

## My Creepy White Van

I owned a 1991 Chevy conversion van for over 15 years. I loved the van because it was so comfortable for long trips with family and friends. I even drove it on a 30-day, 10,000-mile trip from Washington State to St. Louis via a circular route through Arizona and Texas and back home through Colorado, South Dakota, and Montana. Sleeping and cooking in my van on the trip was very convenient and relatively comfortable.

As my van approached 25 years of age and 250,000 miles on the odometer, it began to lose power and burn more fuel. But, I continued to use it for the last few years of its life to pull a 27-foot RV from Camano Island, Washington to Redding, California. However, I almost didn't make it over the Siskiyou between Oregon and California pulling my 8,000-pound RV the last time I attempted it.

But, that's not the most interesting story about my "Creepy White Van." I knew the reputation that white, windowless utility vans had for relating to sexual predators, but I never imagined anyone would consider my van to be suspicious. After all, even though my van was white, it had large windows all around and was painted with colorful designs that made it appear very sporty.

I occasionally underwent extra scrutiny at border crossings in my van and was once accused of questionable motives by a passing motorist when I had one of my grandsons in the van with me. So, I began to wonder if some people held misgivings about my van.

This concern about what some may think about my van was reinforced one Saturday when my wife, Jeannette, and I met our daughter, Laura, for some shopping in Burlington, Washington. Jeannette and Laura couldn't find what they were shopping for in one store and decided to drive a couple of miles across town to another store. My wife jumped into Laura's black Honda utility vehicle, and she asked me to follow her in my van to the other store. My daughter didn't tell me where they were going, so I tried to return to my car and quickly get behind them before they reached the stoplight leaving the shopping center.

I pulled up behind a black Honda utility vehicle and when the light changed followed it across the I-5 freeway, and onto the southbound entrance ramp. The vehicle accelerated onto the freeway and headed south past Mt. Vernon.

This seemed strange because I had thought they would have headed north to another shopping area or at least have gotten off the freeway and driven into Mt. Vernon if they went south. But the black car continued south through Mt. Vernon, exited the freeway south of town, and drove into a housing development.

I was getting suspicious that something was wrong. As the Honda came to a stop in front of a house a block ahead, I pulled to the curb and waited to see what was going on. Two young girls got out of the car, looked in my direction, and ran into the house. At that instant I realized I had been following the wrong car. I must have mistaken this car for my daughter's and turned the wrong way at the stoplight.

I also realized that the girls who got out of the car may have been watching me follow them for the last several miles and were likely on the phone to the sheriff reporting me right now. If they reported my white van to the police I would probably be accused of being a sexual predator who chased the girls to their house.

I immediately backed my van around the nearest corner, raced back to the freeway, and headed north. After I got a mile or two up the freeway I grabbed my cell phone and called Jeannette. She asked, "Where are you? Why didn't you follow us north to the discount mall?"

I said, "I followed the wrong car. It looked just like Laura's. I'll be there soon and tell you all about it, but right now I need to get my van off the street in case the police are after me."

"What? You're wanted by the police?"

"I don't know. I'll see you soon," I said, hanging up the phone and looking out the rear-view mirror. Nobody was behind me and I was never arrested as a sexual predator, but I've been very aware of white vans with no windows ever since.