

## **EARLY 70s CABBIE DAYS**

**By Bill Lanphier**

All of the cabs in Skokie, Illinois were pieces of shit, at least when I was there. Or, maybe just the ones foisted on me when I'd show up for part-time driving. One day my cab smelled like a bum had spent all night in it barfing up Wild Turkey, then expiring. Tips that day were on the low side.

I'm guessing the guy in charge of assigning cabs, after noting my unusual three-day routine, was well aware I didn't take the avocation too seriously. After ingesting sufficient quantities of my mom's seemingly limitless supply of Equinil (then President Nixon's drug of choice) and getting a solid 36 hours of non-stop rest, I'd show up for work after the morning rush hour, wearing a flannel pajama top, and moving a little slowly.

I'd drive until the afternoon traffic got just the least bit heavy, maybe 3:30, and go back home to one cheese dog and another 36 hours of Equinil, the wonderful silence broken only by the sound of my roommate Frank ferociously grinding his teeth in his sleep.

Frank, also a cabby, had other interesting sleeping habits. As his younger sister informed me, Frank once nonchalantly tore down the living room curtains, wandered back to bed—still asleep—and woke the next morning blaming the carnage on the dog.

One afternoon, napping in the TV room while his two elementary school-aged siblings watched cartoons, Frank sat up, stared squarely at them, and robotically intoned in his sleep, "Let's have a funeral."

Frank got a little more respect around the cab garage than me, maybe because he drove more than five hours every third day. I did take my ten hours a week seriously, though, and adhered to all company policies regarding procedure and charges to customers.

For example, for any customer there was a charge for each stop and a charge for waiting, both of which seemed rather high, particularly the first time I picked up the regular customer who had a habit of making several stops each trip. No one informed me that the other cabbies simply waived most of the stopping and waiting charges for this good-tipper, and when I hit him up for an enormous, albeit to-the-letter bill, his response was to unilaterally waive paying me anything at all.

I also adhered to the rules of the road, and practiced the skills I learned in driving school, which didn't include suggestions for driving a cab with the right-front brake missing. I learned early on in my five-hour stint driving this particular machine that, to avoid crashing when braking, it was necessary to hold the steering wheel firmly, lest it get violently spun out of my hands as the car instantly veered in the direction of the working front brake.

But, I also learned that I could perform an interesting maneuver for passengers who displayed a flair for excitement. When I was sure they were paying attention, I'd roar up to a left turn and apply the brakes with the exact force needed not only to slow for the turn, but to negotiate it perfectly with both hands casually resting behind my head.