

'Shroomonster(s) - Part one

by Mitch Dadd

Life has a funny way of going the wrong way, which is my experience more often than not.

I was recovering from a series of severe vicissitudes, when I had the opportunity to enjoy a camping reprieve, surrounded by the cool, crisp spring northern woods of Michigan. I had watched so many others of maturity do this over the last half-century, and now we were finally here! Just the four of us: Dale (my Springdale fifth-wheel), Genny (the necessary generator), Chev (you guessed it, my truck), and me. If we all worked together, we were about to have the time of my life frolicking amongst opulent fungi — the hauntingly elusive *Morel esculenta*. The planning phase done, packing and unpacking over, the best isolated camping spot in the high hills of Mesick secured ... it was time to hit the sack, then get up to meet the fungi!

"Up and at 'em" way past the crack of dawn — I don't wake up like I once did, and who cares? Fungi are *Fun-Guys* all day! Jump in Chev, put him in drive and ... and no-way we go!! What the...! Okay. Must have missed a step...let's try reverse..."Shift Range Inhibited!!!" What does that mean? ...Okay, Chev has never given me problems, has always obeyed my commands — even when he didn't quite feel up to a good ol' mud bath or steep crawl up a valley trail.

I shut him off, restarted him, and ran through all possible gears again. Slight movement in "D". Better forward advance in 4WD "D". No reverse at all — something we don't normally practice, but darn it...sometimes it helps!! We sat there together...contemplated the steep sandy trail that lay ahead of us, and the Fun-Guys "laughing it up" in the woods. Then suddenly it occurred to me, maybe "they" had something to do with Chev's illness...he ran well before bed last night...hmm...I wonder...was it possible that...now, couldn't be. The ingenuity required for an orchestrated assault was way beyond the simple Fun-Guy's mental acuity...or was it? I was glad it wasn't dark. This was getting downright freaky! Maybe the Fun-Guys had a pact with some accomplice. It was obvious Chev was sick and needed a respectable truck doctor. No Fun-Guy 'shrooming today... or tomorrow!

Facing the deep forest trail and being "Reverse - Shift Range Inhibited" presented our first dilemma — how to turn around. We were sitting alongside Dale and Genny in a small grass clearing. All we had to work with was the clearing's 2° slant and a six-inch lip on the edge of the two-track. Pushing Chev's 600+ pounds was out of the question. I don't think Arnie Schwarz could fair better! One of the reasons I was drawn to Chev back in 2005 was his raw "Tim Allen-like" power. He sat low to the ground and was muscle-bound stem to stern, sporting his 6.6 liter diesel — argh, argh argh! Together, we inched to the lip, careful not to set his tires over it, shifted into neutral, then allowed gravity to take us back about six inches. We played this little game for 15 minutes and were finally able to face toward home — which in these woods was anywhere but toward home. Our winding trail just led to another winding trail, then to another, and on...and on...

We inched our way out of the woods. Each mile marked off one of the 109 we had to traverse, decreasing the chance of facing a proud truck's worst nightmare — hiring a tow truck! Forty-five minutes later, Chev was inching out of the woods and onto fine pavement. There was still a long way to go, but we felt good about coming this far together. We shared a sentimental moment mourning his condition, then Chev began to give it all he had. First 10 mph, then 15, 25, 30! He made it up to 50 when I had to pull back on his reigns for fear he might give up his "Truck Ghost," and then need a transplant which often changes truck personalities for life! They could err, giving him a female engine! A nauseating thought! He would be a...a... SHE Truck! I pulled *hard* on the reigns! Whoooooo boy!! Fifty miles per hour was fine, but now he was low on fuel!

We had to attempt a stop and risk his tow-truck nightmare coming true. We rolled into the fueling station, careful not to roll past the pump; then I shut him down for a rest while I attended to his most basic need: food. When finished, I prayerfully turned the ignition and Chev fired to life again! Phew! As we inched out of the station, he reminded me he was still in 4WD and seemed to be asking me, "try 2WD." I fought past the *She-Truck* image, applied the brakes, shifted in neutral, and pushed 2WD.

It worked!! Slowly, he increased speed, and soon we found ourselves cruising once again at 50 mph. We sang "Holy Holy Holy" and "Hallelujah," as *faster* vehicles shot Chev disdainful glances while they revved around us. All the while Chev seemed to be telling them, "Just wait! I'll be back, muscles and all! Just you wait and see!" I had to smile when he chanced a short turbo-charged run up a hill as a cute little foreign gal passed him. She snubbed him, of course, but he knew one day he'd be back, so he ignored her snobby attitude knowing *she* could never be giving the show he was giving at his *darkest* hour! Yeah, Chev's a proud truck, and I like him just the way he is.

I called ahead to Chev's doctor and arranged an emergency team. This would be strange for Chev. He was known as the strong brother by his smaller siblings. Over the years *he* was the one to bring *them* in when they were sick. Always the one to help! Now it was his turn. Were his best days behind him? Had the Fun-Guys managed a life-changing sabotage? Soon we would know.

The bay was open for Chev when we arrived. He was

nervous as we settled on the lift. I stepped out and allowed Dr. Tim to take my seat...Chev winced ever so slightly as Dr. Tim connected his computer to Chev's — his long grave face sent a shiver down my spine as he perused Chev's diagnostic codes. Chev looked at me for assurance, so I gave him my best "wait and see" expression while his engine ticked as he tried to cool. Finally, Dr. Tim looked up, declaring too many codes were awry. I patted Chev and tried to maintain a calm appearance. Then up on the lift for a better view of his underparts. Two minutes later, the diagnosis was complete. Chev's tender exposed main wire harness had been savagely violated! Emotions of outrage and relief coalesced in my mind. "Outrage" that someone or something would have done this to Chev. "Relief" that Chev was not permanently damaged or changed. He would be all right!

Closer inspection revealed deep gouges to Chev's heavy metal frame near his main wiring harness. Dr. Tim gave a hearty chuckle, then asked, "Who did you tick-off in the woods? I gave a hearty laugh, concealing a gnawing concern of a possible coalition between the Fun-Guys and an as-yet-unknown adversary. For a fleeting moment, I considered "locals" — those ignominious northern-staked 'shroomers rumored to despise all outsiders. However, in 50 years of 'shrooming, I've not seen one with strong enough teeth to cause those marks! The Fun-Guys were somehow involved. Two days later, Chev and I were headed back up north, yet I was concerned about Dale having been left alone for two nights! He was glad to see us, but seemed a bit jittery as I spread a generous portion of moth balls under both he and Chev, hoping to stave off the Fun-Guys' accomplices. I went to fire up Genny and found to my horror Dale's heavy extension cord had been eaten nearly to the wiring along a two-foot span right near Genny! What monster could have done this? What horror had Genny endured? Would she be all right? Close inspection showed Dale's wiring, though damaged, was still functional. Genny had been spared physically, but what of her mind? No wonder Dale was jittery!!

Genny fired to life, and gentle feathering of her choke brought her to a steady soothing purr. Dale seemed to be in working order, until Genny sputtered and died! My fears were beginning to rise...first Chev, then Dale, now Gen was...was...dead! Who was next? Me?!

I locked Dale's door and crawled under the covers — lots of them! Fitfully, I slept...nightmares of Fun-Guys dancing around a fire with inebriated conspirators disguised as sweet forest animals, consumed my night. Finally, day broke. Birds were singing...or were they *mocking*? The morning seemed strangely eerie as I attempted to revive Genny. No good. She was gone. Another inspection revealed no physical injury...? Fear... straight FEAR must have killed her! Yet I wasn't too overcome with Genny's demise. She had always been terribly temperamental, working when she wanted to and seldom when I wanted her to — something I had feared might have happened to Chev — if he had required a transplant!

Oh, well, I could find a replacement for Genny if necessary. The day was young and the mighty morels awaited my arrival in their domain. I had arrived...*again*. It was time for Chev and I to get on with our plans. I told Dale I would fix him when I found a new Genny. He was sad, of course ... about Gen, but I knew he would come out of it when I brought him a new one. They always do. Heck, he might like a new model better! Especially if she didn't always play with his emotions causing his lights to alternate between dim and bright as Genny frequently had.

I patted Chev as I crawled in. That strange, gnawing fear tried to rear its ugly head again...something strange about this morning...something strange about these woods...like someone...or something...was out there...watching. Waiting! Chev fired to life, ready to go. I shifted him in Drive and ... no go!! Not Again! Neutral was Okay...Reverse - "Shift Range Inhibited!!!" My nightmares were real! Aahrggg! Fear turned to anger. I jumped out and yelled threats at the ones I knew were watching. I could almost hear them laughing. "Got ya again." Then "'shroom killer...Shroom Killer...SHROOM KILLER" whispered in the breeze. I assumed they were experts at hiding through the day, so it was no use trying to retaliate against them now.

I had to help Chev! He just sat there ... despondent! I fired him up again and went through all the gears, finding he could crawl this time in 4WD Low. I inched him closer to Dale so they could be together while I worked on Chev. Fortunately, I had a good idea of what ailed him this time. (Fortunately?) And fortunately, I always have an ample supply of tools and paraphernalia just for such occasions. There was a wet line running in the grass back to his moth-balled bed. I dipped my finger into the liquid. It was Truck Food! The conspirators had eaten through his fuel line! "'shroom killer...Shroom Killer...SHROOM KILLER" chanted on the breeze! I screamed, "WE Will OVERCOME!! THEN YOU SHALL KNOW I AM HE WHO DEFENDS CHEV, DALE, AND GENNY!" The hills *mockingly* echoed my cries of outrage and retaliation.

The Fun-Guys' conspirators had attacked and ravaged Chev's wiring harness with *attitude* this time. A 1/4-inch hole was laid open in his fuel line, as if to say, "You don't learn too well, DO YOU?" Or could it be the moth balls ticked them OFF? With a section of Chev's coolant overflow hose, a dozen wire nuts, several pieces of 12-gauge wire, two hose clamps, and three hours later, Chev was ready to move again. Though he was grateful, his giant strength and ego were badly injured. As we left the woods, he refused to

reverse (presumably from fear) and worse...much worse...he *leaked* as we retraced our retreat! I was enraged! To bring Chev to such a low point in his life! I would HAVE MY REVENGE on the cowards that danced with the Fun-Guys!!

I remembered seeing fences around other trucks and fifth-wheels in these mysterious woods, so I chanced an encounter with other 'shroomers before we were out of the forest. "Chanced," because 'shroomers are always looking for ways to find your best spots! As I pulled up to a group of trailers and their humans, the trucks sitting in their low fences gave Chev knowing and sympathetic glances. They did not disdain this Truck's Truck as the cute foreign models had earlier. Nor did they ridicule his uncontrollable leakage or his attempts to keep his front bumper from quivering.

A quick huddle with the fellow 'shroomers revealed the identity of the conspirators: Porcupines! PORCUPINES? THEY were the disguised chanting dancers in my dreams!! It all made sense now! The spiny little buggers were conspiring with the Fun-Guys — they were...*Porc-spirators!*

The fellow 'shroomers had learned of this conspiracy a while ago. They protected their beloved trucks and trailers with portable electric fences which run on 6- or 12-volt batteries! Some would drive their beloved trucks over a large tarp and comfortably wrap their trucks for a good night's rest. Still others would place a two or three foot wire fence around their trailers for long stays in this mysterious forest. As we pulled out, heading for home, Chev was still leaking. He had his quivering under control until the oldest 'shroomer called out, "There's more than one porky out there!"

It took considerable consoling following that remark for Chev to feel a little better, yet he still leaked and refused to reverse. I was worried about his mental condition, hoping a counselor would not be needed. Dale, though, was left alone without protection to survive yet another night alone. Gen? Well, my fondness for her was thin, and I planned on bringing Dale a new gal, anyway. Maybe the Porc-spirators would eat her instead of Dale this time.

At home I tried to get Chev to reverse in the comfort of his own garage, but he refused. Odd thing, he reversed just fine for Dr. Tim after I dropped him off. Hmmm...I would have to work on his emotional issues later. Chev's insurance adjuster had to look at his damage this time (a very embarrassing thought for Chev), so I was forced to leave him with Dr. Tim and get back to Dale before the Porc-spirators ate more of him! Chev seemed relieved to just rest awhile, so I didn't have the heart to tell him I was going to take Ol' Plow Dog Dodge into the woods in his stead.

My reprieve began five days earlier, and the Porc-spirators had so far saved many a Fun-Guy. Now with Ol' Dog and Ele (the new electric fence) I was heading back with a vengeance. Old 22 was also ready...•



Beautiful park or landfill?

(Story and photos by Harry and Heidi Wojahn)

Since the beginning of spring, my wife and I have been noticing all of the trash that has built up next to the deck overlooking the lake in Fruitport.

How can something so beautiful be full of so much trash? This is supposed to be a place for families in the community to enjoy. One look at the trash hovering in the water turns into a dark reminder that we need to take better care of our planet. •

Fruitport Area News

This paper's purpose for existence is to be beneficial to this community in any way it can. FAN publishes 8,000 copies six times a year and copies are mailed to all of the 6,000 plus households in Fruitport and Sullivan townships plus additional copies mailed to subscribers and businesses in surrounding areas.

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