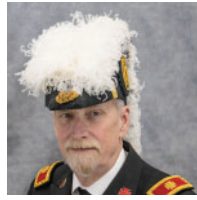




New Mexico Supplement



H. C. Sky Olsen
Grand Commander

Sir Knights,

I hope this finds you and yours in good health and happiness.

I don't think I've grown up a bit since high school when my buddies and I would get at least one vehicle stuck each week somewhere in the wilds.

I remember standing in the mud next to a logging road, staring at the VW van high centered on the hump between the ruts with not a single wheel touching the ground. Or the time we got wedged between two oak trees or stuck in mud, snow, mud, mud, mud.... Ah! Memories.

Since moving to the desert, mud hasn't been a problem but the urge to explore is still an attraction that works on me. I had noticed a road on a map that appeared to go to the back side of a reservoir I had fished. I'm always looking for fishing spots.

The road looked like a driveway next to a cattle pen but the sign named it County Road 1264 and what, after all, could possibly go wrong on a named and numbered county thoroughfare? It wound up the bottom of the valley past ranches set in irrigated hay fields. The bluffs on either side were, in contrast to the green bottomland, stark brown, rocky, sage and prickly pear covered mounds, aptly named the Buckskin Hills.

Having covered several miles of gravel, upon which the greatest hazards were cow pies, I was surprised to see the road narrowing. Now, I've encountered this phenomenon before and, in general, it's not a good sign. However, the map had shown the road circling all the way around the back of the reservoir in about a 15-mile arc so this must just be an aberration. Around the next bend a sign was planted next to the road. It informed me that the road was not maintained in the winter. I'm in my 60s. You'd think that sign might have given me pause. You'd be wrong.

Around the next bend, however, I was given pause, even a complete stop as I looked up at the road as it climbed out of the valley. From my vantage point I could see it winding up a steep hill in a single lane. I sat there and thought about the other narrow roads I'd driven in my life. I guess you could call that my life flashing in front of me. That might have been a sign. I thought about my under-powered, low to the ground, prone to over-heating car. Those were grown-up thoughts!

As I drove up the hill, I noted that it had been recently graded and had a pile of dirt pushed out to either side which were about eight inches high. I rapidly became very fond of those little humps as the road climbed up and ran along the narrow crest of a hog-back. They sort of worked, at least in my mind, as guard rails. However, they didn't do anything to obstruct the agoraphobic view over the sides of the ridge.

The road steepened as it climbed and I thought it was probably time to turn around lest the engine over-heat. Of course, as any still-adolescent-trapped-in-an-adult-body knows, there was no place to turn around. Even with the tight turning radius of my Mazda, there was no way to turn, no matter how many times I backed and filled because the road was not as wide as the car was long. I stopped and looked in the rear-view mirror. Nope. Backing up didn't look like an option. Maybe when I was younger and could turn my head farther.

Looking up the road there appeared to be a spot near the top that was a little wider. Since the Mazda stalled if you let out the clutch before the engine was really screaming, I was a little nervous starting up again on the hill. The car and I managed to get moving without stalling and rolling backward down the hill to the first bend and shooting out over the abyss. Unfortunately, the grader had cut about a foot deep and it was impossible to use that spot to turn around.

The road down the hog-back below me was longer than the last time I looked. The road above me rose more steeply and then disappeared over the crest. What happened to it then?

Well, I wasn't going to try backing down the road, I couldn't turn around and I had neglected the helicopter in the survival kit, so up we went. I had real doubt that the car could make the steepening hill. I backed up about fifty feet on the more level (relatively speaking) road, then slammed it forward as fast as it would go at the slope, hoping there would be no surprises over the crest.

This story seems a good metaphor for our current strange circumstances brought about by the pandemic. We cannot see the road ahead or what obstacles there may be. We cannot go back. All we can do is trust in God and continue on the road laid out before us.

Go with God and be well,

Courteously,

H. C. Sky Olsen
Grand Commander

Photo by Michele Balke

Supplement Editor: Stephen A. Balke 505-730-7189 ktmag@nmyorkrite.org
Please send article drafts and comments/suggestions to the email above.