



That, as it turned out, was our first mistake.

The lot to be cleared was off a small hardpacked path at the end of a narrow paved road. The work itself was straightforward—drop a tree, chip the brush, pile the logs, repeat. We worked fast, and you know what, Dad was right. Within a few hours, the trees were down. Keeping a watchful eye on the hour and satisfied that we could easily make it home by one, we decided to load our big-old rack-bodied relic of a truck, *the beast*, as we called it, with as much of the just cut wood as time would allow.

My brother, Jimmy, maneuvered the *beast* along the path—stopping every so often for loading, and when the truck could hold no more, he continued up the path, around the bend and out of sight, looking for a place to safely turn around.

But as luck would have it, there wasn't one, so he came back, all the way back, to the just-cleared lot, in reverse.

We decided that rather than backing *the beast* out to the paved road, Jimmy would be better off to just jockey the truck back and forth a few times—a couple of small turns, just enough so he could turn *the beast* around, and then we could all go home.

This, however, turned out to be mistake number two.

Our plan, while good in theory failed miserably in execution because the moment the rear tires left the stability of the hard-packed path, they sank, completely.

We should have just left the truck right there—possibly returning after dinner, or better yet, the next day because either would have been the better choice, unfortunately, neither was what we chose.

We decided to free *the beast*—mistake number three.

We emptied all of the just loaded logs, attached tow chains to our sunken *beast*, and our other two trucks. Only then, and ever so slowly did we pull our faithful friend from its muddy confines.

But there was little time for celebration.

I happened to notice the hour—it was already, after two—our final and most unforgivable mistake. We arrived home not long afterward, and just as I'd feared, Mom was utterly annoyed with her mud-covered late-arriving weekend woodcutters.

We quickly cleaned up and dinner was finally served sometime after three—more than an hour late. Aside from saying grace and the occasional request to pass one of the food-laden plates and platters around the table, it was an awfully awkward and quiet Thanksgiving dinner!



Loading Dad's pickup. The *beast*, being loaded nearby, was about to become the cause of our dinner issues

In the end, I guess you could say that everything eventually worked out because, by the time the leftovers were brought back out for round two later that night, Mom had mostly forgiven us.

Some years later and as she was recalling that memorable holiday fiasco with Jimmy's fiancé, Pat, I was told that she did so with *sort of* a smile!

By the way, the girl that I'd invited to our infamous family feast, well, apparently, the events of that day weren't enough to scare her off because these days, on Thanksgiving morning, Karen can be found attending to a myriad of early morning preparations in advance of our family's feast while I'm tossing logs into the blaze that I'd lit earlier in our family room fireplace.

And of course, I still eagerly anticipate all the food and goodies yet to come—especially the pies and sugar-coated peanut butter filled dates, while hunkered down, still watching, after all these years, the annually televised Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

And when it's time for dinner, you can be sure of this: I'm not going to be late, ever. I promise.

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### ***the backstory:***

In one of my earliest childhood Thanksgiving morning memories I'm snuggled under a blanket on a living room sofa, still in my pajamas, watching the parade with my two stuffed animal friends, *Monkey & Bunny Rabbit*. Back then, we watched television on our black & white tv—color wouldn't arrive in our home for some time (and until then, we never knew what we were missing—that is, until we did)!

As my desire to spend time with my stuffed pals diminished, my love of lounging in my jammies and watching the Macy's parade did not. It still hasn't. This is one of the reasons, (yeah, just one, sure), that our fateful family Thanksgiving feast of long ago remains forever embedded within my memory files.

Back then, I was working full-time, attending college at night, the scoutmaster of a Boy Scout troop, and a weekend tree cutter—that is when I wasn't camping with the Scouts. To this end, I was especially looking forward to my annual jammie-wearing parade watching time off from everything while hunkered down on a couch and being entertained by floats, gigantic balloons, and marching bands!

But this, of course, wasn't to be. It did, however, become the stuff of family legend—a story that we share sometimes when we're all together around the last Thursday in November!

By the way, unlike the majority of my written pieces, this one is unique in that it became one of my **radio stories**, and was heard nationally by over a million listeners—this before it was otherwise published anywhere—including here, on my website!