



## Episode 1: The Biggest Tailgate in Trucking Air Date: February 20, 2020

**“Long Haul” Paul Marhoefer** [00:00:00] Four years ago, I was northbound on I-75 in Knoxville, Tennessee. My cargo: a load of imported watermelons. They had sailed on a container ship from Guatemala to South Florida, where they were transferred by forklift onto big trucks driven by folks like me. These were those tiny, seedless, designer types they call "personal watermelons." I always wondered about the marketing cat who came up with that one. Personal watermelons. It's like a watermelon you can have as a friend. [Sound of truck driving on road with low, humming sound in the background]

I was pulling a refrigerated trailer back then— a "reefer," as we call them. A reefer's a heavily insulated box trailer equipped with a giant diesel-powered temperature control unit. It's actually got the capacity to maintain more than forty-thousand pounds of perishable freight at temperatures as cold as twenty below. [Low tones come in, gradually intensifying]

It was rush-hour in Knoxville, or K-town in trucker code. Traffic came to a screeching halt at the junction of I-75 and I-640. I got stopped in time; but the trucker behind me— well, not so much. [Low tones fade out]

Boom! Shoot. Rear-ended. I took a minute to collect myself, and walked to the back of the trailer to check first on the other driver. He said he was OK. Then I opened the vent hatch to check my load. What seconds before had been a perfectly picked personal watermelon, was now prolapsing through its ruptured rind, down the crumpled exterior

of what had once been the trailer's stainless-steel door, and onto my trembling hand. Sorry, friend. [Acoustic guitar music begins]

Unbeknownst to me at the time, this baptism in the purée of a personal watermelon would come to be my own creative Big Bang. Strangely, as a result of this event, I would come to be a part-time recording artist, a contributor for Overdrive Magazine, and now, even a card-carrying podcast-producing Radiotopian. I'm Long Haul Paul. You're listening to Over the Road [Show theme begins, steady acoustic guitar followed by harmonica melody] I got that Lacy, you're Lacy from Mobile. Come on baby. Let's truck it up. Do it baby.

**Debbie "Dingo" Desiderato:** [00:03:00] Now I'm on the top of this mountain. And I know I still got to get down on the other side somehow, and I'm so scared, I'm shaking.

**Trucker 1:** [00:03:07] But I know quite a few drivers that swear by roasting salmon over their engine.

**Trucker 2:** [00:03:11] We were willing to take a Potbelly pig. We tried to even pick up a 60-pound tortoise.

**Trucker 3:** [00:03:17] Times are changin'. It ain't that way anymore, but why shouldn't it be that way? [Harmonica flourishes and fades into steady percussion]

**Paul:** Here's how this is going to work. We've been travelling all over the country, down the highways and the hedges, collecting the real stories of real people who live and work over the road. [Guitar comes back in accompanied by steady percussion] We've got eight episodes for you. In each one we explore how trucking is changing today. And along the way, I'll tell you a few of my own stories. Heck, I might even sing you a few songs. [Theme continues, harmonica intensifies and then fades into silence] [Voices chattering in background at exhibition hall, a male voice chimes in "hasn't been too bad so far" followed by inaudible chatter]

Let's start out at a place called the Kentucky Expo Center in Louisville, home to The Mid America Trucking Show, or MATS for short. [Sound of cart wheeling across hard surface while voices chatter in the background]

Think of a Home Depot about twelve times its normal size, then fill it with trucks, truck drivers, and every possible thing anyone has ever thought of to make a buck off a trucker.

**Vendor 1:** [00:04:39] It's an automatic snow chain system and it works good on a....

**Vendor 2:** [00:04:41] ...So what we're selling is bed bug heaters for truckers that have cabs...

**Paul:** Throw in 90,000 people, with some concerts and swag, and you've got The Mid America Trucking Show. [Music playing in event hall, "Sitting at the Dock All Day"] You gotch yer air freshener dudes.

**Vendor 3:** [00:05:00] Odor eliminator products, for the highway professionals...

**Paul:** I love those guys.

**Vendor 3:** We say three sprays lasts for days.

**Paul:** [Speaking to vendor] Tell me about this beef jerky. [As narrator] You got those ol' boys who make the beef jerky.

**Vendor 4:** [00:05:11] That's the most tender beef jerky you'll ever eat. Feel that.

**Paul:** [To vendor] That is really tender... [As narrator] I actually love those guys too.

**Vendor 5:** [00:05:17] We are an insurance company that specializes in owner operators...

**Paul:** There are international vendors hoping to land that big contract.

**Vendor 6** [00:05:25]: ...we supply shock absorbers...

**Paul:** Big truck makers are here, like Kenworth and Peterbilt...

**Vendor 7:** [00:05:32] We've got our new- 579 Ultra Loft and it's blackout...

**Paul:** ...also model truck makers.

**Vendor 8:** [00:05:36] I'm proud to say I can't afford a real one, but I can hook you up with a real nice toy one. ["Sitting at the Dock" continues into whistling solo and crowd grows quieter]

**Paul:** But for many long-time gearjammers, [Deep voice on microphone speaking inaudibly in the background] MATS signifies something more. It's a hobo convention of sorts- a chance to see old trucking buddies, and to swap stories- and that's why we're here. [Percussion begins, gaining speed]

If you want to know what's going on in the trucking world, this is a good place to start. [Jazzy, upbeat electric guitar plays melody and bass joins percussion] But first, let's cover some basics... [Music continues]

There are 4.2 million Americans who hold a CDL- that's a "commercial driver's license." A CDL allows us to drive a vehicle weighing over 26,000 pounds. Together, we move 70% of all domestic freight. Think of it. Everything you see at the store, everything you

buy online, moves by truck at some point. Add it all up, we're talking about a \$700 billion dollar industry— moving literally 55 billion pounds of stuff every day. At that rate, American truckers could haul off the great Pyramid of Giza, stone by stone, about five times a day. [Music continues transitioning into a twangy melody]

Of course, there are lots of different types of truckers and trucks out there

**Eric Turner:** [00:07:16] Refrigerator freight trucks, they call 'em reefer trucks.

**Paul:** ...you know, like what I drive

**Jason Earlywine:** [00:07:20] Flatbeds we call them skateboards.

**Paul:** ...those big flat trailers with loads of lumber and steel

**Eric:** Car haulers we call 'em parking lots

**Jason:** A bed bugger is a furniture hauler

**Paul:** A tanker truck we call a "tanker yanker." I drive one of those sometimes, too.

**Eric:** Trucks that haul bulls, they call 'em bull haulers

**Jason:** I mean, there's all kinds of terminology for 'em

**Paul:** As you can imagine, we have our own factions, cliques, and hierarchies. Flatbedders don't usually associate with the reefer guys like me. And the bull haulers could never see themselves as freight haulers, or "door swingers" as they call them, 'cause all a 'door swinger' does is back up to the dock and swing the doors open and shut. [Sound of trailer door slamming shut] Or so they say. [Twangy guitar music ends and twinkling, dreamlike tones come in]

But here, for three days at least, none of that matters. We're all just drivers. And not a one of us came here to have a bad time. [Voices chattering inaudibly in exhibition hall, followed by robotic voice that says, "Volvo dynamic steering with stability assist is the new innovation for Volvo trucks..."]

A lot of the talk at MATS this year is about new technology. [Guitar picking with anticipatory tone chimes in and robotic voice continues, "when a truck starts to skid..."] It seems every part of the truck has got a computer in it now... [Robotic voice says, "active suspension seat is turned on] ... even the seat. [Robot voice continues, "notice how much of the bouncing is eliminated by the active suspension seat's computer-controlled motor"]

And there's a feeling the technology is not just changing the truck, [soft, low tone gradually grows louder in anticipation] but that it's changing us, and the way we do business— that the codes and culture of trucking, are eroding before our eyes.

**Paul:** [To Greg Murphy] Have we met?

**Greg Murphy:** [00:09:03] Really briefly, just last year at the show...

**Paul:** I bump into a Facebook friend on the show floor named Greg Murphy, who now works for Uber.

**Greg:** ...threw in a resume and said this is never gonna happen.

**Paul:** Yes, the ride share company, Uber.

**Greg:** And here I am.

**Paul:** [To Greg] Now Greg, you have a unique story because you are a longtime truck driver, [Greg affirms] who has become like the public relations liaison for Uber.

**Greg:** Exactly, kind of the interpreter I would call it between the trucking community and Uber Freight.

**Paul:** Greg is affable; middle aged, with a salt and pepper beard and a cool fedora.

**Greg:** More truck driver than computer person, that's for sure.

**Paul:** All around him is a veritable phalanx of Uber's black-shirted millennials. But Greg speaks fluent trucker, so he pulls out his phone, and shows me, another middle-aged guy in yet another fedora...

**Greg:** So here it is, it opens up...

**Paul:** ...how to use the Uber Freight app.

**Greg:** And it knows that I'm in Louisville today, so it has these little cards for each load, right?

**Paul:** So instead of connecting cars with riders, Uber Freight is connecting trucks with loads. [To Greg] So read those off to us Greg, if you would.

**Greg:** So this one is from Walton, Kentucky to Los Alamos, California for 3,070.

**Paul:** That's the price for this load...

**Greg:** It's 1800 miles. It has the type of trailer, the load number, what it is, the weight...

**Paul:** All I have to do is tap that card, and the load is mine– no phone calls, no haggling.

**Greg:** Technology is coming and we need to embrace it and be part of the conversation.

**Paul:** I have to wonder though, at three thousand bucks on a stated distance of 1800 miles, doesn't no haggle simply mean "take it or leave it, you have no choice"?

**Paul:** [To Greg] I'm just going to confess, there is a primal fear about the power of a company like this...

**Greg:** Well I think change over all is difficult for people to embrace. [Soft guitar strumming begins] it's unfamiliar, we don't know what it's going to look like, and that creates anxiety.

**Paul:** That said, truckers *are* embracing new technology, and using it for their own benefit. [To Sandra Goche while she speaks inaudibly in the background] You've got quite the hat collection.

**Sandra Goche:** [00:11:33] Well, way back when I gave myself heat stroke by being stupid...

**Paul:** Take Sandra Goche.

**Sandra:** Basically, you tell 'em how people treated you, like if they were professional. If there's a bathroom you can use, because there are a lot of places that don't allow truckers to use their bathroom.

**Paul:** She's telling me about Dock 411. It's a rating app, basically like Yelp for loading docks.

**Sandra:** You kinda help the trucker after you or the person after you...

**Paul:** They've surveyed over ten thousand truckers about their experiences. Sandra here is Dock 411's number one reviewer.

**Sandra:** If they have forklifts, that you use forklifts– what are some of the other attributes Stephen that you can think of?

**Stephen:** [00:12:13] Um, if there's overnight parking, if you can sleep there and the overnight parking...

**Paul:** Sandra drives as a team with her husband Stephen.

**Stephen:** ...How you were treated professional. If I were to read the review I put in for this one dock, I would never take freight to that dock. We went in there the first time and waited 3 hours to get unloaded, which— that's OK. Second time we went in there we waited 13 hours— no bathrooms, no facilities, and couldn't leave the truck. [Sleepy, twangy guitar music begins]

**Paul:** Reviews like that are added up, and turned into a scorecard for every dock they do business with.

**Sandra:** Dock 411, it's one of those things where it's never going to be complete, because there's always gonna be new docks. But it's gonna be a real relief to all us truckers. [Twangy guitar music continues with the addition of an ambient tone building anticipation]

**Paul:** But there's still another technology on truckers' minds at MATS this year...

**Voice 1:** [00:13:11] Right now, that e-log.

**Paul:** ...something much more consequential than a new app.

**Voice 2:** [00:13:17] The electronic log situation has become a pretty big issue...

**Paul:** It's called an E.L.D...electronic logging device. [Montage of overlapping voices talking about e-log in background]

**Paul:** [Singing with band accompaniment] *Take this e-log and shove it. It ain't right with me no more...*

This e-log issue is all playing out right now, and it's pretty much *the* biggest change that's come to our culture, at least since I started trucking. [Paul continues singing and then song comes to a halt with the sound of drawn-out truck horn sound]

**News Reporter:** [00:13:54] [Voices chattering and occasional honking horn in background] Hundreds of big rigs took over highway 99 in protest today...

**Paul:** Some truckers have even put on protests about ELDs.

**Voice 3:** [00:14:02] [Speaking over megaphone] Right here guys. 95 south-bound is shut down. [Truck horn honking]

**Paul:** It's one of those things that just keeps coming up in our conversations with drivers. [Vehicle door closes, and makes beeping sound as it backs up] So on our first day at MATS, we find ourselves at the vintage maroon Peterbilt of someone who's been at the center of so much of the protest.

**Mike Landis:** [00:14:22] Yeah, so my name's Mike Landis from Lititz, Pennsylvania, a little Amish country town in Lancaster County. Um, I got into trucking right out of high school pretty much, got my CDL right after I graduated. First time I got behind the wheel at the driving school at the local vo-tech, it was all downhill from there. (Laughs) [Music with steady percussive beat begins]

**Paul:** E-logs are all about how truckers record their driving and working hours.

**Mike:** So yeah, we have what they call our hours of service, which is, once you come on duty, you're allowed 14 hours of working time. 11 of that 14 can be driving, but then you have to take 10 hours off before you can go back to work.

**Paul:** So every day you get 14 hours on duty...And you have to take 10 hours off.

**Mike:** The problem with that is, once you start your day, your clock for day does not stop.

**Paul:** Now in the past, those hours were recorded in *paper* logbooks. Every driver kept a set of books in the cab, recorded their time with a pen on a four-line grid and made that log available to inspectors and state patrol. Basically, you regulated yourself.

**Mike:** So to me that's important because I was taught the old way of trucking. You know you do what you gotta do to get the job done but you sleep when you're tired and you know you truck when you're awake.

**Paul:** If you took a quick nap in your shift, or ran a little over the time limit, you could juggle that, clerically I mean...

**Mike:** You don't turn into a zombie just because your five minutes past your time, and fall asleep and drive off the side of the road.

**Paul:** That is, you could juggle it, until the electronic logging device.

**Mike:** And basically what that does is it hooks into the computer on the motor of the truck and it records everything you do. You know, how hard you're on the throttle how hard you're on the brake, if you're moving, if you're stopped, your speed, the whole nine yards. [Music continues] It counts down every second of your day. So whereas before, on a paper log book, if you're five minutes past your time point at the truck stop, nobody knew the difference. No harm no foul. But now I mean I've seen people backed halfway in a parking spot in truck stops already because if they finish backing up their ELD will put him in violation to go another fifty feet and back the truck up into a parking spot.

**Paul:** Yeah, you hear stories like this all the time: trucks beached like whales in the most god-awful places because their drivers ran out of hours. You've probably seen those trucks yourself. [Music ends] That's because in December 2017, a new mandate came into effect requiring virtually all trucks on the road to run an electronic log.



**Mike:** And to me it's a slap in the face. Driving a truck at eighteen years old, I'm now thirty-three, closing in on two million miles. I have a clean driving record. To me that all comes down to the way I was taught that comes down to the responsibility of knowing you're operating an eighty-thousand-pound machine. The fact that they're gonna tell me that I need this thing in my truck to keep me safe on the road. Doesn't sit well with me at all.

**Paul:** [To Mike] Well I hear you loud and clear. We do these Texas Ohio Texas Florida triangles a lot, and Denise's stepmother is dying. She's in a Louisiana nursing home and we want to see her. She's days away from dying literally days away from dying. And I'm on an ELD. We stopped to see her, and essentially, we've got to say our goodbyes to her in about forty-five minutes because our fourteen-hour clock is ticking, and I just had this moment of complete clarity that something's gotta give.

**Mike:** And there's a lot of people who will say that's not true, they don't force you to drive tired, they don't force you to not take a shower, yada-yada-yada. Well, I mean you're right. The thing doesn't reach up and grab me and tell me to keep trucking. But the sad reality is, they kind of do.

**Paul:** I should say here that Mike does *not* run an e-log.

**Mike:** The reason my truck don't need one is because the cut-off date is 2000 and newer need them and '99 and older do not.

**Paul:** So his '99 Peterbilt is just too old to connect to a computer. But Mike has done more than just avoid the new regulation, he's actually fighting it.

**Mike:** So we started the United States Transportation Alliance, and the unique thing about us is we're all drivers, that met through protest-type stuff for the industry. And nobody out here that is making these rules or regulations or is pushing for rules or regulations have ever sat behind the wheel for any amount of time and definitely not anytime recently. [Laughs] So you know when we go to D.C. and we go every month right now you know we park our trucks and we meet with congressmen and senators and FMCSA...

**Paul:** That's the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration.

**Mike:** ...truckload carriers we've met with the Teamsters. So it's been a pretty good thing, and we've been fortunate enough to help with the hours of service that are supposed to be changed. I'm actually expecting an announcement to be made here at MATS, for that.

**Paul:** In fact, the keynote speaker for the weekend is none other than Elaine Chao, the United States Secretary of Transportation.

**Mike:** Um, so we're hoping that has something to do with that. [Slow, twangy music begins] Yeah, and I realize things change with the times and technology goes and this and any other thing. But trucking is still trucking, and I chose me personally I chose to drive a truck because I grew up around trucks and I love trucks. And for me you know it sounds kind of corny, but the other week I was invited to a concert by someone that we know backstage and stuff afterwards you're hanging out and watching this guy up on stage you could tell he was just in his zone. And I said the best way I can describe watching you on stage is like me riding across the California or Arizona desert with a truck pressed out in the moonlit, chicken lights on, and just pipe singing and drivin', you know, cruisin', and some people are like, "What? I don't get it. You're just driving a truck down the road" and I'm like yeah, but to me it's more than just driving a truck down the road, you know. It's the freedom of it. And that's kind of being taken away is what the bad part is. If we don't do anything to help fight this stuff guys like me you're gonna be gone. [Soft, twangy music slows]

**Paul:** After the break, we'll hear that big announcement from Elaine Chao. But first, we venture out onto the parking lot at MATS. We'll hear why this e-log thing is such a big deal and I'll tell you "what gave" for me, and how ELD's led, at least indirectly, to the making of this podcast. [Soft, twangy music continues to slow until it fades into silence]

**Todd Dills:** [00:22:12] Hey folks, Todd Dills here; I'm the senior editor with *Overdrive Magazine*, which is helping to produce this podcast. For those of you who are new to this trucking world, *Overdrive* is basically a trade publication for independent truckers—the ones who own the rigs they haul with. For many years, we've called ourselves "the Voice of the American Trucker" and so part of what we wanted to do with this podcast was to actually build a little bridge between the highway haulers who read *Overdrive* and, well, the uninitiated among you. So I'm gonna be hosting a special series of mini-episodes, where I'll take questions from those of you *outside* the business, and put them directly to our trucking listeners. We're calling it the Channel One-Nine Special, after the CB radio channel used for trucker-to-trucker information sharing. The first Channel One-Nine episode will show up in your feed next week, but I'm dropping in now to ask a quick favor. If you've got questions about trucking—seriously, about anything at all having to do with it, no question is too simple or strange—give us a call at 765-245-4844, and leave us a message. Again, 765-245-4844. Be sure to state your name and location with your question. And thanks.

**Paul:** [Sound of cloth vigorously polishing hard surface] OK, so back to the Mid-America Trucking Show. I want to pick things up the next morning, outside in the parking lot, where drivers are busy polishing their trucks.

**Devrie Jones:** [00:23:40] I love trucking, though. [Devrie continues polishing truck] It's a lifestyle, it's not a job, it's a lifestyle.

**Paul:** There are actually *two* parking lots of trucks at MATS, each with its own vibe. [Quick-paced, playful guitar music fades in] There's the show lot, and the Papa John's lot— we'll explain why it's called that in a minute. But the show lot is home to the Paul K

Young Truck Beauty Championship. And that's where we start our day. [Sound of drilling in background]

**Devrie:** My name is Devrie Jones. I'm working on Excessive Behavior #1.

**Eric:** My name is Eric Turner. The name of my truck is Showtime

**Trucker 1:** [00:24:19] You gotch yer boost pressure right here for your turbo

**Trucker 2:** [00:24:21] Oh, you want to check out my scrapbook? Check this out.

**Paul:** This is a place where trucks have names.

**Trucker 3:** [00:24:27] The Douse is a 1996 freightliner classic XL.

**Trucker 4:** [00:24:32] It's just part of the family.

**Trucker 3:** The Douse is my big girl. Phyllis is my little girl.

**Paul:** They're festooned with those little amber bulbs we call chicken lights.

**Trucker 5:** [00:24:43] Every truck driver want a chicken light and they want [inaudible]

**Paul:** White carpeting, wooden floors... [To trucker] Tell me about this custom floor, we were checking that out...

**Trucker 6:** [00:24:50] It's actually just a wooden floor you can get at Home Depot.

**Paul:** [To trucker] Really?

**Trucker 6:** Yessir. [Music continues with pronounced downbeat percussion]

**Paul:** For the competition itself, trucks are organized into different sections, marked off with plastic ropes. There are categories like antique custom, limited mileage bobtail— a working combo.

**Devrie:** Meaning I put miles on my truck.

**Paul:** My favorite: the antique original. [To trucker] I cut my teeth on one of these trucks; this is a Transtar International. [Vehicle door closes shut while motor runs] There's nothing like the AM radio reception on an all-steel-made old school Western Star. [Music continues] There are teams who work an entire year to prep a truck for this show.

**Trucker 7:** [00:25:42] I've seen guys polish on it for a day and a half and they're still polishing on it now.

**Devrie:** You gotta live it, love it, breathe it, bleed it.

**Paul:** If you believe, as I do, that a truck can be a work of art, then this is the Guggenheim.

**Daniel Snow:** [00:25:51] There's a lot of history there. Lot of our life has been spent in it, under it, over it— everything a squirrel can do to a tree, we've done to this truck. [Upbeat music continues and sound of engine revving]

**Paul:** [To trucker] How much would you have to have for this truck right now?

**Trucker 8:** [00:26:05] Uhm, 200 grand.

**Paul:** What sort of installment plan would you consider? [Trucker laughs]

**Trucker 8:** Naw, we couldn't do that. [Both laughs]

**Paul:** [To trucker] Thanks for your time. [Trucker affirms] [Music fades out into sound of motor running] As we leave the show lot, I know that two-hundred grand Peterbilt will never be mine. Let's face it, I'm more of a Papa John's type. [Sounds of conversations in the slow lot] This lot serves the University of Louisville Football stadium— formerly known as the Papa John's Stadium. The University dropped that name after the pizza magnate found himself in hot water, but for truckers, the shorthand stuck. In any case, picture a stadium parking lot with rows upon rows of tractor trailers. Only thing is these aren't show trucks; these are just the trucks people drove here to attend MATS. [Sounds of conversations in the slow lot continue] They're all out here now with their camping chairs, gas grills and coolers— walking their dogs in the Kentucky spring air.

**Robert Palm:** [00:27:16] Long Haul Paul and a milk run! (Laughs)

**Paul:** It's maybe the biggest tailgate in all of trucking. Big enough that you can actually lose your truck in it.

**Robert:** You a full-time journalist now or what? [Paul and Robert laugh]

**Paul:** At the show lot, I didn't see a single person I knew. But down here in steerage, it's different.

**Paul:** [To Debbie] How you doing Debbie? I'm digging that new chrome bumper...

**Debbie:** I won't tell you what happened to the last one. [Laughs]

**Paul:** Was it a deer?

**Debbie:** No it was a fence...

**Paul:** ...A fence. Well, I remember that!

**Debbie:** ...a fence jumped out at me. [Laughs] [Hip-hop country music plays in lot]

**Paul:** Later that night, there's even an impromptu concert. [At concert on mic] Now let's get back to it now.

**Paul:** And guess who gets invited to sing. [At concert] Have we got any flatbedders out there? Any flatbedders? OK great.

Yes, in yet another side gig, I'm a singer-songwriter. [At concert] Well we had a friend, he fell deeply in love with a female flatbedder. But when she learned that he pulled a reefer, she rejected him, cause he didn't know, you know how, the chains and the binders [Paul tunes guitar on stage and scattered clapping] And Denise and I— raise your hand, that's my wife Denise— we wrote this song together. And it's called "I'll never run that back door anymore." [Someone in crowd laughs, Paul begins singing and playing guitar and harmonica]

In a way, concerts like this are a re-enactment of a bygone age, when drivers would be laid over at some truckstop. Someone would bring out a grill, [Paul's song in background] someone would contribute a case of beer, someone might commandeer a chicken or two off their load, and someone might just have a guitar. [Paul strums guitar vigorously and song comes to an end] Maybe that's why this e-log thing is such a big deal. [Crowd claps and shout affirmations] Because there just doesn't seem to be time for those encounters anymore. [Paul starts strumming guitar again] And maybe that's why I still come back here; to hear the stories, the stories that seduced me into this life so long ago. [Guitar playing comes to a stop.]

**Tim:** [00:29:49] Yeah, I started driving back in '88, hauling out of Mississippi, furniture.

**Paul:** That same night we talk to a guy named Tim.

**Tim:** And they would tell you right quick, if you cannot turn 5000 miles a week, we don't need you. We've got a stack of applications over here this thick, we can replace you tomorrow. And of course then, I would take a gram of good crank dope, and I would do a line every three, four-hundred miles.

**Paul:** And for some there really was this dark side to the old days— I mean, taking whatever drugs you could take to stay awake. Stories like this of trucking's wilder days really aren't that hard to come by around here.

**Tim:** We would stop, exit 30 in Tennessee, exit 200 in Virginia...

**Paul:** [Tim's voices fades into background] And for some reason, now more than ever I think, we've been herded onto the digital reservation of the e-log, and it's like we have to tell these stories. [low tone starts to build anticipation]

**Tim:** I remember one time I went all the way to Boston. I'm trying to get through traffic, get back. Massachusetts State Police pulls me over, he pats my pockets, I had on cargo pants. The bottle was down in the bottom of it, he missed it. I could have gotten years in the penitentiary then. So I go down to the rest stop in Rhode Island and do two lines of dope, just to get on back. But then, it wasn't to get high, it was to do a job.

**Paul:** [To Tim] It was for your work, it wasn't recreational.

**Tim:** Turning miles— turn and burn man.

**Paul:** How did you get off of that stuff?

**Tim:** There's three ways you get off of crank, meth: jail, the grave, or Jesus. Uh, I was in Amarillo, and I'd been up two or three days, and I prayed to God, help me. And he spoke to me, and he said it's up to you. It was through the grace of God that I got off of it.

**Paul:** So now you're off the crank. [Tim affirms] You've prayed, God's intervened. What do you tell your boss that needs 5000 miles a week from you?

**Tim:** [Laughs] I tell him I can't do it no more, I work for myself. I'm an owner-operator now. Thank God he delivered me from that aspect too. Now I work when I want to. Thank God I've been delivered. [Sound of running motors and trucker duo playing "Free Bird on acoustic guitar]

**Paul:** I got my first ELD back in 2016. A few months after that watermelon wreck I told you about in Knoxville, the fleet I work for announced that we would roll out an e-log pilot program. Guinea pigs were needed. Something about Knoxville jarred me more than it should have. For years, I had pushed myself to the limit as a produce hauler, and had never been bothered by the "what-ifs," but after Knoxville it just seemed like my nine lives were up. At that time, the e-log felt kind of like a way out of all that. So I let Brenda, our safety officer, know I would give it a try. Yep that's right folks, I volunteered. [Truckers singing "Free Bird" continues and minimalistic tone begins] When the day came, they trained me on how to operate the e-log, which recorded the truck's data straight onto a basic Samsung tablet. The company told me not to go crazy on Netflix, and off I went. [Paul playing guitar begins] Since I was now carting around this brand-new tablet, I started recording some of my songs and posting them on YouTube.

**Paul:** [From Youtube video audio] This song came to me in a dream. And it goes something like this. [Guitar music continues]

I also began writing about my experience of being an old trucker who had to make the e-log switch. I mostly did this just as a cathartic exercise, [Paul's song continues in the background with guitar and harmonica] but on a whim I sent some of these ramblings to an editor at Overdrive Magazine named Todd Dills— you heard from Todd earlier. Todd wound up giving me a shot on his blog, and now on this podcast. So at the risk of being shunned by all my trucker friends, I have to say, in a way, I owe all this to e-logs. [Paul sings and plays guitar] But enough about me. [Song fades out and transitions to chattering voices at MATS and percussive downbeat] All weekend, drivers are waiting for that big update that Mike was telling us about on the new rules for e-logs— what we call “hours of service.”

**Mike:** Yeah, we've had a few people sign up to be members and stuff so far...

**Paul:** Mike Landis even has a booth set up on the showroom floor of MATS.

**Mike:** Dropped a couple thousand dollars out of my own company to build the booth and we trucked it here...

**Paul:** He's got a whole crew here, dressed in their matching black shirts.

**Mike:** ... you know, to get the word out there and show people who we are and what we're doing. And what better place to do that than where you've got thousands of truck drivers in one spot.

**Paul:** It's been a year now since the ELD mandate went into effect, and we're all feeling it in one way or the other. So we sit through long seminars by government administrators...

**FMCSA Representative:** [00:35:40] [Speaks on mic] So that's kinda really what we have...

**Paul:** But no news.

**FMCSA Representative:** Well I don't think we have any more time for questions...  
[Crowd laughs]

**Paul:** Then on our last day at MATS, transportation secretary Elaine Chao gets up to give us the keynote address. [Applause] If the DOT has something to say, this would be the time. But right away... [Crowd says “aww” in disappointment]... the power goes out. Eventually, the power comes back. [Crowd claps and responds in relief]

**Elaine Chao:** [00:36:16] Just let me repeat: welcome to my hometown. [Crowd laughs] I hope you really enjoy your stay, and that you spend lots and lots of money...

**Paul:** And she gets to what we're all waiting to hear...

**Elaine:** I'm pleased to announce today that the department is moving forward with the next step, which is the notice of proposed rule-making for Hours of Service rules. [Applause] So I can't go into the details, but let me note that the department understands...

**Paul:** Still nothing, no news.

**Elaine:** ...the strong interest in increasing flexibility, and is giving it serious consideration...

**Paul:** Just then... [Alarm goes off] an alarm sounds, is someone trying to tell us something?

**Elaine:** They don't want to let me tell you the good news!

**Paul:** Instead, the speech turns to the usual platitudes.

**Elaine:** You are the lifeblood of what makes our commerce work.

**Paul:** I'm so tired of that line

**Elaine:** You enable bread to appear on our grocery shelves, and we need to remind Americans of that...

**Paul:** Blah...blah... blah

**Elaine:** ...and we want to thank you for it.

**Paul:** And without really saying much of anything at all, Elaine Chao bids us farewell. Elaine: America would come to a screeching halt if you were not on your jobs helping to make life easier for the rest of us. Thank you so much. [Applause] [Theme music fades in]

**Paul:** The Mid America Trucking show closed the next day. The show trucks drove out in formation, while the Papa John's lot gradually disbanded. MATS was done, but we're just getting started, and we're going to keep following this ELD issue across the series. We'll hear how Mike Landis brought his fight to the streets of Washington D.C. and found unlikely allies in the process. For some context, we'll go deep into the history of trucking with one of my favorite writers. We'll hang out at truck stops and meet the families of truckers, to understand how this business affects the people around us, and we'll peer into a future where the trucks may just drive themselves. But first, we're going to Grand Island, Nebraska to find out why anyone would want to drive a truck in the first place.

**Voice 4:** [00:38:54] I was intrigued and so I called her up and said, "Now come again about this truck driving, now what did you say?"



**Paul:** Thanks to everyone who entrusted us with their stories. We'll catch you again, Over the Road. [Theme continues]

It takes a lot of people to make a podcast, and I'm gonna tell you about all of them.

Our Over the Road pit crew includes producer and sound designer Ian Coss, and contributing producer Lacy Roberts at Transmitter Media. Our editor for Overdrive Magazine is Todd Dills. Our digital producer is Erin Wade, our project manager is Audrey Mardavich, and our executive producer for Radiotopia is Julie Shapiro. I'm Long Haul Paul. [Theme continues]

All the music on the show is by Ian Coss and myself, featuring performances by Travis "The Snakeman" Wammack, Terry "Two Socks" Richardson, The Late Great Roger Clark, Jan Gullet, Jim Whitehead and Andrew Marshall. Additional engineering by Donnie Gullet down in Muscle Shoals, Alabama.

Special thanks to these drivers and vendors, whose voices you heard throughout: J.D. Howard of the Ohio Great Lakes Regions; Atlanta-based small fleet owner-operator Eric Turner; Daniel and Phyllis Snow and the Goose Freightliner Classic; Chad Boblett, from Kentucky horse country; Robert Palm, creator of Truckers Final Mile.org, Christopher Burnett of Burnett Farm Toys, and Debbie "Dingo" Desiderato. We also heard from Devrie Jones, Jason Earlywine, James Raines, Bubba Davis, fellow singing truckers, Brad James, Taylor Barker and The Jake brake Junkie himself: Terrance Mathis.

Over the Road is made possible by support from the folks I've worked for, for a really long time - Moeller Trucking: now celebrating over 30 years of safe and reliable transportation for the food industry. For more information, check out Moeller Trucking dot com. [Theme continues]

Over the Road is a collaboration between Overdrive Magazine and PRX's Radiotopia -- a collection of the best independent podcasts around. I've turned a lot of overnight reefer loads listening to shows like The Memory Palace and Criminal. Seriously, find out more about the whole network at Radiotopia.fm.

Look for Overdrive Magazine at [Overdriveonline.com](http://Overdriveonline.com), where you can read Todd's Channel One-Nine blog, hear the Overdrive Radio podcast, and explore more about trucking.

You can find Over the Road online at [overtheroad.fm](http://overtheroad.fm). Be sure to follow us on all those usual platforms too-- Facebook, Twitter and Instagram @overtheroadpod. You can see some of my videos on YouTube by looking for Long Haul Paul Music.

Thanks for listening, hanging in til the end of the run. We'll be back next week with a Channel One-Nine Special, then in two weeks with more stories from Over the Road. [Theme music fades out]

**Paul:** [Experimenting with different intonations] It's like a watermelon you can have as a friend. It's like a watermelon you can have as a friend. You can have as a friend, you can have as a friend. No, no. You can have as a friend. No, no, no, no. A watermelon you can have as a friend.

[00:44:00] **END OF EPISODE.**