

A Night to Forget

by Lee Lomas

I twirled the little plastic flashlight belonging to my nephew, who had left it in my dad's truck on his last visit, as we approached our destination. The snow-covered trees blanketed with the fresh powder flew by the window as our day trip was coming to an end. We were a short distance from home after making the long trek across state lines to see about a dog my father was interested in purchasing. I usually did not accompany him on these long rides to look at dogs he rarely purchased, but this time I had an ulterior motive. I had just turned 16 years old a few weeks prior, and with that milestone age comes the freedom of the driver's license. My plan was to casually bring up my borrowing the truck for the evening while we were alone on this long ride; I figured he would be glad enough I rode with him that he wouldn't have any objections to my using the truck, which I had done a few times before. My plan was simple: casually bring up my plans for the evening in conversation and hope he would offer the truck to me. We approached the turn off to our street; now was the time, but before I could get anything out I heard his loud over-powering voice ask, "Are you going with us to see the band for your sister's wedding?"

Caught off-guard in a panicked tone I said, "I kind of wanted to borrow the truck to go bowling with some people tonight." He had a disturbed look on his face, as I knew he did not like me driving long distances alone in the dead of winter, being brand new to the driving world. We

lived a little over an hour away from my destination at his girlfriend's house, and I had made the drive before, but never at night, and never alone.

"I don't know, Lee," he said remorsefully, "It's supposed to snow more tonight and get really cold, I'd feel more comfortable if you either came with us or stayed home." I nodded in agreement. I understood his reasoning and did not raise a fuss as I knew from past experience it would get me nowhere with him.

We got home, and the day proceeded as normal. I helped with chores around the house as I usually did, my dad and I watched T.V together as we usually did, and we sat down to dinner early in the evening as we usually did. After dinner I retreated to my room to get ready to go see the band with my dad and sister. I walked into the kitchen, grabbed my jacket and waited for my dad to be ready. I sat at the kitchen counter with a bored posture, not really looking forward to seeing this band, but not wanting to stay home doing nothing, either. Then my dad strolled into the kitchen and tossed me the keys.

"You want me to drive?" I asked somewhat enthused.

"No," he said with that still-concerned look on his face.

"You can go bowling, but you have to promise me you'll call as soon as you get there, and you have to take the highway, no back roads!"

To get to my destination I had two different ways to get there. The first way was the highway—a long and straight road with very few turns and a lot of traffic. The second way were the back roads, as curvy as a question mark with limited traffic, dimly lit by only the moon and the headlights of the vehicle, but about 15 minutes of drive time shorter. I agreed in utter excitement and threw my arms around his broad frame and thanked him repeatedly. He said, “Be careful, the roads might be slippery, and have fun,” as I darted out the door to my freedom.

I climbed into his large silver truck and flung the seatbelt across my chest and began my drive. I made the first turn off of our block, and to my surprise started to fishtail; I slammed on the brakes as my dad’s words about the conditions of the roads echoed in my ear. I finally came to a halt, right before my front end hit a stone dividing wall. I took a deep breath and contemplated turning around as the roads were far worse than I thought they would be; I was only a block away from home and about lost control doing 15mph. I weighed the pros and cons and decided if I took my time and drove slowly, I could make it safely.

The drive started again, this time with a little extra caution. About half way I started to get my confidence back and heart rate down. I had lost time since I made the decision to drive a bit slower. Then I came to the point where I had a huge decision to make. Take the highway, which is what my dad had ordered, or take the backroads and cut down some drive time. In my 16-year-old mind, I figured I had made it this far driving cautiously and was confident I could make it the rest of the way. I began the trip down the curvy road and realized that they were not as

well plowed as the main highways, so I had to drive even slower. I knew this road all too well as I had driven it before, a handful of times, and been a passenger on more times than I could count. For some reason that night it seemed to be extra dark on the already dimly lit road, the slush and salt left over from other travelers beat the bottom of my truck like a drum. I was going a nice steady pace when all of sudden the road disappeared, and I was flying through the air, tree branches cracking and slapping my windows as I plummeted down the hill and smashed into the other side.

A sudden feeling of disbelief set in as I came to a rest down the embankment, trying to rationalize what had happened. I began to recognize that I was severely stuck and severely injured. The truck was still running and on four wheels but was not only buried into the side of the hill, the airbag had also exploded upon impact. I began to struggle to open the door to no avail. I began to push myself back into my seat, which I had slid out of slightly, when a sudden burst of pain rang through my body accompanied by a loud bone shattering sound which could have been heard a mile away. I lifted up my bloody torn jean leg which was the location of the newest pain to my already incredibly sore body, to see a jagged white shape staring back at me bleeding ever so slightly: my bone. Panic mode immediately set in; how would I get out of here if I could not walk? I began smashing the door hoping that it would pop open and I could crawl safely to the road above...nothing. I began punching the window like a heavyweight boxer in hopes that I had enough strength left in order to somehow shimmy my way out of the broken window...nothing. I screamed at the top of my lungs for anybody to hear me. I continued to

punish the door and window both when I realized I had yet to try the automatic button that drops the window. With not much expected I reached my buried hand over to the side panel and pressed the button. The window slid down with ease, and a small smirk appeared on my face for a fraction of a second before I was thrust back into my nightmare. I continued to scream out the now open window, but my screams were only returned by their own echoes of the rolling hills I had grown up around, a car here and there would drive by not knowing that 30 feet below I was trapped in the wreckage as my headlights were still buried into the bank. I laid my swollen and battered face out the window for a minute to take a break, and the strong angry wind whistled through the valley. I began to come to grips with my fate. I rolled up the window, propped my shattered leg onto the seat next to me and covered it tightly with my jacket to help stop the bleeding that had picked up slightly in the hour I was yelling for help. I bundled up the best I could as my truck began to be taken over by the harsh conditions outside; the heater had not worked for the duration of this hell I was in, and I was running out of options, and time. I looked into what was left of my rearview mirror and could hardly recognize the face that stared back at me: swollen, bruised, and stained with blood. I glanced down and underneath the gas pedal was that little plastic flashlight belonging to my nephew that I had been twirling earlier that very day. Literally, this was light of hope.

I realized if another car would drive by I might have a chance to catch their eye with the dim light that would have to stand out in this intense darkness. A short amount of time passed before I got that very chance; a car approached, and I began to yell and shake this little

flashlight up the hill just praying it would catch his eye. It did not, and the car continued on its way. My light of hope had quickly become a disappointment. A good amount of time passed as I laid there cold, weak, and tired before I heard another car approaching. I almost did not try to flag this one down, as my attempts all night had gone unheard and unseen. I chose to try one last time. As he made the corner that I did not a few hours earlier, I shook the light and screamed with all the energy I had left. Then suddenly the vehicle above came to a screeching halt, and then the voice of an angel, "Is somebody down there?" I pleaded with this man for help, and he came crashing down through the deep snow and broken limbs that I had so generously knocked down earlier. He came to my window with a horrified look on his face, as he realized that the person screaming for help in the dead of the night was a close friend and classmate of his daughter. He hugged me and said, "I'm going to get you out of here, Lee," and for the first time in the whole ordeal, I cried.

The doctors weren't 100% sure how I stayed alive that long as my body temperature had dropped well below the norm; it was also a mystery to them how I did not pass out from the pain of 13 broken bones in my leg, including the compound fracture, a broken nose, cheekbone, jaw, and eye socket, or how in that situation I had the presence of mind to put my leg up as high as I could to help with bleeding. I never got any answers on how I survived as long as I did, but I walked, or wheeled, rather, away with a new understanding of listening to parents and why it is so important. They know more than we do, and that is something I will never forget.