

The *Hotshot Chronicles*



Life @ 100km/hr



*"The Highs Are Really High
and
The Lows Are Really Low"*

gary shade

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Hotshots Press
Jacksonville, Oregon

“Ice Road Truckers meets the Kardashians. This is the inner circle. The *hotshots* do the serious expediting for the sensitive and dangerous materials in motion across this great land. Not only do we readers get to hear about the challenges of just in time delivery, but the conflicts between the *hotshots* and the desk jockeys at the home office, which makes for great drama! I feel very lucky to be one of the few who has gotten to read the installments as they were written.”

—*David Nevins,*
Book Club Member

The Hotshot Chronicles

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Introduction

THE HOTSHOT CHRONICLES is a result of my attempt to keep from going brain dead as we drove our expediting freight truck the width and breadth of the North American continent for the past three and a half years.

We are Gary and Barb, a married owner/operator team, drivers of a straight truck that also serves as our RV and office. While driving I would routinely create a “travel log” in my head describing experiences that we encountered in running our “*hotshot*” trucking business. When it was not my turn to drive, I would then write out the “log” from memory, and apply pictures of the events. The final product became a travel log that I would send to family and friends known collectively as “The Book Club.” Given the delight they experienced following our travels, travails, and lifestyle, Club members would often encourage me to write a book about our adventures. They also seemed to enjoy the literary style and attempts at humor.

Enjoy the read and thanks for taking a peek.
gary and barb

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Acknowledgement

I am the author of the book, and Barb and I are the authors of the story.

Without my co-driver, business partner, best friend,
and wife, this story would be fiction.

Thank you my Beloved.

Dedication

We offer truckers and *hotshots* everywhere our heartfelt appreciation for the achievements and sacrifices you make each day in getting us our stuff.

This book is dedicated to those who find this material inspiring,
who demonstrate courage, and are committed to
hard work in achieving their visions.



US Forest Service “Hotshot”
wildland fire fighters

The US Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management employ specialized wild land firefighting crews called hotshots. Interagency hotshot crews are each made up of twenty firefighters specially trained in wildfire suppression tactics. Hotshot crews are considered an elite group among wildland firefighters, due to their extensive training, high physical fitness standards, and ability to undertake difficult, dangerous, and stressful assignments. They often respond to large, high-priority fires and are trained and equipped to work in remote areas for extended periods of time with little logistical support. In American English, the term “hotshots” also connotes “a person who is conspicuously talented or successful.”*

*Photo and description from Wikipedia

Part I

The Story

THE FIRST SECTION of this book is a compilation of the individual logs organized into a more readable format. To stay true to the events, all the logs are presented in their original form, with minimal editing or added narrative. My intent in publishing this material is to provide the reader an entertaining, insightful, and perhaps an inspiring look into a true story of life on the road that one experiences in running a single truck owner/operator expediting trucking business. We do not use the term “lifestyle” lightly in describing the total emersion we experienced in creating our new business and new life together. In June of 2008 my new bride and I stepped off of the riverbank of life as spectators, into the streaming flow of life itself, to experience and create a business and lifestyle together based on hard work and positive expectations. This book is a description of the results.

We chose the business of trucking expedited freight, or it chose us, to replace the desk jobs we had been at for many years. The logistics/trucking industrial complex is a huge industry with more than several million truckers on the road on any given day, and hundreds of thousands of workers in warehouses and logistics centers throughout North America supporting truckers to get your stuff to you on a daily basis. In this industry, there are many unique niches of specialized freight handling. In one of those niches is found the business of providing expedited (emergency) freight services, including elevated security services, to the US Government, foreign governments, global businesses, and local companies requiring time sensitive and secure transport services. When shipping managers require such services, they call on the “hotshots” to get this job done. *Hotshot* is the term used in this industry to those especially qualified drivers, owner/operators and logistic companies providing such services.

In almost four years of this lifestyle/business, we have come to experience many real highs as well as many real lows. In this time

period we have driven almost a half a million miles, and have been home less than forty days per year. As we regularly drive into Canada, our truck is required to have a speed governor set at 100 kilometers/hrs. (64mph) in order to comply with Canadian trucking rules. *Hotshots* who have US Governments security clearances are qualified to haul military related cargo including weapons, ammo, explosives, classified materials and technology. *Hotshots* will also be used by companies to transport high value time sensitive freight that requires extra security.

Just Another Day at the Office

First Day At Work

We've completed our training as an "expediter" truck driver team and Barb has passed all aspects of getting her Commercial Driver's License and now has her CDL. Fortunately I got to miss that part of hell week because I still have a current CDL from a previous life. The way the business arrangement works is: we are independent contractors who drive a truck for a fleet manager called Expedite Solutions. We are leasing their truck and delivering "hot load freight" for an expediter carrier. The rookies get the older trucks but we hope to upgrade in three to six months. Even with the older truck we still have a flat screen TV, DVD player, frig and microwave. No potty though, so we've invested in a port-a-potty. All truck stops have showers/laundries. Barb's got the big truck driving bug (Praise the Lord) just like I do. We can't believe someone actually pays us money to drive these big rigs sightseeing around North America.

In this trucking industry niche, we obviously live in our truck and when "in service," we are on call 24/7 and are expected to respond to a dispatch request, and within fifteen minutes be on the road headed to pick up a hot load somewhere to be delivered anywhere in the US or Canada. Depending on the distance, we are expected to drive around the clock if need be. That is why this industry primarily employs teams. While one is driving, the other is sleeping. Once the load is delivered on time, there is usually a break while we wait for the next hot load, or we will drive empty to an area of the country where we can position ourselves for a better opportunity to get freight. At this time we are expected to be "in service" twenty-five days straight, then we can take three to four days off, then back on for another twenty-five. Most of the freight is concentrated in the eastern half of the US, but we hope to get out west every couple of months.

We have to pay for our own fuel as independent contractors but we

get to write it off as a business expense. The shipper is charged a large fuel surcharge, which we receive as additional income to help offset the outrageous price of fuel. The cost still hurts our profitability, though. For living on the road, the IRS also gives us a nice daily food per diem of about \$60 per day per couple, which we are allowed to use as a tax deduction, whether we spend it or not. Even so, this business is not a big bucks money maker but more of a lifestyle thing.

With the Fourth of July Weekend upon us, we are off to Chicago to do some sightseeing, and then on Sunday we'll drive our truck to Ohio to begin several days of orientation with our carrier. When done with orientation, we are "in service" and standing by for that first hot load.

And by the way, if you've ever entertained thoughts about visiting Indianapolis, that's probably a major thinking error on your part.

Things they don't teach you in Driver's Ed

Had a good last six days. Picked up a Rolls Royce plane engine in Oakland last Wednesday with delivery in Indiana Friday. Drove 2,300 miles non-stop in 48 hours. The truck revenue for those "two days" of work is about \$3,500, with about half of that going to overhead. Good pay for us, but then we need to take two days off to recover. On Monday, we got a load of two large tanks of black ink from a manufacturer in Indiana with overnight delivery to Jacksonville, Florida. Got to spend Tuesday on a Jacksonville beach for R&R. Somebody has gotta sit on those freakin' Florida beaches.

Here are some things they probably never taught you in Driver's Ed: there are two defensive driving lessons that professional truck drivers are taught:

Aim For The Deer. With all the night driving we do, we see lots of deer. Figuring in the law of averages, we know we'll get one in the headlights some day. Some truckers suggest that when that happens, aim for the deer. You've accomplished several important things when aiming for the deer. First, you stay in your lane and second, you maintain control of the rig. And in aiming for the deer, you've just as much probability of the deer jumping out of the way as trying to zig when the deer zags. Barb and I have discussed this a number of times, and even try to practice the discipline of staying in our lane if an animal decides to go to the happy hunting grounds.

Hit The Ditch. When driving there may be times when you suddenly

have zero visibility such as a white-out from snow conditions, thick smoke on the road, or a sudden dense fog bank. If you're driving along and suddenly can't see two feet in front of you, turn off your lights, drive onto the shoulder and then down into the ditch if you can. With lights off, just stay in the ditch until the visibility clears. You'll probably be stuck, but that is okay because there will be lots of wreckers along to clear out the pile up of cars and trucks you just missed getting involved with.

Gross Revenue Starting Out

I'd like to share some revenue figures that might be helpful in training or talking to new folks. The numbers below are for a team driven straight truck who are Elite (government) qualified and go to Canada. The numbers are truck total gross revenue including accessorials. I'm sensing our break even (pay the bills) point is 10k (gross) per month. We drive for an owner/operator, so they are getting the lion's share of revenue. We are coming up on a year of this lifestyle and would like to stay with it, if we don't get starved out first. Actually thinking of trying to buy a truck this summer if we start to break even again.

Start date-07/10/08

Total Gross Straight Truck Revenue (team)

Month	\$
July	10,384
August	13,328
September	13,355
October	15,442
November	10,657
December	12,270
January	12,298
February	9,465
March	8,990

Made In The USA?

October was our best month for our business. Gross revenue for the truck was about \$19,000. About 60% goes to overhead. These trucks can be both cash cows and money pits. As long as we can keep the cow out of the pit we should be okay. In order to make that much we had to

drive our assets off and put in about 15,000 miles of seat time. October is usually a peak freight month and our hope is to save enough to take a month off starting in mid-December. That will keep us off the winter roads for awhile and get in some serious “friends and family time.” Also, available freight usually sucks in December and January.



We recently did a run from the Mexican border to Canada. We pulled up to a warehouse in the California desert in the middle of nowhere. Auto parts made by Mexican labor were delivered to one side of the warehouse, and we picked it up on the other side. We then drove straight through to Windsor, Canada (across from Detroit), and delivered the parts to a Ford factory where Canadian labor assembled the cars.

After we delivered, I told Barb that because we had driven the parts across the United States, Ford can now turn around and sell the cars in the US and claim that the car was made with US labor because we had delivered the parts.

Barb replied, “No way, they would never do a thing like that.”

We had a recent run to O’Hare to pick up some electronic parts at the United Cargo Terminal. Our freight had Beijing, China stamped all over it. We drove by the China Air Cargo Terminal and the longest line of semis we ever saw was lined up along the entry. There must have been twenty-five trucks. The Chinese are grabbing anything that can fly across the Pacific and loading it up with our holiday stuff. This makes it seem ridiculous to consider that the Chinese and US would ever get hostile towards one another. They buy billions of dollars of US bonds and we buy billions of dollars of their goods. Who else would buy our bonds and who else would buy so many of their goods?

First Christmas On The Road

Looks as if we'll be spending Christmas in Indianapolis and staying at the training residence of our company. We are in Indy to pick up a new truck, and are waiting for it to get out of the shop for its annual DOT inspection before we can hit the road. The guys in the shop are in no hurry and it's Christmas Eve, so we probably won't get it until Friday. The place we are staying at now is a house—a trainee and drivers' residence—and we have it all to ourselves. I'm actually very pleased with the way that this has evolved. My boss was concerned about how we were spending Christmas and I sincerely said that "we've got a place to stay and we're together and we don't need more than that to enjoy this holiday." We find ourselves needing a break from living in the truck and all the stress of winter driving. The house is comfortable and has the amenities of a real home. A real kitchen and a real bathroom with a large tub! Our plans are to work through the holidays and see what types of loads the Universe sends us. We are able to negotiate a higher rate being one of the few trucks running. Our goal is to try to make it back to Oregon in mid January, and actually take about five days off.

The Truck and a Plan

In taking a serious look at our life after trucking, we decided to re-examine the owner/operator side of the business. The Universe again provided us with the answer: we purchased an expediter truck that will also serve as a more comfortable living space. We sealed the deal today in Columbus, Ohio and will be taking possession of our new/used truck next week.



We will continue to be living the life on the road, but as owner/operators and team drivers of our very own trucking business. At this time, we will still be driving for the same carrier and pretty much continue with the lifestyle we've experienced this past year, but this time around we'll get to keep the full gross revenue that is paid to the truck, instead of sharing it 60/40 with the truck owner. We are excited and pleased with this new opportunity.

Our plan: The truck will be paid off in four years as we drive full time. After the truck is paid off, we will semi-retire back to Medford, but will keep the truck. We'll then take loads as needed to refuel the checking account or if we just have an itch to get back on the road. Well, at least that is the plan today.

More on the New Truck

We are now in Port Washington, Wisconsin, spending the night in a motel for a little break. Port Washington is on Lake Michigan and known for some of the best fishing in the lake. We watched one guy catch a 30-inch lake trout from the marina and watched another lose one just as big when it got tangled in dock pilings. They fish with chunks of salmon roe hanging in the water on bobbers. The fall is coming to the north country and the weather is changing. The trees are getting their fall colors. All very lovely.

We continue to enjoy our new business and like the spirit of running our little one-truck company. The new/used truck is great but starting to have some things break down, as is expected with 300K miles on it. The shock is that the cost to fix anything is always extreme. Two new batteries cost \$350 and a fix on the A/C was \$700. The water pump is leaking and they want \$700 to replace that but I'll just keep adding antifreeze for as long as I can get away with it. Revenue from the truck is paying the bills but August was a terrible month. We need to generate about \$11k monthly in gross revenue to keep us and the truck running. Did \$17K in July, \$6K in August, and \$15k in September. In the upper Midwest, the freight business has suddenly spiked and when we are in this part of the country we are keeping really busy. A lot of it has to do with the auto industry seeing a spike in production.

It's like the freakin' DMZ here

We've been busy on the California/Mexico border these past couple of weeks, picking up and dropping off cross-border freight. I remembered a news story about a van full of smuggled fake Marines who were picked up at a border checkpoint: we regularly go through that checkpoint. We spent the night on the border across from Mexicali on the California side where the fake Marines came across.

Our friend Dar mentioned that she was concerned for our safety with us overnighting on the border so much. I assured that we feel okay these days on the border because it's like a freakin' DMZ now. Border cops are swarming the south border these days. We constantly see their equipment, trucks, and aircraft through the nights and days. The helicopters with infrared scanning capabilities are operating all along the No-Pass-Zone and keep us up at night. Other than Chico, California, this is probably one of the safer places to overnight in our truck.



The Corn Belt

This is our fourth summer of driving back and forth across the corn belt states, and for the first time in four years I've noticed that farmers are back into the normal rotation of corn/soy beans crops. In the three previous years when a bushel of corn was literally worth as much silver (aka ethanol), farmers planted only corn. Not only did they singularly plant corn, but they planted it everywhere.! Front yards, backyards, playgrounds, and gardens disappeared. I'm sure if the DOT would have let the farmers in Iowa have their way, they would have planted corn down the wide median on I-80. I've heard that if corn prices stay up there that they're going to start ripping up church parking lots in South Dakota.



An Infinite Array of Possibilities

On Friday, “Mother Panther” (our carrier) decided that she would pay for fuel for us to head to southern California, so we spent a leisurely weekend driving to LA. This morning she called and asked if we would layover there for two days and then take a load to Virginia. Given the nature of the west coast business, two days off would have to work for a cross country trip. So where do we suffer for the next two days waiting? How about Malibu?

We drove up Route 1 to Malibu and are currently parked along side the highway overlooking the ocean, celeb watching. The bumper



is we were hoping for a high of 75 degrees, but looks like it’s only going to be sunny and 70. Life’s a beach.



That’s a picture of Charlie Harper’s house (of “Two and a Half Men” fame). We haven’t seen him, but we passed his mom’s real estate office with a big Mercedes out front when we drove through town. We also spotted Rose trying to climb over the fence.

The Highs

July 2011

An Escape To Sanity

Over the weekend, as our political leaders frantically and courageously tried to keep the government of United States of America from declaring war on itself, we finally had the opportunity to decompress with some well-deserved R&R at a Montana ghost town. Friday, a week ago, we picked up a giant screen TV in Baltimore for delivery to Houston, then drove from Houston over to Fort Hood for an ammo load to Fort Carson, Colorado. From there, we did a run for the Air Force from Warren AFB in Cheyenne, Wyoming, to Maelstrom AFB in Great Falls, Montana. The load, perhaps something to do with ballistic missile parts, given all the fuss that was made over our 80 pounds of whatever we were carrying, was the norm for us.



But sometimes, given these small DOD loads, I would just love to say to the powers that be, “Hey, give us the box, and we will put it at the bottom of the bed in the cab, and the only way it’s leaving our possession is a ‘double tap’ from the bad guys. Yes, we will sleep with your freakin’ thingie, whatever the hell it is.”

While at Great Falls, we stopped to give Lewis, Clark, and Sacajawea some directions as they worked their way up the Missouri River. I tried to give them some advice on a route to the Pacific, but finally said,



“Hey dudes, just follow the Indian chick.” But you know how men can be when asking a woman for directions.

At this point we were exhausted and ready for a break. During the month of July we’d driven over 15,000 miles and we were desperate to just stop. Now, Friday, we’ve decided to pull off Mon-

tana's I-15 near the Idaho border and explore some of the state's back roads. Montana is gorgeous this summer. Seems all the rain this year has fallen on Montana, western Colorado and Wyoming. It's the end of July and all the grass-covered hills are still green and the lakes and reservoirs are overflowing. I've been banging around this part of the country for forty years and have never seen it so green this time of year!

At Dillon, Montana, we left the grid. With six hundred lawyers running our government, all of whom are operating at maximum self-serving interest, we just needed to turn-off, tune-out, and unplug. Perhaps we could discover a little sanity, maybe gain some serenity in a Montana ghost town.



After leaving the interstate at Dillon in southwestern Montana, the road less traveled led us to the ghost town of Bannack, Montana. Near the town was a campground nestled in the bend of a wild trout stream, and we spent a delightful weekend exploring the Montana Territory's first capital, established in 1862.





A Precious Moment of Serenity Shared

“Preacher circuit riders became the norm for the isolated towns like Bannack. One of the more famous ones to come to Bannack and have a significant impact was William Van Orsdel, fondly remembered as ‘Brother Van.’

”Brother Van arrived in Bannack at the peak of mining activity. He found all the gambling houses and bars open on Sunday. Stepping up



to the bar, he announced himself as a minister. The bartender whistled the crowd to silence, informing them that the bar would be closed for “one hour.” Given his chance, in his marvelous singing voice, Brother Van sang a popular song of that day, ‘A Diamond in

the Rough.’ The crowd, hungry for entertainment, asked for more. Brother Van continued and the crowd got a good hour’s worth of religion.

In August of 1877, Bannack had a major Indian scare. Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce Indians had just defeated General Gibbon at the bloody Battle of the Big Hole. Word reached the isolated little community that the Indians were on the rampage and headed straight for Bannack. People from around the area gathered in Bannack to seek protection.

Two lookouts were built on the highest points of the hills on either side of Hangman’s Gulch for early warning. In case of a siege, the local water supply was barricaded. The women and children were gathered in the brick fortress, The Hotel Meade. Some stories tell of hiding the children in the safes located inside the hotel. Although the Indians killed four settlers in Horse Prairie, they never came close to Bannack. The bodies of the settlers were brought to town and buried by Brother Van Orsdel.



After it was apparent that the town was safe from attack, Brother Van, being the promoter that he was, took advantage of the large number of settlers in town and talked them into building the first real church in Bannack.”¹

¹ Montana Historical Society, “Bannack’s Early Days”



“It Ain’t Miracle Grow”

In mid October we were driving through the back roads of south-west Wisconsin to make a delivery. This is a beautiful part of the state, with rolling hills of forest and farms inhabited by Scandinavians. When I crested a hill, I suddenly caught a glimpse of something that didn’t quite register in my consciousness but startled me nonetheless. As we passed the site, I told Barb that when we finished our delivery in the nearby town we would head back to that hilltop we’d just passed and check out something I thought quite bizarre. She asked what it was and I responded, “I think it has something to do with pumpkins.”

When we returned to the hill’s crest about an hour later, to our glee and amazement the most interesting sight and activity awaited our discovery. There before us was a group of local folk harvesting giant pumpkins and giant squash from a small, half-acre patch. The garden was filled with these monster veggies, the least of which weighed 300 pounds and several came in at almost half a ton! There wasn’t just one of these behemoths, but dozens of them! We pulled the truck over to the side of the road and quickly engaged in the harvest ourselves.



I got to talking to one of the farmers and asked what it took to get these beauties to grow to such a jaw-dropping size. He said it was important to be in a location that had warm days and cool nights, and that each plant was hand fertilized and watered everyday with his special concoction.

Naturally, I asked what his fertilizer recipe was and with a glint in his eye he stated, “It ain’t Miracle Grow,” and said no more. It was also curious to see blankets and sleeping bags scattered about the harvest site and stacked on top of the pumpkins. Seems as when fall comes on and the nights start to get too nippy, each pumpkin and squash is sheltered with a cozy cover so as not to have the plant’s biological activity interrupted by the cold.



The good folk were friendly and warm, and seemed to enjoy our interest. I assured them that we’d look them up next fall if we were in the area, and we will do our best to make that happen. Heck, maybe we could lend them a truck. Now that’s bragging rights when you need a forklift to harvest your garden!

Litiz, Pennsylvania and the Battle Ship Wisconsin

This spring we took a load to a small town north of Lancaster, Pennsylvania called Litiz, a very picturesque German-American community which is also the boyhood home of Bob Jenkins (Barb’s father). The town was off the beaten tourist lanes and gave one the sense of authenticity as to its roots and culture. A delightful village where one very soon felt safe and at home, wishing they could stay longer.



In the town's central park, there is a quiet pond that invites young and old to linger, and such was the attraction for the Jenkins boy. He recalls playing with toy subs and war ships before the war. But then came World War II, and the sixteen-year-old Bob Jenkins was ready to join the fight. With his dad's written permission he joined the Navy and was eventually assigned to the Navy's newly commissioned battleship, the USS Wisconsin, as a radio operator and signalman.

The USS Wisconsin was assigned to the Pacific and was in the fighting from the get-go. If I've got my history right, the Wisconsin was the first US Navy battleship to fire onto the Japanese mainland in a daring raid under the cover of bad weather. On board was young radio operator Jenkins.

"On 16 February 1944, the task force approached the Japanese coast under cover of adverse weather conditions and achieved complete tactical surprise. As a result, Wisconsin and the other ships shot down 322 enemy planes and destroyed 177 more on the ground. Japanese shipping, both naval and merchant, also suffered drastically, as did hangars and aircraft installations.

Wisconsin and the task force moved to Iwo Jima on 17 February to provide direct support for the landings slated to take place on 19 February. They revisited



U.S.S. Wisconsin

Tokyo on 25 February and hit the island of Hachijo off the coast of Honshu the next day, resulting in heavy damage to ground facilities; additionally, American planes sank five small vessels and destroyed 158 planes.”²

Bob fondly recalls his life on a battling man-of-war. He says he grew up on a battleship and considered the Wisconsin his home. After the war and a couple of years of peace time, Bob started a family, but then the Korean War broke out. Back into the Navy he went again, but this time didn't need his parents' approval. Interesting to reflect that by the time Bob was in his early twenties he had served in WWII and the Korean War.

Now at eighty-five, Bob and his wife Betty are of clear mind and good health and recently returned from attending a biannual reunion of a special group of serving WWII vets. This loose-knit group, that doesn't have an official, formal name, meets throughout the country every two years. The group is always looking for new members. There's just one requirement to join: you needed to have served in WWII as a teenager.

As a committed landlubber, I had the opportunity to ask the old sea salt a question us shore huggers sometimes think about: What's the difference between a ship and a boat? With a wink of an eye he said, “A boat can be put onto a ship, but a ship can't be put on a boat.”

The Corn Murals of Mitchell

We were near the end of our Easter drive across the United States when we happened to go through Mitchell, South Dakota, close to the Iowa state line. Then we realized that this was practically an anniversary. It was almost three years ago that we were here last. It was on our trek east, in the Prius, to begin our new life/business/marriage driving something called a straight truck. We stopped in Mitchell and marveled at the Corn Palace murals, all made of individual ears of corn. Each year there is a new theme and new corn murals are created.



² Wikipedia

Beautiful Ohio, “Who Knew?”

This past weekend we had a load of furniture pieces we were delivering from Madison, Wisconsin to West Virginia, and had three days to do a one day trip. So we got out our travel book, *One Thousand Places to See Before You Die* to find out if there were any sights to see on our route. This book covering the North Americas has been a blessing. Every out-of-the-way place it has suggested has never disappointed.



This weekend the book led us to Hocking Hills in southwest Ohio, near the West Virginia border. Beautiful rolling countryside in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, Hocking Hills is the country retreat for those living in the cities of Ohio, with a plethora of rental cabins throughout the area, and many miles of hiking trails through the gorges of Hocking Hill State Park.



It's great being able to go to sightseeing in areas off-season. There are far less people and the prices for lodging are lower. We rented ourselves a cabin for the night, grateful to get out of the truck, and spent the next day exploring. In the summer there are crowds and traffic jams, but on this rainy spring day it was just us roaming the trails.

American Stonehenge

After a ten day stay at home, we got a load of copper wire assemblies from Redmond, Oregon (central Oregon) to Calgary, Alberta. We drove up Route 97, paralleling the Cascades on the east side, and passed over the Crooked River Bridge as we neared the Columbia River. At Biggs, Oregon, there is a bridge that crosses over the Columbia. Several times in the past I had noticed an unusual site up the hill from the Briggs crossing. It looked like a Stonehenge of sorts, but we'd never had time to stop. With this load, we had time.



After crossing the Columbia and driving above the river, we pulled into an isolated parking lot. There was something strangely familiar about the structure in front of us. It actually did look like Stonehenge. When I walked up to the information plaque it was, in fact, a to-scale astrological alignment replica of England's famous Stonehenge formed from concrete. Quite extraordinary to find something like this overlooking the Columbia River and the vast rolling grass covered hills of eastern Oregon and Washington.

There are many theories about the use and significance of the 4,000 year-old Stonehenge. One assumption about Stonehenge is that the

structure is an astrological calendar which accurately predicts the quarterly settings of the sun and moon in a calendar year. An interesting “coincidence” of this site is that the setting of the midsummer moon is accurately seen through the Stonehenge prisms as the moon sets over Mt. Hood, which is visible on west horizon.



The information plaque gave a very interesting story of this monument built in the 1920s. With delighted anticipation, I decided to spend time looking through and around this marvel. As I did, I soon experienced a mild mental disorientation and vertigo. I recalled having a similar, much more intense bodily experience when I first saw the Grand Canyon. I’ve seen hundreds of pictures of the Grand Canyon, but the first visual experience was an assault on my consciousness. In my reality, there was nothing to register a comparison to the colossal ditch. I was so taken aback and overwhelmed with the natural stimuli that I actually had to grab a guard rail for fear of fainting.

Washington’s Stonehenge had a similar effect on my senses, but rather than a natural anomaly of the site, it was the juxtapositions of the stone pillars and the mosaic of shapes and images. Though in the wide open spaces, I sensed the mental confusion of being in a chambered stone maze. I struggled in attempting to make order of something I didn’t understand.

Kill Devil Hill, Outer Banks, North Carolina. You are there.

We recently had a delivery near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. If the Wright Brothers had launched their air machine on the other side of the sand dunes, “Kill Devil Hill” would have been the name that every school kid on the planet would have needed to memorize. I’m kinda glad they chose the opposite slope.





Amish School Bus

In early January we had a load that took us to Berlin, Ohio, in the east central part of the state, not too far from Pennsylvania. I'd never been there and wasn't expecting much of a change in scenery; just the same flat Ohio farm lands with a fresh winter coat of snow. As we drove into the region we noticed something different and unusual as the farm country became more hilly, and with much more winter. The difference in the scenery was the presence of stacked neat piles of harvested corn stalks surrounding tidy farms that lacked the presence of modern day farm equipment.



We were in Amish country. In all our journeying across America's farm lands, we had never seen such remnants of a corn harvest. As we were to find out later, we would be delivering a load of furniture-making glue to the center of one of the largest but little known Amish communities in the US.



This area has not received as much tourist attention as the Amish people in the Pennsylvania Dutch country near Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Berlin is the center of this large community of Amish, but the town is small and without a single red light or traffic signal. We also noticed something else:

the presence of furniture making signs posted on just about every other driveway. This region is certainly the hub of homemade Amish furniture and is probably their second largest source of commerce outside of farming.

As we made an extra effort to wind our way through their back country, we began noticing their one room schoolhouses, many with adjacent outhouses. We understand that the more strict Amish usually don't allow more than an eighth grade education for their kids. We also noticed that about every two to three miles there was another one room school located near the road, but only about half or less were in use.

Since the Amish don't have school buses, they send their kids walking to the closest school to the farm. As the demographics of the youth population shifts, schools are opened and closed to accommodate the clusters of kids.



This particular schoolhouse caught our attention. It was obviously being used, as we noted the row of sleds stacked against the schoolhouse wall. I noticed no vehicle traffic tracks in the snow leading to the school. We would have loved to have seen those kids making their way to school on their little Amish school buses.

Olympic Village and the Bubble People

After a nice five days at home we drove up to Portland to try and catch a load and were lucky enough to land a prize: a hot load of bar furniture that needed to be delivered ASAP from Portland to the Four Seasons Resort in Whistler, British Columbia. At first we didn't recognize the name, but it sounded like a neat place, and if they had a Four Seasons there, then it couldn't be an outback dump.

As it turned out, Whistler was home to some of the Olympic events in Vancouver, BC. We made our delivery and had lunch at the Four Seasons, then spent two days just hanging out and playing tourist.

Whistler is a delightful town. The center of the village is pedestrian-only and ample parking is on the outskirts. Hotels are located in the heart of the village with shuttles out to the parking lot. Beautiful alpine setting and delightful weather.



One thing that was a first for us to see was the winter ski lifts turned into dirt bike lifts. Young kamikaze-intent men had their bikes taken to the top of the ski run and then daredeviled the dirt bike trails straight down the mountain. They wore helmets and lots of padding all over. Some had on more gear than a football player.



British Columbia is turning out to be one of our favorite areas of North America. Such variety of culture and nature. From Victoria to the Canadian Rockies, there is such beauty and so many friendly people. Especially in the off season when the Americans aren't around. Americans tend to be loud and gaudy, and they're either exceptionally beautiful or exceptionally overweight.

We've also noticed a significant difference between Canadians and Americans: fat people. It's amazing to realize that in crowds of Americans, the obese and heavy hauls are many, while crowds of non-Americans seem to be lacking this profile. I can only imagine what the Asians must see in us when they come over here. Now I understand why the Asians call us the Bubble People.



Oh, one other thing: my Body Mass Index shows me borderline obese.

—The Heavy Hauler.

Canadian Rockies: The Real Rocky Mountain High

On Monday we stopped in Portland to have dinner with friends and wait for our next load. We were settling in for the night when our dispatcher called to ask us if we wanted to pick up a load of designer lamps Tuesday morning in Portland, with delivery to a lodge in Banff National Park in the Canadian Rockies the next day. Hell, yes! So we spent the rest of the week working our way through the snow-covered mountain peaks of the Rockies to deliver 187 designer table lamps to a resort in Banff, Alberta. Always a challenge to get back to the states from this area with no freight, so we usually end up deadheading back to Washington State. “Deadheading” means driving empty and usually not getting paid, not old boomers going to Grateful Dead concerts. So deadheading in trucker lexicon is a sucky term.



Got to visit the town of Banff, Alberta and took a side trip to Lake Louise in Banff National Park. Lake Louise is a “World Heritage” site, with the Fairmont Hotel overlooking the area. We also got to see professional ice skaters rehearsing their routine on the ice in front of the hotel, and draft horses at work pulling bleachers.





Cop cars, rocks, and tulips... I hope you really like tulips

We'd had an interesting tour on the west coast this past several weeks. We were able to get a military load from DC to Seattle and then pick up a car at the Portland Airport. We recently delivered this beast to the Corvallis, Oregon Police Department. This is a real, electric-only car sent by air from Korea. After we picked up this new-age cop car at the airport and dropped it off with the Corvallis Police, we spent a week of home time in southern Oregon and loved seeing the girls and the grandkids.



Then we got a load up to the Yukon Territory in Canada, delivering stuff to a pulp mill and deadheaded to Minneapolis. From there we got a load to a power plant at the Four Corners area of New Mexico and Arizona. From there we snagged a load of Starbucks Frappaccino mix back up to Vancouver, British Columbia.

As we were deadheading south to Seattle from Vancouver, we recalled that we'd broken down in Mt. Vernon, Washington, (50 miles north of Seattle) last year and had heard that it was a great tulip growing area, but one really had to be there in April to see the blossoms. It was now the middle of the flowering season, so we took off to discover what all the tulip fuss was about. Turns out the Skagit Valley is actually one of the largest tulip growing and bulb production areas on the planet. There are more acres under tulip cultivation than in Holland.

We saw an amazing sight: hundreds of acres of tulips and huge tulip gardens that seemed to attract people from all over the world.





Synchronicity and Dollywood

Synchronicity is a term used in Jungian psychology to describe the interaction of seemingly unrelated events into a meaningful experience.

I picked up Friday's *USA Today* (our favorite paper), along with Barb's morning breakfast treats, and served my partner breakfast in bed. Whenever I'm able, I try to serve Barb breakfast in bed as a positive affirmation of my love and appreciation for her hard "living" involved in our lifestyle. We were in Virginia and had just picked up a load to deliver to Dallas. Barb was reading the paper and yelled to me up front that Dollywood was celebrating its 25th birthday and Dolly herself was going to be there for a Hallmark filming with Kenny Rogers, et al... And by driving to Dallas from Roanoke, Virginia, we were going to drive right past Dollywood in eastern Tennessee!



Barb was right. After checking the map, we figured we had plenty of time to deliver our load, and so decided to make a small detour and spend the day at Dollywood. It cost \$11 to park and \$50/head to get in,

but all rides are free. The Dolly Parton story is a rural one that begins with her being brought up on a share cropper farm with no running water and eleven kids. A replica of her home is on display. We enjoyed our day with a tour on Dolly's Travel bus, several fun water rides and lots of things to see. Women can even purchase some of Dolly's famous outfits in any size. Overall a good experience that was pleasant and relaxing. Crowds were "down home" and Dolly actually came out for a ride through the park, but we were not in the right place to see her.



Thought of a joke while touring the grounds: "If you are taking your kids to Dollywood for a multi-cultural experience, then you must be a redneck."





After leaving Dollywood, we made our way to Little Rock, Arkansas, where we planned to do our clothes washing at a coin laundry. We found a convenient laundry in a low income neighborhood. While waiting for the laundry, I decided to explore. Walked north two blocks then east two blocks and stopped in front of the Governor's Residence in Little Rock. I realized it was authentic when I noticed the bust of Willy J. (a.k.a. Bill Clinton) himself on the front lawn.



Dropped off a load Tuesday, and picked up thirty-seven cadavers from SW Medical College in Dallas for delivery to a Medical facility in Las Vegas. The cadavers were to be used by medical students. This was a load for my carrier's Life Sciences Division. I told Barb if we got into an accident with this load, I was sure we'd make CNN.

So there I stood, alone, in the back of my truck, surrounded by reinforced cardboard boxes containing cadavers. The lids to the boxes were not secured.

That's the question... did Gary look??

2,100 miles of deadhead... on our nickel

We were in Laredo, Texas on Wednesday, and my daughter Katrina's baby was going to be born Friday, if not sooner. We set the GPS on "Home" and drove straight through on our nickel. It was well worth it. In driving from Laredo to Medford, Oregon, we stated we were available for a load but nothing came our way. We showed up at the hospital three hours after baby Lila was born.

Most kids born to Oregon natives will be either Ducks or Beavers. The Duck Clan "kidlings" are University of Oregon bound, and the Beaver Clan "pups" are Oregon State bound. Now if a Duck and Beaver happen to co-mingle, their kids become part of the Platypus Clan, and go to school wherever they want. Katrina and husband Tyler are Oregon State graduates and hardcore members of the Beaver Clan. The family picture of Beaver outfits leaves no doubt where these pups are going to college. The rivalry game between the colleges is called the "Civil War" and has literally been played for over 110 years. Go Beavs!



Mother Smuckers

Be careful what you wish for. We were hoping to work over the Fourth, because if we don't get a load the by Thursday or Friday before the holiday weekend, we will be sitting over the weekend until Tuesday. We picked up a load of car parts Wednesday in Milwaukee for delivery to Noglis, Arizona on Friday, then drove down the street to the next Mexican warehouse to pick up car parts for delivery to central Quebec Monday morning. Between Wednesday and July 4th we need to drive about 5,000 miles. That's basically 5k miles in 5 days. Today is Saturday. Only 1,500 miles to go and I'm totally sick of driving and my turn is coming up next. What keeps us motivated is our gross revenue for the trip: \$1.60/mi. I'll let you do the math.

Last week we got a load of tractor tires from Los Angeles to Orrville, Ohio. That name, Orrville, seemed familiar and sure enough, as we were rolling into town, there on the right was the mother of all



Smuckers stores. Seems that Paul Smucker from Orrville got an idea back in the mid 1800s to make apple butter from the mash left over from making apple cider. The challenge was to make it in commercial quantities and still

have it taste as good as the farmers' wives could make it. Back then if one couldn't make food as good as homemade, it wouldn't sell. Tell that to General Mills. Well, Paul kept working on the cooking method and found using copper pots and pipes worked for making commercial level jams and developed a recipe as good as homemade.

And you know the rest of the story.



Sometimes I'm Just Amazed

One would think that after three years of this work/lifestyle a mature couple like us would probably end up looking like Ma and Pa Kettle, or at least I thought we would. The around-the-clock driving seems to be getting harder, and at times the work is downright grueling, but when I look at some of our having-fun photos, I'm impressed that our bodies seem to be responding to this work in a healthy manner.



There are times when we are parked by a beach or lake, just resting, that I'm truly amazed to be sitting around waiting for someone to call and offer me a lot of money to pick up their stuff and haul it across country. This summer we had a load that took us near the Outer Banks of North Carolina. After delivery, we drove over to Nags Head to wait for the next load. The Outer Banks contain some of the best beaches in the US and I'm just a "po' boy" from southern Oregon sitting here with my toes curled in the sand, thinking, "I'm Blessed."





The Lows

The Terrible Threes

I've written about our *hotshot* lifestyle with the highs being really high and the lows being really low. Well, here are my lows for February:

It started out with a stack of pita chips tipping over inside the truck. Almost had to buy a couple of cases of chips to get out of that one, but talked nice to someone and they let it slide.



No such luck in Canada. Barb was driving through Ontario on the way to Toronto when she pulled into a weigh/inspection station. I had been lying down in the back and came up front to see what was up with pulling into the inspection station. She stopped at the scale and the inspector came out and looked up at me with a curious expression. When he finished with the inspection, the cop said he was issuing me a citation for failure to wear a seat belt and the tidy fine would be \$230! I protested with my story of just moving up into the seat, but he basically said, "Tell it to da judge." Of course I was not going to let that pass without a discussion about the Canadian justice system, and was just about to utter the most offensive insult I could think of: "Canadians really suck at hockey," when Barb pushed me out the door and walked me back to the truck. I later thanked Barb for saving me from myself again.

Being a strong believer that bad stuff happens in threes, I was not to be disappointed. Back in the states I was making my way around a

large tree on a the road partially blocked by snowdrifts, when a limb fell hard on the fiberglass roof of the truck van. The limb tore open the roof like a can opener. Now I needed to get the roof replaced and the nearest facility was in Buffalo, New York. After spending almost three days in Buffalo waiting for parts and repairs, I certainly concur with Mark Twain's remark that "committing suicide in Buffalo would be redundant."

Oh well, at least we are back in the non-snowy south, hauling explosives and hoping that the terrible threes are out of the way.

Still Haven't Learned To Love That Smell In The Morning

Friday, 0800hrs, Pennsylvania Turnpike:

A coffee break on the road on a run to Salt Lake from Philly. Still haven't gotten used to that quirky unique morning truck stop smell of piss and diesel. We tend to avoid overnight stays at truck stops and opt for the nearest Walmart.

Some Thoughts At The Pump

Since we spend \$50,000 a year on fuel, I at least get to express an opinion!



Canadian Whiteout

We are now hanging out in Seattle, setting our hopes on getting home sometime this week for our holiday break. Just completed a round trip drive from Portland to Edmonton, Alberta, back to Seattle. We spent two days driving in near blizzard conditions and trying to keep ahead of the Arctic cold. It's supposed to get down to -20 degrees in Great Falls, Montana. We were there Saturday, trying like hell to get out of town before the freeze. At -20°, the diesel turns to jello and won't fuel the engine. At these temperatures things that are supposed to break

don't, and things that are not supposed to break, do. The physics of materials at these temps is quixotic, if not just plain interesting.

I got involved in a vehicle pileup near Calgary, Alberta. Drove into a whiteout on their freeway and barely managed to weave my way through the beginnings of a vehicle pileup. We actually got hit from behind (felt the bump) but didn't dare stop in the whiteout. I continued to drive on until we got out of the whiteout. Then I pulled over in a clear spot and waited for the car that hit us to come on through. No damage to our massive rear bumper, but did see a small scratch where we got bumped. We waited for our bumpee to come out of the whiteout but no one came out, so we drove on as the blizzard conditions continued to worsen.

My Day

Our automatic transmission went out near Barstow, California, where we were scheduled to pick up a load at China Lake Naval Weapons Station for Yuma, Arizona. We had to decline the load upon arrival because the tranny idiot light was coming on, and the tranny was not functioning properly. We can't afford to have a breakdown with a DOD load. It would become a "security incident" if we were to break down on the side of the road with DOD hazmat high explosives or classified electronics. Cops start showing up if we sit too long waiting for a solution to the problem. Most often my carrier will hire a tow truck to drag the loaded truck to the nearest secure military facility for transfer, or tow it all the way to the destination. The seals (metal bolts with numbers) on the cargo doors can't be broken unless strictly supervised with armed cops or MPs.

We drove from China Lake to San Diego (250 miles) with the tranny idiot light on in order to get it fixed. Couldn't turn off the engine or put it in neutral or reverse during the entire trip because the tranny would fail. We made it over the Grapevine (mountain pass) to Los Angeles just fine. As long as we were moving forward, all was good. On top of that, in Sacramento ("Sac-a-tomatoes," as Barb calls it) California, we also had a tail light casing replaced, and neither the mechanic nor I checked to see if both rear tail lights were functioning properly. When I inspected the truck several hours later, I found that the wiring was crossed from the original casing. To make the right tail light blink we had to turn on the left signal, and to make the left signal work we

had to flash the headlights. To make both brake lights work we had to press the brake pedal and turn on the headlights, and to make the hazard lights appear to function we had to put on the left turn signal and pump the brake pedal. And one of us had to drive the truck. If we had been stopped by the DOT cops when going through a weigh station for inspection, we would've had to show that all our lights were functioning properly. Luckily, we made it to the Allison Transmission Service center in San Diego without incident.

Yesterday in Sacramento we spent \$2,300 to get the generator replaced in the Auxiliary Power Unit that keeps our sleeper cozy. The Allison service manager was pleased to see us come in, and courteous. If we get away with less than \$2,000 on that bill, we'll be happy. The truck now has one half-million miles on it, and we bought it with 270K miles. Hey, mechanical stuff fails and that's truckin'. It's times like these that I frequently reflect on the Serenity Prayer:

*“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.”*

By the way, the reason we went all the way to San Diego was because we dislike truckin' in Los Angeles. Truckers are relegated to the shitty parts of town and are treated poorly. The folks in LA want all their stuff to appear magically, without considering the effort it takes to bring in all their crap. LA is a lot like Ashland Oregon, or Washington, DC. A whole bubble of a city, surrounded by reality. So we drove another hundred miles to San Diego because the weather is so perfect (sunny and 70°), and the facilities and people are much more accommodating.

Well, that was our day. However, we did get two days poolside in San Diego while waiting for the truck repair, so I'll stop whining.

It's Too Dangerous To Stop and Too Dangerous To Keep Going

Usually we share and send the highlights of our journeys, but there are many times during the course of a week when we wonder just what the hell we have gotten ourselves into. Two people living in a walk-in closet exposing ourselves to the many risks and dangers of life on the road. There are times we literally drive around the clock for many days, with numbing boredom and fatigue. Oh yes, there is driving across

North Dakota at 0300 hrs in a blizzard, being scared and lonely, thinking that everybody we know is safe at home sleeping in their nice warm beds. I hate driving when it's too dangerous to stop and too dangerous to continue. Then there's the \$40,000 we spent on fuel in 2009, and we just put two new steer tires on the front, to the tune of \$1,100.

Report From The Spill—YOU are there

We drove to the mouth of the Mississippi River today. Venice, Louisiana, bayou country, is more water than land. Beautiful, yet fragile country. Since the Deepwater Horizon spill, shrimp fishing boats have been tied up at their docks, looking dejected. Small Business Administration has set up an office on the freaking dock. The water levels shown in the photo below are natural levels. This place seems to be a target range for hurricanes. A bull's-eye. Lots of helicopter activity carrying sand bags, as they did during Katrina. New construction is going on at a ferocious rate, and the lawyers have billboards up, proclaiming their expertise in suing oil companies.



We took some pictures of an oil clean-up dump, which was also the parish sheriff's incident command post. The parish sheriff, the size of the kid in the movie *Blindside*, came up to me while I was taking pictures and asked me to stop. I made a comment under my breath and he said, "Oh, now are you going to get sarcastic with me?" I said I wanted to take one more picture—of his official sheriff's banner on the command post. He thought about it for a second and then said, "Well, okay." I took the picture and smiled as I looked up at him, noticing that he was also smiling as he let me pass.



The saddest part was that right at the mouth of the Mississippi it smelled like the inside of a truck stop service bay or a mechanic's oily old shop at best. In my mind, we all share the responsibility for this disaster and its consequences, thinking that there are no risks in our demand for cheap oil.





Concession Stand Accident

We had completed our delivery to a concession stand at Washington State Fair. The location of the consignee was at the Central Washington State Fair and was one of many concessions within the Fair Grounds. After we'd made our delivery we were told by Fair Security to exit from a different route than the one we had come in. The area was perhaps several acres in size and was packed with a wide variety of concessions. The roads were narrow and difficult to maneuver, and the area was dimly lit.



As I was maneuvering to the exit, I had to make a tight corner and was traveling at about 2 mph. After backing up once to try and make the corner, I thought I had enough room to miss the corner concession stand and also avoid the one to my left front. I misjudged and

hit the corner of the stand with the side of the truck. Because of the darkness it was hard for me to see the structure in my mirror. I stopped when I realized I had hit the corner of the stand and got out to inspect the damage. Fair Security showed up (the same one who'd told me to leave a different exit) and we began the process of providing necessary information. Security called the concession owner and he arrived within twenty minutes. After surveying the damage, he stated he wanted to file an insurance claim. Though the damage was not significant, it would take a crew quite a bit of effort and time to fix the stand. The damage to the side of the truck was superficial and did not puncture the inside of the van box or effect the structural integrity of the van.

Fender Damage

To My Owner/Operator

On 12/17/2008 we were in Edmonton, Alberta. It was dark and snowing heavily when I pulled into the Flying J on Route 2 to park and eat. As I turned into the truck parking lot, I did not see the cement parking barrier and struck it with the passenger side wheel fender near the passenger side door. I was moving about 15-20 mph and the impact broke off pieces of the fender near ground level.

Attached is a picture of the damage.



Indiscriminate destruction

Finally saw some tornado damage while driving north through Alabama and Tennessee. In one small town it looked like a mad monster had walked down main street and just pushed over all the very largest of trees. Those big beautiful spreading hardwood trees that have been there over a hundred years, only to be pushed over by a mean, mad

monster. The next sight was a small town just off the freeway, where a tornado touched down. Again, it seemed like some kind of giant with a weed whacker had been walking through the town, buzzing everything down to ground level, just to be mean.





The Pooch



Oliver

Last week we were hauling a load of explosives from Kentucky to Travis Air Force Base, California. As we were driving across Wyoming, Barb said she thought it was time to get a dog. We frequently see truckers with dogs and have thought about it ourselves, but we always come up with a good reason not to. I could sense from Barb's voice there really wasn't going to be a lot of discussion on the topic, so I started to seriously think about the type of critter we should get. I reflected on the dog issue for most of the drive across Wyoming as we made our way to Salt Lake City.

I've had lots of dogs over the years and realized that a Shih-tzu was probably the best dog for our situation, and the easiest to take care of. But how and when could we ever get a Shih-tzu pup with the lifestyle we lead? We continued the drive into Salt Lake City and turned down a small road to some outback town west of Salt Lake. When we pulled into a small Walmart for a break, there on the corner in the grass under a tree was a young woman selling Shih-tzu pups. We've discussed synchronicity before; when seemingly random events occur in the same time/space and transform into something meaningful. Well, being a synchronistic kinda guy, we now have a Shih-tzu puppy named Oliver who is learning

about life on the road, “OJT.” Oh yes, and the little guy holding Oliver is my grandson Easton, otherwise known by Grampy as “Easy.”



The Chysanthemum Dog

An interesting observation regarding our little Shih-tzu. Literature on the breed is interesting to read and makes a nice story. Apparently the first time that the breed appeared in an illustration was with a Chinese Emperor portrait painted over 1,100 years ago. The breed has traveled back and forth between China and Tibet for the past 2,000 years and is most frequently noted as occupying many temples, palaces, and castles. The breed was not brought to Europe and England until the late 1930s, when royalty of the West became interested in the breed. Again, it spent most of its time in large estates and castles. It wasn't until after WWII that the first Shih-tzus were brought to the United States by returning GIs. In fact, the year I was born, 1946, was when the dog started to make a presence. The picture helps us to understand why this breed is sometimes called the “chrysanthemum” dog.



The literature I've read mentions the Shih-tzu as a "companion dog," whose only motivation is to spend time with people. They love to hang out with just about anybody. Oliver doesn't bark at strangers or knock on the door. A stranger is just another person to give and receive affection and attention. Loyalty is definitely not one of their traits. Oliver will follow the last person that scratches him behind the ears. He loves us deeply, but will run across a Walmart parking lot if he spots a person he hasn't said hello to yet. If a stranger stuck his head inside the open door of the truck, Oliver would lick his face right off.

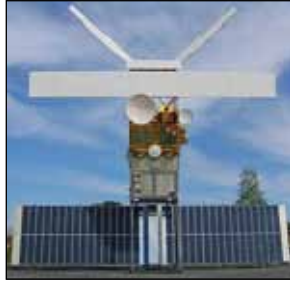
The one thing the literature does not mention is that the Shih-tzu is a killer. In observing Oliver at work and play, we are surprised by his aggressive hunting instincts. Barb says the hunting and killing behavior is much like a terrier. One thing I know for sure is that in those temples and palaces where there were Shih-tzus, there were no rodents. The Shih-tzu is one helluva mouser.

Bait

We were down in gator country this weekend hanging out on the beach, waiting to pick up a load of explosives near Panama City, Florida Tuesday for delivery to Tucson Thursday.

We weren't able to bring in any reptiles with our novel bait, but Bubba says keep tryin'.





Driving For Elite

Oliver vs. the Sergeant—Author’s Choice

0100 hrs. local time, at an airbase on the Jersey shore. I told the guards at the main gate that I had a delivery of munitions in the morning and was looking for a “safe haven” for the night. After checking my ID and paperwork, they told me to head down to their commercial gate and someone would meet me there shortly to open the gate. I found the entrance and pulled in front of the closed high wire gate and waited.

It was one of these deep black nights where the darkness seems to suck the light from the headlights. Even the high beams would not penetrate the darkness. I waited for a few minutes, but couldn’t see anyone in the gloom. Suddenly the high wire gate began to slide open and I drove into a dimly lit inspection bay. The gate closed behind me and I stopped again and turned off the engine. Still, no one had appeared. I climbed out of the truck with my ID and docs and peered into the darkness. To my left, a soldier stepped out of the pitch dark of the night.



Now this was one prepared and impressive trooper. He had a Glock on his hip, and an AR-15 slung across his chest with the barrel pointed down and ammo pouches bulging. He had enough ammo and weaponry to take on a drug cartel. His left hand was free and his right hand was on the 15’s pistol grip, with his trigger finger resting on the safety. As he approached, I had a strong sense that this guy had seen some serious combat time. This was more than just a well-trained soldier. He seemed completely self-assured by the way he handled himself and his weapon, as if the machine gun was an orchestra leader’s baton; his every movement was perfectly synchronized.

When he got two barrels length away from me, he stopped and looked down. And I mean, looked down. I'm six feet tall and 225 pounds, and as I looked up at this man there were two very distinct thoughts that ran through my mind:

One: Praise the Lord, this guy was on our side.

Two: The best thing I could do to get myself tucked away for the night was to just keep saying, "Yes Sergeant, yes Sergeant, yes Sergeant, (I'm your bitch), yes Sergeant, yes Sergeant."

Finally, I guessed it was my turn to talk. Holding out our IDs and Bill of Lading, I said, "We are looking for a safe haven for the night with delivery in the morning."

He didn't reach for the documents, as I expected, and with his finger still on the safety just said, "What ya got?"

"Shipment for morning delivery," I answered.

"Next time call ahead so we can be ready for ya."

"Yes Sergeant."

"Follow me to the ammo dump," he said

"Yes Sergeant."

He stepped back and disappeared into the blackness and I waited a bit, but then finally an MP sedan lit up in the night, and I saw him climb into the passenger seat. I got back in the truck and moved out behind the MP sedan as it escorted us to the ammo dump with blue lights flashing. (I always love those MP parades.) Once there, Sergeant directed me where to park and told me he wanted to brief me after I was finished.

"Yes Sergeant."

Once I had the rig backed into my protective bay, Sergeant walked to the front of the truck and I stepped down to talk as directed. Having a little more time now, I noticed something about his automatic rifle. He still had his finger on the safety, but I saw a small electronic looking box at the end of the gun's barrel mounted over the sight that I'd never seen before. Perhaps it was a laser or infrared device? Whatever it was, it was used to hit your target at night, lethally.

Sergeant started his short talk with, "You'll be safe here tonight, and this area is regularly patrolled."

"Thank you Sergeant, I have no doubt about my safety here," I said.

"See that gray building over there?" he asked.

"Yes Sergeant."

“Don’t go near that building.”

I wanted to shout, “Dude, there’s no freakin’ way I’m going near that building!” But instead I said, “Sergeant, I plan on spending the rest of the night in the truck and won’t step out until someone comes to get me in the morning.”

“That sounds like a good plan. Now let me give you the Duty Officer’s phone number if you need to get a hold of us.”

At this point we moved back to my driver’s side door so I could retrieve a pen and paper for the DO’s number. Sergeant was behind me and spotted Oliver when I opened the door. I heard the Sergeant say, “Awww,” and stepped aside so he could get a better view of the pooch. I noticed a relaxed demeanor come over the soldier, and a school boy smile lit up his face. “What a cute little dog,” he said.

And finally, I saw his finger slip down from the safety.



“Ice Road Truckers”



The headlines from the Great Falls, Montana Thanksgiving winter storm read, “There was one storm-related death.” We delivered a load of explosives to Great Falls during the storm and the low was -15 degrees with a wind chill of -25 due to constant 30 mph winds. The local news described the fatal incident.

It was early evening and the height of the winter’s first cold Arctic blast. A woman was driving her car on a rural road when the car slid off the road into a shallow ditch. When she got out to check her situation, the car door locked behind her. She never got back in. At -15 degrees, anything that could have been used to break a window was frozen fast to the ground. What she was wearing at the time determined how long it would be before hypothermia set in. Her body was found alongside of the road a distance from the car, indicating that she was trying to walk her way out. Having been in that weather myself, I figured even with a normal winter jacket she had about an hour. Personally I couldn’t take more than twenty minutes being outside with normal winter gear.

The week before Thanksgiving, we were in Salt Lake City waiting for a load. It was Friday and we finally got a bite on a DOD load offer to run munitions from Salt Lake to Maelstrom AFB in Great Falls, Montana. The load didn’t pick up until Monday, so that gave us a weekend layover. We had been paying attention to the weather up north. The first frigid winter storm of the Rockies was heading our way. After studying the forecast, we saw that the storm was more of a very cold wind storm with lots of blowing snow, but no real snow accumulation. Considering the weather and topography, (three mountain passes to traverse), we felt we could deal with this storm as long as the snow accumulation

stayed low. The pay was good, and we had confidence in ourselves and the truck with what was being forecast. We also took pride in the fact that if we couldn't run this load, there is no one else that would, as we tend to be the very expensive last option.

We've made this run between Salt Lake and Great Falls several times. In the summer it's a great 600-mile drive long I-15 running north/south. Going north one drives through Utah's Wasatch Range. After crossing the Idaho flat country, the mountains begin again at the Montana border with names like the Beaverhead, Bitterroot, and Sawtooth ranges west of Yellowstone. Continuing north, I-15 runs past Butte and Helena and over the Gates of the Mountains pass down into Great Falls. This section of interstate crosses the Continental Divide twice and most of the passes are above 6,500 ft.

We wanted to make as much time during the day as possible but still got a late start. The plan was to keep driving nonstop until we got to Maelstrom AFB. As we crossed the Montana border (halfway), we really started to hit the cold, wind, and blowing snow and it was getting dark. Not much traffic on the road, which was great, and after a bit we seemed to be the only ones out there. We made it over two passes without chaining up as we headed down into Butte. One more pass after Helena and we would be okay. We have NOAA Emergency Weather Service on our truck FM radio, and we use our cell phone to call #511 and get the state road info. The road from Helena north was open but the temperature was dropping quickly, with double digit minus readings and strong winds. As long as we didn't need to chain up, we'd be okay.

We had last been home in September and didn't bring our heavy winter gear with us, since we thought we'd be back before the extreme winter weather. We always need to carry two sets of clothes because of the wide ranges of weather we drive, but the parkas/boots/gloves didn't get on board this time. With the arctic weather conditions outside, any thought of chaining up was not an option. We would just have to park the truck until we could proceed without chains or the weather improved. We kept moving though, and took two-hour shifts driving so as not to over-fatigue or stress the driver. We finally made it to Maelstrom in about 0300 hrs. We had a contact number, and called the base Duty Officer who arranged for MPs to meet us at a remote gate to the munitions depot. Our military escort showed up, and after the necessary

searches, ID check and paperwork, decided we weren't the enemy. All of this was going on in blizzard conditions. It looked like a scene from some Russian gulag in Siberia; blizzard, arctic cold, soldiers in arctic gear, weapons, barbwire, and me freezing my assets off.



As the MPs became more at ease with us, the comment was made that our arrival was a real surprise, and they didn't expect to see us for another day or two. I asked why, and they said that I-15 south between the Montana border and Butte was closed due to the weather and they figured we got shut down. Seems as we were moving north, the state cops were shutting the interstate down behind us. With sincerity and some respect, one of the MPs said, "Gosh, you guys are Ice Road Truckers." I thought about it for a moment and said, "Yes, I guess you could say that." For the record, that was the highest compliment we've been paid since starting this venture.

On the local radio the next morning was a news item: "...one storm related death..."

Trucker Security

The female Canadian border cop asks, "Do you have any weapons on board such as guns, knives, pepper spray or mace? As usual I say, "No" and most times that ends questions. But then she says, "Do you carry any such weapons when driving in the States?" I'm thinking, "Hey wait a minute lady, that's none of your damn business." What I almost said was, "Officer, we make it a point of being totally defenseless when entering Canada, and we drive around the States like a bunch of whimpy, bleating, sheep just waiting to be somebody's victim." Ya right.

The freight security thing gets kind of weird. What's strange is that we are not allowed to carry any form of weapon to defend ourselves. I would love to have a sign painted on our truck door:

Protective Services Provided

By Smith & Wesson

“Do ya feel lucky, punk?”

Actually I don't do guns, and wouldn't carrier one if allowed, but I feel I do have the right to defend myself and family. A bad guy that wants the freight can have it, but one would have to assume the bad guy is going to do bad things to the drivers in the process. For the record, I don't know of any hijacking of high value or secured freight in the hotshot business, and a lot of vigilance, training and passive security measures keeps that from happening.

Every time we pick up or deliver at a secure facility or cross the border, we are asked if we have any weapons on board. Basically they are saying, we'll load you with this stuff only if you are totally unable to defend yourself. Our cab is routinely stripped searched by men with guns, and now even x-rayed for weapons and contraband before we can cross the border or enter a secured facility. Regarding contraband, about the only thing we carry that would be suspect is that Tums bottle filled with those blue diamond-shaped pills. If discovered, they could ask me for the prescription. So we keep the Tums in the dirty laundry. There is not a cop on the planet who will stick his hands in a pile of women's dirty underwear. Well now thinking about that a bit, you'd probably need a choke chain to keep those TSA crazies from rooting around in women's soiled undergarments, but we've not encountered those folks yet.

Actually our real safety concern is not hauling loads requiring elevated security, but it's when we are delivering in the industrial areas such as Newark, LA, or Detroit. For our own personal safety, we carry, in the sleeper, a can of aerosol wasp killer, amazing stuff. The can will shoot a solid stream of slimy highly toxic goo almost twenty feet. Actually we have a better chance of hitting your target with wasp killer than a shaky handgun. We also keep an aerosol can of extra loud marine air horn near our sleeping



area. A blast of a marine air horn in the face is very effective in a closed space to change one's consciousness and summon the curious. And finally, for close quarter work, we carry a short handled crowbar under the driver's seat. All tools for work, but can also be used for defensive purposes. There is something about a woman's firm grip around a crowbar that sends a clear message, "I don't intend to be your victim today, dick-wad."



Barb's Travel Logs



My First Travel Log

I've been elected by the current writer of travel blogs to try my hand at it. I suspect it's because he doesn't want to stick his foot in his mouth about my behavior regarding one of my more scary travel incidences. Gary describes me as a "wild woman killing snakes" whenever I go ape-shit.

On a cool summer day in Canada, we stopped at our favorite fast-food place for breakfast. (Tim Horton's). I noticed a few bugs on the side of a building next door. There were a whole lot of them! When we got back to the truck I noticed some big-winged, long-tailed bugs were on our truck and the window was half open. I sat inside swatting the lazy bugs who wouldn't move, acting as if they were in a stupor.

I thought they wouldn't move but lo and behold, when Gary came to the door I saw a hundred of them all over his back! I started screaming at him not to get in the truck, which of course he did. Now there were hundreds more winged sloths in the cab. I was swatting wildly and yelling, "YUCK! YUCK! YUCK!" and Gary just sat there calmly saying nothing. The rest of the world went on around us as if no one saw any bugs. I killed every last one and vacuumed them all with our Dirt-Devil. My heart didn't stop beating wildly until we crossed the border back into the states.



No See-um

That, unfortunately, is not the only hoard of bugs I have encountered on our trucking journey. When we had a day off in Florida we were lucky enough to find a parking spot near a beach. We set up a meal on a picnic table in the grass next to our parking space. Ahhh, what a beautiful day. No crowds, no traffic, no noise. It took about 10 minutes to discover that my legs were feeling little stings. I kept telling Gary that there were bugs in the grass. But of course he didn't see or feel any. I couldn't see-em either. Guess that's why they call them no see-ems. After another couple of minutes of jumping around trying to convince him there really were bugs, we moved back onto the asphalt. That evening I tried to count the number of bites I had. I lost count at 92. Finally Gary believed that there were bugs in the grass. I itched like crazy. I couldn't stop scratching. I was so miserable I couldn't sleep. I walked around the parking lot for a couple of hours. I woke up to scratch every hour. Talk about a nightmare! With still another day off due to lack of freight in Florida, we drove to my cousin's house. She had heard of a remedy for itches. I was supposed to put ammonia on the bites. Who has ammonia on hand in their truck? So out came the Windex!!! I sprayed my lower legs and in 5 seconds the itching was gone. God bless you, Terri. Relief at last.



Welcome to our world

We are certainly glad you enjoy our sight-seeing adventures, but this time we thought we'd share our work experiences as well. One of the downsides of continually moving is that we lose our Internet signal from time to time. The other reason is that we're too damn tired to do much of anything else but sleep and eat.

Tonight we'll pick up a load in Portland, Oregon at 8 p.m. and take it to British Columbia for a morning delivery, so we'll be driving most of the night. These kinds of trips are harder but make the most money.

Ever wonder what one of these rigs with a sleeper costs? Over \$120,000 new. Ours was two years old and we got the price down to \$80K. If you want a built-in toilet and shower, that will cost many more thousands. The fully equipped sleeper on this truck is why this lifestyle works for us. We never spend the night in a truck stop. They are way too noisy and chaotic.

Even though it's pretty much against the law to idle their engines for more than five minutes, most drivers idle their trucks all night long. No one is enforcing that rule for obvious reasons: 1) The weather's either too hot or too cold to sleep in the truck without the air conditioner or heater on. Most truckers can't afford to have a generator installed as a power source, so they run the engine. Luckily, we have a generator. It's noisy but reduces pollution and wear and tear on the engine. 2) Who's going to spend any money enforcing the law on the private property of a fuel station? Cops can't do anything and the station certainly doesn't want to alienate customers. So we frequently sleep at Walmart, or in any large parking lot that doesn't have a guard chasing trucks out.



When we do go to a truck stop, it's for fuel and showers. Fuel costs about \$400 to fill the tank. Fifty gallons of diesel gives us a free show-

er. Otherwise it's \$10. The truck stops also fax our daily paperwork to the company for free. Last year we spent \$37,500 on fuel. We drive about 140,000 miles a year.

Winter driving really sucks and it's more than road conditions. Getting ready to leave the truck in the winter just to take a shower is a major exercise. We have to get dressed in our coats, hats, gloves, boots and scarves and trudge down to the truck stop to do our business and take a shower. I now have a sense of what's needed to live without running water.

Summers are just like camping out, and we stay in campgrounds when we can. We also have an emergency camp toilet in the truck, but we hate to use it!

On the lighter side, we love being self-employed, able take off whenever we want. I LOVE "sleeping in" every day. My wonderful husband brings me coffee, the paper, and yogurt in bed. He's a terrific partner all around. We love seeing the country. There are so many unique, interesting and amazing places to see. The guide book we use, *1001 Places to see Before you Die* is a must-have.

We tend to get more jobs to Canada and the northern United States in the winter, and lots of jobs to Florida and Texas in the summer. "Go figure," as my friend Dar would say. All that driving sure makes me appreciate our little Oregon house. I feel like the truck is our home and the house is the luxury suite at a resort hotel. I just love doing laundry at home—I never run out of quarters! Ha-ha. I hate laundromats.

I haven't missed getting mail, but it does make it harder to do business. We are blessed to have good friends who pick up our mail for us (*thanks Rick and Dar*). If we need something right away, Rick will overnight it to a FedEx office at our load's destination.

My ego took a huge dive when we started out in this business. I'm talking Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under The Sea* sort of depth. I've always been prim and proper, so this was a big shock to my system. But I've found that too much engagement in the ego is not always conducive to happiness. That's another long story I won't go into here. Suffice it to say that I'm always happy to see so many woman truck drivers (and dock workers) on the road these days.

The most asked question we get is, how the hell do we survive living in a walk-in closet 24/7 with our spouse? With love, patience, ap-



preciation and gratitude. We have both waited fifty years for our ideal soul-mate to come along, so we are grateful every day. Plus, we really like each other.

Time

Time is of the essence in our job... but what time is it? Not as easy as you may think. First, convert military time to civilian time... is that plus 12 or minus 12 hours? Then find out what the heck time zone we're in... we've learned that parts of Florida are central zone, but so is Missouri... Arizona doesn't observe daylight saving time. Alabama is in the same time zone as Minnesota... check the map to see what time it is! And what time is it in Oregon? Oh yeah, check the cellphone to see what time it is right here right now, however, our business runs on eastern time so we have to convert to their time zone. "And don't be late!" When will we finally figure it out? Whew! Gary just got off the phone with a military base and they asked if we were delivering on Zulu Time!!!



Waiting for the call...

Luray Caverns

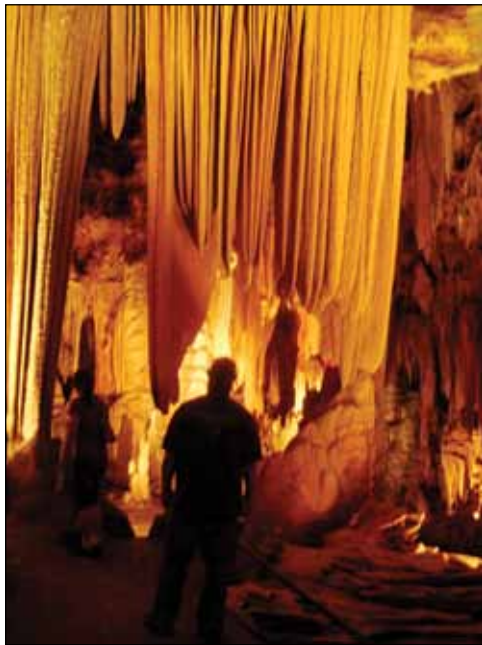
I visited this marvel of the earth with my family at least fifty years ago, when we first moved to northern Virginia. It has been a favorite place of mine ever since. I was able to visit again twenty years ago to rekindle the awe. Miraculously, Gary and I were able to stop there this past week. It was just as awesome as I remember.



There were some obvious changes. The little shack over the entrance was replaced with a beautiful new brick building with three gift shops and a restaurant. Three new attractions were added: a garden, auto museum, and history museum. A small change inside the 167 foot deep hole was a brick walkway and the widening of a four foot high passage. One of the perks this time was the quality of the camera we used to capture the sights.

The bottom line is, I didn't want to leave and I can't wait to go again! A million years of mineral rich water dripping down into a hole has made a fantasy world that not even Stephen Spielberg and George Lucas could duplicate.







Miscellaneous Thoughts From The Road

The following Travel Logs are made up of an assortment of random observations and thoughts that I shared with the Book Club over the years of our life on the road. None of these observations relate to trucking.

The Crazies In The Crowd of Crazies Are The Good Guys

Look at the smile on the special ops guy. He's gone through years of training for this moment and he's lovin' it. I would speculate that our military spends as much on training a Special Operations soldier as the Air Force spends on training a jet fighter pilot.

In my Army days, I completed Special Forces A Team Leader training as a lieutenant and for a short time wore the green beret with arrowhead patch. I continue to follow the subject of special operations tactically, and have been noticing pictures out of Tripoli. I'm starting to see other countries special ops guys in some pictures.

The operational guys will not be wearing berets, body armor, or stylish uniforms with the finest US military weapons. Just the opposite. They'll be the crazies in the crowd of crazies. There are several giveaways in the Libyan scene: they'll have enough weapons and ammo strapped to their body to start a war in a small African country, they won't be following Ramadan, and this guy is a meat eater. But most of all, the giveaway is the smile and the eyes. He's just having too much freakin' fun.



Yes sir, now this is livin'!
Hooah!



Black Swan

As I may have mentioned in the past, some of my writings come from many hours of thoughts and reflections (observing the flotsam and jetsam of streaming consciousness) while hanging onto the steering wheel of our truck. And, as the name implies, most of it is garbage. I find that certain ideas will persist until I write them down and send them off. Once I press the send button the persistent thoughts cease.

I have been noticing an interesting term starting to make its way into our vernacular from the community of statisticians and theoretical scientists: a “black swan event.” The term originates from a discovery made in the year 1700. Prior to that year, it was known throughout Europe and the British Isles that black swans did not exist. A popular cynical phrase in London during that time was, “as rare as a black swan,” meaning that the item was so rare it didn’t exist. Then in 1700, black swans were discovered in Australia.

Several years ago a statistician developed what he called the “Black Swan Theory,” which is predicated on what he called a “black swan event.” A “black swan” has three specific characteristics:



1. It is a total surprise and unpredicted and unexpected. “OMG.”
2. Its effects are epic or historic on a culture or society. “Who knew?”
3. After the event, we quickly rationalize that we surely saw this coming and we are not as ignorant as we appear. “Duh.”

“Black swan events” can be positive or negative but are seen as needed occurrences which serve as catalysts to advance changes in societies, government, and culture. These events can either be natural, human-caused, or both. A positive “black swan” would be the Internet, and a negative is 9/11. A recent black swan for most of us was the collapse of the real estate market; a classic OMG, Who Knew, and Duh. There is talk among some theorists about the cluster of black swans we are currently experiencing globally, including the events in Japan and the “Arab Spring.” Apparently, black swans are supposed to be rare occurrences and clusters are very unusual.

How can we prepare for the next “black swan?” I don’t know. By definition we can’t, because we don’t know what to prepare for. I think I can prepare myself emotionally and perhaps spiritually to rely on my

own instincts, state of mind, and levels of awareness, in order to be able to deal with the next black swan, or better yet, take advantage of the opportunities such a positive event offers. Thank you for being on the other end of the “Send” button.

The North Woods

After spending three years in Germany, I was discharged from the Army in 1972. As an officer, I was able to save up a wad of money. Upon returning to the States, I decided I was going to buy some property with my savings. I spent a year searching the US for some land or property that would resonate with my soul. I had set my sights on a small farm located near International Falls, Minnesota, and had enough for a down payment.

Barb and I were sitting in Minneapolis on Wednesday waiting for some business when a call came for us to take a load up to International Falls ASAP. For those who watch The Weather Channel, this is a familiar name. The town frequently records the lowest temperatures in the lower 48 during the winter. Thirty below is not unusual in the winter, and locals say it gets down to -40 now and then. International Falls (pop. 6,000) is located in northeastern Minnesota on the Canadian border. I actually never got to I-Falls back in 1972, so I was excited about the opportunity to see the place that I was interested in way back when. I was not disappointed.



The landscape and forests of this region are very much like parts of Alaska I had visited as a smokejumper fighting fire for the US Forest Service. In fact, in all our travels, this is the only location in the lower

48 states that has the same type of climate and forest you find in Alaska. The land is flat and water-soaked in many places. The forests, plants and trees seem dwarfed due to the short growing season and extreme cold. The land still has a “wild” quality and energy. The region has an appealing sense of desolation and isolation. Black bear, beaver, moose and the only eastern US pack of wolves are part of the local fauna. Also, the mosquitoes are big and mean enough to rape roosters. The locals make their living in the forest products/logging industry and tourism. We took some time and looked at local real estate. In the more out-back areas (the bush), there was a very modest but nice two bedroom home on ten acres for \$75,000.

Let’s get back to 1972. I was thinking about getting my act together to see this farm for sale in International Falls, but before I did much more homework, I had another piece of land to check out first. There were forty acres in southern Oregon for sale that seemed very interesting. Near someplace called Butte Falls, not far from a town called Medford.



Kiddie Pond

I just needed to add this for you fisherpeople out there: in the southern Cascade mountains of Oregon, northeast of Medford, is the small logging/mountain town of Butte Falls. The town is surrounded by US Forest Service land and there is a pond nearby. The good folks at the local fish hatchery dump some young trout in the pond now and then for the local kids. The rules, among the locals, is that only the kids fish and put back what they catch (most of the time).

My son-in-law, Tyler, took my grandson Tanner, a fine young man, up to the Butte Falls fishin’ hole to try out some new fishing gear. Usually, this is a delightful activity for both kids and grownups. This time, something unexpected happened. A hook got caught on a submerged log, which suddenly started to race across the pond.



Now you know the rest of the story.

You Were Almost Born In Aspen

The following was sent to my daughter, Brooke:

We talked about our run to Aspen, Colorado the other day, and you mentioned that you would like to go there sometime. Our conversation brought up some past thoughts from my US Forest Service days and I vividly recalled how you were almost born in Aspen!

Before we proceed to that story, here's a little Aspen travel log: We picked up a hot load of "party favors" for the Aspen Food and Wine Festival from Grand Junction, Colorado, to Aspen. The town sits forty

miles south of I-70 up on the Rocky Mountain crest about three hours west of Denver.

What a delightful natural setting and a most charming town. We love getting paid to drive to these resort areas. If we had a tractor trailer, we'd never get loads up to these resorts nestled in the mountains, because we'd be too darn big.



Once inside the busy little town, the first thing that becomes obvious is that there is mucho traffic and no parking. Visitors are encouraged to take free buses into Aspen from outlying communities. We were able to score a spot for the “Beast” just outside of town and walked in. Yes, this is the home and playground of the rich and famous. Listings on the real estate store fronts only showed houses over a million dollars.



The chairlifts come right down into town and the place is very pedestrian friendly, and the most dog friendly town we'd ever seen. Just about every other shop has a doggie water dish and some biscuits outside the store front. The outdoor cafes encourage dogs to join their

families for a meal. Where else could Oliver sit at a nice lunch table and dog watch?



In all seriousness, there is one thing that you need to be warned about: Only professional level shoppers should partake in this activity while in Aspen. Beginning and intermediate level shoppers may likely suffer from Post Traumatic Shopping Disorder, with recovery being long, painful, and expensive. Symptoms include “shock and awe,” giddiness, and lightheadedness. As an example, since when did small Ralph Lauren stores start carrying \$12,000 fur coats for summer wear?!?



Okay, now back to You Were Almost Born In Aspen:

Around 1985-86 BC (before cellphones), I was working on the

Prospect Ranger District, Rogue River NF, as their Recreation Forester. It was time for me to start looking for a career promotion, however in order to get promoted, I had to relocate. Most of the relocation options included backcountry Ranger Stations which were not very appealing to us at the time. So my career search focus tended to be on the better name resort/recreation areas. At just about the time your mom was pregnant with you (or was soon to be), I applied for a “Recreation Forester/Snow Ranger” job on the Aspen Ranger District, White River National Forest.

I pulled out all stops on this one. Prior to working on the Prospect District, I was a Recreation Planner for the Department of Interior, working out of the Federal Building in San Francisco, and combined with my years managing a nationally recognized recreation resource such as the one at Prospect, my resume was pretty solid. I had plenty of support from the District Ranger, and the Forest Supervisor on the Rogue River NF even wrote a letter of recommendation. This job was certainly a Forest Service spotlight position, and my Forest Supervisor wrote that in addition to all my great professional experiences, “Gary has stage presence.”



As it happened, while my application was floating around someone’s desk someplace, we left on a long planned vacation trip back to the East Coast to visit family. With anticipation that I might get word on the Aspen job, I left the Ranger (Chuck) a contact number with family back east. After about a week of driving around New Jersey and New York visiting, I received a urgent two-day-old message that Chuck was desperately trying to get a hold of me. The Ranger from Aspen had called him to inquire about me. It seems that I was one of two remaining finalists for this position, and at this point, the final selection was based my ability to downhill ski. Evidently, the Snow Ranger job was the real thing. Even though he did his best to wing it, Chuck could find no one who knew how well I could ski. The Aspen Ranger needed to make a decision on the position in the next day, and asked my employer to tell me to contact him.

The position needed to be filled by Friday and I didn’t get back

to Chuck until Monday. My skiing skills probably lie in the lower intermediate level. I can ski from most tops of a ski slope down to the bottom, but it ain't pretty and certainly nowhere near show-off level. If the position called for more than that, I didn't need to embarrass myself in some ski-off between the two remaining candidates. My memory tends to be lacking in how this episode ended, but since I was a stock broker by the time you were born, you know the rest of the story.

Did I mention Katrina would have gone to elementary school with John Denver's kids?

*Love,
Dad*

Should I Be Giving Advice?

Announcement:

My youngest daughter, Brooke, is engaged to be married to Braydon, her boyfriend of several years. They live in Bend, Oregon, and their tentative plans are for an Oregon High Desert wedding in Bend. Brooke is currently the Regional Assistant Comptroller for a national waste management company, and Braydon is the newest firefighter with the Bend Fire Department. (130 applicants applied for the position).

I had been anticipating a call from Braydon one of these days regarding his intentions, and had reflected, at length, as to whether I should offer some advice on marriage and relationships. I know that to some, my giving advice on these topics is like Charlie Sheen counseling Lindsay Lohan on self-control. When Braydon called, I congratulated him with a hearty welcome to the family, and decided to offer up some advice.

I wish that some older men would have taken the time to share some advice with me at critical junctures on my life's path. This life OJT stuff really sucks sometimes, so I offered up several observations:

First, I said, "Frequently when a couple get married, the man expects that the woman won't change, and the woman expects the man will change. When one or both of these expectations don't occur, that



is a source of conflict. Have a discussion about the expectations of one another and your life together ten and twenty years from now.”

I also shared: “You will hear a lot about raising kids, and what’s the best thing you can do as a dad for your kids? The most important thing you can do for your children, as a father and a man, is to love their mother.”

Barb and I are thrilled.

More Advice

My daughter Brooke has a Masters Degree in accounting (makes my head hurt to think about it) and has just successfully completed her State CPA exams. I thought my “Book Club” friends might enjoy the advice and thoughts I recently shared with her. It’s something I rarely do and probably won’t do again.

Hi Brooke,

I’ve been reflecting on your achievements and I’m so very delighted about what you have accomplished. Life and career is kind of similar to starting all over again, like a freshman in college. You have lots of decisions to make, you’re not sure about what’s going on, but you’re optimistic about what will unfold. Probably the most valued thing I’ve learned after 60-plus years (and I’m still trying to get it right), is that the power of thought and what we “Think About” is our blessed and cursed ability in creating our reality. All of our actions and experiences, I’ll state again, *all* of our actions and experiences first originate in “Mind” and in “Thought.” Our Mind is the cause and we experience its effects, and along the way God’s belly laughs are the little surprises like “life’s not fair” and “shit happens.” In my opinion, our most powerful gift is the ability to choose between the Levels of Thought we manifest.

With that in mind (pun intended), it’s important what you are thinking about regarding career and life choices. One thought I would encourage you to entertain is becoming a Chief Financial Officer. You’ve probably been around enough by now to have a sense of who they are and what they do. You have great communication skills and have demonstrated leadership and management abilities/skills. Now that you have your license, you have the credentials.

My last few bits of advice along this line:

- Think Long Term
- Be Open to a Mentor
- Infinite Patience and Determined Persistence bring Immediate Results
- Use Your Strengths and Hire Others to Cover the Weaknesses

*Love,
Dad*



Berchtesgaden, Germany 1971

Several recently discovered photos of Eva Braun, Hitler's longtime mistress and wife of about 15 hours, appeared on the Internet and triggered some thoughts and memories that might be interesting to share. The patina of Eva's pictures, combined with her hairstyle and some physical features reminded me of some older photos of my mother from the 1940s. Her parents were German immigrants and she was born in the United States. This got me to thinking about what our government today calls the kids of immigrants: "anchor babies." I always assumed that Mom's parents were US citizens, however, they may not have been. Was the government's Im-



migration Service really on top on this flood of Europeans in the 1920s and 30s? In the lexicon of our political leaders, if Mom was an anchor baby, what should they call their kids? I think an appropriately degrading term might be, uh... “floaters.” Consequently, if my mom was an anchor baby and I am a floater, I wonder what the government calls *my* kids?

While on this segue, I had a recent epiphany while driving graveyard shift across New Mexico:

“Good people do good things and bad people do bad things, but politics and religion make good people do bad things.”

Sorry about that folks. Let’s get back to the travel log.

“Something you didn’t know that you didn’t know.”

In the early 1970s I was an Army 1st Lieutenant. I was stationed in Germany as a Mechanized Infantry Platoon Leader positioned on the East German border in central West Germany. In my tour to the Fatherland, I was doing a “Roots” thing before there was a “Roots.” As an officer, I was able to choose whether to live in Army housing or live in the civilian sector. I rented a small apartment and did my best to live as a local. I knew enough “gasthaus Deutsche” to shop and travel with the natives.

During my tour, I was briefly assigned to accompany a visiting Brigadier General (one star) as aide and escort during a NATO exercise. I must have made an impression, because several months later during the winter of 1971, orders came from above for another aide assignment. I was to be temporarily assigned to be the V Corps Commander’s personal aid-de-camp for one week while he and his family vacationed in Berchtesgaden. I was to travel to Frankfurt and accompany Lieutenant General Willard Pearson (three star), his wife and two daughters on a six day trip to relax and play in the German Alps. I was told we would be traveling by train.



The night before the morning departure, I went to the general’s personal residence to meet with him and his family. The General was a man of slight build with graying temples, usually serious and in-

tense, with a timid but pleasant wife and two daughters. One was twenty something and just graduated from the University of Pennsylvania, and the other was a teen-something just graduating from Army brat high school. I was to live with this family for a week. My role was to be aide, escort, travel guide, and personal bodyguard for all four of them. During my briefing, the General gave me a wad of cash and told me to cover any cash expenses the family may have on the trip. Interesting how the powerful and rich think it's demeaning that they should have to reach into their wallet and actually pay for something. They still do that today.

Some historical background about our destination: Berchtesgaden, Germany and more specifically, "The Eagles Nest." When the Allies defeated the Nazis in 1945, the military took over the possession of many of the facilities used by the Nazi elite for play and recreation. Those same R&R sites that were the exclusive use of the Nazi high command became the exclusive use for the US Army's high command. I think they call that the spoils of war. Hitler's personal Bavarian residence was located here and called the Eagle's Nest. The pictures with Hitler and Eva were taken at the Eagle's Nest. Himmler, Goebbels, Goering, Albert Speer, all had had personal residences there. Most of their chalets were bombed by the Allies except for Albert Speer's, who was Hitler's personal architect and lead architect for the Third Reich. The memory trigger for me, in those black and white pictures, was the chalet pictured in the background in the photo of Eva and friends. It may have been the chalet of Speer; it definitely was where we stayed while in Berchtesgaden. We had the whole place to ourselves.



On the morning of our departure, I met the General with his family in tow, at his residence. I helped load up several vehicles with luggage. I made an attempt to interact with the daughters, but their stand-offish attitude left me with the impression that the less they heard and saw of some shavetail lieutenant, the better. We made our way to the Frankfurt Bahnhof and were directed to our train. And yes, I mean OUR train. There at the rail siding was a two-car train with a small diesel locomotive. It looked like something out of the Orient Express. The whole train was probably left over from the war but was immaculate and in perfect condition. The first car was where the German chef and

steward worked, and the second car was a combined dining car and lounge. Lots of linen, polished wood, plush seats, crystal, heavy silver and dining ware. We were the only passengers. The trip south took most of the day because we kept having to pull over to side rails to let other trains pass. The cook and steward were very talented; for lunch we were served the best pan-fried trout I have ever enjoyed. I was able to have an extra serving because the chef had left the heads on the trout, and the daughters freaked when they noticed their meal staring up at them. Eagerly and apologetically, the steward said that he would have the heads removed, but the damage had been done.

Upon our arrival in Berchtesgaden, we were picked up at the local bahnhof and taken by military escort to what may have been Speer's chalet. I don't remember a lot of detail of our days, other than when the daughters got bored it was my job to take them touring, sightseeing and skiing. And of course, working my way through the wad of cash the General had given me. The General and Mrs. General seemed content to spend much of their time at the chalet just hanging out and reading. We did get to go into places that the average tourist doesn't get to see, like Hitler's bunker off to the side of the tunnel that leads to the elevator up to the Eagle's Nest. At that time it just looked like a dark damp concrete vault. I don't think a nuclear bomb could have shaken the bunker, as it was drilled many meters into the side of a granite mountain upon which the Nest was perched.



Reflecting on my short time living in the General's "bubble," it was a true delight to experience the reality shift. Through the centuries, a soldier's lot has been to hurry up and wait. In the "bubble" no such waste of time seems to exist. Things and events seem to function smoothly

and seamlessly, and of course everyone is nice and respectful to the General's entourage. It was a real treat to have majors and lieutenant colonels sucking up to me. Knowing the unit where I was to shortly return, this was bliss. Awaiting me on my return would be my Company Commander, Captain Holmes. Imagine if you will, Mike Tyson in an Infantry Captain's uniform. My Commanding Officer looked like Mike Tyson, and on a good day behaved like Mike with a rotten molar. He ate "butter bar" lieutenants for breakfast. Most mornings, Captain Holmes would meet with his platoon leaders to review the previous day's performance. I'm sure the good Captain enjoyed the smell of his lieutenants crapping their pants in the morning. But what can I say? I loved the guy and would follow him to hell and back. I wanted to be just like him when I grew up.

With our vacation over, we returned to Frankfurt on the same train with the same staff and no fish heads. Overall, the experience was positive with no major issues. The only time I felt uncomfortable about my performance with the General was when it came time to settle up on the wad of bills he had given me. I returned what was left of the cash along with some "cuff notes" I had made on the expenditures. After reviewing my attempt at accounting, I could sense that The Man was not pleased with my lack of attention to detail. If only he'd known that forty years later I would have a daughter who was Certified Public Accountant.



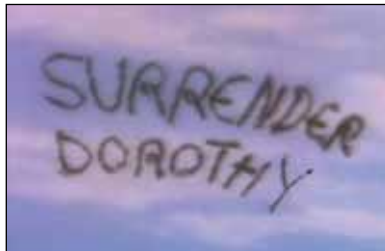
Egoic Silliness... Surrender Dorothy

Thank the Lord we don't watch TV. With the constant barrage of stressful news out of Washington, it must be unnerving for those who try and keep informed. The egoistic dysfunction of the lawyers who run our government is saddening. It is unfortunate that we as citizens have let a profession (lawyering) take over the governance of this country. Supposedly, 76,000 lawyers live and work in the metropolitan Washington, D.C. area. How many lawyers does it take to run our government?

Lawyers are trained and conditioned to use a "zero sum game" in negotiating, to cultivate adversarial relationships, as well as encourage courtroom drama. For one to be successful, one's opponent must fail, and compromise is looked on as a failure by both. I propose a new style of negotiating: for parties in a contentious situation, start by stating the fears about a given issue. The ego is a fear-based thought system (see footnote). Most of our exaggerated emotional responses are actually cries for help, which have their roots in fear. Instead of demanding that our needs be met, ask the other party what they are afraid of. Each party's role is to allay the other party's fears. Start out with simple fears first and work on putting those to rest, in practice for the bigger fear. Try this approach sometime: have the courage to ask another what they are afraid of, but first state what you're afraid of regarding the topic. See if the other person is willing to address that.

Try this approach in buying a car someday: Never start out talking about price. Tell the other what you are afraid might happen to you in the purchase of the car, and how you think those fears are legitimate. You will have some very interesting results.

Back to the question of how many lawyers does it take to run our government? The answer: Nine (The Supreme Court).



Note: The fact that the ego is a fear-based thought system is demonstrated by our politician's addiction to using fear in order to manipulate us; we lap it up like Pavlov's dog.

The Forklift Economic Index

It's October 2011 and we just picked up a load of auto parts in Michigan for delivery to the Honda plant in Alabama. Our business primarily services the manufacturing sector, when I visit a manufacturer, I routinely ask the warehouse folks how business is going. Since the first of the year the answer has been fairly uniform: "We are working our asses off." Folks share that business is good and steady, but what a lot of manufacturers found out is they could meet the upswing in production without rehiring. Working people are beginning to complain about all the overtime and weekend work that they are getting.

With our business, we are as busy as we want to be, and actually turn down freight so we can take some R&R now and then. During the Recession, we would deliver a load and wait a day or even two for a load. Today it is routine for us to get a load offer before we even deliver the load we have. The trucking companies and carriers in our business are paying sign-on bonuses. Drivers with trucks that have qualifications like ours are getting \$5,000 sign-on bonuses, and the smaller trucks and less qualified drivers are getting \$1,000 sign-on pops.



“A bad day of truckin’ is better than
a good day at the office.”

Part II

The Business

**“If you want to have what others don’t,
you will need to do what others won’t.”**

The first part of this book was written about me for me. The second part of this book is written about you for you. If you’re a trucker considering a career move into the expediting/*hotshot* business or a novice who is inspired to make courageous decisions about your future, I will attempt to give you some insights. I will share information that will be a valuable resource in your business and life considerations. I am not an expert on any of the topics to be discussed, but will give you a thumbnail sketch of lessons we learned in building our own trucking business. I am not representing any particular carrier or expeditor service company, but will share experiences I’ve had with a variety of carriers and vendors in the field. I do allow advertisers to promote their businesses, but I must be familiar with the advertiser before running their post.

Basically I am sharing observations, experiences, and opinions that you might find helpful. If you are considering becoming an owner/operator with either a tractor or straight truck, this is a must-read book. This material is meant to be just one of many resources you will need to seek and use in making choices and decisions.

While waiting at truck stops and staging areas truckers will routinely approach us and ask questions about our truck and the *hotshot* business.



It is the intent of this book to answer some of those questions. Readers who use this material in making business/life decisions will all have different levels of trucking experience and some will have none at all. I will proceed with the assumption that the reader is not a “trucker” and is involved in making serious decisions about creating a new life for themselves and their families. So for you old road warriors, just follow along with patience.



Getting Started

To The Inspired

Trucking is blue collar work making blue collar wages. Life on the road can be “adventurous,” but every day you are still just trucking. It’s work and the lifestyle can be grueling. The worst part is the long absences from your loved ones. On the plus side, if you have your loved ones with you, then you’ve removed a big negative from the equation. The great news is that it’s work and wages that can support a family. And the best news is that you and your family can own and run a successful business with strong and immediate cash flow where persistent hard work and the application of sound business practices will always be rewarded. You can be sure that truck companies want to hire you right away.

Once the decision is made that you and your partner are going to become commercial truck drivers with a goal of becoming *hotshots* and even owner/operators, we give you three cheers. So let’s get started.

The first step in this life-long venture is to get your commercial driver’s license. You will need a Class A license to drive a semi and a Class B license if you plan on driving a straight truck. Each state seems to have their own requirements to get licensure. The best place to start your research is to contact a local truck driving school. It seems that many states don’t make much distinction between the training requirements of Class A or B, so always go for the A. It will cost several thousand dollars for each person and three weeks to a month of your time. The CDL schools will give you advice on financial options and resources, and don’t forget to check local Jobs Work Programs at the Federal, state, or local level. Sometimes these programs will help to cover the tuition cost for “worker training.” Also, many of the major trucking companies will reimburse new drivers for their CDL tuition at about \$100-\$200/month for time driving their truck.

If you are a couple working to get your CDL, this could involve a major outlay of hard cash. However, this is an investment in your

education, business, and future, and may be tax deductible depending on your business status. Warren Buffet (billionaire investment guru), when asked what would be the best investment the average person could make, stated, “Invest in yourself.” Amen, brother. Always invest in your life first. Monies invested in your education and/or start-up business can provide significant returns, along with a meaningful life. In the US today a person with a Class A CDL and a reasonable driving record is always able to find a long haul trucking job. That doesn’t mean it’s your dream job, but sometimes “ya gotta do, what ya gotta do.” And while I’m talking to the “inspired,” if your goal is to be a *hot-shot* owner/operator, figure on a year of training, education and experience before you will be ready to report to a carrier with your first truck. It may take at least a year of driving for you to decide if this is really what you want to do when you grow up.

You Might Be A Trucker

There may be some confusion over just who is or who is not a trucker. Here is a little test as to your pedigree:

- When you are on a trip in the family car and you pull into the first weigh station you pass, you might be a trucker.
- The next time you see your family and everyone looks taller or fatter, you might be a trucker.
- If the state cop asks you when you last updated your log book and you answer “back yonder,” you might be a trucker.
- When your wife whispers in your ear, “You might get lucky tonight,” and you answer “Ten-foo,” you might be a trucker.
- If “deadhead” means something to you other than the name of an old rock band’s groupies, you might be a trucker.
- When your alarm clock goes off and it is recorded as a seismic event, you might be a trucker.
- If your hot vacation getaway is home, you might be a trucker.
- If you know what it means to get a PM at a TA for the DOT to cover your CSA, you might be a trucker.



Homework



Homework, homework, homework. You can never do enough research. Barb and I spent twenty years in other careers before we set off to Indiana to start our new life/career/business. I worked in the financial services industry, and Barb worked in the insurance industry. My tours of duty included stockbroker, trust officer, and loan officer. About fifteen years ago I took a sabbatical from the industry, got my Class A CDL and drove long haul for Gordon Trucking out of Washington State. For those living on the west coast, Gordon is a great long haul trucking company that hires out of CDL schools. I did this for about six months, but had to get off the road in order to stay involved in family stuff back home in Medford, Oregon.

I'll take a quick detour here to comment on my first but short experience in trucking. When I was a stockbroker for Smith Barney, on my daily I-5 commute, I would delight in fantasies of driving one of those huge eighteen wheelers back and forth the US in total isolation up in that big 400 horsepower tractor. I finally turned that fantasy into reality and got to experience the power and aloneness of driving, but also experienced the real down side: on the road two weeks, then two days home, maybe. I really needed to be home more often to take care of my family life, and I hated the feeling of being stuck in one place, wishing I was in another.

I'd taken my CDL training through a local community college and very much enjoyed the program and my classmates. In the class was a married couple who had just sold their house, quit their day jobs, and made the commitment to become long haul team drivers. They were friends of a local couple that had just done the same thing and were making good money. Teams driving long haul, or *hotshots*, are known

to sell their homes because they only use their house a couple of weeks out of the year. My class friends decided they would do the same. He was an out of work logger and she had driven delivery trucks for FedEx Ground with lots of road time. They were an excited, experienced, motivated, smart couple with a plan. They started driving for Gordon after graduation. Also at that time, Gordon was assigning brand new trucks to rookie team drivers. Life was good.

About a month after we had completed school and were out on the road, I saw the wife member of the team working in the office while hubby was on the road by himself. The unexpected had paid them a visit while on the road. When driving as a team, you are expected to drive non-stop around the clock. While one is driving their shift, the other is sleeping. These days one can drive eleven hours, but a mandatory ten hour break is required before the next shift. It seems that the wife was unable to sleep or rest adequately with the truck moving. Depending on the road and driving conditions, a big truck can be noisy, bumpy, bouncy, jerky, and shaky. Some can sleep through that amount of distraction when really tired, but there are some who just can't. It sucks to find out the hard way that you might be the one that can't get rested in the sleeper when the partner is driving.

On another note, a great little book that I've used to help motivate me and give me some fresh ideas about running and promoting our business, is "Get Out Of the Herd" by Jerry Martin. A light read, filled with lots of wisdom and actionable ideas. www.getoutoftheherd.com.

The Numbers

In discussing our *hotshot* business experience I'll take the approach that we are sharing a cup of Joe at a Pilot Truck Stop. Although as a trucker you might suspect that much of what I say is laced with a certain amount of BS, but I'll almost always tell the truth, and some of the facts I state will actually have a basis in reality. I'll start off with sharing information that few in the business will divulge: how much money we make.

In our first year as *hotshots*, we drove someone else's truck. This was our trial period to determine whether this lifestyle/business was for us. We had decided to work a full year, then make an assessment as to our future in the business. The hardest piece of information to find when starting out in this industry is the revenue potential for a team operation. The good folks at FedEx Custom Critical do the best at being up front with earnings potential for new drivers. They have put together an earnings fact sheet that their recruiter will be happy share.

In starting our *hotshot* business we set some financial goals in running our little company that, to date, continue to be applicable. How one measures success is always an important monitoring tool!

With the purchase of the truck, we have four years of truck payments. Several of our goals were to make enough money in four years to pay off the truck, cover our business and personal bills, pay off all our debt except for the mortgage, save for retirement, and live comfortably while on the road. I have listed our gross revenue and some major expenses for the past two calendar years. So far we have been achieving our measures of financial success, but those numbers don't include enough income to cover health insurance. Not being able to afford health insurance continues to be our biggest risk exposure. With time, we'll qualify for our country's socialist healthcare program for old people. Thank God for FDR-care. (Medicare)

The numbers below represent our business revenue and some of the major operating expenses for 2010 and 2011. During this period we were an experienced owner/operator team driving a dry van mid-class straight truck, working just as much as we could while attempting to stay sane and married at the same time:

	2010	2011
Miles		
Loaded	103,600	102,000
Deadhead	6,200	16,000
Total	109,800	118,000
Income		
Haul Income	\$142,300	\$148,000
Fuel Surcharge	26,700	31,200
Total	\$169,000	\$179,200
Earnings/Mile	\$1.54	\$1.52
Major Expenses		
Fuel	\$ 47,150	\$ 56,000
Truck Payments	23,150	23,150
Repair & Maint	11,500	19,200
Insurance	6,000	6,500
Qualcomm/Phone	4,000	4,100
Base Plate & Permits	2,100	1,900
Total	\$ 93,900	\$111,850
Major Expenses/Mile	\$.86	\$.94

A likely first impression is that your truck is a “cash cow” and a “money pit” at the same time. The challenge is keeping the cow’s head above the rim of the pit. That’s called running a business. When comparing the numbers above, the higher fuel costs reflect increase in fuel and miles driven. The repair costs reflect an aging vehicle with 600,000 miles on the original engine. There were also additional expenses, but they tend to be more individual in nature. Another team will have a different set of numbers and expenses such as motel costs, and tools and supplies. A hardworking solo *hotshot* owner can make up to 60% of what a team earns.

The Carrier

Several Mondays each month, a handful of ex-drivers from FedEx are attending Panther's new driver orientation and a handful of ex-Panther drivers are attending FedEx's new driver orientation. Typically, a carrier's new orientation will have a number of folks coming over from the competition. There are several reasons why musical chairs among *hotshot* carriers is so active. The story from most drivers is that the other carrier "couldn't keep us busy." If a *hotshot* carrier's driver relations manager were able to get their turnover rate down to 50%, they'd be carried around the office on the shoulders of the accountants. The turnover rate among some of the over-the-road carriers can be as high as 70%.

Choosing a carrier as a driver and or owner/operator is one of the most important business/life decisions you will make as a *hotshot*. There are over thirty well-established *hotshot* carriers in the US, with the top five probably carrying the majority of expedited freight. All of these carriers have marketing and recruiting departments claiming they are the best in the industry. It is your challenge to choose a carrier that fits your wants and needs. For the newbie, this can be very confusing, especially when looking at pay rates. Most carriers will pay according to a rate/mile schedule depending on the equipment and qualifications of the drivers. Then there are carriers that pay simply on a percentage of revenue the load generates. But to lay out a matrix of carrier pay plans comparing all the items paid or not paid would take a Certified Public Account to develop and a Philadelphia lawyer to interpret.

It's difficult for the beginner to determine which pay rate works for their business. Carriers will advertise rates they pay per mile, but those advertised rates represent the top pay they are offering to highly qualified drivers with well-equipped trucks. Just asking the carriers their pay per mile is only part of a carrier's compensation package. The rate for straight trucks can range from \$1.12 to over \$1.80/mi depending

on truck and drivers. Questions to ask: “What do you pay for dead-head and empty moves? Do you pay for tolls and state trip permits? If going to Canada, do you pay for crossing fees, and do you pay any bonuses for border crossings? How is the fuel surcharge paid? What is the upfront cost to drive for you? Do you pay extra for hazmat and/or Government qualifications?” Then there are the carriers that just pay a flat percent of gross revenue. This number usually averages between 60% and 65%. If you are a driver looking to work for an owner/operator, they usually pay 60% of gross revenue earned. If the driver is paid the fuel surcharge then the driver is paying for the fuel.

The upfront costs for owner/operators to lease their truck with a carrier are all over the map. The range will be from zero to several thousand dollars, especially if you have to buy a Qualcomm (wireless communication system). One approach to take with a carrier who wants big bucks upfront is to say; “I want your upfront costs covered in my sign-on bonus.” The real rip-offs are the carriers who insist that you pay for the decals, logos and advertising that they stick all over your truck. I am not going to pay a carrier to plaster their advertising on my truck. As owner/operators, let’s force the carriers to pay for their advertising on our rigs and demand that they credit each truck \$25 a month to drive their display ads around the county.

Other things to consider are: Does the carrier haul hazmat and government clearance loads? Does the carrier go to Canada? What are the freight lanes the carrier services? And most importantly, how often do you need to be home? Are your home time needs a match with carrier expectations? Is your type of truck and equipment in high demand? It is important to do the upfront research in carrier selection and try to get it right the first time. Otherwise there is a loss of earnings every time an owner/operator changes carriers.

“How do you measure success?” This is a vital question to ask yourself and the *hotshot* carriers that you are interviewing. Be clear about what your needs are in selecting a carrier. Remember, you are interviewing them. When Barb and I first started expediting we chose our current carrier because they were one of the largest carriers with national coverage. Needing to get home to Oregon every couple of months was important and still is. Panther is the only *hotshot* carrier we’ve driven for, and we have been pleased overall. Over the years we have seen them continually improving the issues affecting drivers. One

issue for us that has been a big disappointment is the decline in west coast freight. Since joining Panther there has been a steady erosion of expedited freight serving the west. From our experience, west coast freight is down 40% from a couple of years ago. In fact, it has gotten so bad that this fall we seriously considered leaving Panther because we need to be home more. We started searching for another carrier that would keep us more productive while increasing home time. An ideal carrier for us would be one that is large, has national coverage, has access to hazmat and government loads, serves Canada, and has electronic logs.

Our search limited us to three other *hotshot* carriers: Landstar Express America, FedEx Custom Critical, and Express-1. As you can see, we are still with Panther, so what happened with these other companies? We'd probably be driving for Landstar, but they were unable to meet one of our criteria: electronic logs. Landstar's business model has the truck paid at 62% of the load's gross revenue, plus fuel surcharge. The drivers are left to find their own freight, but with a lot of access to freight boards and selected brokers working as partners with teams. Landstar advertises itself as the carrier giving the owner/operators the most freedom to run their business. But "most freedom" equals less support. As a newbie, a haircut in pay is well worth the support that centralized dispatching provides drivers. With our experience and Landstar's freight/dispatching model, we figured we could successfully stay busy on the west coast running Canada, regional freight, and government loads. But for us, electronic logs are a must, and Landstar still hasn't implemented electronic logs. I know the old timers and government haters call electronic logs "snitch boxes." To us, this is a no-brainer. With electronic logs, we have zero DOT issues relating to our log books, and no more paper logs! Barb will never do paper logs. She says they're like doing geometry homework all day long. A driver has the choice to do it with pencil and paper or have a computer do the task. Duh!

After a talk with FedEx Custom Critical recruiters, the issue of little west coast freight seemed also problematic for FedEx. At Panther, government freight, high end freight, and hazmat freight are handled by the Elite division which, at FedEx, is called White Glove. When I asked about opportunities with White Glove, I was told that we would need to be put on a waiting list to join White Glove. The waiting time was

indeterminate. The arrangement seems a bit bizarre considering that FedEx recruiting ads state that drivers with our qualifications are paid sign-on bonuses. Also, after driving for over three years with Elite, we have no intention of going on some carrier's indeterminate waiting list. For those starting out though, FedEx is a must to interview if a large integrated carrier fits your business/life needs. When it comes to providing drivers with earnings information, FedEx is heads above the rest with the marketing materials that give owner/operators real numbers as to earning potential based on miles driven and load acceptance.

The last on the list of *hotshot* carriers we contacted was Express-1, and that was because of a Wall Street hedge fund manager named Bradley Jacobs. Several times Mr. Jacobs has demonstrated his ability to take an "okay" company in a niche market and build it into something with significant profit to his investors. He is able to do this with the infusion of Wall Street money and Wall Street management. One of his most public turn-arounds was a small company called United Rentals. With an investment of \$150 million, Jacobs is now the CEO of XPO Logistics AKA Express-1, and that's a good thing. XPO Logistics has multiple freight/brokerage platforms that will be used to launch significant industry improvements and innovations in technology, software, and competitor relations.

Express-1 is expanding into the Department of Defense and life sciences business, but I don't believe they run to Canada. I think this company would be an exciting company to work with, given their vision and capabilities. They promote themselves as being an industry leader in owner/operator compensation. But when their recruiter told me, "We don't pay bonuses," I just tuned out and politely got off the phone. If a company wants to be a leader in this industry they will pay-up for their management team, so they will need to pay-up for *hotshot* quality drivers and owner/operators. In this business results are more important than being the low cost provider.

One *hotshot* fleet service/lease company, which has an interesting business model that supports new drivers getting into their own truck, is Expediter Services. This *hotshot* transportation services company is out of Mississippi and brings on new drivers with the option of purchasing their own company truck. They provide fleet level trucks to the national *hotshot* carriers. If I understand their business profile, a new team can come on as drivers and transition themselves into purchas-

ing/leasing a *hotshot* straight truck. This is a great way to try out this business before making the big commitment. From a tax prospective, as a driver or an owner/operator, you are considered an “independent contractor” and will receive a 1099 earnings statement. *Hotshot* carriers do not hire drivers or employ drivers; only independent owner/operator trucks are used. Don’t avoid or join a carrier because of their location. After orientation there is never a need to go back to the company until termination time. Any materials or supplies needed can be mailed home.

Specific information about a carrier’s operations and resources is difficult to obtain. We actually know less about our carrier today than we did three years ago. After driver orientation, drivers are brain dead from an overdose of training and information. However, after a period of time a driver starts to wonder just how this company really runs its business and gets freight. If a carrier provides loads to drivers, how are trucks and freight matched up? After we deliver our load and report to dispatch that we are available, Barb thinks that there are a bunch of people scurrying about trying to find our truck a load. Gary thinks that after reporting to dispatch our availability, there are a bunch of people scurrying about finding freight and then searching if a driver has a truck open. The difference: if there’s no freight, the truck becomes invisible. If there are no trucks, the freight gets forwarded to another carrier. Obviously, neither one of us knows what we are talking about, but in the absence of knowledge our minds tend to wonder.

Information is still a valued commodity in selecting a carrier or making decisions about your next business. There are two important and must-read sources of information about our business: **www.expediter-online.com** and **www.expeditenow.com**. Be sure to visit them; they are industry trade journals and great ways to keep current and informed about our business. Rather than waste my words telling you what they do, just go to the website. You can literally spend a day or two cruising through and researching current and archived information.

Another good source of trucker information focused on the owner/operator is the Owner Operator Independent Drivers Association, **www.oida.com**. Again, go to their site and join this organization which is your voice in this industry. Just do it!

Other carrier websites:

www.load1.com

www.tstate.com

www.express-1.com

www.pantherexpedite.com

www.customcritical.fedex.com

www.expediterservices.com

www.landstarexpslc.com

www.nationsexpress.com

www.bolt-express.com

Request for Driver Feedback

In the past eighteen months with our carrier, we have experienced a real effort by our carrier to improve driver relations and driver productivity. Part of that process included their request for driver feedback. Good for Panther. The following is my response to their solicitation. Though the response seems to focus on Panther, I can assure you that I can substitute most any competitor's name without changing a word in the message. This unedited memo is to all carriers who run Elite qualified teams, and Canada desks. The issues discussed are industry wide. The wonderful thing about being an O/O is that one can have a mature professional discussion with their carrier regarding "How can we make you more money?" without getting terminated.

To my carrier:

Thank you for having the courage to ask for O/O input.

First, I asked my wife (controlling interest in the business), if she had any comments about Panther Elite. She said, "You are doing a fantastic job," and "Just don't bounce any paychecks." Now I'll offer my 49%. Sorry for the manifesto, but no one in three years has asked me my opinion, so I have a nice inventory of comments. We have been driving for Panther for over three years. I know less today about Elite services and operations than I did since orientation and the Elite class. Example: How many trucks in the Elite fleet and what kinds? Do you have a surplus of trucks? Why don't we run more Elite freight? How do you measure success both for drivers and Panther? What percent of our total loads should be Elite?

Operationally, we are pleased with the way freight and trucks are managed. You guys are the experts on that. But begging for tolls and layover pay is annoying, especially when we forget to ask. Also, for long runs into the western Provinces, you need to build into your pricing model EM pay at .50cents/mile to get us back to the freight lanes.

If you want us to go to Edmonton Alberta, it's 1,200 miles back to Minneapolis and we need to agree on my EM before we will take the load. No EM, No Load.

I would suspect that 30% of Elite drivers generate 70% of your revenue. Why are we not in the 30%? Check our records. In three years, we have never turned down an Elite load, and have an excellent performance and safety record. In fact, for a significant time we never got loads at all and thought Elite was shut down. Given the low number of our Elite loads, and in the absence of information to the contrary, I suspect we are your second string. You have a core bench of dedicated Elite drivers that you use (30%) and when they are committed, you give the second string a call. Lack of transparency provides fertile grounds for onerous thoughts, and ignorance is always the enemy.

Within the past year or more, we have noticed a significant improvement in Driver Relations throughout the organization. Those efforts are noticed and appreciated. For us, the biggest improvement has been the handling of customs paperwork for Canada. During our first year of working CAN, it became clear that Panther struggled in the handling of the customs stuff. Once we received the customs docs, from then on we felt abandoned, especially at the border. We've spent countless hours at customs doing your work to fix your mistakes. We finally stopped doing CAN, but then you came out with \$130 border pay. From our perspective, that was cover money to compensate us for our continued long waits at the border to fix the customs work. Then awhile back, something changed and suddenly there seemed to be staff available that were knowledgeable and supportive of us getting across, and have been more than willing to hold our hands the whole way. CAN opts works for us now and we do our share of runs. Bravo to you!

While I'm on a roll, something that creates more animosity than good will are those annual drivers of the year awards. It seems like the same clique of managers and drivers keep getting the annual awards. Why is that? Perhaps they know the secret evaluation criteria and bench marks that you use to nominate and select the winners. If you are not going to provide transparency in detail on your process, the ignorant will stay happy on this one.

How do you recognize and reward longevity, productivity and quality of service? You need to incentive increases in driver productivity. Here is an excellent idea to improve driver retention and recruitment: I

recommend that drivers get a 2-cent bump in their contract rate on every annual anniversary (w/ceiling) that a driver meets their specific performance objectives. Now that would make a recruiter from the competition shudder.

Thank you for your time
gary



The Truck

RVers and truckers have a lot in common with their shared lifestyle on the road. Even though we're working, sometimes we like to think that we are getting paid to be on vacation. That said, two events we all share is that the best day of our lives is when we buy "my rig" and the second best day is when we sell it.

I'm not going to attempt to give you much information on buying your truck. I'm no expert and I don't want to take away all the fun. The best thing I can do is to share my experience and observations, and every owner/operator has a different one. We actually bought the truck over the Internet. I never thought I'd buy something for \$80,000 from www.fydafreightliner.com.

Buying your first truck needs to be a team effort. The team includes you, your carrier, your accountant or financial advisor, and the dealer. Your carrier will be very helpful in telling you their specs for a truck, and the type of trucks that are in demand. There are add-ons to a truck that can create a lot of revenue with some up front expense. It is amazing the different rates per/mile a truck will get paid depending on the upgrades, like refer units, lift gates, and drop down axles, which does increase your payout.

In today's *hotshot* trucking market the money maker is the straight truck with a high end refer unit and a lift gate. These units can get paid from \$1.60 to \$2.00/mile. Of course you will pay much more for it but the return on your investment is significant. Also, the big sleepers are what keep the women involved in this business. Barb says the only reason she decided to keep tagging along with me in this trucker life, is that she fell in love with the truck.

There is one huge thing I would have done differently, had I known then what I know now when it comes to buying a truck: I would have bought the newest and best equipped truck I could possibly get a loan on and come up with the down payment for. The best equipped trucks

get the highest payout. The newest trucks have reduced maintenance costs and keep their trade-in value. It is significantly better to pay higher monthly truck payments than lower monthly payments but with ever increasing maintenance costs. The real payoff comes when you have paid off the truck and you have some residual value left in a newer truck. No matter what type of purchase/lease agreement you enter into, as soon as you lift your pen from the contract you are significantly upside down on the loan, and it will be about three years before you get to break even on its resale value. If you are leasing a truck through a carrier program, be sure to ask what happens if you want to leave the carrier and take the truck with you, or just quit trucking. More than one O/O has found out that the fine print says the truck stays with the carrier until it's paid off.

Let's get back to the team effort of truck buying. Your first source for hotshot truck sales and truck dealers is found on **www.expediter-online.com**. The well-established dealers advertise on that site. Established dealers like FYDA have contacts and business relationships with the lead carriers. They know the carrier's specifications and truck requirements. The dealer and the carrier will handle all the licensing and Base Plate requirements. Again, have your carrier involved with this process from the get-go. Also, hopefully you have a CPA or accounting firm specializing in trucking that you are working with, and can advise you on this purchase. This business has great cash flow and great tax advantages. To maximize your after-tax income and be square on bookkeeping and tax preparation, we strongly recommend retaining a firm that will do your bookkeeping and taxes. Usually the carrier can recommend some services. The monthly charge can range from about \$90 to \$140 per month. We use Central Business Services, **www.cbsi-tax.net**, and are very pleased with the service, reporting, and tax preparation. As an O/O you are a walking, living, breathing, tax deduction and having a pro on your side to give advice, and monitor your books is well worth the cost.

Now some facts about our truck purchase of 2009: It is a 2007 Freightliner M2106 with a C-9 Cat engine, with 250,000 miles. It came equipped with engine brake and APU and two storage boxes. The cost was \$80,000, with 10% down and payments of \$2,100/month for forty eight months. The purchase agreement was called a "track lease." I have no idea what a track lease is but my CPA does, so it works for me. Do not buy a truck without some form of engine brake and an Auxiliary

Power Unit. The engine brake helps the truck brakes last twice as long, plus assists with stopping. The APU may literally save your business and marriage. Barb says she would have quit if we hadn't found a decent sized living space behind the cab. The old truck had no standing space at all. There was a queen sized bed, but the small refer and microwave oven were over our heads. Ever try getting something hot out of a microwave and not spilling it? Try doing all your life's "chores" while sitting on a bed! The new truck is just like a motor home... very livable. There's a dining room table and benches, sink with running water, a convection/microwave oven and a large freezer/refrigerator. And we can stand up to get dressed and stretch our legs after a night of tedious driving. The truck makes all the difference!





Odds And Ends About Your New Truck

Just some stray thoughts about the new truck you just bought. Most carriers will require that you present them with a new Annual, Level One, DOT Truck Inspection Report. Make sure the dealer provides you with a current report on their nickel. In fact, part of the sales agreement needs to be that the trucks pass a DOT Level One Inspection, and any repairs are at the dealer or seller's expense before you take delivery.

Be sure to bring a tape measure and permanent ink marker with you when inspecting your truck. Before you leave the dealer parking lot, measure the highest point on your rig and write it down, preferably on your partner's forehead. If you're going to run Canada, convert it to meters and write it down. As a *hotshot* team, you will be taking your truck into places that are "off the road" for normal trucker traffic, especially if you have a straight truck. You will constantly be presented with underpasses and structural overhangs of all shapes and sizes and many that won't have the height clearance stated. It is our understanding that at Panther, if a driver strikes an underpass or overhanging structure with their truck that is a terminable offense. It's also a preventable accident, which is even worse. While on the topic of terminable offenses, at carrier orientation, ask them to provide you a list of terminable offenses. They probably won't, but ask anyhow, and maybe they might share some of the unusual ones. You will be shocked at what your carrier considers a terminable offense ("you're fired"). Remember, you are a hotshot and you are held to a higher standard of performance than the normal trucker.

Since you're doing the measuring, climb into your cargo box and measure the height and width of the door opening. Write the measurements down on the cargo wall in big numbers. With that marker, draw lines on the wall where the axels or axel is located underneath the cargo department. Finally, starting from the doors, draw bold vertical lines every four feet (normal pallet size). You and the folks at the shipper will constantly be using these lines and numbers to position your freight or determining if it will even all fit.

Your carrier will ask for a scale ticket documenting the weight of your truck empty. Before you take your truck onto the scale have both fuel tanks topped off and as much of your personal gear onboard as possible including your partner. Showing your true running weight will keep dispatch from offering you loads that will make you overloaded.

Let's go back to the issue of knowing your vehicle height. As a new driver in this business do not, I repeat do not, accept any loads that will take you into New York City metro area, or onto any of the communities on Long Island. If you are not from this area, only accept loads to this particular corner of trucker hell after your team has been driving for six months. Aside from eighteen hours of daily grid lock, and the most aggressive and rudest drivers on the planet, there are "12 ft. plus" underpasses waiting around every corner to ambush you and change your life. There must be a city ordinance stating, "It is unlawful to post the height of any underpass, in order to preserve its decaying and historic appearance." I cannot fathom, for the life of me, why so many low hanging underpasses are not properly signed and routed.

Gary's Best of Class ratings for interstate trucker services:

Recent truck stop mergers with best results for truckers and four wheelers:

Pilot/Flying J, www.pilotflyingj.com

Best Showers:

Pilot, www.pilotflyingj.com

Little America, www.littleamerica.com

Best Pizza:

Flying J, www.pilotflyingj.com

Best Sit Down Food:

Petro, Iron Skillet, www.petrotruckstops.com

Best Truck Service/Repair:

Travel Centers of America www.tatravelcenters.com

Best Truck Wash:

Blue Beacon Truck Wash: www.bluebeacon.com

Best Preventative Maintenance:

Speedco: www.speedco.com

Running Your Trucking Company Like A Business

For many new owner/operators, having just bought your first truck, you have officially established yourself as an entrepreneur and a business decider. And, for many, this is your first attempt at running a business. This actually is my fourth attempt at starting a business, and since I'm now 'truckin' one can easily guess the success of the first three ventures. The one hugely positive aspect of being a *hotshot* O/O is the immediate cash flow. The single biggest cause in the failure of any start up business is that they are "under-capitalized." That means you ain't got enough money in the checking account to keep running. To sustain and run an entrepreneurial business one needs access to money, and that's either one's own or someone else's (credit). The new business owner needs to establish and maintain a strong cash flow as soon as possible. I can't think of another business where the cash flow can be so immediate and so significant for a hardworking and thoughtful team. Also, your fixed and operating expenses are significant.

I think one of our biggest challenges, as truckers, is to combine hard work with business smarts. It seems that Barb and I are either very good at working hard or good at working smart, but seldom does it seem we do both at the same time. One approach we took in our start-up venture was to make this project as much as a "turn-key" business as possible. That means letting or paying others to do most of the paperwork, permits, base plate, certifying, and general bureaucratic stuff. I think it is really helpful to work with truck dealers who have business relationships with the major carriers. Getting all the dots connected behind the scenes gets the new truck owner "load ready" in the shortest time.

How Do You Measure Success?

It is critical that you develop and make both short term and long term goals. I suggest not only including revenue goals, but outcome goals which you hope to experience in both the short and long term. As I mentioned before, we have a long term goal of being debt free within

four years of our truck purchase. We have seventeen months left on our four year plan and so far we continue to be on track. We have a monthly minimum gross revenue goal (+fuel surcharge) of \$10,000. This pays all the bills and keeps us and the truck running, but won't get us out of debt or save for retirement. It is also equally critical that you write down your goals and review them now and then. Writing your goals (thoughts) down is a very powerful tool, and even sharing them with selected people is just more leverage in making that thought a reality. In writing this book, we developed three measures of success:

1. This book will inspire others to make courageous decisions and choices regarding their work, their family, and their life.
2. We will walk into a book store someday and see this book on display.
3. We will be interviewed by Ann Curry on NBC's "Good Morning America." (Ann is from our hometown and I think we have access.)

So now we've got our measures of success, how do we make it happen? I had a powerful learning experience several years ago regarding achieving one's goals. I attended a short training session with an Olympic level athlete, not in physical fitness but in achieving goals. It was my first experience in spending some face time with an Olympic level athlete. She was a 400 meter runner and legally blind. These types of people are really different than most of us. They have a focus and commitment that one can sense and almost feel. Our athlete shared how she both mentally and physically prepared for the upcoming Olympic trials. When making decisions and choices during the course of every waking minute, she would run the issue thru her decision making filter. "Would this decision or choice bring me closer to my goal of qualifying for the Olympics or not?" And she had the discipline and commitment to only do those activities, behaviors, (and even thoughts) that would place her on the starting line.

Soon after this experience, I came across another decider who used this same decision making model. When Dwight Eisenhower became Supreme Allied Commander during WWII, he was quickly overwhelmed by all kinds of politicians and VIPs who were demanding his time. He sent off a note to his Chief of Staff stating that in the future he

would only meet with people who would help shorten the war. Again, a singular focus based on specific activities leading to a clearly stated result. I've tried this myself at times, but I'm only able to keep up the effort for short periods of time. In writing this book, I was suddenly presented with a deadline to submit my writings in a surprisingly short time. We were running hard, yet I had a week to get this material to my editor in time to be printed. I then committed myself to only engage in those actions (except driving) that would have this writing submitted by deadline. This was a powerful tool and got the job done, but to maintain that level of commitment on a regular basis would be a challenge. Saying "no" to myself really sucks.

The Cash Cow vs. The Money Pit

The truck is your cash cow and money pit. Your affair with your "Beast" starts before you even sign the sales contract. It is to your advantage to already have set the groundwork with your new profession as a business owner. Projecting yourselves as business people will help in your search and negotiations with the dealer and your carrier. If you do not take legal action to set up your business as a "legal entity," you are automatically a sole proprietorship. As a sole proprietor, there is no legal distinction between your personal finances and business finances. If you have significant assets to protect you should look at setting up "Limited Liability Corporation" or LLC.

Start your venture by opening a business checking account. It may be helpful to open a business account with a large national bank. Though it's okay to mix your personal and business finances as a sole owner, it is not wise. It is most helpful to separate your finances, and a business checking account provides the perfect record keeping tool which can help to keep you focused and your finances simpler. Yes, it is a hassle to set up these accounts, and every state seems to have a different set of requirements. We use a national bank for our business account, and we have found it helpful to have branches nationally distributed when banking business requires our personal contact. I hate big banks, so we use a local credit union for our personal business.

The next relationship to have established prior to the truck purchase is with a professional bookkeeping and tax preparation service. You and your family are now walking, talking, breathing tax deductions. To make this business work, you need professional trucker tax and record

keeping services. Some services will also play an active role in advising and supporting your business. Their fees can seem hefty, but I have always found these services to return much more in dollar and advice benefits than for services paid. As mentioned, we use CBSI, **www.cbsi-tax.net**, for our tax and record keeping. Many carriers are knowledgeable about these services and can make recommendations.

One more pre-truck decision to make is to decide who is going to provide insurance coverage? Remember the turn-key concept. Many carriers will be able to provide coverage through their insurance company. Let's keep it simple and just use the insurance company they are working with. You can shop insurance anytime, so do that later when you have a better sense of your insurance needs and issues. One big advantage we have found with using the carrier's insurance is that claims seem to be handled more promptly and easily.

Where Do We Get The Money To Buy A Truck?

I haven't a clue. I can just share our experience. Our sales/lease deal called for 10% down, which in our case was \$8,000. We also wanted to be well capitalized to cover our first six months of operations, so that would be at least another \$3,000 of cash on hand. We bought our truck in 2009, at the recession bottom, so finding financing was difficult. Fortunately, I had an IRA rollover left over from my last employer's 401K and withdrew \$11,000. This was certainly the best investment we could make with those funds, and with advice from our tax people we were able to mitigate the tax bite. One of the best sources to finance your truck is a dealer. It's a good idea to shop dealers for trucks and financing. With the shortage of capacity these days, we are seeing carriers helping O/Os with financing and lease options. The hotshot carriers want you to buy a truck and run for them, and they'll work with you to get started.

The Beast and The Pit

Before signing your sales/lease contract, demand that your truck be in the best possible mechanical condition. Things that can get overlooked in a used truck include battery life and front end alignment. Tell the dealer you want to see the battery test results and printout of the truck's alignment. You also need to know the mileage of the last preventive maintenance service of each and every component of the truck

requiring oil and fluid. Again the dealer needs to have that information and they should be making all PM's current.

Do You Know Your Cost Per Mile?

As a *hotshot* driver, you will be making business decisions every day. The most important decision you will make is whether you should take the load offer that dispatch/agent is pitching or the freight boards are offering. There are multiple considerations involved regarding your acceptance or refusal of a specific load offer. The primary consideration is the profitability of the load. To determine the profitability you have to know your operating cost. If you can't tell me your costs per mile off the top of your knucklehead, you are making a significant business error.

When it comes to math, there are three kinds of people: those that can do math and those who can't. The math to figure your per mile cost is difficult because there are many variables, like fixed costs, variable costs, and miles loaded versus empty. There are a variety of ways to figure the numbers, and I'll share our approach. We use a base or denominator of loaded mileage at 10,000 miles per month. Then we attempt to compute our fixed and variable costs based on that number. For truck maintenance and repair we use \$1,000/month. After calculating all of our fixed and variable expenses, including payments on our credit card business debt and a nominal return on our upfront investment, we simply divide that sum by 10,000. Over the years that number keeps changing as we become more aware of our actual costs in running our business and keep refining the numbers. At this time, we are using \$1.00/mile as our loaded per mile cost.

With every loaded mile there is the cost of running empty, and we try to take that into account in computing total "shipper miles." In our formula for computing "gross revenue/mile," we divide the load's total gross revenue by "shipment miles" which is the sum of loaded miles plus deadhead miles to reach the shipper. The formula:

$$\frac{\text{Gross Load Revenue}}{\text{Total Shipment Miles}} = \text{Gross Rev/Mile}$$

Gross Load Revenue is the sum of all monies paid for the load including pay for deadhead miles, loaded miles, fuel surcharge, accessories, and negotiated bonuses.

Total Shipment Miles is the sum of miles driven to get to the shipper plus loaded miles.

Let's do a calculation for an example with the following assumptions:

- Your pay rate per mile is \$1.20/mile loaded.
- Your carrier only pays deadhead after the first 75miles, after that they pay .40/mile DH
- You negotiate a \$100 bonus for delivery to Long Island to cover pain and suffering.
- Tolls will be reimbursed
- The load offer is to Stuck N' Traffic, Long Island with 500 loaded miles. Your deadhead is 175 miles.
- FSC is .30/loaded mile

Load Revenue	=	1.20 x 500 = \$600	Loaded Miles 500
FSC	=	.30 x 500 = \$150	Total DH <u>175</u>
DH Revenue	=	.40 x 100 = \$40	Total Shipment Miles 675
Bonus		= <u>\$100</u>	
Gross Load Revenue		= \$790	

Gross Load Revenue: \$790 = \$1.17/mile Gross Rev/Mile

Total Shipment Miles: 675

(Remember our cost per mile is \$1.00)

Would We Accept This Load?

I don't know yet. Over the years we have established, through experience, that we need to make minimum of \$1.30/mile gross revenue per load in order to make a run profitable for us. On the face of this example, based solely on the numbers, we would turn down this load even with the NYC bonus. The high DH miles both, paid and unpaid, really make this load unprofitable.

Again, there is another number you need to establish. What do you need as your gross revenue per load to make a run profitable enough for you? With our cost/mile at a buck, we feel our gross needs to be at least \$1.30/mile, but we prefer a gross of \$1.40/mile or more to make us feel warm and fuzzy about the load offer. Deadhead miles are usually the "make or break" item in making a load work for us or not.

I know reading and trying to make sense of this material makes your head hurt. Well, it does mine also. But, I'll add more factors in the load

acceptance model. Where does this load take us to or take us from? Is the load taking us to freight lanes or away from freight lanes? Again this is another one of those understandings that come with experience in working with your carrier.

Refusal Rate

Our carrier keeps track of a team's "Refusal %" based on loads turned down in a given month. Our refusal rate over the years is zero. Based on the carrier's definition of refusal, we are able to apply their criteria to our load acceptance model and we accept every load, well almost every load. Our basic premise for looking at load offers is to accept everyone. We are firm believers that laws of physics also apply to expediting freight. "Bodies in motion tend to stay in motion. Bodies at rest tend to stay at rest." We feel inertia is on our side so we try to keep busy. If we are offered a load that doesn't meet our financial requirements, we do the math and make a counter offer as to what it will take for us to run the freight. Sometime it works but sometimes not. But we always try to accept every load. We are also firm believers that in every decision or choice made there tends to be an infinite array of possibilities in outcomes. And we have not been disappointed with this attitude. We don't attempt to prejudge the future, and when we do we are usually wrong. That mini "favor load" across town that wastes a day's production, just might have a 2,000 mile load waiting for us after delivery.

More Tools For Your Load Review

What I have described above is a sampling of one of many approaches to take in your load offer review. You will develop your own model that works for you. I'm just trying to stimulate some thought and discussion on the topic.

There is another great tool out there to review loads developed by Phil Madsen. Phil is a hotshot O/O who is also an author, reporter, trainer and magazine contributor. He is a champion in this business for helping folks getting information and training on this work and lifestyle. In the most recent addition of **www.expeditenow.com**, Phil authored a piece "Do You Sit or Do You Move? Try This Decision Aid." Phil's website is a must visit at **www.successfulexpeditors.com/madsen**.



Time for A Travel Log: Machine Heal Thy Self...Not!

As a *hotshot* team living on the road for years now, we've come to appreciate the fact that we literally live in a machine. In fact, living in a hotshot truck is as close to living in an earth orbiting space station as we'll ever experience. And yes, there are times when our actual survival depends on all these mechanical systems working properly. We run loads in regions of the US and Canada where winter temperatures can drop to -25 degrees. Temperatures that low can kill people who are unprepared for even a minor mishap. Also, at those temperatures, the laws of physics don't seem to apply. With so much of our time spent in a machine, we've become very sensitive to the slightest malfunction. And then there is that sound.

We are actually more prone to paying attention to our truck than our bodies. And we've come to learn, and dread, that sudden strange noise that comes from nowhere. Some machines will give us a warning light and some machines will make a noise as they begin to fail. That strange click, click, click or thump, thump, thump can only mean trouble ahead for the crew. Our first response is to be in denial that something possibly terrible is about to happen, and our second response is to hope and even pray that somehow the machine will get better and heal itself. Well that ain't happened yet folks. To stay ahead of and be prepared for the inevitable mechanical mishap is a daily challenge for a driver. We've come to learn that we need to treat our truck like a good calvary trooper would treat his horse. On a daily basis we take care of the truck before we take care of ourselves.

When we bought our rig, the dealer mentioned as an aside that the previous original owner had purchased extended warranty coverage on the C-9 Cat engine which is good for 750,000 miles. We thought that was cool, but hadn't yet envisioned or internalized what that number really meant. With years, and hundreds of thousands of miles behind us, we can only say to the previous owner, "Bless you Brother." As our

goals and visions for our business evolved, we realized that we will need to drive one million miles over the course of our business career, and this is the only truck that we want to own. The truck had 250,000 miles when we bought it, and we've come to understand that the engine wasn't built for that longevity.

"The Beast" is classified as a Class 7 type of truck verses a Class 8. The large tractors hauling the 53' trailers are generally Class 8, and with proper care and maintenance they can get up to one million miles or better on an engine. Our truck is a step down from that size and engine life is something between six and seven hundred thousand miles. It finally sunk into heads that our engine was probably going to die before we did, and our great wish was that it would somehow self-destruct while under warranty. When we were home this past Christmas, our Cat service shop informed us that the warranty also had an expiration date on it. The warranty was good up until 750,000 miles or February 1, 2012, whichever came first. It was December 2011 and we had 630,000 miles on the truck. Gulp!

As we hit the road after Christmas break, we had one month left of warranty coverage and the engine was running just fine. Well maybe this engine had more life in it than we thought, and with good preventive maintenance we could surely coax the extra miles. About mid-January we were headed to Dallas with a load and subtly but persistently a thump, thump, thump noise comes from the engine block. Well, we did what we usually do when the dreaded odd sounds starts, we switched on denial and hoped the machine would heal itself. We next picked up a load from Houston over to Houme Louisiana, which about sixty miles southwest of New Orleans. The thumping wasn't going away and actually getting louder, but the truck was running just fine. We delivered on a Saturday morning and with the weekend ahead and no probability of freight; we went looking for a Caterpillar dealership. It was actually hard to find a Cat service shop that worked on truck engines in a timely manner. So the friendly Cat folks sent us up to a Peterbilt truck shop in Baton Rouge. We pulled into the shop Monday morning January 30. The shop quickly diagnosed the thumping sound as the camshaft needing replacement, and yes the warranty would cover the repair. The warranty fix was approved one day before expiration. That was the good news.

The bad news was that it would take up to a week to do the job including a weekend layover. Now there's a bunch of double whammies for owner/operators. Not only do we lose a week's revenue, but we need to stay in a hotel while the truck is in the shop. Plus there are always aspects of a repair not covered under warranty, and I told the shop foreman to make the engine like new while they had it apart and I would pay for the extra labor and parts. We figured the warranty would cover the first \$8,000 of truck repair, we'll pay another \$1,200 on doing it "right," the motel is about \$500, and we've lost \$3,000 in gross revenue. Now that's called "truckin" and ya' gotta love it to keep doing it. Back to the good news; we get to winter over in Louisiana instead of North Dakota and Oliver is making new friends with the locals.





Finally... a corner office.

Women Truckers



A while back we had a hazmat run with a pickup at Philly's port with delivery to Maryland. Though I attempt to use levity in the book, we take very seriously our professional responsibility in delivering, safely and legally, some of this country's most dangerous and valuable cargo. When dispatch called with the load offer we went through our SOP check list for running a hazmat Class 6 load. The placard for this load reads "Inhalation Hazard." The dispatcher was very insistent that our cargo box had no weather leaks in it. He seemed to go on about keeping the cargo dry, until I finally said, "Look, we've been driving this rig all winter and that cargo box is tighter than a duck's ass in water." That seemed to satisfy his concern so we got the run and picked up one 55 gallon drum at the port.

After completing the paperwork and securing the load, Barb and I reviewed our Emergency Response Guide and made sure we and our documents were squared away. It was Barb's turn to drive and that was a good thing. With these types of loads she usually has a little adrenalin rush going and it really helps to work if off if she's driving. The drive was about six hours and she had plenty of time on her log, so she got to

drive the whole trip. She was rested and all business. Our rule in team driving is that whoever is in the driver's seat is the captain of this rig, and the off-driver is very attentive to the captain's orders and instructions. The drive went uneventful as we followed the hazmat routing to someplace in the Maryland country side.

As Elite drivers, we've been to similar facilities like this: small compounds in the middle of nowhere with no signs, but surrounded by high wire fences and guarded gates. After clearing security we were told to park in the middle of the compound and wait to be unloaded. Soon after parking, men started coming out of various buildings and seemed to eagerly collect around the cargo doors. These guys were not worker types; in fact they looked like a bunch of "rocket scientists," and some probably were. Finally the forklift showed up, we broke the seals, and like kids at Christmas, the boys' eyes lit up as the drum was removed. Safely on the ground, it now belonged to them, but I did ask one of the guys what the fuss was about this chemical not getting wet. He said, "Well, we've been waiting several months for this product to be manufactured in Germany, and we are excited to see it finally arrive. The danger is, if this chemical comes into contact with water it sends off a vapor that's a type of nerve gas." I turned and walked back to the truck with an "*Oh Baaarrbb.....*"



In the trucking industry today there are several hundred thousand women with CDLs, but even with that number, they still represent less than ten percent of CDL holders. However, when we look at where the women truckers are concentrated, it is in the expediting and DOD freight business as team drivers with their husbands. Though overall, only 7% of the truckers may be women, when it comes to hauling the most dangerous and valuable freight, about 40% of the drivers are women. We are way beyond thinking whether women can make good truckers. Women aren't the ones dragging trailers filled with toilet paper across country. Women are the ones driving loads of nerve gas.

To The Suits:

If you are a hands-on executive in the trucking business, you spend parts of each day dealing with issues of capacity, driver retention and recruitment. Your staff keeps giving you all kinds of excuses about

the lack of qualified drivers and trucks. Hello! Let me tap you on that knucklehead. You have yet to recruit and attract the largest untapped pool of driving talent in the United States: women. A fundamental thinking error in this macho dominated industry, is the attitude that a woman needs to “man-up” to be a driver. But what actually turns women away is their perception that they need to “man-down” to become one of us. A paradigm shift is required to break the perception that women need to be acting like men to be successful. What you need to do, Mr. Decider, is to dedicate more resources and talent in making this industry “woman friendly.”

What does a “woman friendly” trucking business look like? It includes equipment and facilities that encourage women to consider this career. “It’s the truck, stupid,” says Barb. She has to be able to live and drive comfortably in the rig she is going to literally live in. Let’s start with something simple that you have control over, like having warehouses provide clean, secure restrooms for all drivers. Or how about requiring safe and secure parking areas where drivers can wait with their tractor or straight truck? Actually, my best advice is to ask women what “woman friendly” looks like. A great place to start is an organization called Women in Trucking, www.womenintrucking.org. This is a must-join organization for women in the trucking industry, and a great site to visit for those considering a professional driving career.



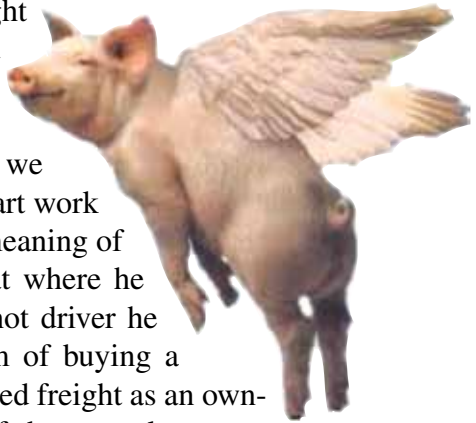
Los Angeles warehouse driver’s lounge with “running water and separate restroom facilities.”



Photo by Gary Shade

Conclusion

The material we presented in this book was developed around the concept, “We wish we would have had a book like this when we were researching and educating ourselves on the hotshot business/lifestyle.” Today there is more information than ever to help you make a decision about your future, and we hope you have found this book enjoyable, informative, and inspiring. The best part about this business is the quality of people it attracts, and the kinds of folks we get to hang out with. A couple years ago we were in a truck staging area and pulled up next to a FedEx Custom Critical straight truck. We noticed in the back a black plate hanging in the space of the DOT bumper. On the plate was painted a flying pig. Well, we were naturally curious about the art work so we asked the team about the meaning of the pig. The husband shared that where he worked before becoming a hotshot driver he had told coworkers of his dream of buying a straight truck and hauling expedited freight as an owner/operator team. The reaction of the coworkers was, shall we say, less than supportive, and they would tease him that “pigs would fly” before he and his wife would ever own their own truck. Now these are the kind of folks we enjoy parking next to.



Wishing you and yours much success.

Check your mirrors and keep it between the lines.

gary and barb

Steve Jobs said:

“Your time is limited, so don’t waste it living someone else’s life. Don’t be trapped by dogma which is living with the results of other people’s thinking. Don’t let the noise of other’s opinions drown out your inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.”

Gary Shade says:

“That which you are seeking is seeking you, but you need to step into the traffic of life to bump into each other. Bystanders just watch, and complain about the score.”

The Hotshot Chronicles



A highly entertaining, insightful and inspiring look into a true story of life on the road that one experiences while running a single truck owner/operator expediting trucking business.

Gary and Barb, a married couple and “hotshot” driving team, travel across the North American continent in their expediting freight truck, sometimes hauling military related cargo including weapons, ammo, explosives, classified materials and technology, while at other times they will carry a load of custom-built chairs to a ski resort in Canada.

The Hotshot Chronicles is a two-part book including their detailed and often humorous travel logs, plus a fact filled, hands-on account about how to get started in the expediting trucking business.

“Ice Road Truckers meets the Kardashians. This is the inner circle. The hotshots do the serious expediting for the sensitive and dangerous materials in motion across this great land. Not only do we readers get to hear about the challenges of just in time delivery, but the conflicts between the hotshots and the desk jockeys at the home office, which makes for great drama! I feel very lucky to be one of the few who has gotten to read the installments as they were written.”

—David Nevins, Book Club Member

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