

Bill Humphreys '64 reflects on *The Magic Carpet Ride* that has been his life...

Back in 1967 - when I was a 23 year old truck driver, and before movies and country western songs made the drivers into folk heroes - it was not as regulated as it is today.

I was a rookie on a 2-driver rig that just kept going down the road. One guy sleeping, the other driving. Then, when the #1 driver quit out on the road, I kept his log book and continued to drive a 2-person schedule illegally. I was getting paid by the mile, and much of my freight was over-limit, so I had to learn how to get my rig around the DOT scales at each state line.

When we got to the home terminal in Dallas, we sometimes had a day or two off, and the drinking at roadhouses with the cowboys got pretty crazy-mainly because we went bar hopping with our tractors and trailers.

I was weighing in around 220 pounds at the time and could eat a large pizza while downing a 12 pack of beer no problem.

If you had told me then that six years later I would be on the first fully sponsored American (Cycling) Team to ride a stage race in Europe, and then go on to represent the USA at The Worlds Championships in Barcelona Spain, I would have looked at you in total disbelief. (What is a stage race anyway?)

Now at age 71, I am back behind the wheel of the big 18 Wheeler's that roam across the interstates wondering, "What have I done with my life?"

"Where have you been my blue-eyed son? My darling young one?"

"I have dined in palaces & drunk wine with Kings & Queens."

The songs on the radio late at night bring back an amazing array of memories of days gone by that I never had time to reflect on until I heard that diesel roar once again:

- Hitch hiking across America, doing college interviews in 1963, coming back home to Connecticut with an O'Neil's Surfboard.
- Being a Pot Washer in the galley of a modern day freighter from Port Newark, New Jersey to Lima, Peru and back when I was 19 - and living to tell about it.
- Walking into a local working class saloon and getting a standing ovation from the boys at the bar for some legendary antics I'd pulled.
- Drinking all day with Lee Marvin in South Mission Beach, San Diego -my hair at shoulder length with full beard. I would meet him again on a flight to Johannesburg, South Africa after I had transformed myself into a clean-cut International cyclist on my way to a race in Cape Town.
- Riding my bike across the USA from San Diego to Quebec City to Connecticut during the summer of 1972 and being selected to race in The Tour of Ireland and The World's Championships one year later.(I have a notebook from the ride and can compare notes to my training diary of '73. From the plains of Kansas in '72, to breakfast with Phil Liggett at The Tour of Ireland - one year to the day later)

- Being the first cycling coach in residence at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs with Eddie B. Coaching a group of Juniors who would go on to win The Tour de France and win Olympic Medals in Los Angeles 1984.
- Going back to college at UMASS Amherst Sports Management School at age 50 and helping teach event management courses, getting credit for my life experience and graduating with a 3.4 GPA.
- Rebranding a cycling cap to a sailing cap, selling thousands to the surf and active sports industry as a functional sports marketing vehicle, then switching to the premium incentive arena with orders of 100,000+ to Fortune 500 companies in the US.
- Travelling to the Netherlands on a regular basis to do business with cycling, and importing.
- Landing a mid-management job at Bicycling Magazine, getting married buying a house and having a baby boy at age 54, I had finally become a true American?
- Getting another round of applause 19 years later from the entire staff of *Mountain Bike and Bicycling Magazine* at an upscale restaurant in San Francisco for closing on two major sponsorship deals.
Producing major international bicycle races from 1983 to 89 with Tour de France riders and \$12,000 prize lists
At no point along this magical mystical tour did it occur to me that I would ever be back driving a truck for a living.
- Going back to the truck driving school I graduated from 46 years earlier to get my CDL at age 69 and now I am driving the big rigs through-out the Northeast getting home on weekends.
- Getting out on the highway at 4:00AM and jumping into a pace line of other rigs is a world that millions of Americans that share the road with us have no clue about.
- Passing by small towns everywhere that I still associate with classmates from my prep school days. (How did their lives turn out? Most are retired now with grandchildren the same age as my son.)

Then it's back to reality, as I envision my 16 year old son, Ian, in the seat next to me so that I will keep the risk factor down while jamming my rig between others on the approach to the George Washington Bridge at 5am.

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So, it has come down to this!

I've had a great life, a crazy life, no regrets, came close to making the big time a few times, and I had lots of success along the way.

Now I'm 71, with a great wife and a great 17 year old son, living in a house that my Daddy built with his buddies back in 1948 on a lake in Connecticut.

Got up this morning at 1:45am, even though my alarm was set for 2:18am. Did my back roller and my 30 push-ups, then had my coffee eggs and toast before climbing in the car and driving 35 minutes to Prides Corner's Farm to start my day as truck driver at 3:18am.

The driving to major garden centers and huge Landscape wholesaler's is the easy part of the job. Sitting behind the wheel driving for 2 or 3 hours before the first stop turns this old body into cement, and it takes considerable effort to loosen up while slowly climbing out of the truck. Swinging the arms and shrugging the shoulders while slowly and carefully walking towards the receiving office is a reality check on just how old I really am.

The 48 Foot trailer holds about 36, 4X4 carts loaded with 3 or 4 shelves of potted plants, small shrubs, and trees, with the larger trees on the floor in 10 gallon buckets.

Unloading all this to the end of the trailer and onto the lift gate for the fork lift driver, takes its toll on your arms, shoulders and legs, add in the cold, darkness and snow.

This is what I gave up sleeping in my truck as an "Over the Road" driver for.

Now, even though my work days are 12 to 14 hours long I get to sleep in my own bed.

At this juncture, making good sandwiches the night before has become an important part of my life. Once back at the farm, there is no time to relax, in fact now more than any other time of the day my focus must remain 100%, because there is paperwork, primitive math, refueling, and dropping the trailer, to be done.

So why do I do this? Why aren't I retired, living the good life like so many people I read about by seeing their posts on Facebook?

Standing on the side lines during my son's Lacrosse and Soccer games at Old Lyme High School, in a quaint, little, blue blood, puritan village on the Connecticut shoreline, I feel like I'm in the "Witness Protection" program with the life I've lead. I joke with my truck driving friends that the only reason the townspeople let us live here is because my wife has a Volvo station wagon, we have 2 Labrador Retrievers' and our son is on the varsity.

At some point soon, I have to flash back 50 to 52 years or so and write the ultimate story on this rambling, Kerouac, Turkel, life I have led.

The songs on the radio in the dawn's early light, bring back an amazing array of memories and questions about the price I am currently paying for the audaciousness of it all.