

## Laura's Purple Mail Truck

When my youngest daughter, Laura, returned home from her first year of college at Simpson University, she needed some "Wheels." You know, a car. She needed a way to get to class at Grossmont College where she had transferred and her new job at Starbucks. She either had to have mom or dad drive her, or she needed her own transportation. Having your parents drive you to school just wasn't "cool," so that wouldn't do. And, taking the city bus was even worse

What to do? Ahh, look in the classified section of the San Diego Union for a "new" car. That would do the trick.

Running into the kitchen from her bedroom, Laura was yelling excitedly, "Hey, Dad. Guess what? I just found a jeep for sale in the used car section! An ad from a private party for a jeep! And it's in my price range! Only \$200! Can we go look at it? Huh, can we?"

"Really?" I replied. " Two hundred dollars? Well, I doubt if it'll even run for that price. Is it here in town? "

"Yeah, the guy has it parked for sale near the bowling alley, just two miles away. Can we go look at it? I've got exactly two hundred dollars saved up," she exclaimed.

"You realize there'll likely be some additional expenses getting it registered, don't you? Like, the fees to the DMV, the taxes, and there'll also probably be some repairs," I said.

My wife, Jeannette, piped in at this point and said, "Don't be so negative Larry. This may be her first car and you don't want to discourage her! Go look at it with her and see what it looks like. She can't afford much of a car. If it runs, what could go wrong for only two hundred bucks?"

"Yeah, right," I thought. I knew what could go wrong, and I knew who would have to fix it, if things did go wrong!

Well, it was Saturday afternoon and I had a little time to spare from the other chores I was working on before dark. The two of us drove across town where the owner had displayed it near a main highway with a "For Sale" sign in the window.

It was worse than I expected! It was an old, worn-out mail truck discarded by the U.S. Postal Service. The seller had changed his mind about fixing it up after buying it at an auction, and just wanted his money back.

The Postal Service markings had almost completely faded; what little original white paint remained was beginning to succumb to the advancing rust; two of the tires were almost completely bald; the gas cap was missing; and the engine barely turned over because the battery was nearly dead.

I was about to remark to Laura that even for two hundred dollars the jeep wasn't worth it, but before I could say anything, I noticed an excited smile on her face as she jumped into the driver's seat and said, "Dad, this is great! Just think how much fun it will be to drive! And, I could have my friends ride in the back!"

It was then I realized the steering wheel was on the wrong side of the vehicle; the gear shift had to be operated with the left hand; there was a shelf to the left of the driver used to hold mail; and there were no seats in the back. This jeep was designed to deliver mail, not to carry passengers!

This was getting out of hand. "Laura," I said, "Where would your friends sit on the way to school?"

She looked around the jeep and replied gaily, "I'll just put some rugs on the floor and they can sit in the back. Dad, can I buy it? This will be great!"

I drove the jeep home because I was afraid she would need additional instruction before learning to drive from the right side. I also wanted to complete a full inspection, get some new tires, and replace the battery before she got on the road. We had reached an agreement that I would contribute another two hundred dollars to get her car "Road Ready" if she purchased it. After that, she was on her own. Additional expenses would be her responsibility.

Her first car turned out to be a pretty good buy. It was reliable, if she stayed in town; it allowed her to transport a few of her closest friends, with a few minor

modifications; and it earned her a little notoriety at college. The main modification I made to her jeep was to remove the shelf on the left side of the driver's seat and install a second seat from another mail truck. She could then carry one passenger in front legally, and as many others in the back as she could stuff in.

One other important passenger rode in Laura's jeep--her black-haired, blue-eyed dog, Sabine. He rode in the passenger seat on the left side, so everyone seeing the car coming down the street thought Sabine was driving!

Laura decided to make one other important modification herself. The color of her jeep just wasn't exciting enough. It was a dull, washed-out white with accents of rusty stain. One Saturday a few months after purchasing the jeep, she recruited her older sister, Kelly, to help sand and paint it. She bought about a half dozen cans of spray paint to turn the jeep blue. I'm not sure if she bought cheap paint or she didn't apply enough to form a thick enough coat, but when I first saw it, the paint was a very uneven and splotchy shade of blue.

But, even worse, as the paint dried and aged, it turned a distinctive purple. Her "Purple Mail Truck" gained even more notoriety on the campus of Grossmont College and her former high school, West Hills!