74, it looked like that every politician in the federal capital had been lining up in a queue to stab President Nixon in the back... Recently, we had learned that the former second in command head of the FBI, mister W. Mark Felt, was "Deep Throat", the famous informant who gave tips to the *Washington Post* investigators Woodward and Bernstein about the whole Watergate affair.

A badly shut door in the Watergate building in June 1972, and the second in command of the FBI playing the stool pigeon to the press led to a potentially successful impeachment procedure one and an half year later, the worst case scenario for President Nixon running amok with everything that can be used against him being public before he could find a convenient denial to present to the public. And there is still fruitcakes who believes that 911 was a perfect inside job, managed by the same kind of politicians who had been unable to prevent the Watergate scandal to became public nearly thirty years ago... We're talking here about wiretaping the Democratic Party presidential campaign office, not destroying two 1,400 ft tall towers and killing nearly 3,000 people, most of them civilians, in a terrorist attack...

More interesting, Grandma, as a blue-collar daughter who have seen by herself the Great Depression, is a resourceful person for poor men recipes, which are the art of combining low cost with great taste. And a cooking lined with a basic principle : meat and other animal products are luxury reserved for great occasions. Today, that sounds weird but, in the '30s and '40s, a blue-collar family can only afford to buy meat once a week, or even once a month if the family man was unemployed.

So, Grandma and Grandpa had learned to cook great stuff with a misery budget, and I have dozens of recipes that are still great today. For instance, the Indian bannock, a flat bread made with corn flour, vegetable broth and what you can put in it and have ready on your kitchen's shelf, spices, vegetables or, Grandma's favorite and easy to pick in the wild around the city, pinyon nuts. Another recipe which still starts a craze among youngsters (and some older people too !) when ready to eat, the blue-collar cake, a sweet cake made without butter, milk or eggs, and flavored with corn syrup, maple leaf syrup or honey, and, if you have some, dry raisins, apples, or other season fruits.

Grandma is also a great salad eater, anything with lettuce and whatever tasty vegetables you can put in it (including onions, yuck !) is a gourmet staple food for her. Especially with what she considers as a must-use for the sauce : mustard, black pepper, red vinegar and olive or walnut oil. When she's not using slavish-style dressing, with yogurt (replacing the smetana, the traditional sour cream of slavic eastern Europe cuisine) and green spices like dill. She's also a fan of American-style salads, her two main recipes are the Dixie-style salad, with sliced bananas, peanuts, fried sweet potatoes slices, and mashed tomatoes as dressing and the caliente salad, Mexican-style with red hot chili peppers, corn grains, red beans and avocado slices, using lime juice for dressing. And, of course, green lettuce in both salads, the basic staple vegetable.

For dessert, Grandma took the same sweet as us : ice creams. She discovered this dessert only when she was an adult, in the late '50s. Blue-collar families tends to do all their cooking by themselves with raw ingredients for budgetary reasons, including desserts, and buying no commercial specialties outside their home. And the widespread use of artificial cold for home food storage became only effective in the '50s. That is why Grandma ate her first ice-cream, a three-balls lime, orange and watermelon sorbet, in July 1957, two weeks after Independence Day. She was delivering the food department of a great department store in Denver and, during her lunch break, she had a little chit-chat with a friend of her working there as a salesgirl at the ice cream stand.

My Mom told me once that, during her childhood, Grandma was always using her and aunt Rachel as an excuse to eat herself a huge ice cream. Grandpa had never been fooled and, with his work as a cook, he managed sometimes to have some ice-cream samples from the suppliers of the mess he was working for, usually a pack of a gallon of the latest ice-cream product sold by the company for professional use. After this delightful break, we had to hit the road again and, before leaving, Grandma asked to the salesgirl if she can fill her three vacuum bottles with ice tea, preparing her to have a cold drink on the road :

"I've got three one-quart thermos, can you fill 'em up with one-third of ice and two-thirds of iced tea please ?

— No problem ma'am, I have a dipper to do the job. . . You'll have enough range with it to end your working schedule without getting thirsty.

— Hope so, got two little ones with me, and they're also great tea drinkers. And you're is a pretty good one.

— Fresh limes do the job, but I'm teaching nothin' to someone like you. . . So, with the ice, I'm doing you a bargain, only two quarters for your three bottles.

— Thanks, I've got an half-buck for the tea, that leaves me a quarter left for your tip, with the previous half-buck, that will pay your work for filling the bottles.

— Thanks ma'am, and have a nice journey !"

Tea drinking is a great tradition coming from my mother's side. As with every slavic people, tea is the staple drink all along the day, and all along the year. Hot in winter, and iced in summer. Grandma have always a vacuum bottle or two, and even more, with her aboard her truck. Like with every industrial foods for low social ranking people of her generation, commercial drinks like sodas are not something commonly bought, except for sparkling water and lemonade for kids. And Grandma does not drink coffee daily, a cultural habit she have, like most members of my family.

We resumed our journey at 1pm by driving back to the interstate 70, leaving Colorado and crossing the border with Kansas at the Sherman county, an administrative division that marks the easternmost border of the mountain timezone, making us loose an hour ten miles east of the little town of Goodland. We entered Kansas at 1.20pm and, 20 miles later, we left the mountain time zone at 2.45pm central time zone. Our next stop was scheduled at the little town of Russel, KS, besides the highway of infinite boredom, a. k. a. Interstate 70 between Denver and Kansas City.

With her truck, Grandma had all the bells and whistles, and more, aboard her R-700, what was the Cadillac of the Mack trucks offer in this year 1974. And, with the hot weather outside, the air conditioning was greatly welcomed. This dog had been bought at a \$65,000 pricetag per tractor by Jerry O'Brien, who wanted to have a fleet of six top-level trucks for his interstate business before retirement. It is the equivalent of nearly \$260,000 for each tractor in 2013 dollars.

Now, you have the equivalent of a RV with interstate trucks sleepers cabs, including a plug for a laptop computer, a TV set, a refrigerator with a microwave oven and an all-climate conditioning air system, making you feel in a nice hotel room everywhere and anytime of the year you go for your job. In the '70s, the top level was less cozy, the top class was a 60" low roof rear-cab extension with one bunk or, like in Grandma's dog, two bunks, one low and one high, both with 3" thick high comfort mattresses, storage for the driver's stuff and that was all. If you need something else, go to an aftermarket dealer to get a butane one-fire cooker and an air conditioning road unit, what Grandma had.

My eldest sister didn't fall asleep straight forward in the passenger's seat like me. She was watching the road traffic and listening to Grandma's chatter on the CB. As usual, she didn't stay awake more than an half-hour than me. . . When she was not talking on her CB, Grandma switches her cab radio on a good rock'n'roll station to pick some good music, the last traffic news and the weather report. Ahead of us, a clear blue sky was the forecast of the day, with incoming thunderstorm over the Mississippi valley :

“ ...coming from the gulf of Mexico and dragged northwards by a low pressure zone over British Columbia, the line of thunderstorms will reach south Missouri, south Illinois, west Tennessee and west Kentucky tomorrow in the morning. They will drift westwards over Kansas and Nebraska in the afternoon, with temperatures rising up to 95°F in from of the storm line. The National Ocean and Atmosphere Administration warns us about heavy rains and lightning which have already been seen with this line of thunderstorms today in Louisiana, and recommends to cancel every outdoor activity in the areas that would be affected by this phenomenon. It is also recommended to drivers to avoid any unnecessary travel by road due to the loss of visibility below the storm clouds due to heavy rain, minimal horizontal visibility down to 200 feet had been monitored by the Louisiana State Troopers today. For professionals who cannot avoid the risk of driving under such a rain, we recommend you to turn your headlights on when entering a zone where stormy weather is forecasted, and drop your speed to a maximum of 30 mph, or less if visibility lowers dangerously, a risk of high-speed skidding over flooded roads is also something to consider. For the 8th of August, a clear weather is forecasted, with cloudy sky and temperatures down to 75°F... This was the weather report presented by Alvin Mc Candless, thanks for listening to WDGHKS Radio, Kansas number one news and music. And now, our rock'n'roll afternoon program, beginning with a single from his last album “On The Beach”, here is “Walk On” by Neil Young...

— *Hola hombres, nobody there ? Here's El Borracho west of Salina, heading to Denver. What the fuck, you're all on strike ?*

— *Seems they do the same as my granddaughters, a good nap. Hola hombre, llamando Marsha de los Montes. ¿ Como estas ?*

— *¿ Muy bien chica ! Estoy con mi piñata aqui, y yo no se si hay osos en la carretera... ¿ No han visto ?*

— *Yo he visto osos en Colorado y en Kansas, este de Goodland. Hay tambien coches de navidad en la setenta, he visto tres. ¿ Cuidado con tu velocidad hombre !*

— *Gracias chica, tengo un viaje largo hasta Arizona.*

— *Yo tambien, voy a Washington. ¿ Arriba muchacho, y hasta la vista !*

— *¿ Hasta la vista chica, y buen viaje !”*

As you can see, west of Mississippi, the most noticeable ethnic minority who had rushed into the occupation of trucker in the '60s and '70s was the Latin-American minority, new source of hard-working blue-collars jumping on a more qualified and better paid job by enlisting themselves as truck drivers. On the road there, you can have a little chat in Spanish easily with a latino trucker driving his piñata. Little thing to know : *coche de navidad*, Christmas car in English, is a calo word for “police car”, the calo is the Spanish slang of US resident Latin-American people. I had learnt it with Mexican Spanish at school with my schoolmates, and Linda did it too. And Grandma had learnt her Spanish with the fathers of the '70s generation of latinos truckers, the Mexican handlers who, in the '50s and '60s, were loading and unloading her truck.

The road along the I-70 in Kansas was uneventfull this day. I slept nearly three hours and it was still under a bright shining sun that we travelled our last hour before stopping for a pause when I awoke on the passenger seat, shared with my sister Linda. The landscape was still void, and the traffic was still the same. In the fields, we could sometimes see a line of heavy harvesters on duty, turning wheat or corn freshly grown into grains ready to be processed to become food. From time to

time, a sunflower field, or the bright yellow spot of a canola field was a change into this dull landscape.

But, with the CB, Grandma had the possibility to make a little bit of smalltalk with a coworker of the road. Two miles straight ahead on the road, having a look over a long distance due to one of the rare eastward-climbing slopes this road have, she spotted someone familiar to her, another trucker from Colorado she knows. The truck was clogging the traffic on the Interstate, trailing miserably nearly 20 mph below of top speed. Holding her CB mike, Grandma told us :

“Sweeties, if this dude ahead is the one I know, I could present you a complete moron, just need to check it. . . Hi the dude two miles ahead of me on the '70, trying to climb the slope, this is Marsha the Mountaineer speaking, you're Swedish Pete, ain't you ?

— *Oh no, the twit from O'Brien's ! What the fuck to you want to laugh at ? Sheridan Trucking Company cannot afford to buy luxury trucks like ol' Jerry boy you know ? We have a fleet of 78 units, and no cash to buy new ones !*

— Blah blah blah, your boss is a scrooge who's killing the business with mileage prices too low, and he's fucking you all up the ass by cutting corners with an axe by forcing you to drive derelict trucks. And you're all a bunch of jerks who let this crap happens by not having a union card !

— *Damn you and your Jimmy Hoffa ! I won't let such thieves like the IBT ones do anything with my boss and me !*

— So, don't complain to drive a wreck and being underpaid, because the IBT won't do anything for you ! Tell me, you have what's left of your engine running or you're forced to crank by hand the driving wheels to go forward ?

— *Yeah, yeah, yeah, once again, you're laughin' at honest workers. . .*

— Working for a thieving boss dude, if you like being screwed, that's your problem. And I won't laugh at you this time, I've got my two granddaughters with me, I'm gonna show 'em what the shame of the working class looks like. . . Sweeties, we're gonna pass *Sluggish* Pete's truck, wave at him and see what happens when you don't have your union card !

— *Marsha, fuck you.*

— Ain't need it dude, my hubby do it better, ask your wife, she'll confirm it ! . . . Siobhan, Linda, wave at poor Swedish Pete, whose truck is a piece of shit, thanks to the skinflint he have for boss !”

Sheridon Trucking Company was the shame of trucking business in Colorado between the mid '60s and her bankruptcy in 1977. Derelict trucks, lowest trucker's wages west of the Mississippi River, submissive drivers recruited here usually after being fired from anywhere else, and an aggressive pricing policy towards customers to get contracts at any cost. Of course, no one there had an union card.

Grandma had her own since 1956, she is a proud member of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the mighty union of truckers well known for the dubious links it has with the maffia, thanks to its leader, Jimmy Hoffa. Grandma had shake him his hand in June 1960, when he was speaking at an union meeting in Denver. She also jokingly add that, this evening, she can't remember what happened to her wristwatch after that. . .

Jimmy Hoffa had, in the '60s, problems with justice and he was even put in jail for bribery in 1964. Released in 1971, he disappeared in 1975, and he's presumed killed by mobsters. But his legacy was to have helped to build a great union with the IBT. His son is the present president of the Teamsters, and Grandma, even retired, still have her union card at the IBT. And a picture of her with James P. Hoffa, Jimmy Hoffa's son, taken in 2004 at an IBT meeting in Denver.

Like in lots of small businesses, when the boss do the same job as you, union affiliation is not a point who's discussed by anyone in the business, starting with the boss, who let his employees do what they want with it. Jerry O'Brien had said to all of his employees that, as an application of the first amendment, he didn't want to know anything about what his truckers were or were not doing with an union or a political party, telling it would be unfair to have an opinion on them based on something else than their working skills. And he won't break a strike in his business, no matter the reason why it had started. He just asked to the potential strikers to do their protest legally, and avoid wildcat strikes if they can.

Grandma learned what was behind his attitude a few years after. In march 1959, members of the IBT had made a picket at the entrance of a great trucking business, to help the striking drivers there to have a better pay. Grandma had helped with what she can do : get them food, leafleting for them, collecting money for their families and giving a hand at the picket after her working hours.

The strike was two weeks long, and there was some attempts of strikebreaking. A scab had been tarred and feathered and there was even a fight between strikebreakers and union men, with some casualties and a strikebreaker badly injured after having been clubbed by two teamsters. This evening, Grandma went to the picket with some sandwiches to help the union dudes there. The picket leader, an old school trucker called Frankie Flanagan, had appreciate Grandma's help, and he was admiring her way to have guts :

"Hi Marsha, thanks to be here, that's pretty tough today, you've been told about the strikebreakers ?

— Yeah dudes, I've brought my pump gun with me, just in case... Looks quiet tonight, the dudes inside are still fighting ?

— Their boss will be bankrupt if they last one more week, that will help for the discussion. We also have another truck for the roadblock, a scab had tried to tumble this one over when he tried to get out of here by force... Here's our reinforcement, hi Jerry !

— Hi dudes, hi Marsha !"

Driving the 6x4 flatbed of his company, Jerry O'Brien went there tonight to give an helping hand to the Teamsters, because he have the same union card as my Grandma. This thing happens frequently in small businesses where the boss do the same work as his employees...

Driving all along the I-70, we spend the afternoon on the road going eastwards, with our next stop at Russel, Kansas, a little town in the middle of this state, lost in the prairies. For the dinner, Grandma had planned a stop at 7 pm central time, and a delicious picnic dish she had brought with her from Denver. With the traffic flowing

smoothly in the interstate, we had a little margin to reach our destination. There is a stopping place at Russel, on the Interstate, which is used by all road travellers to make a stop before entering eastern Kansas. With her excellent knowledge of this road, Grandma had a list of quiet and convenient places to stop all along the highway.

The Russel rest area is a place where you have truck parks easy to use, and not crowded, picnic tables ready to use and very pleasant in summertime, and clean toll restrooms, a dime for a pee in 1974, I still remember the price... Grandma parked there her dog behind another van truck which amazed Linda, who was very interested by the licence plate of the vehicle :

“Grandma, Massachusetts, it’s the state with Boston, ain’t it ?

— Yep sweetie, this guy is coming from the east coast, and he’s back home... I’m coming with you at the restrooms, don’t run and always stay on the alleys... Linda, I’m gonna pick Sibby down, you’ll go after her, she’s small and that’s a tall height for her from the seat to the floor.

— Know that Grandma... Sibby, I’m holding you ’till Grandma open the door, don’t wriggle, you’re such a drag !

— Eeeeeek ! You’re ticklin’ me !

— Okay Linda, I’m holding Sibby, you can let her go.”

Due to my small size, Grandma preferred to hold me in her arms instead of letting me climb up and down by my own from her truck’s cab. My then seven-years old eldest sister Linda was taller and could do it by her own. Like Mom and Grandma, Linda had been a very slim girl before her teens, getting the nickname of “the match” because she was very thin and, with her red hair, having a red tip on the top. She had always hated this nickname, you can guess why...

In our family, Grandma was 5’ 9” tall, only superseded by Mom, with a round 6’. Later, we went further Linda and me, my sister with 6’ 3 ½” and me with a 6’ 1” size. Both from my mother and from my father’s side, we have tall people. But that has not been always easy to live. For my Grandma, that barred her from buying ready-to-wear women’s clothes, her 10 size for shirts was not commonplace in the late ’40s and early ’50s. But for the occupation of trucker, she can buy men’s shirts and overalls, and men’s snow jackets for wintertime.

Too tall to have women’s ready-to-wear outfits for her size, Grandma had also a problem with shoes. She is a 7 ½ in size, fortunately not large enough to prevent her from buyin women’s shoes. But she needs working shoes too, and usual brands of shoes specially designed for truckers did not sold, in the ’50s, sizes below the equivalent of size 8 for women... Fortunately, she had found via mail order, from a friend she had met when she was trained to become a trucker, a mail order company in California which sells sizes down to the equivalent of size 7 for women.

The reason ? In California, they have lots of Asian-American customers, whose shoe sizes were usually below the ones of the other ethnics... If you’re interested, it is the Hantzberg vocational shoes factory in Sacramento, CA. They’re still an highly sought manufacturer for such a niche market, and a must-have for truckers, bus drivers, locomotive firemen and engineers, and airline pilots too, my 9 ½ size pair from Hantzberg is always on my feet when I’m flying.

And, for this dinner in open-air, in the cooling hot hair of the end of this day, we stopped for a good picnic with Grandma on a open-air table provided by the highway

authority of Kansas. To see a grandmother and her two granddaughters going out of a eighteen wheeler surprised some of the families who were stopping here, some of them for the night. Grandma had everything needed aboard her truck to provides us a good dinner. She had brought with her a delicacy from Denver, a recipe she had from Tyler, O'Brien's trucking company mechanic, one of our favorite summer meal :

“And here's the dinner sweeties ! Guess you'll like it, its an Italian pot !

— With grated Italian cheese Grandma ?

— With grated Italian cheese Sibby, I've got a box with me, and I have not forgotten to put some garlic for Linda !”

The famous Italian pot is a simple dish made of zucchinis cooked in olive oil with tomatoes, parsley, fresh basil leaves, thyme, and garlic if you like it. And you add penne rigate pasta into it, and grated parmigiano cheese if you like it. Serve it hot or cold, it's either delicious ! Grandma had a cooler with her in her cab and she could provide us with such delicacies. Unlike most of her fellow truckers coworkers, Grandma is someone who's not satisfied by a T-bone and mashed-potatoes meal, she had always brought with her good dishes for her meals on the road, always finding a place for her cooler in her cab.

Some of her non-conventional lifestyle habits, for a trucker I mean, had been positively been received by her boss, and also her coworkers. About her cooler, the first one who noticed such an unusual equipemnt was her boss, Jerry O'Brien, late in 1957. Grandma had to do a delivery of some agricultural harware from Denver to a little town known as Wray, in the northeastern side of the state of Colorado. It was in summertime, and she had prepared drinks and food for the road. But, before that, at dawn, she had to take her boss at his home and drive him to a truck rental office.

The business was going well and an extra truck was needed to satisfy a customer in dire need of some freight transportation, the complete fleet at O'Brien's was busy on those days. Grandma arrived with her truck in front of the O'Brien's family house right on time, at 7.30 am. Her boss had just finished to have his breakfast and he was pleased to see that Grandma was perfectly on schedule :

“Mornin' boss, got the stuff for the farmers here, I've loaded it yesterday in the evening before going home... You've got a rental truck for this contract ?

— Yep, a shipment from Henderson Automation on the east coast, I had to pick it up at the railway freight station, and deliver it to Silver Mountain Mine. Some mining stuff, they can't wait too log for it... West Denver Rentals got me a flatbed four wheeled Peterbilt, I'll get the job done with it... Marsha, what's in this box, on the passenger's size ?

— Uh, that's my cooler. I've put in it my tomato salad for lunch, and some home-made iced tea. One bottle of peach, and one of lime, that'll be a good deal for the road. Put it besides, you'll get enough room for your feet.

— You drink iced tea ? That's something only my kids want to swallow at home.

— I drink tea anytime of the year, iced in summer, hot in winter. That's a tradition at home, and iced tea is sometimes the only non-alcoholic beverage I can find at a trucker's café. I'm sometimes the only customer to ask for such a drink.

— Teetotaller, ain't you ?

— Well, not really. . . . But drinking a beer or a glass of vodka, it's only within my family for things like birthdays, Sunday lunches or holidays. Daily, that's tea for me, and nothing else.

— Mmmmm. . . . One good point for you Marsha. . . ."

Jerry O'Brien was very sensitive to the use of alcohol by his employees because the driver who was seated in Grandma's seat before her had problems with alcohol. One day, he took the wrong way at full speed with his truck, driving straight forward instead of turning left, and he bogged his van truck in a freshly plowed field near Fort Morgan, CO. That was the last of a long series of DWI situations at O'Brien's Trucking Co, and Jerry told this dude that he had to send his best regards to Mr. U. R. Fired by now. In dire need of a trucker, he reluctantly hired Grandma on his payroll instead of this drunkard, taking the only trucker in the promotion that nobody wanted to have in his roster, a female truck driver named Marsha Rosenbaum, spouse Zieztinski.

This day, Jerry O'Brien had another good reason to say that the other business owners who didn't hire Grandma were jerks. And that was not the only good point of the day. With alcoholism, another plague of truck drivers is heavy smoking. Grandma had never smoked, and Grandpa had to quit smoking to be a cook for hygiene reasons. So, my grandmother was very aggressive towards her coworkers who turned a truck cab into a giant ashtray, and she had a special thing of her to change the smell of a truck cab, something that Jerry, her boss discovered this day :

"Tell me, you're a non-smoker too, that's a good point to help me to prevent the other dudes to turn our trucks cabs into garbage dump with their cigarettes. What's smelling now ? Something of your own ?

— Yep, I've put a cotton soaked with Eau de Cologne in a small glass jar, a small mustard pot is enough to do the job, and I just have to open the lid to have this good smell. I do this every time in the truck I'm driving, you like it ?

— Yeah, I take your idea for me, that's fuckin' good !

— You did not noticed it before ?

— No, I had just quit smoking for one month now, and I'm just beginning to smell things correctly. What a chance for you to have not started !"

This evening, Grandma had another hundred mile to drive to get her 450 miles a day, and she had planned to stop for the night at a truck stop she knows in Junction City, KS. For this first day of travel, we had crossed the eastern half of Colorado and the western three quarters of Kansas. We had an hundred miles more to drive before stopping for the night, and we kept on going after 8.00 pm, local time.

Over the flat land of Kansas, the sun was setting down, turning the white light of the day into a magical orange one, coloring the sky with its fire-like tones. The air was cooler and the night was coming fast. We passed Salina after sunset, when the last lights of the day faded over the Prairie. With the usual traffic of the interstate diminishing, Grandma had more clearance to drive at highway speed all along, sticking the tachometer needle at a steady double nickel. Watching the road ahead of us, lighted by the truck's headlights, was a fascinating show for me.

I also clearly remembered having seen the lights of the town of Junction City appearing suddenly out of nowhere ahead of us, into the dark prairie, below the starry sky of this summer night. Grandma had a good place for all of us to spend the night, and it was just a few miles ahead. In the US, you have a great choice of truck

stops, but some of them were seedy places back in the '70s. Of course, you can find such places nearby big cities, with hookers, drug dealers and other low-life people, but not all truck stops are like that.

Middle-aged truckers, like Grandma was in 1974, tends to prefer nice places in small towns, or in the countryside, with decent security and lots of facilities, from convenience stores to truckers cafés with a family-like atmosphere, clean showers, quiet and guarded parking places and truck-designed fuel stations. And this trend, initiated in the '70s, had turned spending a night at a truck stop from a walk in the wild side to a comfy stop. And, in the mid '70s, the trend to change truck stops from a roadside skid row to a nice place to be had changed the bulk of them into something civilized.

Grandma is not someone who's looking for strong sensations, and she wanted to be in a quiet place after having her day at work done. She began interstate trucking in the early '60s when truck stops were minimalist, and were places of choice for prostitutes to get their customers. . . With an ageing and increase in size population of truckers, and problems caused by seedy truck stops, the trend to change them into something more pleasant began, with great efforts done. What she was doing with my sister and me in 1974, she would had blatantly rejected the idea to do so in 1964 with Mom and aunt Rachel as her passengers.

The Southern Junction City Truck stop is one of those new places designed for truckers who want a rest, not an adventure, after a day at work. We had to get out of the interstate, drive a mile southwards and find our stop on a quiet place in the fields. The main selling argument of this place is its guarded parking, \$1 a night in 1974, with facilities for truckers including a fuel station and showers. Grandma parked her truck and we all three went to have a shower before going to bed. The shower attendant was not surprised to see Grandma with two little girls, this place is also used by ordinary tourists driving huge RVs :

“Good evening ma'am, you're in for a shower ?

— Yep, that's a long way from Denver, but it was a good ride. It's \$1 for everyone ?

— Half price for youngsters, and free below the age of 5, like your youngest daughter, I guess ?

— My youngest granddaughter in fact. . . So, Linda, Siobhan, you'll have the lower bunk for you two, I'll take the upper one. We'll wake up tomorrow at 7.

— You get something for breakfast Grandma ?

— We'll see for that in the café near the fuel station tomorrow in the morning Linda. So, let's go to the shower, it's late !”

After the shower, we all went to bed. Grandma, as she use to do, took with her the 12 gage pump gun she always have in her cab, remnant of her firsts journeys as an interstate truck driver. As she said, when you hear a deer slug fired by this gun buzzing two inches beside your ears, it means that you had pissed off a trucker and you'll just have to turn your heels and run like hell away if you want to live. Grandma had used her gun several times in the '60s, when coyotes tried to stole her cargo, and bartenders tried to screw her with the loose change. . .

This evening of our first day on the road with Grandma ended below a starry night in Kansas. On the bunk, Linda had fell asleep in a matter of seconds after we went to sleep, and Grandma did the same on the bunk over us. I discreetly had a

look outside through the curtain of the sleeper's window and I saw the quiet parking place outside, with rows of trucks parked all along, and the stars in the sky over us. I did not watch this landscape for a long time. Feeling sleepy, I went back to bed besides my eldest sister and I fell asleep immediately. For a quiet night far away from home...

The next morning, we woke up after dawn for a breakfast at the roadside dinner before going back on the road. With the teapot, a delicious bowl of apple purée with cinnamon and some pancakes, Grandma showed us on her road atlas the way we had to drive to go eastwards. I had always been fascinated by maps, colorful abstract pictures of real landscapes and, even if I was unable to read at the age of 4, I had clearly understood the conventional patterns used on the maps : red lines for the roads, blue for the rivers, brown spots for the cities... Grandma showed us the planned journey of the day :

"Here we are sweeties... We're here, in Junction City, and we have to go this way. Next city we crossed will be Topeka, this small spot on the map...

— And the huge one here Grandma, which city is it ?

— That's Kansas City Siobhan, one of the two big cities on our way today... Then, we'll stop here, in Concordia, for lunch.

— That's in Missouri, another state !

— Well seen Linda, and we'll drive to Effingham, in Illinois, to stop for the night. There's another big city here...

— Linda please, can you read me the name ?

— That's Saint Louis. And the river crossing the city is the Mississippi !

— Yeah Linda, we'll have the time to see it when we'll crossed Saint Louis. I'll stay on the right lane for you to see it... So, we have to go, I have to fill the fuel tanks before going back on the highway, let's go !"

As a customer's requested equipment, Grandma's truck was fitted with a long range tank with a capacity of 200 gallons of diesel fuel. With a 3-4 mpg mean consumption, that gave her around 500 statute miles of practical range, enough to drive a complete day without being obliged to refuel midway. With the previous generation of trucks, interstate drivers had to refuel around noon after starting their working day at 7-8 am to stop after 8-9 pm, losing time to refuel twice a day with the casual 100 gallons tank as standard issue. That's why Jerry O'Brien, Grandma's boss, had put more money on the table to have larger tanks : filled up in the morning, and nothing to add 'till sunset.

Another very interesting feature for Grandma was the then-new use of a credit card to pay for her fuel. Provided by Visa Card Professional Services, this payment service was a great plus for truck drivers, and their employers too. First, safety. From the mid-fifties to the early seventies, Grandma and her coworkers had to take with them cash money to pay for the fuel. And a \$100 or more amount in cash in the '60s was very attractive to all kinds of thugs... Grandma had to fire her 12 gage a dozen times at such coyotes to avoid being stolen, or worse. As she said, a deer slug buzzing in the air calms downs many people, and another one right between the eyes do the same for the remaining ones...

BankAmericard Visa marketed their professional credit cards to small businesses beginning in the late '60s, and O'Brien's Trucking Company opened a professional account in October 1971 for their truckers, with a professional card issued per trucker. No more cash money on board for the fuel, easiest billing and less paperwork for the boss, this service had fastly become a must-have for all small trucking businesses. At this time, you did not have electronic devices to secure your payment. It was the press with the carbon ticket you have to print with your embossed card number, sign and get a copy for you, a copy for the shop keeper and a copy for the bank.

To see my Grandma pay her fuel with a small plastic card slid into this kind of printing device, and get a bill back, it was something new and fascinating for me. In my family, we did not have credit cards before the mid '80s and, surprisingly, my stepbrother, who's French, had seen his Dad use his own credit card first in 1975. The main reason for that it's because when you're in the center of France, if you drive 500 miles in any direction within land, you are for sure in a foreign country. And, to have easily and safely local money in a western European country, the use of a credit card was the best way to do it. And you also were able to pay directly outside your homeland with an international credit card and a business that provides such a service.

In the US, you have a country the size of a continent, and if you have your account in a great national bank, you can withdraw cash at any counter nationwide, lessening the need for such a service outside professionals. That is why blue-collar families are low users of banking services like that. I get mine only when I started to work as an airline pilot in 1992, having to spend nights away from home and not having time to go to a bank to get some cash money to pay me some food, for instance. Linda, with her career in the military, got her own when she was at the Annapolis Naval Academy.

And her kinkiest use of such a card was in Panama in December 1989. With her platoon, she had to secure Panama City post office and, having no local currencies with her, she went to a local ATM outside the post office, under escort by two of her Marines, to get some cash to buy postcards and stamps to write home to tell all the family that everything was OK for her into this phoney war, where she didn't even fire a blankshot... That was a great moment of fun to read her postcards in Denver while seeing President Bush on TV talking about this shitty police dragnet sold as a major war...

This morning, Grandma had paid her fuel with her professional credit card, and seeing the salesman passing the remainder of the credit card's payment board back and forth over the paper bill to print the embossed card number on it was something interesting for me. Now, you have, in the US, electronic payments terminals you can use with the magnetic tape of your card to pay with a direct computer connexion to your bank, simplest and safest. But not as what my stepbrother has with his Canadian bank: an integrated chip in his card he calls an "eurochip", technically called an EMV, for Europay Mastercard and Visa.

It is a very useful active control using a dual-link electronic connexion between your card and your bank via a computerized terminal that unlocks the payment with a personal identification number you have to type in the keypad of the terminal, securing the transaction. With a classical magnetic tape, you have only a single link,

the bank read the tape and nothing more. With an EMV, you have an active control with a PIN code to enter to unlock the payment, and a cryptologic number stored in the chip that can be modified by the bank at every transaction to prevent fraud. And we don't have that in the US yet (planned to be phased in between 2015 and 2017), when even countries like Poland or Ukraine have EMV credit card systems. . .

This morning, after having paid \$99.75 for 175 gallons of diesel fuel (you can't get the same below \$700 today), Grandma put us, Linda and I, on the passenger seat and went back to her driver's position. That was the start for the next leg of our journey :

"Okay sweeties, let's walk the dog !"

A big rig starting is always something really rock'n'roll for me. Grandma made the engine coughed by turning the starter's key and made it run, awakening the road beast with the growl of the idling engine. Then, having her 90 psi of air for the brakes, she released the trailer's parking brake, then the tractor's one, by pushing two valves on the dashboard, making sounding two puffs of compressed air. Then, with another puffing sound from the air-assisted clutch pedal, she opened the clutch, engaged the second gear and, with a precise push on the throttle, Grandma made the truck started forward, softly but firmly.

With the growling sound of the V8 at low rpm, we went out of the truck center and turned towards the Interstate 70 at low speed. Then, before turning right to go on the interstate, Grandma let a sedan with a family aboard turn left in front of us to reach the interstate. Then, it was our turn. Clutching the dog in second gear, Grandma turned right and entered the entrance ramp. Then, after having cleared the entrance with the trailer, she unleashed the beast, turning the doggie growl of the engine into a wolf's roar by pushing down the throttle, racing the truck at his highway speed in a matter of seconds.

And the most fascinating thing was her way to clutch the gears up, a real dance floor training : clutch down-neutral-rpm drop-clutch down-gear-up-clutch up-throttle up, and this way up to the fifth gear and a decent speed of 45 mph just before reaching the end of the entrance ramp (called the injection track by my stepbrother, a designation I find too medical. He's a M. D., that explains it. . .). Then, with the truck still accelerating, she swiftly engaged it on the right lane of the highway, finally reaching the cruise speed of 55 mph, giving her dog his daily mileage of interstate to savour.

I've already told you about this, a eighteen wheeler is, for me, like a rock'n'roll band. The hit that comes to my mind when I'm thinking about Grandma and her dog is *Born to be wild* by Steppenwolf. Heavy metal thunder, that's exactly what can describe the sound made by a big rig racing along an interstate, perfect encounter between raw engine power and driver's craftsmanship. And, for this, Grandma is an expert, moving nearly 80,000 pounds of metal up to 55 mph top speed, with a precision of an inch and the smoothness of a mother rocking her newborn child in its cradle. No cracks in the gearbox, no hiccup in the clutch, every move both fluid and straight, done with the perfect combination of power and delicacy needed. The dream of every trucking business owner, and of his mechanic, happy to see their fleet treated as gently as fairy tale princesses, with the fuel consumption and the mechanical wear peaking their lower values possibles.

Grandma's driving instructor told her that her way to drive a truck would be her best asset to get a job, customers use to hate to have their freight shook by a macho-

style trucker racing his big rig like a race car. And that was why Grandma had top priority for fragile loads like china, glasses, window panes and stuff like that. Jerry get priority contracts like that because he had a trucker who did not shake, rattle and roll the trucks she drove. You cannot drive a semi box van with 40,000 pounds of china as freight like a log truck on a dirt road.

Grandma's delicacy in driving gets her an extra on her chauffeur's licence paid by her boss, a qualification for liquid transport by tank in 1964. It's obvious that, for instance, when you have to deliver 20,000 gallons of milk, you have to take care to not turn it into butter before reaching your destination. . . That's also an extra on the pay, and more contracts for the boss. And delicate driving is always useful, regardless of the freight.

O'Brien's trucking company had also logging contracts in the summer : big rigs were sent in the forests of the Rockies around Denver to pick fresh cut wood and drove it to the sawmills. To do that, trucks have to travel on dirt roads in the forests, and that's something which requires a good touch of the driver : deep ruts, slippery and swampy dirt roads are traps for truckers, and a bogged truck is something common if you have a careless driver. Grandma had never bogged a truck, and she had driven thousand of miles of dirt roads in the forests of Colorado.

This morning, we had to cross two cities before leaving Kansas to enter Missouri. The first one was Topeka. We reached it one hour and a quarter after having departed from Junction City. The main point is that you have two possibilities to cross the city using an interstate : the straight road, north side along the Kansas river, slower but shorter, and sometimes jammed with crosstown traffic, and the diversion road, south of the city, longest but not speed-limited at 40 mph like the north road, and less frequently jammed. By personal preference, Grandma took the north road.

After nearly 600 miles of prairie, Topeka was the first significant city we met on our way to Washington D. C. with its 125,000 inhabitants in 1974 (slightly same figure in 2013 : just below 128,000 people live there). Compared to towns like Junction City, the capital of Kansas is a real urban area. The I-70 crossed it on its north side, alongside the Kansas river, from west to east. At the western interchange, splitting the road between the cross city branch and the southern diversion, connecting itself south of the city with the I-335 to Wichita, the traffic signs indicated the change also gave us the speed limit for cross city traffic, and a specific warning for truck drivers that puzzled my sister :

SPEED LIMIT
ALL TRAFFIC DAY : 40
ALL TRAFFIC NIGHT : 30
TRUCKS : NO JAKE ALLOWED WITHIN CITY LIMITS

“Grandma, why does they not allow truckers named Jake in Topeka ? And why not truckers named Joe or Harry ?

— That ain't the trucker's surname sweetie. It's the name of a device you find on trucks which is called a Jake brake. It's a braking system that shuts down the fuel in the engine, turning it into a huge brake. You use it on downslopes in the mountains, for instance, to avoid using the normal brakes, which could be rendered inefficient if

they are too hot. So, you use the Jake instead, it does the same as the brakes, without heating them.

— And why can't you use in in town ?

— Because it is very noisy, I'll make you ear it working when we'll stop for lunch after Kansas City."

This braking device, whose technical designation is compression release brake, is sold for trucks since 1961 by the Jacobs Vehicle Systems company, first to manufacture it. Its implementation on Mack Truck engines is called the Dynatard®, and Grandma had one on her truck. This systems works by shutting down the fuel input to the engine and, instead of opening wide the exhaust valves when the piston reached is lower point after been pushed by the combustion of fuel and then pushing up the combustion gases to clear the cylinder for another cycle, it shut them and traps the air inside the cylinder, ai released in one shot after the piston reaches its maximum high point.

Then, without fuel burning, the cylinder is filled up with clean air, and the exhaust valves are kept shut until the piston reached its higher point, compressing the air inside and taking energy from the engine, slowing him and the truck through the driving train. The exhaust valves are opened as late as possible to release the compressed air, and another engine braking cycle start until the driver shuts downs the Jake to return to the normal propulsion mode of the engine. The main drawback of this system is the noise produced by the compressed air released in the atmosphere after having been compressed by the engine's cylinders. On a 998 cubic inches V8 engine like my Grandma's truck one, the growl of the Dynatard® you can ear in the cab when it's working turns to a machine-gun like noise outside, not really friendly for the neighborhood. . .

This system is widely used by truckers instead of the mechanical brakes, acting directly on the wheels for slowing the truck by slight braking, for instance when the road ahead had its traffic slowing, limiting speed in a downhill slope or before entering a sharp turn. Standard brake are used only when power braking is required, usually to stop the truck, or where the Jake is prohibited to use. Grandma also had a personal history of surviving a general brake failure driving a truck, back in 1965, and that was what prompted her boss to buy trucks only with compression release brake as a mandatory equipment for his fleet.

That was in the summer of '65 that my Grandma had her first truck crash, due to a faulty vehicle rented to O'Brien's trucking company. In the summer, in the mountains, you have lot of logging works in the forests, works that needs big rigs to take the fresh cut wood from the logging site down to the sawmills and papermills which needs it for their business. So, truck drivers have an increased workload between June and September, an interesting time to get some extra hours paid.

Between two interstate or regional deliveries, Grandma took some logging business to pay her some extras when Jerry O'Brien could take logging contracts. With a busy fleet, he usually did not have enough big rigs to handle the workload. So, he used to dry-lease big rigs to specialized businesses. And, sometimes, with bad surprises. . . In this hot beginning of July 1965, Grandma had to drive to the mountains to pick a load of wood in the forests near Bailey, west of Denver, and drive it down to

a sawmill in Castle Rock, south of Denver. Her boss had driven the same road with another truck the day before, and she was sent there for an extra load.

After having driven two dozen miles of dirt road in the forest aboard a rented truck, Grandma had finally reached the logging camp at sunset. She had been delayed by a delivery she had to do on the road, five pallets of groceries like sugar, flour, cans... to deliver at the local convenience store of the little village of Bailey, a small load Jerry O'Brien took to avoid having a truck running empty. The unloading at Bailey was painful because the shop owner did not have a ramp, and the freight was stored on the logging flatbed, protected by a tarpaulin. So, the pallets had to be broken down one by one, and the packages moved by hand from the street to the shop's storeroom, two hours of work for four, Grandma, the shop owner, his wife and their employee...

Grandma was expected to reach the logging camp for dinner but she finally get there before sunset. By chance, days are long in the beginning of July, and you still have sunlight after 9 pm. It is not recommended to drive at night on a dirt road, even if you're a crack driver. Even with a two hours delay, Jerry O'Brien was happy to meet his best driver at this scheduled destination. He have a serious problem with the truck he had driven there, and he cannot go back home :

"The gearbox is broken, there's nothing else to do than call the jerks who had rented me this piece of shit to ask them for a repair. I cannot clutch any speed on it, the engine runs on empty and the truck don't move at all.

— Mazeltov, ain't a chance, especially with you boss. They'll need to send someone with another truck to tow yours outta there.

— Yep, I have to see with Roddy if he can go there after his trip back from Chicago to pick the load to the papermill in Colorado Springs. You'll drove me tomorrow back at the office in Denver before driving to the sawmill, I'll manage everything from here.

— Okay boss, let's do it like that. I'll wake up at dawn tomorrow, we'll take the trailer with the load already done, that would gain us one hour or two, and the lumberjacks would have all the time they need to fill up the empty one."

At this time, when you've got a stranded truck deep in the forest, you cannot call by satellite telephone, or standard cellphone if you are lucky enough to be within range of a cellphone relay, the hotline of the rental company to have a repair ASAP. Logging works had sometimes a radio to call for emergencies and that was all, you had to travel down the closest town to have news and carry there any kind of information. And a stranded truck with a broken gearbox in the middle of nowhere was a worst case scenario.

By chance, Jerry O'Brien had managed to have some kind of merry-go-round style logistic method that provides one truck followed by another one at a 24 hours interval at the same workplace. So, in case of any problem with the first or the second truck, there always been a backup to prevent a driver from being marooned in the middle of the woods. And that was something good for O'Brien's trucking company this day. Due to a high demand of rental trucks in summer in Colorado, Jerry O'Brien had to rent what was left in Denver, and he had only the option to rent trucks from the poorest truck rental business, Walton's rental, a company plagued by a poor reputation, due to the fact that they were experts in renting derelict vehicles.

Jerry had rented them, out of other possibilities at short notice, two 1956 Peterbilt 351, which were clearly suffering from poor maintenance and careless use. Breaking the gearbox of a truck happens only if you bash your transmission for years, avoid taking care of it or doing both. And the one of the truck driven there by Jerry O'Brien was the only broken gearbox that Grandma saw in more than four decades of truck driving. But, as business should go on as usual, you have to cope with it. Next morning, Jerry O'Brien and Grandma drove back to Denver with the remaining functional truck. Which went into troubles on the way back home. . .

From Bailey to Denver, you have a direct road with the 285, which passes between Lakewood and Columbine, before intersecting with the 85 five miles south of Downtown Denver. Turn left, drive five miles northwards and you're in Denver. But, with this truck, the problem was not with the gearbox. . . Grandma, driving it, had the bad surprise to see that something went wrong when she entered the downslope of the 285 towards Denver, after the eastward turn of the road at Indian Hills :

"Dreck ! What's the hell with the brakes ?

— Marsha, don't tell me you have overheated them !

— The pedal goes all the way down without any resistance ! . . . I don't understand, the air pressure indicator give me a 100 psi ! This should not. . ."

The brake pressure indicator was as faulty as the rest of the truck and, before Grandma had finished her sentence, the pin indicator, which was clearly jammed, suddenly dropped from service pressure to zero, telling the driver that the air pressure brake was not working at all. . . On a downslope at a speed over 50 mph, with no brake, that was the worst case scenario for a driver : a full loaded runaway truck. . . Jerry O'Brien was not really pleased to be in such a situation, especially when Grandma told him that things were going from bad to worse :

"The clutch is jammed too, I can't downshift ! Jerry, if you have any idea, that would be helpful !

— Except prayers, I don't. . . Marsha, Grantham spirits, their factory, can you figure what it looks like ?

— Yeah, that's at the southwestern entrance of Lakewood. . . See ya ! The wasteland in front, I can use it to stop by running on it to stall the truck.

— That'll be a bumpy ride but we have nothing left ! You'll have all the room you need to stop there !

— Got it ! . . . Hang on, I'll try to avoid killing motorists for the next miles ahead of us by now !"

In 1965, the Grantham Spirits distillery, specialized in industrial alcohol, had his factory near the crossroads of the 285 and the 121 roads, south of Lakewood. The area surrounding the factory was not a suburban neighborhood like it is now in 2013, it was a scarcely populated area with a few farms and some small industries. Apart the 285 road, then a two-lanes rural paved road (expanded later into a four-lanes suburban highway), the area was connected to the rest of the state by the now defunct Bear Creek and Western Denver Railroad, a third class railroad built in the beginning of the 20th century to provide transportation to the local sawmills in this area.

This availability of an heavy transportation system had attracted some small industries along its road, from its interchange with the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad where the interchange between the 285 and the 85 had been built later in Englewood,

to its terminus in Arvada, serving South Lakewood, Columbine via a branch line, and Golden. All along its road, several industries, including Grantham Spirits, had built their factories, taking advantage of easy heavy transportation and cheap land.

With the advent of the road transportation, and the Great Depression, lots of industries along the road closed, or switched to road transportation. The Bear Creek and Western Denver Railroad had to cut back its track to a line from Englewood interchange to Golden in the mid- '30s. It survived with an increase of traffic during the second world war and went bankrupted in 1947, all the small industries along the line were shut down. The end of military orders, the changes for larger factories and the road transportation increase after the end of the war killed the railroad. And the only industry left in this area was Grantham Spirits.

They bought the track of the defunct Bear Creek and Western Denver Railroad between their factory and Englewood to have a connexion of their own with the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad. As a great user of huge volumes of grain for their production, they need it delivered straight from the silos of the Prairies to their processing plant via railroad cars. So, they need to have a direct connexion with a class 1 railroad, even if they have to pay for it. They did it by buying the track of the Bear Creek and Western Denver they needed in 1947 but, more than a decade after, this appeared to be only a stopgap solution.

What was a good deal in 1912 when the factory was built there became a drag fifty years later : isolation from the residential areas and the main roads meant lack of attractivity to have workers, increased transportation costs for the manufactured products and, last nail in the coffin, the railroad tracks which needed a major overhaul to handle the new generation of heavy 120 tons grain hopper cars then phased in by all the class 1 railroads. The days of the Grantham Spirits distillery, also plagued by outdated and non conform to safety standards equipment, were counted.

In 1965, the owners had decided to abandon the factory and build a new one in Englewood, located in the new industrial area besides the DRGW Railroad main line. The new factory opened in 1968, the old one and its railroad track became industrial ruins before being scrapped when the municipalities of Columbine and Lakewood reclaimed the land in the late '70s and early '80s to built residential areas there. And the truck crash, which involved my grandmother in July 1965, helped the investors to take the good decision, then pending funds from the shareholders of Grantham Spirits LLC.

With a runaway truck impossible to stop, Grandma had to swirl around the other vehicles on the road at the same time with her, and that was dreadful. She barely escapes three head-on collision and was close to send half a dozen of motorists out of the road. Jerry O'Brien had chosen the Grantham Spirits distillery as a crash site for several reasons. First, they have a rescue team of their own, and the possibility to call an ambulance and the Lakewood fire department by phone for immediate assistance. Second, they have a wide wasteland in front of their factory, a raw flat land with bushes that can act as emergency brakes when the truck will plow through them. And third, the factory came after a long and flat road, a nearly two miles of straight road, a last occasion to have a decrease of speed by using the then desert shoulders of the road to avoid traffic and take profit of the bushes and the soft ground to loose some mph.

Grandma arrived at a speed which had been estimated to be slightly over 85 mph, with her loaded runaway truck on the final straight section of the 285 before the Grantham Spirits factory. Overtaking another big rig by the right shoulder of the road, she desperately waited for an occasion to cross the road safely to run on the left shoulder, but the traffic was too dense, preventing the move :

“Dreck ! Why does everyone in this state drives on this fuckin’ road today ?

— Marsha, you’ve got a spot between the green car and the truck !

— See it !”

Grandma finally crossed the road and, with a tight margin of less than a hundred feet before an head-on collision, she ran on the left shoulder of the road. Grantham Distillery was just an half-mile away, and the factory building was clearly visible ahead. The plan was simple, and Grandma told it to her boss :

“I’ll crossed the wasteland in the front of the factory after having shut the engine, it’s a desert land, we’ll have a quarter mile to stop before entering the 121. And if it’s not enough, we’ll go backwards off the road on the wasteland.

— Okay Marsha, do it !

— Hang on boss, we’re . . . OUCH !

— Marsha ? . . . MARSHA !”

As a complete application of Murphy’s law, everything went wrong by now, and in the worst way possible. Grandma had turned towards the outer wall of the Grantham Distillery, a quarter mile away from the road, but the truck unexpectedly bumped over a huge hump of the terrain, and Grandma was stunned when she knocked her forehead on the steering wheel. Unconscious, she cannot stop the engine running and, worse, she pressed the throttle at full blast, accelerating the truck towards the wall of the factory. In this situation, the truck had no other choice than broke on through to the other side of the factory’s outer wall, what it did.

The big rig punched his way through the brick wall and into the huge tank behind, a 100 feet long by 20 feet diameter tank filled up to the top with 70° rectified alcohol intended for sale as a basis for retailer brand vodka : add water with flavoring agents to have a 40° beverage, put into bottles and sell it in retail stores as a entry-level vodka. With Grandma who’s not a drinker at all, that was really the best proof that if G** exists, he’s Jew because he have a screwy sense of humor . . .

The truck entered the tank at one of his side and, with the pressure, it blows it up completely, twisting the stainless steel like banana peels, and spilling thousands of gallons of alcohol on the floor of the factory. Fortunately, the Grantham Spirits management had made built a containing wall on the floor around the set of three storage tanks installed in this zone of the main factory building, preventing the spilled alcohol to flow all around. Grandma had punched some kind of door through the wall and the tank, turned into giant twisted slices of torn metal, had the stalled truck sitting atop what was its bottom before the collision.

There was there the known and the unknown and, between them, you didn’t need to cleanse anything to see that it was a real mess. First thing Jerry O’Brien did after the crash : get Grandma out of here. Still unconscious, she was not responding, and the driver’s door was jammed shut. Jerry had to carry her over the passenger’s seat to pull her out of the cab and, helped by the emergency team of the factory, he laid her on a stretcher :

“She’s my driver, dunno what happened to her, call an ambulance !

— Don’t worry sir, replied a member of the emergency team. The fire department is on its way. . . She’s got some kind of cut on her forehead, that ain’t looking too bad. She’s breathing normally, that’s a good thing.

— Hope she have nothing broken. . . Marsha, it’s Jerry, can you hear me ?

— Uh ? . . . Boss, what the dreck is happening here ? . . . Feel like I’m completely floating in the air, that’s fuckin’ weird !

— The alcohol, replied a factory worker. She had swallowed some with the crash, was she unconscious when you hit the tank ?

— Yep, answered Jerry O’Brien, she was stunned by the steering wheel, that’s why she didn’t manage to stop the truck outside. . .

— Hey boss, why do the fuckin’ hell do I smell like an Irish Christmas pudding ?

— That’s nothing Marsha, you have a bad cut on the head, you’ll get an accident leave at the hospital, the ambulance is on its way. . .”

The final results of the crash were a 235,000 gallons tank destroyed, nearly the same volume of rectified alcohol lost, a truck and its trailer destroyed, 50,000 pounds of wood ruined for the carpenter’s use they were planned for, small bruises to Jerry O’Brien and a bad cut on Grandma’s forehead. With a post-Saint Patrick day’s hang-over the morning after. . . Grandpa saw her at the hospital on the afternoon, when she was able to stand up a normal conversation. The doctor who treated her told Grandpa before that her situation was not critical :

“On the x-rays, we had seen that your wife had no fracture, she’s only have a cut that requires sutures, that would be healed in a week or two. The most important now, its the drawback of her alcohol intoxication, you’ve been told that she rammed into a tank with her truck.

— Yes, her boss told me so. He also told me that she had prevented other motorists from being killed by her runaway truck. Would she have problems with all this alcohol she had swallowed in the crash ?

— No, she won’t. She’s not a drinker, and that is the main thing that is helping her for the detoxification. Her intoxication won’t go farther than a bad headache and some dizziness, that would be OK for her tomorrow in the morning. We’ll keep her for two more days for medical survey and blood analysis, just a precaution, but we have seen nothing abnormal with her since her admission.

— Thanks doctor, I’ll bring her the good news, she’ll be happy with that.”

Grandma had a rude awakening in the morning, the first and only time in her life she had to cope with an Irish-style hangover. In this afternoon, she was less sick but she still needed medical attention, as she told Grandpa :

“The guy who tried to open my skull with a jackhammer had stopped his work two hours ago but I still have my stomach full of axle grease. That would be OK tomorrow in the morning, as the doctor said. Mazeltov, I don’t understand why people are drinking so much that they became as sick as I am now.

— The doctor told me that you have no problems besides your intoxication, you just need some rest honey. . . The girls are waiting for you at home, I told them that I’ll brought them here tomorrow, you’ll be in better condition.

— Thanks honey, I’m too sick now to be able to talk to them. . . Got news from Jerry ?

— He's worrying for you, I can tell him that you're OK. He told me that there is brass from the state department of transportation who are making a complete investigation on your truck. Jerry's insurance is also on it, they told him that you are a crack driver, you have prevented at least a dozen crashes by driving the way you did.

— Good news, that's a good thing that there is no one else but me in this hospital with this crash. Wouldn't be the guys at Walton's Truck Rental by now !"

For the aftermath of this incident, as you can guess, the faulty rental company was blamed for all the consequences : non roadworthy vehicles proposed for rental, insufficient maintenance with sub-standard procedures, and deliberate acquisition of low-end second-hand vehicles proposed for rental with minimal preparation. Cornered both by the Colorado DoT and Jerry's insurance, Walton's Truck Rental went out of business at the end of 1965, its boss was prosecuted and jailed for criminal negligence by lack of proper safety precautions, and fraud by selling substandard service.

Grandma recovered fastly from her medical problems and she acquired a strong taste for pineapple juice at the hospital. To help her to recover from her intoxication, the doctors gave her pineapple juice to drink, an easy way to get back the vitamins you had lost by alcohol abuse. Grandma is not a tropical fruit user and the taste of pineapple was something new for her at this time. She liked it and she's still drinking some every week as a delicacy. Final thought : she gets a \$250 reward from her boss for her exceptional driving skills, close to one half month of pay at this time. The equivalent of the Medal of Honor in Jerry's professional rewards hierarchy.

We entered the section of the I-70 which is a part of the Kansas Turnpike after having traveled through Topeka without incident. We had to pass a toll barrier to get a ticket for the toll booth at the exit, to pay the right price for our journey on this turnpike. For a Topeka-Kansas City ride with a class 8 truck, you had to pay \$3.50 in 1974. That's \$14.50 today for the same kind of vehicle. On the radio, Grandma had switched to her favorite music and news station, before talking on the CB to have news of the traffic condition ahead :

"... On WKSFG radio, for the cool hours of the morning with Stephen Szaplinski. Now, after a very nice tune by the British singer Cat Steven, titled "Oh very Young", another cool hit from Great Britain with the famous Rolling Stones, and their famous tune "Angie", from their last year's LP, "Goats head soup". And, after that, another taste of England with Led Zeppelin's hit "Over the hills and far away", from their LP "Houses of the Holy". Stay tuned on WKSFG radio !..."

— They ain't broadcasting the guy who played some kind of tropical music I heard some days before, can't catch back his name... Ah ! Gotcha ! Eric Clapton ! Some song about a sheriff... .

— It's music to get high Grandma ? did I asked, very interested. Like Dad use to listen to at home.

— Not that kind, more the kind of music you're listening to on the beach, when you're in holidays... Hi Kansas dudes, here's Marsha the Mountaineer, I'm on the turnpike east of Topeka, does anyone have a tip on the road condition here ?

— *Goddammit ! You're truckin' here Marsha ? Here's Road Nazi speaking, I'm down from Chicago to Wichita, some bulk fertilizer to deliver, and you ?*

— Patriotic hardware dude : an electronic brain from Honeywell and propeller blades for the Navy. Delivery in Norfolk.

— *Wow, that's a long road from Denver, pretty Interstate job you've doing here.*

— Thanks dude, that's between two logging duties in the mountains. Got some news of Sergeant Dork ?

— *Nope yet, last time I heard him, he was delivering some freight near Detroit last month. He's from Saint Louis, you'd certainly hear him on the radio if he's on duty near his hometown. . . Ah, about the traffic, I hear some dudes talking about weight control and Irish bagpipe by the bears east of Kansas City. I have seen nothing but I give you the tip, might be useful.*

— Thanks dude, have a nice trip, and Heil your Dad !

— *Heil Daddy, and, last thing, I saw a dime on the shoulder of the turnpike five miles west of the Bonner Spring interchange. It's on the westward shoulder lane, if you're interested. . .*

— Mazeltov, I'll have to do a U-turn at the Bonner Spring interchange, but that's worth for a dime, thanks for the tip !

— *Yeah Marsha, I was sure that you'll be interested, I'll keep this one for you. You know, below one buck, I ain't moving, got my gas bill to pay. . . "*

Both Grandma and Road Nazi, real name Jason Miller, from Chicago, laughed at this exchange of humorous stereotypes. Grandma is an expert in Jewish humor, especially harsh one. Her favorite signature is to yell "Hello antisemites !" when she's entering a trucker's dinner. About trucker dinner, when she drove her first regional delivery, from Denver to Cheyenne, Wyoming, she had to spend the night in a trucker's roadside hotel and dinner for the first time. And, in 1956, a female trucker was something never seen before. When Grandma entered the dinner to book a room for the night and have a good meal, the keeper thought at first sight that she was in the wrong place, and he told her :

"Hem, madam. . . Excuse-me to tell you that but, hem. . . You're in a trucker's dinner, not quite a place for a lady like you, you see. . . There is lot of men here, they're not used to see women when they're out of their home for work, and. . . This might be disturbing for them, you see. . .

— So mister, let me guess. . . I'm a trucker too, do you mind that I am too ugly to get gang-raped here ?"

Grandma's blunt and humorous answer made all the truckers present in the dinner laugh, and the hotel boss made her a discount on the dinner for this premiere. This night, as a married woman who had fight to be one of them, Grandma was invited by some coworkers to share about her working experience, and that was an unexpected pleasant evening. Fifteen years later, in another dinner, she met a female trucker who told her that one of the guy who was at the table with her was her Dad, and she choose this job after he told her he met Grandma in this dinner.

With other male coworkers, Grandma had never met any problem. She has always been seen as one of them, having the same job, the same blue-collar family background, the same union card, and be able to listen to some topics men usually never spoke about, like family affairs. One thing she fastly mastered with her trucker occupation is the ability to detect a forthcoming bar fight. With her sense of observation, she can predict who's gonna hit who, in which delay and for which reason. And

warn in time the other dudes to duck and cover under the tables to avoid being hit by flying beer bottles, bar stools or other objects.

Grandma became well-known in the trucker's community for her professional skills, her good temper, her multiple tips outside the trucking occupation, from cooking recipes to good ways to handle a wet coat and stuffs like that, and her helping hand toward other truckers or motorists in distress. She helped many people stranded along the roads, sometimes spending an hour with her tools to revive a stalled car engine, or towing a bogged truck out of a soft shoulder.

On the roads of Colorado, she gets fastly a reputation of expert in Jewish jokes among the local truckers, and "A funny tale from Marsha" became a common expression to introduce a typical Jewish story. And Grandma is an expert in this matter, sometimes confusing her own family about the humorous nature of her claims. My sister Linda had been fooled by one of Grandma's joke she thought it was a real fact about Jews. One day in school, speaking about what are the different religious beliefs you can find in the US, Linda gave the example of Jewish faith and gave, as examples, the names of four Jewish holidays : Hannukah, Pessah, Yom Kippour and Pogrom, the last one being a special Jewish holiday made to get the Christians happy... Of course, the joke is from Grandma.

Other Grandma's joke but, this time, I was the believer : when I was six years old, I saw for the first time a Mercedes-Benz sedan parked near my school. I immediately noticed the famous logo of the manufacturer on top of the front grille of the car, the three branches sign into a circle. Grandma, who had picked me up at school with Linda to brought us back home, explained to me that this sign was, in fact, a crosshair mounted on the cars by the Nazis in Hitler's Germany to help the drivers to aim correctly when they saw a Jew crossing the street, and not missing to run over him...

Born the day the Reichstag burned in Berlin, Grandma have dozens of Jewish stories like that, and also dozens of situations where she had use her sharp sense of humor in real life against selected targets. The best of all of her jokes was in 1971, and it was put on a right-wing antisemitic radio host in Denver. Live on the radio, this dude was complaining live against the fact that high society Jewish people were selling US by the pound to foreign interests, his usual business model.

Not shy about ridiculing this jerk live, Grandma gave a phone call to the radio show, which was broadcasting questions of people from his audience, and she was smart enough to give a false question to pass the filtering by the radio's switchboard operator. Then, she was broadcasted live and she gave a great moment of typical Jewish humor, here is the transcript from Grandma :

"Well, we have one of our patriots from Denver, Colorado, miss Marsha Zieztinski, questioning our irresponsible governmental financial policy. Go on Marsha, you're on the air.

— *Thanks dude. That's just about one point you've put forward. You said that Jewish people are selling out our national assets for their own sake, that's a lot of money to them, ain't it ?*

— You're right Marsha. And you also right to say that they are doing this only for their own sake. What's your question ?

— *Well, I'm Jewish myself, and a little bit short of money right now, can you tell me who I have to ask to get my share of this sale ? Thanks for the tip dude, and have a nice day."*

That was a real piece of Jewish humor, but I suspect Grandma to have invented all of this, because I am unable to find witnesses of such a joke. Knowing her, the reality of this story won't surprise me, if you can confirm it, call me at USA Transportation Group headquarters, North Shore Heights, Long Island, state of New York, USA, we're on the phone book, input "corporate management". But, for the moment, Grandma was focused on the road. We were approaching Kansas City, the largest city on our road since we left Denver, and the traffic around us was increasing. Also, the landscape was changing, switching from the desperately flat plain of Kansas to a more hilly surrounding, with the Kansas River valley and its tributaries digging their way through the plains around there.

And, more visible, the increased presence of human activities which became more and more visible as we drove closer from Kansas City. And, after having passed at the south of the Kansas City Speedway, we passed on the interchange with the I-435 and entered a suburban residential area of Kansas City. Less than five miles later, the turnpike entered into the Kansas River Valley, passing between the industrial areas on the right bank of the river, and the residential suburbs on the north.

After a wide turn and the passing of the Kansas River, we were driving on the I-70 through Kansas City downtown, cutting a shorter road by using the I-670 branch of the interstate to drive through the city. The speed limit plunged down to 35 mph and the cross city traffic was dense, requiring all the attention of our grandmother, who had to slide her eighteen wheeler between the lines of cars of the usual city's daily traffic. The exit signs indicated streets and avenues instead of towns, the landscape was a continuation of buildings of different sizes instead of fields, and the motorists driving there were locals commuting between work and home, or going to the local supermarket to do some shopping.

I saw some trucks in the city, three of them were medium-size delivery trucks, one was a dumper, probably driving from or to a construction site, and the last one was a garbage truck from the municipal services. We drove eastwards through the endless suburbs of Kansas City, crossing the small Blue River, and finally leaving the huge city area after the suburban town of Grain Valley. The interstate became rural for the next dozens of miles, and Grandma had planned to stop for lunch in a dinner in the little town of Concordia, at one hour of road east of Kansas City.

The Missouri landscape, still a long series of cultivated field, was more hilly than Kansas, tributaries of the Missouri were cutting their valleys through the flat prairie. Next great city on our journey would be Saint Louis, four hours of road ahead of us, and a change from Missouri state to Illinois, three states in a row in a single day. Grandma had planned to pass Saint Louis and stop for dinner on the road ahead, then drive to the truck stop she had found us for the night in Effingham, Illinois. But then, we had some miles to drive to reach our lunch destination, Concordia, Missouri. We were passing the interchange 49, a crossroad in the middle of nowhere between the I-70 and a local 13 road, with the indication of 10 miles to our destination, and the latest news report on the radio :

"You're listening to WKSFG and here is the 12 o'clock news by Andy Stevens. . . The main headline of our news report today would be the constitutional crisis in Washington D. C. with

President Richard Nixon. The public release of the tape revealing the cover-up of the operation against the Democratic Party directly ordered by President Nixon Tuesday had prompted the last support of members of the congress to the president to collapse, clearly opening the way to an impeachment. With overwhelming evidences of direct presidential input into the Watergate affair, the position of President Nixon is becoming fastly unsustainable. For the moment, no decision had been taken by the President on what he will do to face the impeachment, then stalling all the action of the executive branch in our country. No comment had been done by members of the Republican Party, except governor Ronald Reagan from California, who had told the press that the hypothesis of a resignation of President Nixon was irrelevant. Senator Sam Irvin, chairman of the Senate Watergate Comity, had confirmed that nothing would stop the legal action against the President by now but his immediate resignation. . .

— Still in the White House this thug ? Mazeltov, if you'll have to send the army to get him out of here, that's gonna be fun. . .

— Grandma, the sign says that we're at five miles from Concordia !

— Seen it Linda. . . We've got the time to ear the weather report before stopping, I see clouds coming our way, they had told us yesterday that we can expect thunderstorms here.

— . . .by the French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, this proposal of a coordinated energy policy in the European Economical Community had been positively welcomed by the German chancellor Helmut Schmidt. The question is still under examination by the British government, Prime Minister Harold Wilson said that the coal mining in Great Britain could be an help for Europe's energy policy. . . And now, our weather report with our partner, Sagerton Garden Shops. On this day of the seventh of August, a line of thunderstorms, with local squalls, is coming from east and is now over central Missouri. Heavy rains are expected in the afternoon on western Missouri and Eastern Kansas, with temperature dropping from 95 to 75°F. A second thunderstorm line, now above Indiana, would be over Missouri and Kansas tomorrow in the morning, but with a lower activity. Forecast for the end of the week is sunny, with a slight increase in temperatures. That was our 12 o'clock news, stay tuned on WKSGF. . .

— Here's the exit sweeties, I'm gonna show you one of the favorite trucker's spot on this highway. It's the Roadside Dinner, we're gonna stop here."

Grandma's dinner is located on the old US Road 40, which is the first avenue when it cross the little town of Concordia, Mo, on its northern side. From the highway interchange, you have to drive westward an half-mile to reach this place and, then, park on the roadside dedicated truck parking. Grandma knows this place since her first journeys as an interstate truck driver back in 1962. But, this day, something had changed. She hadn't been there for the last six months and, apparently, the ownership of the dinner had changed, with its name :

"Mazeltov, that's not the same name, ol' man Pete had finally decided to retire. . .

— Grandma, do we have to find another place to eat ?

— Hope we ain't Sibby, let's have a look inside, seems the same ol' dinner as it was this winter."

The name of the dinner had changed, not the atmosphere, the typical American trucker's dinner, with it's country music in background and its basic western-style decoration. A young black-haired woman in her thirties was the new boss of this

dinner, and she was serving customers behind the bar. Grandma went to see her for a table, and some news about the former owner :

“Mornin’, that’s for a table for three for a lunch, got one ?

— Pick your own ma’am, we have a low attendance this week, dunno why.

— Yep, up and downs in business. . . I haven’t seen lots of trucks on the I-70 east of Kansas City, there’s a drunk-o-meter control by the bears on the highway, might be a cause.

— Could be, the Missouri State Troopers have their favorite ground with the I-70. . . The day’s chef special is an omelette, flavours plain, potato, cheese, onion, mushrooms or lard, you can ask for a combination of those if you want.

— I’ll drop the onion, my youngest granddaughter doesn’t like. . . Tell me, the previous owner, ol’ man Pete, he’s retired now ain’t he ?

— Uncle Pete ? Yes, he is, I’m his nephew, Frances. He quitted in April this year, you’re someone he knows ?

— Marsha the Mountaineer from Denver, Colorado, I’m always stopping here when I’m trucking eastwards. Tell me, that’s a kinky new name you have chosen for the dinner, call it *The Two Dykes*. . . Can’t see a body of water nearby, that’s not a corny idea !

— That’s not mine, it’s my husband’s one, I can ask *her* about it. . . Shirley, the lady is asking for the reason why you change the name of the dinner.

— I’ve found the previous name too ordinary sweetheart, and the new one sounds better.”

So, Frances and her. . . uh. . . husband Shirley were by now the owners of the former Roadside Dinner. . . We had there an excellent mushrooms and cheese omelette, with a green lettuce salad, and oven-baked tomatoes in garlic with herbs as a vegetable. And we get a nice ice-cream for dessert, with a huge pineapple juice jug and two quarts of lime ice tea for Grandma to refuel her vacuum bottles for the road. Under a darkening sky, we went back on the road in the beginning of the afternoon. The thunderstorm line was coming ahead of us, and that was not the only problem to cope with. When idling her truck to get the proper air brakes pressure, Grandma had a call from one of her friends on her CB :

“Hi to all the commie scum west of Saint Louis, this is Sergeant Dork speaking. It’s fucking raining here, and I’ve been stopped by the bears west of Columbia on the I-70. Does anyone listen ?

— Mazeltov, the one I wanted to ear now ! Hi sarge, this is Marsha the Mountaineer, I’m in Concordia, ready for the road after a good meal. You’ve been checked by the bears ?

— *Affirmative Marsha, and nice to hear you here, no interstate trucking business since May ?*

— Not in this direction, I had freight to California, Oregon and Washington, and the wood season in the mountains. The bears, they made an Irish bagpipe concert down there, or does they grant us the complete show ?

— *The complete show Marsha, they put a roadblock on the interstate, in both direction, and they check everything. They had nailed a drunko when I passed by them. Fortunately, they don’t check if you’re an asshole or not, that’s why I’m still driving !*

— You say it dude ! Just a question for my boss, is it still a mess with the public works on the I-57 between Champaign and Kankakee ? That was a real drag in June to go to Chicago by there.

— *It's still a drag, and it have worsen. Hit the road on the 55 via Springfield and Bloomington instead, longer but safer. I have a cargo for Kansas City to deliver this evening, and you ?*

— Stuff for the US Navy at Norfolk. I'm half-way now.

— *Gee ! That's what we can call an interstate trucking ! See ya later Marsha, and have a nice trip !*

— Thanks dude, and have a nice stay in Kansas City !"

Sergeant Dork, real name Randolph Carter, was a well-known figure of the trucking community west of the Mississippi River. Veteran of the Korean War, where he really served as a sergeant in the army, he is a man of my Grandma's generation, and someone who knows all the driving tips around the western Great Lakes. He was working for a great transportation company in Chicago and he was a figurehead of the IBT in the Great Lakes. Now, his grandson is the boss of the company that had employed his grandfather, recently deceased. Another part of the trucking history in the US...

The road across Missouri was more eventful, in term of landscape, than the crossing of Kansas. As we get closer from Saint Louis, the terrain became more hilly and some woods were scattered between the crops. From time to time, a creek was cutting the plateau, and added some variety to the landscape. But the most important point was ahead of us. Before we reached a wide bridge, Grandma told us something important about it :

"Sweeties, here's the Missouri river just here. Watch carefully, we're passing over it in a few seconds, I stay on the right lane to give you a better look at it !

— Great Grandma ! Sibby, look at it, a big river !"

For my eldest sister, the abstract blue line she had seen until today on her geography book at school became a reality of water, mud, sand and landscape. This bridge, the Rocheport Interstate Bridge, is a passing over the Missouri river and carries the I-70. It is a two by two lanes steel truss building, classical architecture of the early '60s. The glimpse we had on the river was our best moment of the day, Linda and I, but it won't last long. After the passing of the Missouri River, a provisional roadsign warned the motorists that the Missouri State Highway Patrol was on duty today :

*TRUCKERS – MANDATORY STOP 5 Mi AHEAD
VEHICLE AND DRIVER CONTROL
KEEP RIGHT AND SLOW DOWN – ROADBLOCK*

Grandma had a long experience with highway patrols controls, beginning in 1956 with Colorado troopers who stopped her for three hours because they did not believe that her chauffeur's licence was a genuine one. . . They phoned to the Colorado Department of Transportation to check if it was not a fake, and if Grandma was not a madhouse escapee on the run with a truck. She had several times such a problem later in the late '50s and the early '60s, see a truck driven by a woman was, for state

troopers, weird. But, in May 1964, she was controlled by a trooper in Wyoming who told her that she was the *second* female driver he saw since the beginning of the year. At last, the times, they were a'changin' !

Grandma was first controlled with another female trucker at the same roadblock in April 1969, and women became only something not out of the ordinary in the early '70s. Earning a female voice on the CB became more and more ordinary in this decade, even if only 4% of US truckers are ladies by 2013, one out of 25. That was one out of 100 in 1973, and less before. . . In fact, Grandma was the *only* Colorado female to have a chauffeur's licence before 1960, and the member of a little club of less than a dozen of female truck drivers in Colorado until 1968.

But, for the moment, the Missouri troopers were controlling all the trucks on the I-70 at a rest area located at the west entrance of the little town of Columbia, Mo. Grandma stopped as instructed, and took her place in a queue of big rigs waiting to pass over a scale. The state troopers were very efficient this day : when a truck was stopped before passing for complete weight and mechanical check-up, a first group of troopers proceeded to the control of the documents and the road stripe of the truck. Grandma had just stopped for one minute when two troopers came to see her :

"Good evening madam, Missouri Highway Patrol, we're in for the control of your documents and the usual breath analysis. That won't be long before you'll go on the scale with your truck for the weight control.

— Thanks sir, here's the cargo manifest, my chauffeur's licence and the road log stripe. And I've got the maintenance log of my truck here if you need to check it.

— Keep the last one for the technical control after the scale. . . Mmmm, good lunch break between 12.25 and 13.15 pm, thanks to think of our safety madam, that's hard to see a trucker stop for more than a quarter of hour for a meal.

— My boss hates to hurry to eat, and he manage to follow the working rules properly to gave us good meal breaks. I'm on a 12 hours and 450 statute miles a day, that helps.

— Colorado laws are not the worst for drivers, I agree with you. . . Your daughters aboard your truck ?

— Granddaughters, from my eldest daughter. We go to Washington D. C. together, my second daughter takes them for holidays.

— Well, madam, the least pleasant part of the control, my colleague will do you a breath analysis, you just have to blow into this device, we'll get the number immediately.

— Uh, you don't have the usual plastic bags for it ?

— This is a new electronic breath analyzer, more precise than the chemical pipe and bag system, we've got it since last month, that is more convenient.

— Let's see it, if it explodes, you've been sold a kike detector.

— It's on, on your mark madam. . . Done, and zero point for you. I think you'll be interested in our free non-alcoholic drinks stand after the control point.

— Mmmm, always in for a good refreshment, thanks for the idea.

— You can pick some recipes there, I'm sure you will find something for you and your granddaughters. . . OK, the scale is yours, thanks for you cooperation madam."

Hollywood cinema had made films in the '70 with good truckers and bad cops as a plot device, the most highlighted examples of this trend were Sam Peckinpah's *Convoy*

and Hal Needham's *Smokey and the bandit*. Honestly, that's caricatures far from reality, and the kind of films despised by real-life truckers. You've got all kind of characters in truckers and troopers, but the great majority of them are ordinary good tempered people. Truckers knows that troopers works for their safety, and the ordinary trooper does not like to put a trucker behind bars. You can't work against each other on the same ground, and good troopers learn it for good truckers, and vice-versa.

Of course, you have some good examples of nazi-style sadistic troopers along the US Highways, and also psycho truckers like the one of Steven Spielberg's made-for-TV movie *Duel*, but that's the exception. The main concern of everyone on the road was increase the safety. Casualties figures were high in the '70s on the US roads, with 45,196 death for 1,280.54 billion vehicle miles travelled in 1974, following record years of 1972 and 1973 with over 54,000 killed on the road for around 1,300 billion miles travelled. And nearly 10,000 truckers killed on duty for each of those years.

So, the fight for safety became critical, and it paid on the long term. The 4,000 truckers killed on the road was passed in the good direction, downwards, in 2008, and for the last complete year with statistics available by now for the US, 2011, you have 32,367 killed for 2,930 billion miles travelled. 1.10 death by billion mile, instead of 3.53 in 1974. Still too much, but better. And, in 1974, the main concern among truckers was to eradicate a constant plague in this generation of truckers : alcohol abuse. Hard working conditions, working class people, lax road controls in the '40s and the '50s, that was the recipe for a public health disaster.

Grandma got her job because Jerry O'Brien had to fire the previous trucker who had the seat for recurrent alcohol abuse, and half a dozen crashes, fortunately without casualties and serious damages. Teetotalers with a chauffeur's licence were, and still are, praised by the transportation industry, and Grandma's daily use of tea as a staple drink was her best quality praised by her boss. In the late '50s, drunks with the same mpg rate as their vehicles were common, and state troopers all around the country used to put in sobering chambers daily truckers who had the same breath as a Dixie moonshine running at full capacity when they controlled them, no need for an drunkometer to check it...

But, with the Vietnam War, another plague was spreading along truckers. The trivialization of psychoactive substances among a general audience had led some truckers to use amphetamines as workload extenders. Called by the euphemistic terms of power candies, nitro for humans, no-sleep Mentos™, Ludovico treatment, horse awakeners, kamikaze pills, roadmiles maximalizers, suicide beans or eye-opener fudges, those drugs were more and more used among truckers who became rolling stoned because, without them, they can't get no satisfaction with their jobs. And, of course, with bad consequences, including death by accident.

The problem with amphetamines, it's that you have always drawbacks ranging from heart attacks to, more common, driver's erratic behavior. Taking usually a drug that can permits you to drive from Miami to Seattle in less than three days within speed limits (55 mph in 1974 for 3,300 statute miles, guess they'd have to skip all the pauses to do that) is not without side effects. I remembered when a was a kid a frightful trucker story told by Grandma : a guy who had to drive from Miami, Fla, to Brownsville, TX. He took a shortcut in Tampa and drove straight ahead towards Texas, then quitting the jurisdiction of the Florida Highway Patrol to enter the one of

the US Coast Guard by trying to do on the Gulf of Mexico with a truck what Jesus had done by foot on the lake of Tiberiad, but without success. . . And he was high on amphetamines.

Another one, driving from Philadelphia to Chicago, had missed the good interchange on the interstate 80, south of the great city of the lakes and only noticed it when he entered Omaha, Nebraska. Look on a map (that's a 472 miles difference) and you'll be convinced that this dude was rolling more loaded than his truck. . . That's the kind of details that changes a stairway to heaven into a highway to hell, especially when you can't get much higher, and your truck becomes your funeral pile after you crashed with it. . .

And, with the trend towards security, no more shelter for the trucker's little helpers like amphetamines. Chemical tests were available for state troopers in the early '70s to confirm their diagnostic of amphetamine abuse on drivers who have a tachograph stripe the length of their truck without interruption, e. g. San Diego to Boston in three days within speed limits (3,050 miles). In the '80s, the use of amphetamines had dramatically decreased, but it was replaced by the one who don't lie, who don't lie, who don't lie : cocaine. Now, drug-abusing truckers have abandon amphetamines to get in their nose a good mileage of white powder to drive abusively. And the bottle and the damage done is still a plague among truckers nowadays. . .

With the control of the truck's documents came the control of the driver's activity by checking something new in the '70s : the tachograph. In the US, the first models available were boxes fitted besides the driver's position in the cabs of the trucks, and recording the truck's movement on a paper strip running with a clockwork mechanism. The driver have to set the paper roll on the proper hour and change it when full used to keep a record of his or her on and off duty driving cycle and speed. On those tachographs, a stylus draw a curve on the paper according to its driving speed. By reading the curve, you could see when, how fast and how long the truck was previously moving.

That was, and that still is nowadays on old trucks, a way to control if the driver is not working too much. In 1974, the federal rules for trucker's hours of service was to allow a 10 driving hours over 15 on-duty hours max and 8 off-duty hours per 24 hours of work, with limitations to 60 hours (duty plus off duty) per 7 days for daily work, or 70 hours over 8 days for non-daily work. On-duty hours are hours when the driver is on the road, but not driving his truck : loading and unloading if he or she have the obligation to do so, mandatory rests between 4 hours period of driving or less, and meals. Grandma had the benefit of an exception to the rule according to the laws of the state of Colorado because her yearly mileage was made of less than 50% interstate duty, where she can use the rule of 450 miles driven in 12 hours for a 24 hours day of work. Rule finally repealed in march 1975, and working conditions of Colorado's drivers were then lined up with the 1962 federal rule.

Also, there is the one day at work means one day off after work applied for working schedules in interstate transportation. Four days driving from Denver to Norfolk would gave Grandma four days of mandatory paid leave following that. But, for this work, she had agreed with her boss to take an half-day off in D. C. and Norfolk before going to Charleston and drove back to Denver, where her mandatory leaves would be regrouped. Today, the rule had been slightly modified in 2003, allowing 11

driving hours on a 14 on-duty hours period with 10 off-duty hours for 24 hours (or a minimum calculation basis of 21 hours per working day). Also, the driver who had reached the maximum of 70 working hours have the obligation to stop for 34 hours minimum before going back to work.

From my point of view, that is not enough to guarantee the safety of both the truckers and the others motorists. In the airline I'm working for, pilots and flight attendants have a 1,000 yearly flight-hours limit (roughly 80 to 100 hours a month), with a maximum of four days of outside-home duty cycle (E. g. it could mean, for me : fly off from my hometown of Denver the first day, fly between cities away from my home the two others days and fly back to Denver at the end of my working period on the fourth day, and have three days off). Driving a truck is something more dangerous than flying an airplane (you don't have traffic jams at level 350 for instance) and the working conditions are worse. Cheers profits, fuck safety, as Grandma said me once. . .

With the second step of the control came the close examination of the two tachograph stripes Grandma had recorded from Denver, CO. She drove her truck on the highway patrol's scale to check if her vehicle was not overweight. In the US, the limit for a semi-truck is 80,000 pounds in driving order all included. With 74,734 effective pounds (fuel tanks half-filled and truck ready to run, less driver and passengers), she was OK for this one. And it is easy to overload a truck when it's a van-type of a reefer. With tanks or hopper trailers, the risk is minimized, such vehicles are built with the effective density of their freight in mind (liquids for tanks, grains, fertilizer pellets or other kind of dry powderized freight for hoppers) with a safe margin, and you cannot overload them because they are overflowing before you could do it.

On dump trucks used for works, you have gages on the suspension which prevents the truck from being overloaded, for instance with gravel or rocks, by sounding an alarm into the driver's cab. But, on van trucks and trailers, you can fill the box up to its full capacity, and sometimes go over the weight limit. With five crates loaded with propeller blades, and three boxes with a computer, the weight for Grandma's truck on this journey was easy to calculate before going to work, but, sometimes, you could be over the limits with freight loaded box by box, when you have three, four or more customers for less than truckload freight for the same destination, loading you with heterogenous freight not always weighted.

The worst case scenario is the delivery truck collecting customer's less than truckload freight, starting empty at the truck station and becoming more and more loaded on the road, by picking freight from customer to customer. Overweighting happens easily in such situations. And a truck too heavy is a dangerous one, unable to brake properly, for instance. That is why weight controls became more and more frequent in the late '60s and the early '70s. With the increase of power, a truckload who was nearly stalling a 150 to 200 hp semi truck could be moved by a 300 to 400 hp new generation semi tractor. But the laws of physics remains the same. . .

After the scale test, Grandma's truck had to pass a final exam : a general technical verification. Outer aspect, brakes, engine, transmission, axles, and all the devices needed to make a truck run safely, had to be checked by a sworn team of mechanics working for the Missouri Highway Patrol. Grandma had to park her truck on the

technical checking area and let the policemen do the rest. The chief inspector of the mechanic team had a look at Grandma's truck and told her :

"Well, madam, that would be a simple formality with your R series. It's a brand-new one, and you seems to work hard to keep it in pristine condition. If you're interested, our alcohol-free bar is here, you could get back to your truck in fifteen to twenty minutes, with all the paperwork done.

— That's a good idea you've got sir, offer such drinks, I'm in. An idea from your commanders ?

— Educational purpose, take profit of this control break to give ideas of safe beverages to truckers. We've got some good results, and that's always pleasant for road workers like you to have a more casual contact with the police in such a way. See you later with all the paperwork done, madam..."

Grandma is an already convinced no-booze-at-work driver, that's why she's considered by her boss as his best driver, and she is always ready to pick some good ideas for food. This day, the safe drinks stand of the Missouri Highway Patrol was under the supervision of rookie bears, doing efficiently their public-relation duty. Between several kind of fruit juices, varieties of carbonated water and recipes of iced tea, Grandma had immediately found something new that pleased her :

"Evenin' sir, I'm in for your drinks. This one looks goods, can you get me a glass, please ?

— Here's for you madam, two more for your daughters ?

— Guess they'll found it nice, that's pretty good. Made with mint I guess.

— My Grandma's recipe : mint iced tea. Half a dozen of fresh mint plants for a quart, or more if you like it, boil the water and put the mint in it, stop the boiling and let it cool. Then, remove the mint, add some sugar if you like and serve cool or iced. Cheap, easy and tasty, I had served ten gallons of it since last week.

— And you'll be serving more gallons before being off-duty, that's a pretty good recipe, I borrow it to you. Siobhan, Linda, you like it as I can see it !"

This day, mint iced tea became another family recipe, thanks to the good idea of the Missouri Highway patrol. As we were expecting, Grandma's truck was OK, the troopers gave her a complete inspection report and she was free to go. We went back on the road for the next leg, going to Saint Louis, passing the city and stop for the dinner after entering Illinois. Another experience on the highway for us, and the job done for Grandma...

After the break with the troopers, we went back on the road and drove forward our destination. East of the little town of Columbia, the landscape became more hilly and the crops were replaced by woods. We entered the Saint Louis urban area in the town of Wentzville, and change our direction from the main I-70 to the northern pass of Saint Louis on the I-270 branch highway, after having crossed the Missouri river one more time between Saint Charles and Earth City. The interchange with I-270 was west of Saint Louis Lambert International Airport, and we passed between O'Connor Park and the 11 side of the 11-29 track of Lambert International Airport. Today, O'Connor park is a visual waypoint for me when I land an airliner on VFR conditions in Saint Louis Lambert, the I-270 serves me as a mark to put the nose up when I overfly it.

Grandma took the grannies lane on the Highway to gave us a view on our pass over the Mississippi river, patiently driving behind an underpowered delivery truck peaking at 40 mph. From the New Chain of Rocks bridge, we had a glimpse on the Old Man River, the great water link of the central US, flowing from north to south, river made legendary by authors like Mark Twain. After the Mississippi pass, we drove through a sparsely populated area, between fields and suburban communities, and we left the northern Saint Louis pass after an interchange that led us back on the main road.

Grandma had her favorite trucker's dinner in the area in the little town of Greenville, a rural place between the crops and the woods of this western side of Illinois. It was just a little over one hour away from our stopping place for the night, and Grandma had to call her boss in Denver. At this time, she was still with nearly 450 blank miles between Norfolk and Charleston. This evening, the dinner was full and we had to wait a little while to get a table for three. And that was an occasion to discover the specialty of the house : spice pork and ham, usually called spam. . . The waitress, named Sylvia, came to see us and, not having a menu to give us, she told us what was on sale tonight :

"... Muriel, my boss, made me rewrite 28 times this fuckin' menu and it is still not ready tonight. . . So, you have, as starters, mixed salad with spam, tomato salad with spam, assorted delicatessen with spam, and the main stater of the house : cold spam sliced with pickles and BBQ sauce. . . Ah, and you can also get our potato salad with spam. . .

— SPAM ! SPAM ! SPAM !... SPAM ! SPAM ! SPAM !... SPAM ! SPAM ! SPAM !... sang a group of half a dozen of truckers at the table on our left, angering the waitress.

— SHATTUP YOU LOUSY SCUMBAGS !... Hem, ma'am, what's your choice ?

— Well, your mixed salad for... Linda, Siobhan, let's say three. No objection sweeties ?

— Grandma, asked Linda, may we add one delicatessen dish for three ? It's always good with the salad.

— Okay, let's do that Lindy, I'm sure there would be nothing left of it with your sister, you and me... You can add a delicatessen dish, single portion. . .

— That's done ma'am... As main course, we have spam with rice, spam with noodles, spam with beans, spam with steamed green vegetables, spam with mashed potatoes, and spam with corn cobs. . .

— SPAM ! SPAM ! SPAM !... SPAM ! SPAM ! SPAM !... . . .

— GADDAMIT ! SHATTUP !... Of course, you can order for a dime some sauce with your spam, BBQ, tomato, mayonnaise or ketchup.

— Ma'am, is there onions with the mashed potatoes ?

— Nah little one, nothin' else than plain mashed potatoes with spam. . .

— SPAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAMMM !

— WHAT THE FAKIN HALL DID I TELL YA ?... So, one mashed potatoes ?

— You're OK with that Sibby ?

— Yeah Grandma !

— Beans for me !

— Beans for Linda, and steamed vegetables for me. No sauce ?... Linda ?

— Ketchup !

— One ketchup for Linda, and that's all. Put us a quart of your home-made lemonade and we'll order the desserts later.

— Got it ma'am, and, by chance, our desserts are without. . .

— SPAM ! SPAM ! SPAM ! . . . SPAM ! SPAM ! SPAM ! . . . SPAM ! SPAM ! SPAM ! . . .

— SHATTUP YOU FAKIN' DORKS !"

By chance, this evening, Grandma had learnt a good new for her work : O'Brien's shipper had found us something to truck between Norfolk and Charleston, a truck-load of electronic domestic appliances imported from Japan that had to be delivered to a wholesaler in Charleston straight unloaded from a cargo ship delivering them in Norfolk's harbor. 439 blank miles avoided for Grandma.

Then, we drove towards the little town of Effingham, east of Illinois, a little bit further on the road. Due to time zone change after crossing the Illinois-Indiana border, Grandma told us that we had to wake up one hour earlier in the morning to avoid being one hour late. Indiana is in the Eastern Standard Time Zone, and Illinois still in Central Time Zone.

Our road to Effingham was uneventful, and Grandma stopped us for the night at the Northern Effingham truck stop, a sympathetic place in the northern suburbs of the city. Starting at seven, after the breakfast, we took the road towards our destination of the day, the little village of West Alexander, PA. This time, we had to cross completely two states, Indiana and Ohio, and two large cities, Indianapolis and Columbus, cross the Wabash and the Ohio rivers, leave Illinois and enter Pennsylvania, and shift from central to eastern time zone.

On this eighth of August 1974, something more important was happening in the federal capital. Two hours after having left Effingham, between Terre Haute and Indianapolis, we were driving through the hilly countryside around the Wabash valley before entering the flatlands that marks the usual landscape of southern Indiana and Ohio. It was the time for the nine o'clock news on the radio, and Grandma was very interested. Especially by the headline of the day :

" . . . On WWIRXF Radio, your news and music radio in Indiana and Ohio, here is the morning news with Alvin Helstey. . . Today's breaking new come from Washington D. C. where president Nixon had decided to put an end to the constitutional crisis due to the Water-gate scandal by resigning, effective tomorrow in the morning. Vice-President Gerald Ford will then take the position of president, ending a constitutional crisis that led to a complete stall of the executive. At this moment, no further declaration had been made by the White House staff. . .

— At least ! . . . commented Grandma. This quack had finally drop off before being jailed ! That's a pretty good thing !

— Grandma, did I asked. It is mister Nixon who is punished now for listening at closed doors ?

— Yes sweetie, it is. He's leaving the seat of president at the White House before being forced to do so."

To give you an indication, this was the first time in US political history that a president had resigned before being impeached. If Richard Nixon wouldn't had done so, he would had been impeached by the House, the last remnants of hope for him had collapsed whith the release of the Watergate tape the 5th of August, tape recorded shortly after the aborted attempt to bug the Democrat Party presidential campaign

office at the end of 1972. On this tape, you can clearly hear him talking about this event and preparing a cover-up, then shooting down in flames his denial of any involvement into the Watergate affair.

To throw out a president in the US, you have to get a vote for it at the House, with the majority voting yes to discard the acting president. That had never happened in the whole history of the United States of America until today, August 2013. Before Nixon, President Andrew Johnson had to face an impeachment in 1868 but the House did not get the majority to impeach him and, then, he was acquitted. It happened like this for President Clinton in 1999 : impeachment failed by lack of majority to vote for it at the House.

In August 1974, there was now a clear majority to vote the impeachment against President Richard Nixon. With the 5th of August tape, the votes had changed from stick with Dick to jettison Nixon. Cornered, the president took the right decision : to resign before being thrown out. And, up to this day, he is the only one to have done so. On the road, Grandma had planned to stop after we had passed Indianapolis, on a good dinner she knows in the little village of New Lisbon, Indiana, a dozen miles west of the state border with Ohio. In the dinner, we had the news on TV, and Vice-President Gerald Ford was interviewed, confirming that President Nixon had resign today :

“So, mister Ford, you can confirm that resignation of President Nixon is by now something real, and not a rumor.

— It is. President Nixon had taken the measure of the depth of the constitutional crisis and, for the interest of our nation, had decided to put a term to the crisis by resigning with effective effect on the 9th of August, tomorrow. As he told me this morning, the United States cannot endure more problems due to a stalled executive. The crisis would certainly have lasted until the end of the year, pulling down the country. A situation we do not have the luxury to cope with. So, the obvious answer to this crisis by President Nixon was to put an end to it by resigning.

— And, by doing so, all the impeachment procedure is coming to an end.

— It's a fact, but it's the law too.

— And now, we get him as a president. . . said my grandmother, not really happy. So, we'll have to wait 1976 to get rid of the GOP jerks that mess up with our country. . . Please, I have to call my family outside of Indiana, does your phone booth can be used for interstate calls ?

— Well, we have a meter and we can charge you at the real cost, regardless of where you are calling, answered the waitress. Usually, people are calling local, Illinois, Ohio or Kentucky. You want to call someone farther ?

— My daughters in Colorado and D. C., if it's possible.

— I hadn't been told of limitations, but I have to check, one moment please. . .”

The waitress had an instruction manual from the phone company for the use of the booth, with the prices indicated for interstate calls. And the good new was that Grandma could gave phone calls in Colorado and D. C. for a price of 5 cents a minute, plus a quarter for the communication. That's 1974 prices, and by today's standards, it's awfully expensive. . . Grandma called Mom in Denver, saying that everything was alright with us, and making us spoke on the phone.

Same call with aunt Rachel in D. C., and a final bill of \$4.75 for two calls. Grandma had also news from Grandpa, and she also talked of the good news of the resignation of President Nixon. Like many working class people, we were happy to see him go. Especially my Dad, who had won his ticket to frontline in Vietnam thanks to his policy of escalation in this war.

The following road was not really interesting for the landscape. It was like in Kansas, a great cultivated flat plain. We passed through Columbus, Ohio, at the peak hour, and the traffic on the crosstown section of the I-70 was nearly stalled by traffic jams. We finally managed to drive out of the city and, after having left Columbus, we went back on the road in the plains. After around twenty miles, the landscape changed, the cultivated plains were replaced by hills and woods on the eastern side of Ohio, announcing the mountainous landscape of Pennsylvania.

The next leg of our journey would make us stop in the little town of Cambridge, Ohio, where Grandma had another good address for dinner. On the radio, the news had announced that President Nixon would make a resignation speech live from the White House at 9 pm EST tonight :

"...confirming that his decision to resign is by now effective. As Vice-President Ford said, President Nixon will leave his office tomorrow, marking the end of the constitutional crisis. And now, on WTFGH Radio, another hour of music beginning with an unexpected hit by British guitar player Eric Clapton, from his LP "461 Ocean Boulevard", the famous "I shot the sheriff" by Jamaican musician Bob Marley, now played on WTFGH Radio..."

— That's the tropical music I heard before... said Grandma. I did not have the weather report, seems the thunderstorm line of yesterday is clearing the sky.

— Grandma, do you think that we'll have sunny weather in Washington ? asked Linda.

— Dunno sweetie, but seems to be going like that... We'll see with the weather report in the news tonight, at the dinner."

We arrived at Cambridge under a clear blue evening sky, and we left the interstate to look for the dinner Grandma had in mind. But, unexpected, another address came in sight when we were driving northwards to the town of Columbia, something Grandma had not seen before, a new dinner recently opened :

"Hey, looks like someone opened a new business here !... Sweeties, let's have a look at it, this one is pretty different than ordinary dinners !

— Looks like a flying saucer which had landed here Grandma ! answered Linda, interested.

— Would they have alien food ? did I asked.

— Yeah, space onions ! replied swiftly Linda.

— They choose the right name for it : *UFO Dinner* ... noticed Grandma. Hope they won't take off before we can have a table."

This dinner was really looking like a flying saucer, shaped like a huge silvery disk with windows on its rim. The entrance was a stairway in the center, between tripod legs lifting the dinner above the ground. Inside, three quarters of the size of the dinner was dedicated for the customers, providing a huge dining room. With only half of the dinner full, Grandma had no problem to find us a table near a TV set. She was interested by the presidential resignation speech, which had to be broadcasted tonight. On the menu, Linda had immediately found something interesting :

“Yummy ! They’ve got a dozen different kind of wafers for dessert ! Sibby, would you take one ?

— Uh ? Dunno... They’ve got some with orange marmalade ?

— Sweeties, let’s look for the main course first... Mmmmm ! Cucumber salad with yogurt sauce, you’re in ?

— Last time mummy ordered one for me, they put onions in it !

— I’m in Grandma, onions or not.

— Let’s ask the waitress... Good evening ma’am, before ordering, can you tell me if there is onions in your cucumber salad ?

— None madam, only sliced cucumbers, russian sweet pickles called malossols, and capers.

— Sibby, you’re in ?

— Yes Grandma !

— So, one cucumber salad for three, you’ve decided for the main course ?

— Frankfurter with beans for me.

— Omelette with green vegetables, We’ll share both Linda and I.

— Well, let’s go for it, I’ll take your moussaka, it’s the Greek dish with eggplants and minced meat ?

— Yes, it is madam. Do you have some wishes for drink ?

— Well... you’ve got three dozens of beers on the menu, I can’t take one, I’m driving tonight... Uh, had not see this one, alcohol-free, one pint for me, and one quart of lemonade. It’s home-made I guess ?

— Lemon juice, water and if you wish, sugar added. We have the same with lime.

— Sweeties, lime or lemon ?

— Lime !

— Same as Linda Grandma !

— So, one quart of lime, sweetened... Tell me, you were not here three months before, would you ? I’m passing here when I’m driving interstate to the east coast, and I didn’t noticed you before today.

— Well, madam, we had landed... Uh, opened here three weeks before, it’s our first month on Earth, and the business is going well.

— I’ll see later if you can count on me as a returning customer, that’s sympathetic here, this Star Trek like dinner... We’ll see with your cooking.”

The cooking was as good as the dining room was original, and Grandma booked this address on her personal roadbook. The cucumber salad did not survived, the crunchy vegetables were all eaten, especially the malossols, the kind of pickles I’m mad about. Grandma was delighted by the moussaka, with eggplants roasted before being cooked with the meat, the slight touch of olive oil to give the taste without drowning the dish in liquid grease, an excellent beef meat and, the chef’s touch, a good dose of fresh garlic, just the quantity needed. Grandma gave us a bit of her dish to made us taste, and she had to order a second one for Linda and I.

And, in the end, we had our dessert with wafers, the specialty of the house. And one of the best wafers I had ever eaten. Grandma wanted to watch the presidential speech before leaving and she watched as the waitress switched on the TV set we were seated nearby. But, when the set was on, something wrong happened, the evening news were not the ones we were expecting :

“...by President Obama wishing to avoid a direct military intervention in Syria. According to Russian president Vladimir Putin, the reports of use of chemical weapons by the government troops under the orders of president Bashar Al Assad are unfounded rumors... ”

— Uh, ma’am... What’s the heck going on with your TV set ?

— Oh no, it goes time shifting again ! I have to set it correctly, wait a second... ”

The waitress took a toolbox and she opened the back of the TV set, and she started to dig into the set, changing the programs and finally switching us to the good timeline :

“...French president François Hollande, back from holidays, had declared after the French councils of ministers... (whistles and snow on screen) ...by President George W. Bush yesterday, who had been dismissed, stated that the motives for their dismissal are purely political. Asked for the official motives, White House chief of staff, Karl Rove... (whistles and snow on screen) ...had exploded in mid-air over East Moriches. The FBI had started investigating the terrorist hypothesis and the Department of Defense is checking if the US Navy ships executing simulations near the explosion area of Flight TWA 800 were using surface to air missiles. The first reports from the US Navy indicates that this kind of ordnance had not been fired during those exercises... (whistles and snow on screen) ...by President Reagan yesterday. This law would be a useful tool for stabilizing the federal budget deficit, the main challenge President Reagan is facing for his forthcoming possible second term... (whistles and snow on screen) ...has been now passed into law by President Carter, lifting every governmental regulation on airlines. An increase of offer by the airline industry is expected in the next decade, the limitations... (whistles and snow on screen) ... tonight live at 9 pm Eastern Standard Time, President Nixon will make his official resignation speech, broadcasted live on all national TV and radio networks. Confirming the initial declaration of the White House officials this morning... ”

— Damn, we’ll be on the road when Tricky Dicky will tell us that he have to go... Ma’am, thanks for the TV set, we have to go, I’m missing 65 miles to end my working schedule of the day.

— No problem madam, if you please, I will bill you on the cash.

— Okay, I’m following you.”

Surprisingly, behind the cash register, it was not a man or a woman who was at work, but some kind of Teddy bear. Four legged with front ones terminated by organs identical to human hands with fur, walking cushions and long retractile claws, like cats, with a short brown fur all over the body, which is spherical and around two feet in diameter, a head also spherical, half size of the body, a huge spherical black nose slightly two or three inches in diameter smaller than his head, two ribbon-like ears over the head and a ball of black fur for the tail. He seemed to be happy to see us :

“Grunt !

— Here’s Malcolm, our cashier, said the waitress. As you can see, he likes children.

— Uh, you have this... animal as a member of our staff ?

— Sometimes, he’s giving us a hand at the cash register, customers likes to see him. Usually, he works for the maintenance of the craft... the restaurant... Malcolm, the bill for table 12, please.

— Grunt !”

The unexpected cashier made a good job and we had a reasonable bill this evening, \$15.25 for three, including the tax. We added a \$1 tip for the waitress and some

scratching behind the ears to Malcolm, not interested by money. On the road, we had to leave the state of Ohio at the town of Wheeling, pass through the northern tip of West Virginia for a dozen of miles and enter Pennsylvania for our night stop. The landscape there became more and more hilly, with woods all around and fewer crops. The interstate was passing up and down in the valleys and over the hills of this eastern side of Ohio, which gave us an idea of the forthcoming crossing of the Appalachian mountain range.

Grandma was waiting for the presidential resignation speech on the radio. She had switched on to a national channel and, at the 9 pm news, just before we reached Wheeling and left Ohio for West Virginia. We finally had President Nixon on the radio, and I lived one of the most important moment of the history of the United States during a warm sunset in Ohio, seated besides my eldest sister, in Grandma's truck cab. In front of us, the sky was becoming darker, shadows of the mountains were growing larger with the sun going down. The Interstate 70 was quiet, the bulk of the traffic had passed during the day, and was becoming scarce with the night. On the radio, the president finally gave us his resignation speech on this warm sunset of the 8th of August, 1974 :

"Good evening. This is the 37th time I have spoken to you from this office, where so many decisions have been made that shaped the history of this Nation. Each time I have done so to discuss with you some matter that I believe affected the national interest. In all the decisions I have made in my public life, I have always tried to do what was best for the Nation. Throughout the long and difficult period of Watergate, I have felt it was my duty to persevere, to make every possible effort to complete the term of office to which you elected me. . .

— Not me numskull. McGovern got my vote in '72.

— In the past few days, however, it has become evident to me that I no longer have a strong enough political base in the Congress to justify continuing that effort. As long as there was such a base, I felt strongly that it was necessary to see the constitutional process through to its conclusion, that to do otherwise would be unfaithful to the spirit of that deliberately difficult process and a dangerously destabilizing precedent for the future. But with the disappearance of that base, I now believe that the constitutional purpose has been served, and there is no longer a need for the process to be prolonged. . .

— You say it dumbass !

— I would have preferred to carry through to the finish whatever the personal agony it would have involved, and my family unanimously urged me to do so. But the interest of the Nation must always come before any personal considerations. From the discussions I have had with Congressional and other leaders, I have concluded that because of the Watergate matter I might not have the support of the Congress that I would consider necessary to back the very difficult decisions and carry out the duties of this office in the way the interests of the Nation would require. I have never been a quitter. To leave office before my term is completed is abhorrent to every instinct in my body. But as President, I must put the interest of America first. America needs a full-time President and a full-time Congress, particularly at this time with problems we face at home and abroad. . .

— Blah blah blah. . . For one time, with the Congress, you were listening to people without bugging them.

— *To continue to fight through the months ahead for my personal vindication would almost totally absorb the time and attention of both the President and the Congress in a period when*

our entire focus should be on the great issues of peace abroad and prosperity without inflation at home. Therefore, I shall resign the Presidency effective at noon tomorrow. Vice President Ford will be sworn in as President at that hour in this office. . .

— So, get lost at last, asshole !

— *You're welcome silly cow. . . As I recall the high hopes for America with which we began this second term, I feel a great sadness that I will not be here in this office working on your behalf to achieve those hopes in the next two and an half years. But in turning over direction of the Government to Vice President Ford, I know, as I told the Nation when I nominated him for that office 10 months ago, that the leadership of America will be in good hands. . . "*

So, that was done. The 37th president of the United States of America had resigned to avoid an impeachment. We were entering the deep valley of the Ohio river at the town of Wheeling when the speech ended. When we passed through the Wheeling tunnel, we did have a radio blackout and, after that, we passed through West Virginia through the high hills, becoming more and more mountain-like, before entering Pennsylvania and stopping for the night at the West Alexander Truck Stop, a nice parking place for the night, between the interstate and the forests of western Pennsylvania.

This night, under a clear starry sky, I fell asleep rapidly, having a more pleasant memory with the weird Teddy bear of the UFO dinner than with the presidential resignation speech. Tomorrow, we will enter into the federal capital when Richard Nixon would have to leave it. That's sometimes funny to see how things are going in your life. . .

For the Friday, 9th of August 1974, our road schedule would be tight. We had six hours of road ahead of us, with the crossing of the Appalachian mountains in sight, and we would have to stop for lunch on the road a last time before entering Washington D. C. aboard Grandma's truck. And that's how we saw, Linda and I, that 400 hp in a big rig was not a waste of power. In the fresh morning, Grandma called our aunt Rachel at her fire station to give her some news. Then, she gave a call to her boss in Denver, who had given her the next afternoon and half of Saturday. She will also have had a free Sunday at Norfolk, the next customer would not opened before Monday morning.

This time, we had to drive through the southwest corner of Pennsylvania, not the worst terrain you can find but an hilly one. On the interstate, we were easily passing least powerful trucks, usually stuck at 40-45 mph or lower on the steepest climbs on the interstate. With her roaring V8, Grandma had no problem to pass them without dropping below 50 mph, even with a full trailer in tow. In the early '70s, you still can find trucks built in the late '50s on the roads, including semi-trailers, which were sluggish with sometimes only 200 to 250 hp or even less under the hood. Grandma's R-700 1974 model was what she used to call a mountain climber, a truck fitted for doing heavy duties, sometimes off-road, in the Rockies, where steep slopes are seen by truckers on a daily basis.

And that's how I saw a very important know-how of every good trucker : the double clutch. With the interstate going up and down, and slow trucks that were sometimes a drag to pass, Grandma was up and downshifting lots of times on this road, between the fifth and the third gear, always with the same tempo : clutch-

neutral-clutch-gear, with a slight pressure on the throttle to increase the rpms when shifting down to get an higher torque at a lower speed. That's why truckers are great for square dancing ! And this, without a single scratch, the slightest squeak or the most lightest hiccup in the shift change, everything smooth and efficient, a mechanic's dream.

With such a craftsmanship, the eighteen wheeler gave his best all the time, mastered by an expert driver, Grandma. I have noticed that she did not press the clutch pedal all the way down, and I had the explanation of this a few years later. On a big rig clutch, you have a clutch brake to lock the gears of the box when idle, to engage the first or the second gear to start the truck. When rolling, you do not engage it by pressing the clutch pedal down to a hard point, roughly at 80% of the pedal course, tells you that you have reach without engaging it the clutch brake. Then, you can move the lever and depress the clutch pedal. That's a trucker's professional basic knowledge, and the first thing you learn on a trucker's driving school.

And Grandma gave us this day one of the best view of her professional skills you can ever expect to see in real live action. Crossing Pennsylvania led us to travel across the Appalachian Mountains, the range that's between the eastern seaboard and the Midcontinent prairies. Running from north to south, it is not a great barrier like the Rockies, but it is not a small hump in the landscape. It's a true mountain range, with summits over 6,000 ft elevation ASL (Mount Mitchell, NC, 6,684 ft elevation ASL, highest mountain in the range). So, you can find pretty steep slopes on the I-70 when it comes to cut its way eastwards in the Appalachian mountains.

It was east of the little village of Donnegal, PA, that Grandma was bogged in the slope that climbed up over the ridge which is a dozen miles west of the town of Somerset. An old Kenworth semi, loaded with logs, was crawling along the highway, painfully gaining altitude at a speed down to 30 mph. With an heavy traffic on the Interstate, Grandma had to downshift in second gear to prevent her truck from stalling behind the slow logger. Patiently waiting for a gap in the continuous stream of traffic, she told us :

"Here we are sweeties, that's how real truckers overcomes traffic problems, with elegance and savoir-faire. Look at this !"

I've heard Grandma had a secret shift, that truckers plays and it pleased their boss. And you really cares for driving, do you ? Finally having a proper gap in the traffic, Grandma switched on her blinker on the left side and she steadily pushed the throttle downwards all the way. The V8 roared at full power in a matter of seconds and pulled the whole eighteen wheeler forward, at an ever increasing speed, without any hesitation. At maximum rpm, Grandma shifted on the third gear, still increasing the truck's speed and passing the slow Kenny, gaining 10 mph before having completely passed the slow vehicle. She shifted like this, the fourth, the fifth, with major torque and softliest gears, and then we climbed the slope like an Hallelujah.

And that was like this all along Pennsylvania. We entered Maryland before lunch and we had to drove through the last Appalachian ridge before entering the eastern seaboard. Grandma found us a trucker's dinner, with a real New York cheesecake for sale, and a TV set that broadcasted the final hours of President Nixon at the White House. Grandma was on the phone with aunt Rachel when the one o'clock NBC news were broadcasting live from the White House, showing us Richard Nixon and his wife

embarking into Marine One, the presidential helicopter, and flying away to Andrews AFB, then California, where now former president Nixon had his family house. The comment was brief :

“President Nixon resignation is effective since 12 pm, EST, and Vice-President Ford is now the acting president. As we had been told by the presidential staff of the White House, President Nixon will leave Washington to go back to San Clemente, California, where he have is private residence. You can see now Marine One taking off towards Andrews AFB, where Air Force One is waiting for him...”

— Rachel ?... Yeah, that’s me... No, everything fine, especially with the little ones... Just seen it on NBC, what a relief !... Two hours roughly, the traffic is not too heavy on the Interstate, count on me at three... Hagerstown, Maryland, sorry to be short, that’s a one buck call from this phone... Yep, a pineapple juice, two quarts of ice tea for the road, and I’m gonna be back on the saddle... Okay, see ya later, bye !... Sweeties, your aunt had a guacamole for this evening, and a pecan and pumpkin pie for dessert... Excuse-me ma’am, can I have a pineapple juice and the bill, please ?”

It was a bright sunny day over the eastern seaboard on this 9th of August 1974. On the road, the traffic on the interstate became more and more city-like when we got closer from the federal capital. Aunt Rachel and her family lived in 1974 in Petworth, a neighborhood of Washington north of the city. Uncle Garreth had kept the flat he had bought with his ex-wife after having divorced, and aunt Rachel had settle with him in this residential neighborhood. We had a last leg of Interstate to the interchange of Silver Springs and, then, we had to drive along Georgia avenue.

That was now a city traffic pattern, something Grandma does not like a lot, especially while driving a big rig. In this hot summer afternoon, the traffic was low in this part of the city, and Grandma was not stopped by traffic lights too many times. She just had to take care of the proper direction. At a red light, she read the indications given by aunt Rachel :

“Mazeltov, what did your aunt said ?... Go down on Georgia Avenue to the library, then our street is the second on your left, you have a traffic light that would help you to turn... So, let’s find this library. Linda, can you read the names of the streets ?

— Last one was Decatur Street Grandma.

— Yep, we’re getting close... Here’s the library, so, second left and traffic light.”

It was not unusual to see a big rig in this residential area. Apart from public works, a supermarket was near aunt Rachel’s house, and it relied on truck deliveries to do its usual business. The problem was to park Grandma’s truck in the street, but uncle Garreth had found a solution, with the help of some friends of him at the City of Washington Police Department, where he was working there as a uniformed policeman. Driving carefully along Taylor street, she was waiting for our uncle, who had found a way to park her truck in the street. Not a by-the-book truck stop, but a smart do-it-yourself provisional truck stop area. The flashing lights of a patrol car ahead was the signal she was expecting :

“ Here’s your uncle and his pal sweeties, they had found us... Mazeltov, don’t tell me they have blocked five parking places for us ?”

Using provisional NO PARKING signs, uncle Garreth and his coworker, officer Randall O’Connell, had emptied five parking places where Grandma’s truck can park overnight near aunt Rachel’s and uncle Garreth’s flat. Not quite, let’s say, authorized

but done discreetly, that won't harm anyone. Grandma stopped before the parking area and she asked uncle Garreth :

“Hi Garreth, that's pretty nice to you to have planned such a thing. Would nobody complain about my dog ?

— Nobody there, I'm giving such kind of help to people all around there. It's not illegal, I do the same kind of favor for people living in the street from time to time, that disturbs nobody and no one will talk about it. Hey, Randy, want some help for the signs ?

— Thanks pal, but I already have finished. Wow, miss Zieztinski, you've got a real Cadillac truck here ! Full Mack driving train and prime mover, I've been told.

— Yep officer, Mack R-700 with Mack V8 998 cubic inches, Maxitorque® five shifts gearbox and heavy duty driving axles for a 33,000 pounds load each. You know someone in the trucking business ?

— My Dad's a trucker and my youngest brother too. That's always a pleasure for me to give a hand to workers like you. Here's your parking place miss Zieztinski.”

And Grandma parked her truck on the street, putting a *VEHICLE OUT OF ORDER – Repairs expected tomorrow in the morning* sign behind her windscreen to give her an alibi to have her truck parked here. . . That was the end of our journey from Denver, for Linda and I, and to see Grandma's big rig parked below the trees of Taylor street was something great for me. That was the end of a great adventure for Linda and me, and a great travel to remember. . .

The morning after, Grandma departed for Norfolk with her truck. She left us and hit the road again, having to deliver an Honeywell mainframe computer and a set of propeller blades to the US Navy. She gave us a phone call in the afternoon, having completed her job. Then, after having delivered a batch of TV sets and other imported domestic appliances from Norfolk to Charleston, she drove back to Denver with a truckload of canned fish, and get a complete week of rest before going back to work in the mountains, carrying logs down the Rockies to the sawmills.

Trucker, it's a hard life, but a good one if you want to travel. This summer of '74, I had understood why Grandma had fought to get this job, and why she did everything to keep it. And get a lesson from her : whatever job you do, don't do it half-way. When I started to be an airline pilot in 1992, I had to fly old regional twin-engined 44 seats propeller-driven Fairchild 27 airliners from Denver to the local airports in the Rockies with Aspen Air. That was not the magic of airline transportation, with commuter flights lasting one hour, or even less, but you have to deal with it when you're beginning in your career.

Grandma had her first trucking jobs with deliveries in downtown Denver, and my Mom started her own duties for UP with shunting and branchline works. I remembered the feeling I get when my instructor gave me my type rating for the MD-80 airliner in 1995, a kind of reward, the same when Grandma had her qualification for eighteen wheelers, and Mom her engineer's licence. Handling a Mack semi, a SD40-2 locomotive or a A320 airliner makes you feel the same of achievement in your career. You worked hard to get it, then you've got your reward. And you have to deserve it.

Grandma had kept her level of craftsmanship all along her career, even with the derelict trucks of the Denver Municipality, finally all phased out by 1988 and replaced by private contractors, even when she had to drive 8x8 public works dump trucks and, later, when she gets her job at Mountain Trucks Special Deliveries in 1992. For the end of her career, she had a Mack CH, with something great for her : and Allison 4000 automatic gearbox. And a 70" high rise sleeper that looks like a small hotel room stuck behind the driving cab, as she said.

She called the Allison automatic transmission a "warp drive", like *Star Trek* space propulsion system, and called it the most useful innovation she had ever seen in her career since the power steering as standard issue for trucks in the '50s. It's like a second driver whose sole job is to shift gears when needed, lowering the driver's workload and, then, increasing safety by helping the driver to focus solely on the road ahead.

Automated gearboxes were phased in in the early '60s on trucks, with the obvious advantage of easing the work for truckers. But their use on highway trucks was not something common before the nineties for one good reason : an automatic gearbox needs power to work, and it draws it on the engine. So, with a low power output engine, you're losing power to drive the truck.

That is why the first trucks to use such a device were deliveries and refuse trucks, mid-size vehicles driven in city streets at a low speed, with stop and go all day long. Ideal candidates for a system that avoids hundreds of hand-made shifts a day. Then, with the increase of reliability given by this practical experience, Allison transmissions began to offer, in the first half of the '70s, dedicated transmissions for eighteen wheelers. Mack R series of the '70s could be delivered with an Allison automatic transmission as a customer's request.

Another step ahead was, in 1973, the decision of the US military to have only automatic transmissions on all their heavy vehicles. The reason put forward by the DoD is to have anyone in the troops to be able to drive every heavy vehicle with a minimum of training. Another reason I've got from my sister Linda, who's a USMC reserve officer, is that you can more easily sabotage an automatic transmission to prevent the use of the vehicle you're forced to left behind by the enemy. And, if you've got some time, even turn it into a booby trap, like having a truck stuck at full power that cannot be stopped or slowed after only being started and moved by the enemy...

This fact had put on the road in the '80s lots of truck drivers, who had learned their job in the military without any experience on manual gearboxes with double clutching. With the increase of power output of the prime movers at the same period, this had led to a wider use of automatic transmission on highway trucks. In the 2000s, the realm of manual transmission is more and more restrained to heavy duty trucks, off-road and no-road trucks, and public works vehicles. But even those classes of trucks have also an offer from Allison who provides extreme duty automatic transmissions specifically dedicated to this kind of vehicles. And Caterpillar does not provides manual transmission for their offer of public works trucks.

Even Mack Truck, very conservative with transmission devices, had finally offered an automatic one build by their own factories, the m-Drive™ for their Pinnacle highway series from 2010 onwards, tired to see more and more of their customers ask for

an Allison 4000 instead of their manual-only transmission offer. . . On highway trucks in North America, you cannot find today a tank truck with a manual gearbox for instance, smoother shift changes done by an automatic transmission is a safety bonus when you're hauling a tank not always filled up by preventing the liquid inside to shake back and forth at every shift.

One great step forward was also the transformation of truck sleepers from a box behind the driving cab with a bunk or two and nothing else to real sleeping rooms with all accommodations needed, including all-weather air conditioned, refrigerator, TV, electric plugs for domestic appliances, lots of place to store your personal belongings and, more recently, a backup power to use all this stuff when the truck is stopped without turning the main engine on. When you're an interstate trucker on the road all year long, that helps.

Last word before leaving, an interesting experience that my mother told me. At the age of 14, in 1965, she wanted to have a good job, like her mother, and she applied to a professional school to have a course to become a lathe and milling operator, the job she wanted to do. She had the school level to do that but, instead of being listed in directly, my Grandma received a letter from this school to check with its deputy director, a Mrs. Bartlett, some details of her inscription file. Grandma, who had to deliver some freight to a nearby customer, went there with her truck and asked to see Mrs. Bartlett about her daughter. Mrs. Bartlett, the deputy director, was an upper-class woman with, let's say, a classical point of view about men and women occupations in life. In her office, she told Grandma :

"Well, miss Zieztinski, about your daughter Claire, I have her inscription form, and I see, uh. . . her interest for such an occupation. Honestly, we did not have this kind of request before, and we don't know how to handle it. . . So, miss Zieztinski, are you really sure that your daughter Claire wants to do such a. . . uh. . . specific course ?

— Tell me, what do you mean by "specific" ? Claire is good at school with everything that's metal work, she had seen some of her friend father's do the job, and that's what she wants to do to have a decent pay each month. Like we both do in our family, my husband and I. As blue collars, we cannot have the luxury to have one of us unemployed, we're not short of money with two pays back home. That's how it gets when you're not a member of the high society : husband and wife are obliged to work to make ends meet.

— Well, I see that, your daughter had written "truck driver" and "cook" as parental occupations. As a cook, miss Zieztinski, you might see that some occupations are. . . uh. . . not really suited for young ladies. . .

— About parental occupations in our family, you've got the picture wrong. My husband is the cook, and I am the truck driver, check that. . . "

And Grandma put her chauffeur's licence on Mrs. Bartlett's desk, who was more surprised to see such a thing that she would have been to see an alien lifeform disembarking from a flying saucer after landing just in front of her school. Confused, the deputy director tried to made my grandmother understood that a girl cannot be a lathe and milling operator :

"Well, uh, miss Zieztinski, with your daughter, well. . . What I mean is that it is an occupation where you can only find boys, you see ? That would not be easy for her,

and that would be a better idea if she can find a better training to have a job more . . . convenient with the fact that she is a young girl, you see ?

— Honestly, no. I've heard this for my own ten years ago, when I started to work as a truck driver and, if you want my opinion, it is pure baloney. Jobs for girls and jobs for boys, that ain't exist anymore today. Even if the jerks at the Department of Transportation are obliged to write "female" in the "special signs" line of my chauffeur's licence because they cannot write it elsewhere. So, my daughter want to have this course, she'll get it. Do you have any *legal* objections about it ? I mean, a law that prohibits my daughter to be a lathe and milling operator ?

— Uh. . . I will see with the legal department of the school and I will tell you about this, miss Zieztinski. You do what you want with it, but I have to advise you to check if you cannot find another professional training for your daughter. Hope to see you later with this situation clarified, miss Zieztinski. . . "

The situation had been clarified later, and my Mom finally went in this school for her professional training as a lathe and milling operator. She gets her professional graduation in 1968, one year late due to the birth of my eldest sister Linda in may 1967. And, later, while she was working as a lathe and milling operator at the Union Pacific Railroad depot in Denver after having lost her job at the Chrysler factory due to its closing in 1972, she took the opportunity to be a train driver, the job she still have today. That's how things goes. . .

And then, the next generation have a USMC reserve officer, recipient of a Medal of Honor in the Gulf war in 1991, now attorney in law in NYC, and an airline commander, me, as professionals passionate by their job. That's the most obvious legacy of my grandmother, this family tradition of always doing your best anytime. Even if today, being a trucker, or any kind of demanding profession like that, when you're a woman, is less a challenge than it was in the '50s.

And, last word, with this travel during this summer of my childhood, I have one of the best experience of my life. And a direct feeling of what is a great country like the United States of America. Later, when I learned geography at school, names that were only reference points on a map for the other pupils were living realities for me : Kansas, Missouri River, Pennsylvania, District of Columbia, Ohio River Valley, Appalachian Mountains. . . The lived experience with its formal representation on a map gave me an higher interest in travel and geography than my other classmates.

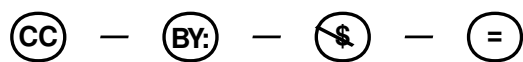
Today, Grandma is 80 years old, happy and healthy retired trucker, still member of the IBT. Sometimes, she drives a truck, her then-now Commercial Driver Licence is still valid with limitations. Last time, she was a test pilot from 2007 to 2009 for Mack Truck to gave them her impression on their then-prototype m-Drive™ automatic gearbox. As Grandma told me, with all those electronic system on the trucks, she have the feeling of being captain Kirk on the bridge of the *Enterprise*. That's how things goes in our family, the wind of change always blows our sails !

THE END

CC Olivier Gabin, 8th of September 2013 – 14th of July 2014

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Typesetting made with \LaTeX

Texlive 2012.8 distribution and Texmaker 3.5 editor