

At the southwest corner of Matheson and Goodwin Street, there was once a lone cabbage palm next to the road. It is gone now, a victim of my first auto accident. It was 1962 and I was eight years old... a little young to be driving around, but there is family tradition involved.

My father was twelve years old when, due to his father's death, he was left with the responsibility of driving his mother around in a Model A truck. The authorities realized that an unlicensed 12 year old could not be allowed to operate a vehicle, so they promptly gave him a driver's license. Problem solved.

Years later, my father expected me to follow in his wheel ruts. So, early in my childhood, I stayed at my father's side, driving equipment and trucks. By the time I was eight, I was a pretty accomplished equipment operator and was driving trucks all around the farm fields east of town where my father did the majority of his work.

One day, my father needed to get his pick up and his dump truck back to our house on Old 41. We were standing in the middle of nowhere (it's called Citrus Park now) by ourselves. My Dad pushed his sunglasses further up on his nose. "Can you drive my truck back?" "Sure!" I said, hands in my pockets, looking down, kicking the dirt, and acting cool. "Okay, then..." My Dad continued talking, but I had stopped listening. Even as he poked his finger down at my paper-thin chest, his words just went right past me. I stood there sporting a toothy grin, thinking, *I'm finally going to get that truck past second gear!*

To my father's surprise, before he could get in his dump truck... I was gone in a cloud of dust. Oddly enough, he thought that *I* should be following *him!* (As it turns out, this was an important detail) Try as he might, he couldn't catch me. I was flying, tearing the gravel off of Terry Street, until I got to the 90-degree turn at Goodwin and Matheson, where the laws of physics finally caught up with me. (Note: The 1957 Dodge "Power Wagon" was not designed to be driven by someone in the 3rd grade!) My skinny butt came completely off of the seat while trying to brake and turn the steering wheel at the same time. But then... there was that tree. My father pulled up just in time to see his truck firmly wedged in a cabbage palm and his scrawny son bailing out, like the truck was on fire. This story makes us both laugh... now.

It was a good lesson to hang on to. Even though we are all predisposed to sift through information, ignoring everything else as we look for that one piece that fits our needs, it's always better to truly listen, so that when the time comes, you can make that turn... and stay out of the tree.