

ABBY

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Chapter 46 - Trucks

Wheelchair Bob in the car and truck repair office sent an intern from there as a runner for me. "Bob in auto repair wants you in a hurry." She scurried away before saying why.

I had been about to have my breasts pumped and I knew that station would insist on changing my heavy, wet, sagging diaper. Instead we hustled although I didn't like my breasts bouncing painfully that way when they had become heavy with unexpressed milk.

At the repair yard the State Police had sent us a damaged truck from an accident on the Interstate highway. It had been a flat faced cab-over-engine type of tractor before a few pipes as part of a load on a flat bed trailer had rammed through the windshield killing both the driver and the assistant. The driver had been decapitated. The assistant's head had been crushed. I almost threw up in the half a minute of watching those corpses being loaded into an ambulance for the morgue.

Those c-o-e trucks were very popular in Europe where space can be cramped and the distances are shorter. We easily had runs to the far corners of America at 1700 miles from us. The distance from Paris to Berlin is 660 miles, and Berlin to Warsaw is 360 miles.

I knew right then we would sell off our three cab-over-engine tractors, and Bob and the Cedar Valley Trucking Dispatcher on duty had the same idea. I told both of them. "If we are going to be replacing trucks, let's do a good job of it." *That meant form a committee or a task force.*

The Dispatcher had an intern contact Shannon by satellite link. She had been the driver sleeping on the crew of three young women drivers. The first full meeting of the new task force met when she would be the assistant driver in the right front seat. She had her laptop connected into the satellite link Cedar Valley Trucking kept open for all of our drivers. Our drivers talked constantly about the weather where they were, about crossing tall mountains, wide rivers on high bridges, regional differences, passing each other, rest stops they liked and those they wanted improved, and when they stopped to help a big rig truck or a motorist in distress.

As of that first call, the Shannon team had been racing with a Federal Protective Service cruiser ahead and behind from the Davis-Monthan Airbase in Tucson, Arizona, to something hush-hush at or near the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado. That 830 mile trip usually required 11-1/2 hours. They made it in under ten which means they had that four trailer tandem combination going at an average speed in excess of eighty miles an hour. Yikes! They needed engine oil after that run. They

told us the cargo had been lightweight aluminum aircraft parts and jet engines.

Urged a little by myself, or maybe more than a little, we had the Task Force plan an improved sleeper for our own drivers. Our drivers could be teams of three who kept their truck rolling twenty-four hours a day. Husband and wife teams were usually the best at training new drivers especially if that team had grown children.

The Task Force made a way to take a standard medium length sleeper of 7' 1' or 85 inches, and re-plan it for continuous operation. The typical sleeper of that size appeared more as a bachelor pad for a stopped truck at night. Our growing freight market used our twenty-four hour service. The Task Force changed that bachelor style as they squeezed and tweaked until they had an on-board toilet and a cramped shower with a centrifuge for recycling waste water and burning the waste in the hot exhaust. One of the two beds had a 36" width for our growing number of married couples as drivers. The oven had a lower heat setting as a warmer. The freezer with an ice maker had a companion unit of a refrigerator as a chiller. The rack in a small dishwasher for plates, bowls, glasses, cups and flatware also served as storage for those. The medium sleeper being longer allowed more fuel capacity and more storage for portable water. The water supply fed water injectors in the diesel engines which helped with reducing emissions. They wanted an on-board engine oil reservoir. The tweaks went on.

My sister-wife Kittie the prior banker and Chair of our Banking Committee applied for an SBA loan for rebuilding our truck fleet. The bank refused. The Mansion House residents voted to fund from our reserves of money.

The Federal Department of Transportation churlishly refused to certify our new sleeper design. They did when we added emergency exit doors on both sides.

These developments required expanding the Dispatchers Office. It had become too small when the dispatcher had two interns or others as assistants. Adding a pair of people for truck sales blew the space capacity.

Our residents were troubled with despondency. The new need for a pair of women to work the phones on truck sales became an opportunity for them to have something new to do. All sales operators renamed themselves Chrissy for their phone duties. It seemed to work with the mostly male buyers of trucks.

The Task Force went searching for a manufacturer of the highest weight capacity trucks known as Type Eight. They thought buying in quantity of a standard design could do something for having the sleeper built the way we wanted, and maybe lowering the price. The manufacturers wouldn't talk that way. They seemed to not believe us.

The Task Force found a manufacturer who would talk. That truck plant in Mexico had major financial problems following a multi-million dollar judgment for selling trucks with engines that would not meet emissions requirements. That plant had barely avoided closing with the workforce accepting reduced hours and reduced hourly pay.

Our Task Force talked with our immigrant community about speaking Spanish. One of our residents came with us who had been learning Spanish while teaching the immigrants English.

A resident who worked as a Dispatcher for Cedar Valley Trucking served as our driver for the day long trip to Laredo, Texas. There we stopped our rented motor home, had a restaurant dinner with private snide comments comparing them to our Cap'n

Jackie restaurant, slept, and had breakfast with more private snide comments. At 8am we arrived at the border crossing into Nuevo Laredo, Mexico.

The motor home had generic labels instead of Cedar Valley Trucking or Mansion House which could have attracted the ire of Immigration and Customs Enforcement. At 8am of a day to turn hot, a virtual mob waited to cross into the United States for day work. The ICE officials were too busy for more than the most cursory check of us.

Three hours later we arrived at a big plant for making heavy trucks. It only took an hour for the Smiling-Jack type of sales rep to figure out we were not interested in what he could do. We had similar services writers of our own at our repair business.

A Sales Manager tried for about twenty-five minutes before he too figured out we were different. He moved along faster to the Executive VP for Sales.

Finally the four of us were provided with a guard for the motor home and a joint meeting of the Sales VP and the site President.

By this time the four of us from the Mansion House were losing our patience. Danielle our lawyer eyed me. "Lay it all out Cindy."

Which I did with the aide of a three ring notebook. "We are here to discuss buying new Class Eight tractor trucks for replacing our entire fleet. Many people do not believe us when they first meet us. Perhaps nearly all." I led him quickly through our history from the very beginning of the Mansion House to the first Cap'n Jackie restaurant, and the modest beginnings of repairing a few old trucks. The last pair of photos gave them emotional reactions to our complex of an image of the new multi-layered restaurant from a low flying airplane with the gas station and auto repair businesses in the background. The aerial photo with a view straight down showed all that, plus the retail shops, the railroad, two hotels, a church, and two square miles of fish, shrimp, and oyster ponds without mentioning the clams, scallops, and alligators.

The next several pages were copies of our state and Federal Court orders, with loose copies they could keep. The last page had a summary of our bank balances which raised eyebrows.

The four of us rotated out one at a time for having our breasts pumped, and on alternate pumpings having our wet diapers changed. While I had been in the motor home, the Dispatcher of Cedar Valley Trucking took them through an almost engineering drawing made by Misty of what our Sleeper Committee had worked up. We had a quart of our Cedar Trucking standard green paint, a paint chip, and the correct painting industry formula. We would provide the label decals including the ones for under the driver's window of the truck company name, below that in smaller lettering the words 'Mansion House', below that an image of an American flag billowing in the breeze, and near the bottom the slogan 'we hold these truths to be self evident'.

When I returned all pumped and changed, the Plant people were into their Dog and Pony Show of their plant and what they could build. All the way through Danielle and I ew-ed and ah-ed while our Dispatcher asked pointed questions and our translator spoke Spanish with as many of the employees as possible.

They took us to a first class Mexico style Mexican Restaurant. They and our translator had beer. Danielle, the Dispatcher, and I had bottled water for keeping our wits as sharp as possible. We ate too much which didn't help with our fending off

becoming drowsy.

The President took us to his fancy plush Executive Conference Room. There Danielle led the next discussion. The he inside the she outer covering bluntly raised that company's recent financial disasters caused by failing emissions standards, Federal fines, and disastrous commercial law suits. That Congress couldn't provide consistent standards had vexed the auto and truck manufacturers. "How would you like it if we supplied the engines? You could tell that to all those pesky types."

We knew from the nearly instant change in their appearances before they used a single spoken word they liked that a lot. It helped they were already using the big diesel engine and matching transmission we wanted.

We wanted the new trucks delivered by railroad. The odometers would read almost zero that way. We could install the big diesel engines we wanted, or they could.

It made more sense to them for the factory to install the engines we supplied before the cab would be lowered into place. We wanted one standard brake drum for the power axles and another for the front axle for easing our repair efforts.

All cash sales almost 'blew them away'.

We could have our own inspector at the factory. We sent two, one of whom would be a translator. What they created, or concocted, had our two on-site people accept delivery before installing the engine. Their most frequent problem became the alignment of the rear axles. The factory came to depend on our inspectors.

One truck of ours a day made for twenty of so a month arriving by double door boxcars at our railroad siding.

Everybody back home became excited in different ways. Danielle returned to Court duty every morning objecting to the arrests of too many African-American young men and getting their bonds reduced. The Judge asked where Danielle had been who gave a straight answer. That raised the Judge's eyebrows who demanded better police and prosecutor behavior. Danielle kept going to Court. The Judge ordered that Danielle be given privileged access to the holding cells before Court, and be provided a Spanish translator. That reduced the Court time needed. Their words almost became a lingo.

Our immigrant truck repair plant needed hired help for pre-installation testing of that many diesel engine and automatic transmission sets so fast. With our immigrants speaking mostly Spanish and limited English, they hired Spanish speaking diesel mechanics who had been having trouble finding work. Those hires quickly caught on to our whole-person healing efforts and particularly the evening English classes. We caught some of them sleeping in the swamp and made them go to our nearest motel at a discount rate. They wanted to move in with their families, but we didn't have that much space in the growing number of concrete apartment houses at the immigrant end of our property. They found a source for mortgage money. The next apartment house commenced construction more quickly than we had planned. We bought more land.

The longer length sleepers made for longer truck frames which allowed for more fuel and water storage capacity. Shannon became excited at hearing all this. She insisted on visiting the factory. We gave her team a load to deliver near there. When at that factory, they and the manufacturer tweaked those cab and sleeper designs.

When the first ten trucks had arrived, been tested, and received their safety and environmental inspection stickers, Kittie and her Banking Committee descended on the bank Commercial Loan Committee. They threatened to find another bank. They received loan approval on those new trucks as long as they could have each truck be security on the financing and at least bank standard collision insurance.

Danielle had a great time heckling the insurance company representative. The Court appointed a legal aide representative. Danielle didn't have to go to Court all the time anymore. He certainly had plenty to do with all these trucks.

The two women residents working on truck sales needed their own intern. They, Misty, the Chief Dispatcher, and more people from the immigrants created an idea. Could we offer a guarantee on the new trucks we sold of roadside service? They kicked that upstairs to me. I didn't like it.

Wheelchair Bob and Misty went to work on me. What they had in mind became offering roadside service if any new truck acquired from us ever became immobilized. Or if an essential major assembly broke down. Charge a fee for the service. They made a map of North America including Alaska, Canada, and Mexico. They drew circles from our location to two hours out, half a day out, one day, one and a half days, and two days. Nearly everywhere including to the south end of Mexico came within a long one day for a three member driving team. \$500 a month for one hundred trucks meant \$600,000 a year. *Gee, I thought, we could do this.*

The big manufacturers made guarantees, but not like that for speed of returning the truck to service. Repairing an inoperative motor, transmission, or powered axle for a big rig typically took four days to two weeks of lost revenue from an operator's perspective.

Bob went to work with his legendary ability to find things on the internet. He, Misty, the Chief Dispatcher, and the Head Mechanic doodled and designed.

Bob found four coach limousines with front fenders and hoods the way we liked our trucks. Those coaches were inoperable and had been vandalized in San Diego, California. They were for sale by a bankrupt company.

I hate going to Courts. Danielle glared at me. We rented a motor home. All four of us making the trip were residents of the Mansion House.

Bob found parking for the motor home eight blocks from the San Diego Bankruptcy Court in the Navy Yard area for the Museum of the USS Midway.

After a breast pumping and diaper changing that morning, all four of us dressed in our best skirt-suits. My sister-wives had selected a deep apricot with a peach blouse. Danielle wore a Navy Blue with a blazing white blouse with ruffles. The seamstresses had made similar attire for the representatives of the Dispatchers and the Mechanics.

I tensed up at just the intimidating image of the building from the outside. Security personnel at the magnetic detector were pleasant enough after Danielle used a pleasant voice on them. I feared my voice would crack, but followed Danielle's lead and tried saying something nice. All I got out disintegrated into "good morning". That had been enough. They told Danielle the location of the correct Courtroom.

On the third floor Danielle went up front before the Court formally opened while

the other three of us sat in the benches and fidgeted. Danielle had a Motion to be admitted to practice before this Court for only this one case, and only for our bid for those four coach limousines. They had a funny name for that of *pro hoc vichay* for whatever that meant.

He returned from up front and asked in a loud voice if anyone had arrived from the Trustee's Office. Later I found out that meant the Office of the United States Trustee. A young woman in a lawyer's pants-suit responded, and came to us. Danielle and her had a chaotic hurried conversation. She offered to introduce Danielle to the Court as if that had always been a requirement.

Someone in a formal voice up front called out "all rise". That had been the same at every Court I had ever been in. An amazingly attractive women came in wearing the black robe of a judge.

The Trustee lawyer and Danielle joined a line for uncontested motions. That lawyer impressed me with her very short summary of why Danielle had come to Court and why be admitted. Danielle handed the Motion to be admitted to a Marshalls Service person as the Courtroom security who handed it to a Court official who handed it over the high barrier to the Judge. The Judge made a slight smile. "Motion granted."

That lawyer and three others argued for over an hour on issues I barely followed in that corporate bankruptcy case. Without warning someone up front called "bid by Cedar Valley Trucking".

Danielle and I went through the swinging gate and sat at a table between the railing and the front of the Courtroom.

The Trustee lawyer made a brief and accurate summary ending in the bidder is unknown and from a long day's travel away.

The Judge had on her formal face. "Explain why this bid."

Danielle went to the podium in the front center and called me as a witness. "If it please the Court," Danielle responded, "I believe a few minutes will be useful and necessary on who is Cedar Valley Trucking. I have a three ring binder for the Court to follow as the witness will be testifying from it."

The Judge nodded her approval. That binder went hand to hand to her.

I briefly explained the Mansion House from the beginning with photos in that binder. Our building a better home had been disrupted by the mob and by people who hated us. We had parked a construction trailer at the work site, and stocked it with sub sandwiches and sodas for our people working at the site. It made a convenient place for breast pumping and diaper changing. We provided those foods at no charge to whatever police cruiser had parked at our site as a convenient place for them to wait. After moving into our new home we faced our profound continuing despondency. For that we opened a restaurant for something to do. Using the photos in that binder I led the Court through our ever expanding operation ending in an aerial view of our two square miles of expanded restaurant, gas station, auto and truck repair, railroad, shops, the church, the two motel/hotels, all those fish, shrimp, and oyster ponds, and finally the immigrants apartment houses and their truck and locomotive shops.

The Judge watched me instead of that binder by the time I reported replacing our

truck fleet with new trucks, and the proposed guarantee. She asked. "How many people are working for you now?"

I counted out loud. "Eighty-six residents. No, that's now eighty seven. About a dozen jail work release men at this time. The number of railroad volunteers fluctuates from two to a dozen. Thirty-seven high-school interns this year from three high-schools. About sixty paid staff and volunteers for the kitchen and restaurant. The eight failed drug abuse patients who pay their way for treatment by running the pumping and changing station." I directed the Judge to the image of the sign there of 'no privacy, no modesty, no suicide'. Her eyebrows jumped up and she flipped to that image in the binder. I continued. "The church has two paid pastors and dozens of unpaid volunteers. The nearby hotel has twenty to thirty. The hospital we started must be up to a hundred or so. The immigrants have grown to about eighty. One hundred and fifty big rig trucks with most of those having three paid drivers for twenty-four hour continuous duty makes, uh, what, four hundred and fifty rounded down to maybe four hundred truckers."

I stopped talking as I saw the Judge's mouth moving with numbers. "Six or seven hundred?"

"Yes, your honor. Please go to the back of the binder for the State and Federal Court orders protecting us."

Her eyebrows went up at that. She ordered her law clerk to go find those orders on the internet. They were there exactly as presented. They also found Danielle's continuing appearances in Court. She inquired. "Who pays for that?"

I tried keeping my grin down. "Danielle is a resident. Those are given residence, a terrific dining hall, and good things to do for their self-esteem. No pay. We make enough money we no longer ask for the residents to pay from their disability income."

Her face froze as she digested that statement. She asked the lawyer for the Trustee for their requirements.

"All cash; and remove within three days, your Honor."

She eyed me. "Can you do that?"

I responded. "We haven't seen them. We do not know where they are parked. I think so."

Danielle intervened without having a chance to ask me. "As we understand all this, those coach limousines are unsaleable. We will submit a separate low bid on each in case anyone out bids us on one or two."

We bid a hundred dollars each and no one else bid at all. We had them shipped by railroad flatcar. We didn't quite make the three day limit for the last one, but no one complained.

They were in far worse shape than anyone expected. We didn't care about the sliced and ripped interiors as we were going to replace those anyway.

The immigrant mechanics had a fun time on those four coach limousines. They cut off and removed the back half or so of the shell. They made our standard sleeper out of the front of the shell, where they could have more space, and added a solid

bulkhead. Behind the bulkhead became storage for eighteen big truck tires inside the old shell. Out in the rain had places for an engine and transmission as a unit. Two heavy truck powered rear axles which expanded to three axles, and an unpowered front axle. Boxes of parts and a three complete sets of brake drums. We sold brake drums.

They removed the one powered rear axle, and replaced it with two heavy ones moved to the rear of the frame. They strengthened the frame. They added two cranes. One of which didn't not swivel sideways and could pick up the front or tow a heavy truck. The other had complete 360 degree rotation for moving those heavy parts.

Misty put our guarantee on the new truck sales website.

No one responded.

The women working the sales desk kept revising their telephone sales pitch.

The Krystal Krew with Shannon were towing tank trailers loaded with crude oil. The railroads had suffered another dangerous accident. Trucks were towing every tank trailer anybody could find. They way I heard it, Shannon had been asleep in the back as Kayla drove a heavy triple trailer over a tough grade. The engine coolant temperature had risen to near maximum. The engine wanted more lubricating oil as running that hot increased the oil consumption.

As they crested that mountain Kayla saw past the downgrade and into a shallow upgrade of a big rig pulled over on the shoulder. Shannon woke up on her own as Kayla let our truck slow down while coasting down the grade allowing the engine heat to cool. Kayla pulled their heavy oil trailer train in behind that stopped rig with barely enough room to pull out on the interstate highway. The shoulder had been paved.

Shannon picked up their big red handbag with their Special 38 revolver in it. They had been told the correct designation had always been a 38 Special, but for their own humor they kept to their mis-designation. She tapped Krystal on the shoulder for vacating the passenger front seat. Shannon went out the passenger door.

As she approached the cab of the stopped rig a man opened the driver side door and hung out enough to see around the trailer. The tone of his voice matched being an angry long standing alcoholic and perhaps drunk or high to boot. "Beat it."

Shannon retreated while continuing facing forward. She went up on the driver's seat that had been vacated by Kayla on Krystal's thinking.

That man came down to the ground carrying a pistol.

Shannon opened the driver side door a fraction, stepped down on one foot, and aimed the Special 38 revolver out in the narrow gap between the door and the cab. She steadied her aim on the curves in the cab and door. "Halt!"

He raised his revolver.

She squeezed the trigger as the women had taught themselves in target practice with target strength ammunition. They had never before fired the maximum power hollow point ammunition. The recoil stung Shannon's hand.

He fired his 357 magnum sending its bullet through our windshield and the flimsy

walls behind the driver's seat before finally stopping in the sound proof padding in the far rear of the sleeper cab.

Her bullet hit him a little above the eyes and left of his right eye. That hollow point had scrambled his brain instantly killing him. It blew out the back of his skull sending a train of his brain across the pavement under and behind where his body collapsed to the ground.

Krystal keyed their radio handset. "Hello; hello; State Police. This is Krystal for Shannon on Cedar Valley Trucking cab number eleven. We are near" she paused "milestone 147. We were attacked and killed the man in self-defense. His rig is parked in front of us and something is wrong here. Please send a cruiser and an ambulance."

We heard about this when the State Police called our Dispatcher to confirm there could be our cab eleven on that Interstate highway. We confirmed.

The Krystal Krew as we called them heard the first siren in five minutes. That cruiser, the next few, and the ambulance all had the pedal to the metal as they say.

The first cruiser pulled in front of the unknown rig preventing it from departing.

Two men exploded out of the right hand door of that cab and ran into the bramble on that side of Interstate right of way. They became confused at a fence between the right of way and a cow field. If they had kept running they might have made it. In their confusion first one and then two more troopers caught them.

Shannon became despondent thinking about spending the rest of her life in prison for murder.

The police did not charge her. They examined the revolver and commented on the five inch barrel maximized the muzzle velocity, the muzzle energy, and the recoil. That must have hurt. "Yes, Shannon replied shaking her hand still tingling in pain.

The troopers opened the back of the trailer. At the rear were contraband cigarettes that hadn't paid any tax. Next were TV screens stolen as an entire shipment from a Walmart truck. At the front of the trailer hidden by the stacked TV screens were boxes. The boxes became two thousand pounds of illegal cocaine.

Krystal had taken Shannon to the bed across the rear of the sleeper, held hands, and let Shannon talk her heart out. Kayla called us for a psychologist to help with coaching Shannon. We called the nearby hospital for that pained tingling hand. Krystal alternated cold and hot packs on the palm of Shannon's hand which helped.

The police asked for Krystal's, Kayla's, and Shannon's addresses. They responded they drove twenty-four hours a day a week or more at a time. No personal addresses anymore. They provided the Mansion House address that served for all of our subsidiaries. The reward for the cocaine capture would exceed two hundred thousand dollars. Our three drivers gave out bottles of Miss Cindi's Tupelo Honey to the troopers.

The three women talked about that reward all the way to delivering those trailers of oil. They called us. Shannon wanted a few modifications, and in her stress screamed on the radio. She wanted a larger radiator, on-board back up coolant, on-board back up engine oil, thicker window glass, more lights, and a bunch of lesser tweaks.

The manufacturer could do all that, but too many states had laws against bullet proof glass. OK, one of us responded. Label it CV Protected instead of bullet proof. It would deflect handgun bullets, but not necessarily military rifles.

The police from that cocaine bust called Shannon on the radio which terrified her all over again. What they wanted to know is how could they become heavy truck drivers with us. That reward money had grown on their mind. Krystal found an application on our website and forwarded that to them. Two months later three applications arrived in the mail from those police and all had a brand new CDL driver's license. Sure, we responded. Could you be auxiliary police? Same ole gray uniform, but no patches and awards? Have the prepared place for hanging your badge when called into action. It all worked. They could spot trouble faster than anybody and had two high reward busts within sixty days.

What Shannon and her team invented all on their own became giving the Cedar Valley Trucking company most of that reward for paying off the financing on "their truck". They didn't own it when they did drive one of the newest ones with all those improvements. They kept \$15,000 each of the prize money. There wasn't quite enough to fully pay off the bank. Kittie and Danielle went after the bank and had the lien released as to the bank and applied to the benefit of Krystal's Krew. We added their names on both doors of the cab. A photo of them at that door showed them having much of the pride of ownership. The three prior troopers did the same thing although their private share of two drug busts became a much larger amount of money.

Krystal had the wheel with Shannon in the right front seat as Kayla slept when they pulled up behind an older nondescript foreign passenger car stopped on the shoulder. All of those fancy red and yellow lights we had added to the newest model trucks were flashing.

A sweaty man wearing older clothes struggled with a lug wrench. The car did not have working air conditioning. A mother held her screaming infant in her lap in the heat and humidity. Shannon asked the man "how may we help?"

He had a flat tire, and the undersized spare had leaked all of its air pressure.

Shannon took the spare around and up on the cat walk of the tractor behind the cab where they had an air pressure line for their own tires powered by the air brake line. She returned with the undersized spare pumped up to the high pressure shown on the side wall. She also brought a more useful X wrench for the wheel nuts.

He made a lengthy appreciative thank you in Spanish which Shannon could not understand. She barely remembered how to say you're welcome mis-pronounced the way a Gringo would. "Danada."

Kayla woke up to the truck having stopped and the screaming infant. Kayla came down to the ground with a pair of red solo cups almost full of cool water.

Shannon reached in the box they carried with twelve bottles of tupelo honey. Using pantomime Shannon suggested to the mother to spread a little on a finger and slide that in the infant's mouth.

Peace reigned.

The husband/father had the spare mounted and handed the X wrench back to

Shannon. Our truck followed them to the next travel stop just in case the spare had become unreliable.

What Krystal's Krew and the Hispanic family did not know came from a camera and a microphone at the front of our tractor trailer trucks. Wheelchair Bob and Misty with a little help had installed those. The microphone picked up too much noise. It barely caught the man calling Shannon "Santas". That meant a woman saint. Saint Shannon on that video swept around the Cedar Valley truck crews and out to several State Police Headquarters. When calling for help all of our women drivers now called themselves Shannon.

Six more troopers applied to be drivers.

The troopers added a rifle rack for AR-15 rifles to the back wall of their closet. When their applications were approved, they replaced those with military M-16 rifles with full auto capability. They had acquired those through their prior police units.

Those former police drivers could distinguish between a stopped truck for a criminal activity and a sick truck or driver quicker and slicker than an alligator in the nearby swamp on the prowl for dinner. Sooner or later their reward money paid for their truck with a nice addition to their bank accounts.

One Sunday morning I had been standing in the back of the Choir wanting to make my voice more feminine when I saw the Krystal Krew sitting near the back of the church Sanctuary. I didn't have the skills of the Pastor noticing when anyone switched where they usually sat. I didn't think I had ever seen any of those three young women drivers in church. Senior teens and young adults of their ages did not generally attend on Sunday morning.

The distance between them and myself might have been seventy-five feet. At that range I generally couldn't identify facial expressions. I could tell something going on with Shannon. Without any warning during the Announcements and Concerns section of the religious service she stood up and moved into the center aisle. Krystal stood on her left. The aisle would be cramped if three adults tried standing side by side. Kayla stood behind them.

The Pastor stopped talking when she concluded a statement.

Shannon walked slowly in the aisle heading for the front. The entire sanctuary went silent wondering what she had in mind. About half way I could see her face in active distress as she wept. A wail escaped from her struggles to control herself. She whimpered and cried as she stumbled forward. When she raised her head she starred straight at me. Not at the olive wood cross behind the choir, and not at either Pastor.

What, I asked myself, had I done?

What came out between her sniffles and her sobs developed into she thought she had seen a resurrection. She added, "you know; like Jesus". She had everyone's attention. What she had witnessed had been the two passed out immigrants who had collapsed among the dead in a trailer.

The Senior Pastor Lucy signaled me with her hand concealed by the pulpit from being seen by the congregation.

Me? I asked myself. I used one hand for holding up the front of the beautiful royal blue choir robe with a white V in front descending from the shoulders, and the other for grabbing arms in the Choir for my own safety and stability as I came down the elevated levels. I had no idea what I could say to the distraught Shannon.

When I came close to Shannon she grabbed me with both of her arms. Not having a clue, I gave her a reciprocal hug. She shuddered in my arms. Tears were rolling down her face and onto my choir robe.

I slid both of us sideways to the nearest front pew. The people on it graciously moved away. I have no idea how Shannon arranged herself to sit in my lap. Her significantly shorter height than mine had her head almost down to my level. She kissed my cheek and whispered "if you were a guy, I would take you to bed right now".

I am a guy. Apparently she didn't know enough about the Manson House. I couldn't have let her anyway. Later, we arranged for a Resident in the Dispatchers Office tell her a little of our secret truths.

I got the eye of a Pastor. "Could you make a Sermon right now on the 'love' in the ministry of Jesus?"

She did. She called it "what's love got to do with it? Everything." Perfect.

It took all of my sister-wives with help from Tara, Dr. Christina, their students, and the Pastors to tell me there had been nothing different that I could or should have done. My doubts continued.

Misty captured the video. The next Sunday it went out to all of our trucks on the road. The State Police in the nearest states caught it. The Saint Shannon designation became an anchored fixture. Every Sunday thereafter nearly all our trucks stopped for an hour for the Sunday Service.

A little later one of our teams of only two drivers called in from their becoming sick. They were both throwing up. The Dispatcher called the nearby hospital and connected them. The hospital estimated they had radiation sickness. They left the truck where they had stopped it, and walked to the shade of a nearby tree taking water and cups with them. Being alerted, the responding State Police had a Geiger Counter. Yikes! They called for more backup including a National Guard decontamination unit. They found a nuclear bomb that had been smuggled in through a port in a conex container. It had been headed for Washington, D.C. The National Guard took that trailer away. Our two drivers recovered while staying at the hospital near us for a few weeks.

Misty called the telephone company and the State Police who called for Federal support. They could determine the other phone number of calls. An incoming call became nasty and threatening. They found it came from the South American country of Guyana. Guyana had the only Russian embassy for the Carribean Sea. It had not come from that embassy. It had been a call from one of the many Russian Mafia clans. The meeting with the Residents informing them about all that became difficult. Misty installed more security cameras and automatic alarms such as at our water supply. The reaction of our truck drivers made me cry with help from the feminine hormones. "See the American flag on all of our trucks ... mess with my truck will be over my dead body."

Never a dull moment in the heavy truck business which worried me for what next.