


# FIRST GEAR

## NEW DRIVER NEWSLETTER

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DECEMBER 2020



### A Driver's Journey – Part 1

*How one driver lost everything and made her way back to success*

By Brita Nowak

I had lost everything. My truck, trailer, business, relationship, a place I called home for three years, and my breasts to breast cancer. I looked around in the RV I was living in and thought: "This is what your life has come to, Brita, great job." Trying to stuff what little I had left in every inch of the RV that my friend Penny let me stay in on the side of her house.

*The hardest part is to come up with a goal, something that you REALLY want in life.*

Anxiety wallowed up, hot flashes, anger, and GRIEF. I couldn't catch my breath, and my brain went into a frenzy.... anger, fear, and hopelessness. I knew this wouldn't end well; I had been there before. So I darted to Penny's house: "Please, Penny, can I sit on your couch for a while, and you keep an eye on me? Please make sure I won't do anything to myself." Her hand over her mouth and tears filling her eyes, she just sat there with me and then barraged into the mantra that saved my life: "You are the strongest woman I have ever met. If anyone can get through this, it's you. And you'll always have us."

Once I get pissed enough, I literally make a fist and say: "I'll find a way." The hardest part is to come up with a goal, something that you REALLY want in life. I wanted my trucking company back. But this time 10X. I had heard that term when I started listening to videos on YouTube. First Wayne Dyer, which calmed me, and then Tom Bileuy, Ed Mylett, and Omar (The Passionate Few). That fired me up. I realized it's all in our minds. I decided to 10X.... give me ONE YEAR, I said, one year and I will have a truck again.



I drove my KIA Soul for UBER and LYFT like a madwoman. There are times and places where more money can be made, and I figured that out quickly. My initial hesitation to drive Friday and Saturday night turned into an addiction to be out in downtown Miami at those times. At some point, I had to admit that I had reached my earning potential and with my navigational and conversational skills needed to step up. I bought a black GMC Yukon with a black leather interior to do UBER and LYFT XL, Executive, Luxury, etc. right before the Honda Classic in West Palm Beach. I made a cool grand over the weekend without breaking a sweat.

I moved out of the RV into a cute little house and thought I conquered the world. Spring break in South Beach, I made so much money and had so much fun.

*Once you start moving towards your goal, things no longer will happen TO you; they happen FOR you.*

Then Covid-19 hit and shut everything down. After freaking out and moping around the house for a day, I told myself: "Brita, you just moved, paying more rent, you just bought an expensive car that you love. There is no way you will go backward now. I ask myself, what jobs were still going strong?" Hmmm... healthcare and ..... TRUCKING..... how ironic.

I put the word out on Facebook that I was an available truck driver and received a ton of recommendations and a wonderful message from Anne Schelling with Secure Logistics. I decided that it was time to learn the in & outs of the ELD that I had opposed so much in the "secure" setting of being a company driver for a change.

Once you start moving towards your goal, things no longer will happen TO you; they happen FOR you. It's an energy you create. The very moment that I started to drive to Michigan for my new job – I hadn't even made it out of Jupiter yet - I got a text message from Penske! On the phone with my best friend Bruce. I read or rather screamed the message to him: "Are you still interested in getting a full maintenance lease truck from Penske? We changed our requirements for you. Zero down payment and only \$2800 per month."

"What are you going to do?" asked Bruce.

"I'm going to take it. Of course! It's what I thought of every single minute of the last year!" I replied.

"Are you still going to Michigan?" he said.

"Yes, because I first have many new things to learn and need to make some money before everything is signed, and the truck is actually in front of my house," I said.

I had no idea how to pull all of this off. I had a ton of medical debt, credit card debt, and barely got by every week. But one thing was clear; I was going to pull this off!

*When everything goes perfect and a certain comfort sets in, I think many of us make decisions to keep it at that level.*

Once at Secure Logistics, I memorized the hiring process, learned operating the ELD, got to know a new truck with the DEF system, ran new routes, etc. Honesty and transparency are very important to me; therefore, I informed Secure Logistics early on that my stay there will be very temporary.

When everything goes perfect and a certain comfort sets in, I think many of us make decisions to keep it at that level. My job at Secure was so wonderful; I made good money, had no worries, went to great places, and had to make no decisions. I could have just floated on like that, easy. And I actually had those thoughts, "Why do I want that Penske truck again? Why do I want to make my life more complicated again? Have problems and headaches again?"

It's difficult to stop and then interrupt that circle of thinking because our brains can only measure what we would lose but not what we could gain.

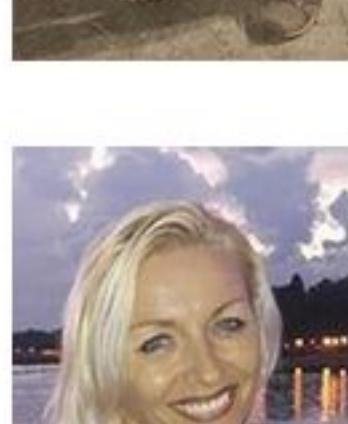
The call came in that my truck had arrived at Penske in Riviera Beach, Florida. Now it was time for me to start looking for a trailer, get insurance, and reinstate my DOT and MC numbers. This time it was clear to me that I need to concentrate on my part of the business and pay others to take good care of the rest. I let an agency handle my DOT, MC, drug screening and consortium, employment application, etc. Again, once I started moving towards something, the universe conspires to make it happen. I got that call from Penske: "Do you need a trailer? We can get you trailer, too?" There ... that's how it works.



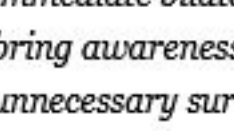
On my last load with Secure back to Michigan, I got contacted by a German TV show about female trucking company owners. I told them that I found this quite interesting because I haven't been trucking or in the business for the last two years but will be in about a week again. The next day they called and told me not to do anything until their camera crew could get there. They wanted to document everything from the very beginning.

Seriously, none of this could have fallen into place any better. ●

***This is the first part of Brita's story – make sure to check out the next edition of First Gear for the rest of her journey towards success.***



*Born in Berlin, Brita worked as a model and actress in Hollywood before starting her trucking career. Now she owns her own trucking company, BratCat Express. In addition to all things trucking, Brita is multilingual and has a business degree. In the same week that she was voted Overdrive Most Beautiful 2016, Brita was diagnosed with breast cancer. She opted for immediate bilateral mastectomy WITHOUT reconstruction and is trying to bring awareness to the practice of selling vulnerable women on this unnecessary surgery.*





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## Survival Tips for Winter Driving

By Robert Greene

I will start by saying if you think conditions are unsafe, stay parked! If you choose to roll, remember, easy on and off the gas, turn your engine brake off and give yourself more room. And, for God's sake, don't bunch up! When in frigid temps, be sure to check the truck over when you stop as extreme cold is one of the hardest things to deal with. Be sure to check the fifth wheel area, keep an eye on your air lines as snow and ice can build up, causing them to break or pull away from the glad hands. Spray WD40 on a rag and wipe your tail lights off as this makes it easier to remove snow and ice as keeping them clear will mean others that are behind you in a storm will be able to see you. If you are trying to make the decision to chain up and run or park, pay close attention to the road conditions, and if you have to put 100+ pounds of chain on each tire, it's time to park! No load is worth your life.

Keep a couple of bottles of rubbing alcohol in your truck. If the temperature is expected to drop below freezing, add half a bottle to your windshield washer fluid. This will decrease your chances of the wiper fluid freezing when it hits the windshield. You should also carry extra blankets; I prefer microfiber as they seem to work well when it comes to warmth. Keep a large three-wick candle and a coffee can in your truck. If you become stranded, this creates a small heater and will help keep you warm.



Tracking weather changes is also essential in the winter months, and it is a good idea to have a weather app installed on your phone that will provide the most up to date weather forecast. I utilize the NOAA weather app, but several other apps can track the latest conditions, including Weather Underground, Storm Shield, Weather Channel, and AccuWeather, to name a few. Pick the one that works best for you but make sure you check it often as weather conditions can change quickly.

Thank you for reading my winter and safety tips. Above all, stay safe! ●



*Robert started trucking in 1986 and has been an owner/operator for over 19 years. He has driven everything from oversized to flatbed drop deck, hazmat, reefer, and tankers and enjoys helping other drivers. He is the proud grandfather of 5 beautiful grandchildren who have him wrapped*



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## Riding High Through the Holidays

By Sierra Sugar

2020 has been a year! I think we can all agree on that. And as we roll into the holiday season, it is not just the stress of the year behind us that brings us down, but also holiday stress and blues. What is a driver to do? How do you ride high after a year full of lows? Here are five tips to help you navigate through the holidays with high spirits.



### Unplug!

Instead of feeding the beast that is misery, anger, hate, and depression - starve it. Unplug! Either get off social media and live in the real world or adjust your social media feed, so you stop seeing things that upset or depress you. We've all fallen into the trap of needing to know, comment, and argue the minutiae of life, from (the big one) politics to how someone dresses or where they choose to eat. Are you really changing anyone's mind? Are they changing yours? Put down your phone and step away. If you can't do that, then unfollow, unfriend, or block people and pages that constantly raise your blood pressure.

*Challenge yourself. – Being positive isn't something that happens to us. It is a choice we make every single day.*

Whatever you need to do for your own peace of mind is ok. Just because someone is family, or a close friend does not mean you have to see everything they post or say on social media. Unfollow them through the holidays. Follow pages of puppies and kittens, of good music, or of pretty pictures. The more you like and comment on these positive, fun things, the less your social media feed will show you things that you are trying to avoid.



### Let the Sunshine In!

Fall and Winter can be beautiful times of the year. But the same reason the leaves change colors, is also the same reason so many suffer from seasonal depression. SAD or Season Affective Disorder is a real thing and is caused by shorter days and lack of direct sunlight. Put on a jacket and go for a walk. Let that sunshine on your face and lift your spirits. Vitamin D deficiency has been linked to depression. Our bodies make Vitamin D from sunshine. OMG we're a plant! But seriously, it's not an apple a day that keeps the doctor away, it is sunshine that keeps the blues at bay. Get a little every single day to lift your spirits.



### Learn to say "No."

Holidays are a busy time of year. In trucking, the loads slow down this time of year, but life picks up everywhere else. It's the holiday season and everyone wants to travel or visit. Maybe you have big Thanksgiving or Christmas dinners, New Year's Eve plans, company parties to attend, local events and parades, shopping, decorating, hosting guests, traveling... the list goes on.



### Play!

That's right; play. I think as adults, we get so bogged down with work, family, health, the state of the world, and everything else that we stress about daily that we don't just forget to have fun, but we have forgotten how!

Crank the radio and dance in your seat. Sing to your dispatcher, even if you sing off-key. Go for a walk or a bike ride. Turn off the TV and go watch the sunset. Go fishing. Be silly. Laugh out loud. And do whatever you need to do to bring a little fun and joy into your life. It truly is the little things that matter.

Fun can be spontaneous, but it can also be intentional. During a time of year that is wrought with stress and blues, fun absolutely should be intentional. Plan to have fun. Don't just pencil it in, write it in with permanent marker in capital bold letters! You've worked hard all year, and **YOU DESERVE FUN AND HAPPINESS**. Don't wait for someone else to bring it to you, be intentional, and do fun things for yourself! ●



Sierra Sugar is a blogger and writer with a passion for trucking, travel, adventure, tiny living, and cooking. Involved in the trucking industry for nearly four years, she has experienced living on the truck 24/7 for 3 of those years with her husband, Allen Wilcher, a 30-year veteran truck driver. For more on Sierra visit her website or follow her on Facebook or Twitter  
Website: <http://www.SweetLifeOfSierraSugar>  
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## Who's Doing it Right?

By Kim McDonnell, RoadPro Family of Brands

We are now over 9 months into the COVID 19 crisis, and most of us are weary of hearing about the virus and not only want "IT" to end but also 2020 too!



At first, when the country shut down, so too did many amenities at the travel centers and truck stops, as well as the truck stops themselves - leaving many a driver without food and essentials. But within weeks, not only the locations that closed but those that cut back on services realized just how essential they were to the ESSENTIAL truck drivers. Truckers were still out there, delivering everything the country needed so that many of us could remain sheltered in place. Many travel centers who initially closed, changed course and opened up with safety precautions for the drivers and their employees.

Things are now back to 'somewhat' normal in many travel centers and truck stops, but in most cases, not the same. However, after all these months, one thing that did not change is the truck drivers' expectations and what they want when they stop.

A recent discussion forum in Brake Time asks drivers what they look for in a travel center or truck stop. What makes one stand out over another? What makes a good travel center? Who is doing it right?

While almost everyone said that a clean place, clean showers, and restrooms, plenty of parking, and friendly staff were the most important, others pointed out specifics and provided insights on what makes a travel center or truck stop stand out.

*"As a country shutdown, we kept goods going out, and many travel centers and facilities helped us and continue to do so."*

*-Daniel W*

Allen M started us off and said the places that offer something other than hot dogs, pizza, or chips, especially when you are in a hurry, and provide good food choices, get his vote.

One driver pointed back to the impact the virus had on travel centers and truck stops. "I think the biggest thing done right was staying open and available to drivers." said Daniel W, "When all this crap really went crazy, yes, all of the drivers here made choices that were heroic, but we are nothing without support." He continued, "As a country shutdown, we kept goods going out, and many travel centers and facilities helped us and continue to do so." He is especially glad to see measures in place to protect the cashiers and workers.

Some pointed to specific places like Gary K, who likes to stop at Gearjammer in Union Gap, Washington. He said the friendly staff, cool products, quiet location, and lots of parking made this a favorite. He tends to like the 'Mom and Pop' truck stops and also said that Gordy's in La Pine, Oregon, is another standout and loves the small-town feel.



Judy D called out Russell's Truck Plaza in Bard, New Mexico, and said, "You will not regret it! Clean restrooms, good food, and coffee that is never empty."



"Out in western Washington, around Toledo off I-5, is Gee Cee's, family-owned truck stop, huge parking areas, big store, grill, and friendly staff," said Cindy A. "They just installed maybe six brand new large shower rooms and any issues you just tell one of the staff, and they are quick to fix it." She also noted that the regular chains such as Pilot and Love's that are where she travels are fairly reliable when it comes to being clean.

Linda C. said, "The travel centers are doing a great job staying open during this crazy year. They took a huge hit closing the restaurants and the country shut down, and yet they kept their doors open, the showers clean, and the stores open." She added, "I am constantly amazed at what a good job the travel centers do by allowing us to park at their locations and not just fuel and move on."

While many pointed to their favorite stops, including the major players like Love's, Pilot, and TA Petro, what came out again, and again in the Who's Doing it Right discussion on Brake Time was how the place made them feel. What is your favorite stop? Join the discussion on [Brake Time](#). ●





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## What kind of fuel do you choose?

By Casey Hayes

**C**ARBS - Such a confusing topic. Huh? What are “good” carbs? Why should I eat them? What are “bad” carbs, and why do they get a bad rap? Let me put this topic into trucker language:



### Carbs are the main fuel for our bodies.

Let's think about how you fuel your truck. What kind of fuel do you put in it? Do you put in the cheapest diesel? The one that makes your engine knock? Maybe the one that will ruin your engine after a while of using it? Some bad diesel has contaminants like water or debris; some have the wrong blend of detergent (or DEF), the rest have been diluted and are inferior...I don't think anyone would risk their livelihood on

bad fuel ruining their engines.



### What is running your engine?

What kind of fuel are you using? The engine of your body is actually millions of little engines in each of your cells. These engines take the nutrients that your gut digests and absorbs and fuels each cell. The motors in each cell then burn the

nutrients to create energy. If you are putting in bad fuel, you will lack energy, and your system will run rough.

Do you ever have an energy slump during the day? ...Yup?

Does it ever feel like your personal engine has a knock?

This could be because you are using inferior fuel.

### Good carbs vs. Inferior carbs

What is a carbohydrate? It is food that your gut breaks down to glucose, and glucose enters your cells for fuel. Carbohydrates are one of the three nutrients your body fuels with each day. In the nutrition world, we call these fuels MACROS. These macros are Protein, Carbohydrates, and Fats.



Fruits, vegetables, nuts, and whole grains are all carbohydrates. But they also contain great vitamins, minerals, fiber, and phytonutrients. All of this is like detergent additives that clean your engine and keep it working in tip-top order. Fiber cleans out your gut, and the vitamins and minerals actually amplify the energy made by the engines in your cells, like turbo energy.



Soda, chips, crackers, candy bars, and french fries are inferior carbohydrates. These are processed carbohydrates from the real foods they were to become to the foods they are. These foods have most of the fiber, vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients removed. Then there are preservatives and trans fats added. These foods are like the diluted fuels with debris and water that have had the detergents (or DEF)

removed. They make your engine knock, they seize up your engine, and you have no energy to do the things that you need to do. Your exhaust may be nasty, and that is why they get a bad rap.

Highly processed foods may be cheap and taste good, but they are ruining your body. If you wouldn't feed bad fuel to your truck, why feed your body bad food?

Let's fuel our bodies well... One Mile at A Time. ●



Casey Hayes, RDN, is a wife, mother, and sister-in-law to a truck driver. She has worked the last 11 years on the dock of a wholesale warehouse while achieving her degree as a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist. You can find her at [www.CaseyHayesRDN.com](http://www.CaseyHayesRDN.com) and testing recipes in her 12V appliances or finding better food to eat on the road. Her passion is to help truckers choose healthier food on the road...One Mile at a Time.







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