

A Trucker's Last Letter

Steamboat Mountain is a man-killer, and truckers who haul¹⁾ the Alaska Highway treat it with respect, particularly in the winter. The road curves and twists over the mountain and sheer cliffs drop away sharply from the icy road. Countless trucks and truckers have been lost there and many more will follow their last tracks.

On one trip up the highway, I came upon the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and several wreckers winching the remains of a semi²⁾ up the steep cliff. I parked my rig and went over to the quiet group of truckers who were watching the wreckage³⁾ slowly come into sight.

One of the Mounties walked over to us and spoke quietly.

"I'm sorry," he said, "the trucker was dead when we found him. He must have gone over the side two days ago when we had a bad snowstorm. There weren't many trucks. It was just a fluke⁴⁾ that we noticed the sun shining off some chrome⁵⁾."

He shook his head slowly and reached into his pocket.

"Here, maybe you guys should read this. I guess he lived for a couple of hours until the cold got to him."

I'd never seen tears in a cop's eyes before----I always figured they'd seen so much death and despair they were immune to it, but he wiped tears as he handed me the letter. As I read it, I began to weep. Each driver silently read the words, then quietly walked back to his rig. The words were burned into my memory and now, years later, that letter is still vivid as if I were holding it before me. I want to share that letter with you and your families.

December, 1974

My Darling Wife,

This is a letter that no man ever wants to write, but I'm lucky enough to have some time to say what I've forgotten to say so many times. I love you, sweetheart.

You used to kid me that I loved the truck more than you because I spent more time with her. I do love this piece of iron----she's been good to me. She's seen me through tough times and tough places. I could always count on her in a long haul and she was speedy in the stretches. She never let me down.

But you want to know something? I love you for the same reasons. You've seen me through the tough times and places, too.

Remember the first truck? That run-down 'old corn-binder' that kept us broke all the time but always made just enough money to keep us eating? You went out and got a job so that we could pay the rent and the bills. Every cent I made went into the truck while your money kept us in food with a roof over our heads.

I remember that I complained about the truck, but I don't remember you ever complaining when you came home tired from work and I asked you for money to go on the road again. If you did complain, I guess I didn't hear you. I was too wrapped up with my problems to think of yours.

I think now of all the things you gave up for me. The clothes, the holidays, the parties,

the friends. You never complained and somehow I never remembered to thank you for being you.

When I sat having coffee with the boys, I always talked about my truck, my payments. I guess I forgot you were my partner even if you weren't in the cab with me. It was your sacrifices⁶⁾ and determination as much as mine that finally got the new truck.

I was so proud of that truck I was bursting. I was proud of you too, but I never told you that. I took it for granted you knew, but if I had spent as much time talking with you as I did polishing chrome, perhaps I would have.

In all the years I've pounded the pavement⁷⁾, I always knew your prayers rode with me. But this time they weren't enough.

I'm hurt and it's bad. I've made my last mile and I want to say the things that should have been said so many times before. The things that were forgotten because I was too concerned about the truck and the job.

I'm thinking about the missed anniversaries and birthdays. The school plays and hockey⁷⁾ games that you went to alone because I was on the road.

I'm thinking about the lonely nights you spent alone, wondering where I was and how things were going. I'm thinking of all the times I thought of calling you just to say hello and somehow didn't get around to. I'm thinking of the peace of mind I had knowing that you were at home with the kids, waiting for me.

The family dinners where you spent all your time telling your folks why I couldn't make it. I was busy changing oil; I was busy looking for parts; I was sleeping because I was leaving early the next morning. There was always a reason, but somehow they don't seem very important to me right now.

When we were married, you didn't know how to change a light bulb. Within a couple of years, you were fixing the furnace⁸⁾ during a blizzard while I was waiting for a load in Florida. You became a pretty good mechanic, helping me with repairs, and I was mighty proud of you when you jumped into the cab and backed up over the rose bushes.

I was proud of you when I pulled into the yard and saw you sleeping in the car waiting for me. Whether it was two in the morning or two in the afternoon you always looked like a movie star to me. You're beautiful, you know. I guess I haven't told you that lately, but you are.

I made lots of mistakes in my life, but if I only ever made one good decision, it was when I asked you to marry me. You never could understand what it was that kept me trucking. I couldn't either, but it was my way of life and you stuck with me. Good times, bad times, you were always there. I love you, sweetheart, and I love the kids.

My body hurts but my heart hurts even more. You won't be here when I end this trip. For the first time since we've been together, I'm really alone and it scares me. I need you so badly, and I know it's too late.

It's funny I guess, but what I have now is the truck. This damned truck that ruled our lives for so long. This twisted hunk of steel that I lived in and with for so many years. But it can't return my love. Only you can do that.

You're a thousand miles away but I feel you here with me. I can see your face and feel your love and I'm scared to make the final run alone.

Tell the kids that I love them very much and don't let the boys drive any truck for a

living.

I guess that's about it, honey. My God, but I love you very much. Take care of yourself and always remember that I loved you more than anything in life. I just forgot to tell you.

I love you,

Bill

□by Rud Kendall

长途货车司机的临终遗言

斯廷博特山地势险恶，行驶在阿拉斯加公路上的长途货车司机无不对它敬畏有加，冬季尤为如此。山路崎岖回转，千丈悬崖紧挨着冰封的公路，无数货车连人带车翻下山去，又不断会有人重蹈覆辙。

有一次，我驱车行驶在那条公路上时遇见皇家加拿大骑警队，几辆救援车正从悬崖下吊起一台半挂车的残骸。我停车，走向默默看着失事车辆缓缓上升的过路司机们。

一名骑警朝我们走来，低声说道：“很遗憾，我们发现司机的时候，他已经死了。两天前这里有一场暴风雪，他必是那个时候翻下悬崖的。当时路上没有多少车经过。我们也是偶然看见镀铬残骸反射太阳光才发现的。”

那骑警慢慢地摇了摇头，把手伸进了衣袋。

“这个，也许你们该看看这封信。我估计在冻死之前他活了一两个钟头。”

我以前从没见过警察哭。我总认为他们对死亡和绝望已经司空见惯，早就麻木，但是他把信递给我时，抬手抹了抹眼泪。我读着读着，泪水夺眶而出。司机们挨个儿看起信来，读完便一声不响地回到自己车上。信上的话深深印在我的记忆中，直至几年后的今天还是那么清晰，好似那封信就在我眼前。我想与你们和你们的家人一同分享这难忘的临终遗言。

1974年12月

我亲爱的妻子：

这是封谁都不愿意写的信，但是我庆幸还有些时间来得及告诉你多少次都忘了说的一些话。亲爱的，我爱你。

你总是跟我开玩笑，说我爱这车胜过爱你，因为跟它在一起的时间比跟你的多。我的确喜欢这铁玩意——要知道，我们配合得那么默契。再艰难的时候，再险阻的地方，我们都挺过来了。长途跋涉也好，在平坦大道上风驰电掣也罢，它从没让我失望过。

可你知道吗？我爱你也是因为这个：生活中的艰难险阻，我们也一块儿挺了过来。

记得第一辆卡车吗？那破旧的老式玉米割捆机一度把我们搞得濒临破产，可我们总能赚上足够的钱糊口。你出去找了份工作，我们才付得起房租和账单。我把赚到的每一分钱都投在那车上，全靠你来维持全家吃住。

印象中，我对那车发过不少牢骚，但我却不记得每当你疲惫地下班回家，我又向你索钱上路的时候，你有过不满。或许你也抱怨过，我想我是没听见。我满脑子都是自己的麻烦，哪有心思顾及你的难处呢。

现在我想到你为我放弃的一切：衣服、假期、派对、朋友。你毫无怨言，可我却从没记得为此向你道过谢。

我坐下喝咖啡和儿子们在一起的时候，总是谈论我的车，我为它支付的钱。我想我忘了你是我的伴侣，即使你不和我一起坐在驾驶室里。为了攒钱买新车，你的牺牲和决心一点不

比我少。

有了新车，我的自豪溢于言表。其实我也为你感到骄傲，但是从未对你说过。我满以为你早就知道了，但要是以前我也用那样多的时间和你交谈，或许会向你讲这些的。

奔驰在道路上的这些年来，我知道你的祈祷时刻伴我左右。可这次祷告却未能使我幸免。

我伤得很厉害。我行驶完了最后的里程。现在我只想讲那些早就该说许多遍的话。我要说因为过去太在意我的车和我的工作而抛在脑后的那些事。

我想到我错过的多少个结婚纪念日和家人的生日。我想到多少次学校演出和曲棍球比赛，你都独自前往，就因为我出车在外。我想到多少个孤单的夜晚，你默默地牵挂着我。我想到多少次想打电话给你问声好，不知怎的却又没打。我想到我那时的平静心态，因为我知道你和孩子们正在家等着我归来。

多少次家人在一起吃饭，你总得费力向你娘家的人解释为什么我没能露面。我忙着给车子换机油；我到处找零件；我得睡觉，因为第二天一早就得出车。总是有理由，可现在看来这些都不很重要了。

我们刚结婚的时候，你连灯泡都不会换。没过几年，我远在佛罗里达等待装货时，你居然已经能在暴风雪天修理出毛病的火炉了。你成了不错的机械师，修车时还能做我的助手。你跳进驾驶室，虽然倒车时压在玫瑰花丛上，可我还是为你感到得意。

我把车开进院子，看见你睡在小车里等我，我为你感到骄傲。不管是凌晨两点还是下午两点，在我眼里你总像个电影明星。要知道，你真美。我想近来我没跟你这么说过，但你真的很美。

我这辈子没少犯错，可要说我曾作出过一个明智的决定，那就是向你求婚。你永远无法明白为什么我对开长途货车那么着迷。其实我也不明白，但这是我的生活方式，你也就依了我。不管境况是好是坏，你始终和我在一起。亲爱的，我爱你，我也爱孩子们。

我身上疼痛，但心里更难受，因为在我走完这最后一段路时你不在我身旁。我们在一起那么久，我第一次感到孤单，这真可怕。我太需要你，可是我知道这已经太晚了。

我想这也挺有意思，现在我竟然跟这车在一起。长久以来这该死的货车支配着我们的生活，这么多年来我跟这摔成歪七扭八的铁家伙形影不离，靠它挣钱。但它不会回报我的爱，只有你才会。

我们相隔千里，我却觉得你就在身边。你的脸浮现在眼前，我能感受到你的爱，可是想到得独自一人走完这最后一程，我还是害怕。

告诉孩子们我多么爱他们。以后千万不要让他们去开车营生。

亲爱的，就说这些吧。天啊，我非常爱你。好好照顾自己，永远记住，我这辈子最爱的是你，我只是忘了说出口。

我爱你，

比尔

NOTE 注释：

haul [hɔ:l] vi. 卡车货车拖运

semi ['semi] [ɔ]=semitrailer 双轮拖车，挂车

wreckage ['rekɪdʒ] n. 破片；残骸

fluke [flu:k] n. 侥幸

chrome [krəʊm] n. 铬，铬合金

学英语，练听力，上听力课堂！

sacrifice [ˈsækrɪfaɪs] n. 牺牲, 献身
pavement [ˈpeɪvmənt] n. 公路, 人行道
hockey [ˈhɒki] n. 曲棍球
furnace [ˈfɜːnɪs] n. 炉子, 熔炉