

# The Washington Post

## So your rental car is damaged. Now what?

SAN DIEGO, circa 1990's--

I went with Enterprise Rent-a-car because they had a weekend special; at the time, like, \$40 for Friday afternoon till Monday morning; and they offered to “pick me up.”

I had just moved to LA and since I had owned no vehicle and had never been to Mexico; I wanted to go on this adventure.

I got a Pontiac, I recall, I think a Grand Prix. I waived the insurance, or lied, to keep costs down. I always kind of said, “Any problem will be their problem. I don’t own this car.”

I sped the whole way down and since I may have, may have been drinking at the time; [I stopped in 1991--still sober since--I just don't remember what year this happened] I partied the whole weekend in Mexico. However, I knew I had to get the car back or I probably would have just stayed longer.

I didn’t think I was tired as I headed North from Tijuana to San Diego; I wasn’t drunk or intoxicated, but I may have been mildly hungover and definitely weary, and I am sure I knew I was dozing-off, but I didn’t want to be a quitter and always tried to accept the challenge of staying awake. I would roll down the window; rock and dance to louder music; and speed, in the left lane, because I thought I could outrace the tiredness. I even, even, to keep busy, with my boots on, shined my cowboy boots.

Truthfully, after I swerved a couple times and nearly wrecked from the boot cleaning, I used that shock, rush, or adrenaline boost to liven me up and awaken me.

I probably was, maybe, :30 minutes North of San Diego when the highway was just pretty

straight, with little scenery, and again, kind of sensed, I was sleepy, but said to myself, “I’ll know when I fall asleep and will wake myself up and then think of another option; maybe, maybe, pull over and nap.” That never happened. I don’t remember falling asleep.

I woke-up when I heard crunching and a loud noise; the next thing you know I was under, fully under, this semi-truck trailer. I mean, the timing was amazing that I would kind of get vacuumed underneath that trailer. I said to myself, “This is not good.” Then... “God...please...” and then after about, maybe, three seconds; the car bolted from beneath the semi, who was riding in the middle lane, and right out, across the right lane traffic, miraculously missing everyone, and onto the shoulder, and then onto this grass embankment.

At first, I didn’t realize it; but the roof had come off the car in most places; there may have been a small piece of metal, from the rear window, which remained. After, literally taking a deep breath; I thought, “Am I okay?” I didn’t, even, physically look myself over; I just wanted to “feel” if I was okay. I am not certain, but I think, thankfully, I had my seat belt on; ‘cause I thought, “Well, I am still in the car, so I must be okay.” I am unclear, but I think I got out for a few seconds to see if the car was further damaged “Because I know these rental car companies check for everything.”

Anyway, there was damage all over the car, and although one wheel seemed to wobble some, I noticed it was drivable. I didn’t think twice [and I am boldly unique, I confess] of continuing the drive. What option did I have? I was pulled over for, maybe, 1-minute; ‘cause I didn't want to see or know where most of that roof was.

Anyway, at a much, much, slower pace; I drove the rest of the way to LA, in the right lane, and only sometimes worrying about the Highway Patrol seeing me. But I thought, “I don’t think I broke any law. I am legal. I just crashed.” Believe it or not, I never got stopped. The other drivers, I recall, looked with disbelief; some did nothing; others never noticed; and I think one or two may have beeped at me; and one pointed to the tire damage!

Anyway, as noted, I thankfully dropped it off and they wanted to bill me a few thousand or “call it a total.” But I told them, “Well, thanks, I don’t have that kind of money and can’t pay. I'm sorry.” In fact, I tried to rent from them a few weeks later, for the same deal, and they told me I was on their “banned or black list.” They tried to collect for like a year, but I never paid anything.

In fact, I would try, maybe once a year, after that; and for at least 10-15-years, they told me the same thing, “You totaled one of our cars, owe us thousands, and won’t rent to you.” And

after about ten of the years, they once just told me: “We’re sorry, but you’re on our blacklist (for some reason) and we can’t rent to you.”

In closing, it has been probably over two decades; and to this day, I can still, vividly, see the underbelly of that trailer and in my mind, I can still remember the sensation of spitting out from beneath that semi and the roof shearing off. Truthfully, I may have only told a handful of people that story and no one in probably a decade, but always said to myself, “One day, I will have a Hell of a story to tell.”

True story... I guess this is that day.