

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, December 2, 2013

A Heavy Foot and Other Troubles: Those who ride with me today (and there are few) probably think I'm a very conservative driver. When I was young and gay, that was not always the case. I relate a 1963 experience herewith.

Our Holiday Inn at Talleyville was two years old, and while I did not have regular hours, I would typically arrive about 10 A.M. and leave some time around midnight. Using back roads, seldom did I meet more than two or three cars on the way home in the middle of the night. Often, I made the 10-mile run in record time in my '55 Chrysler Windsor four-door sedan. The route was usually Mount Lebanon Road to Rockland, then to Montchanin and onto Kirk Road. Turning right at Kennett Pike (Route 52), I would follow this main road to Lower Brandywine Church, then Old Kennett Road to Snuff Mill Road. Snuff Mill Road dead-ends at Route 82, and in less than a mile I'd be at Auburn Heights.

One night as I sped across Kirk Road, a car decided to follow me. As I turned right onto Kennett Pike, his high-beam lights were most distracting in my mirror. I thought, "This wise guy doesn't know these back roads as well as I do, and I can out-run him." I gave him a good run for his money at probably 70 M.P.H. up Kennett Pike and onto Old Kennett Road. I came upon a slow-moving car and whizzed around him, crossing a double line to do so; after all, no one was coming the other way. As I turned onto Snuff Mill Road, my pursuer was still there, but I didn't give up; my intent was still to prevail. As I descended Snuff Mill Hill toward the stop sign at the bottom, a police siren alerted me that I had made a mistake.

The officer threw the book at me, as well he should have. He wrote me up as traveling well over 20 m.p.h. above the speed limit, crossing a double line to pass, etc., etc. He told me to appear at a Magistrate's Court somewhere around the Cedars or Cooper Farm the next morning.

The Magistrate explained the situation to me and fined me (I think it was about \$60). She assured me that since I had pleaded guilty and paid the fine, the matter was closed. About three days later, a letter arrived in the mail, advising that my driver's license had been revoked. It suggested that if I really needed to drive, I could come to Dover and apply for a temporary permit, which would allow me to drive at regular hours to and from work *only*. At the end of three months, I could apply for a license again.

Hank Schreiber took me to Dover, and I applied for a temporary permit. I told them that my work hours varied greatly, that I didn't have a 9-to-5 job. Their response was that unless they specified the exact hours, losing my license would be no punishment at all. I accepted the temporary permit, although I often had to drive during times specifically prohibited.

One day, I had to go to Philadelphia for a brief errand. The Schuylkill Expressway and the new Vine Street Expressway to the Ben Franklin Bridge had been completed, but not I-95. I accomplished my errand in center city and was coming west on the Vine Street Expressway. Confused by the signs, I turned north on the Schuylkill, instead of south. At the turn-off for the Philadelphia Zoo, I saw my opportunity to turn around, so I turned into the zoo's parking lot and re-entered heading south. Soon, a police siren brought me to a stop. The officer asked to see my license. I handed him the temporary permit, expecting to end up in jail. He chided me for turning around illegally, asserting that it was not my intention to visit the zoo, but he made no comment about my "license." I proceeded toward home, fearing repercussions in the days ahead, but nothing more came of it.

When the three-month period was up, I got a new driver's license, but I had lost my permanent license (apparently) forever. That was 50 years ago. Ugh!