

The Good Ol' Days?

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People love to reminisce about the 'good ol' days'. I am guilty of it too, specially when things are going wrong. It seems that looking back at times long ago veils the past with rose colored glass and it is no different within the trucking industry. Was the past in the trucking industry better for women than now? That answer is simple...a resounding NO!

In 1982 when I decided to go over the road as a driver, women were just beginning to enter the profession in greater numbers with an eye to going solo. Most women who were already drivers ran team with husbands, brothers or significant others, though some companies required a marriage license for a mixed gender team to run together. Equal employment opportunity laws were being cited left and right by some women which brought on some companies having to meet employee percentage quotas of women drivers.

Our brother drivers weren't very brotherly back then either. It was a rare day when a woman would key up on the radio and NOT hear several comebacks about how she should be home cooking supper and raising kids, or worse. Some men were so insecure about women entering the industry that they would try to terrorize a lady driver by threatening to run her off the road. A friend of mine was beaten at a truck stop in Indiana by a couple of drivers who thought that she was taking a 'man's job' away from them.

Many companies balked at hiring women because of the misconception that we could not handle the physical requirements of the job. The personnel manager at my first company was of this mindset. His comment to me was that he didn't think women should be truck drivers because 'no woman could hand unload a load of 50# sacks of potatoes.' My response to him was that I didn't know many men who would even consider unloading a load of 50# sacks of potatoes, most men were smart enough to hire a lumper to do it.

When you started with a company that hired students, you would do your paper work and then go to the driver's lounge or nearby truckstop and wait for a lead seat driver to choose you to take out as second seat. Needless to say, it was sort of a meat market with the good looking women being chosen first. There weren't the double bunk sleepers like there are now. Company trucks had a single bunk in them...the size of a twin bed or smaller. You had four choices of sleeping if you were laid over; getting a motel, sleeping in shifts, across the doghouse or with your co driver.

Trucks back then were for the most part cabovers. Tilt and telescoping steering wheels weren't even thought of yet and most trucks didn't have power steering. These last two things were the worst drawback to some women as it took real strength to turn the wheel and some women were too short legged to reach the pedals, but strength could be gained and there were ways of making one's feet reach the pedals. A husband/ wife team I knew rigged blocks that hooked over the pedals so her feet could reach the pedals. Of course, if DOT would of stopped them while these blocks were in place, I am sure she would have had to quit driving, but DOT wasn't as prevalent as they are now.

Truck stops were not the havens that they are now with separate facilities and showers. We solo lady drivers would often times have to find a male driver or another female to stand outside

of the men's room or showers and guard the door. What few showers there were that were for women were in the restroom itself. They were little more than a shower stall with just a shower curtain across it. You would leave your clothes outside on the chair and put your billfold in a plastic bag and take it in the shower with you and hope that no one took your clothes while you were showering. If you needed necessities you had to find a store because the truck stops carried little, if any, type of feminine needs.

Though at times I bemoan the loss of some aspects of the good ol' days, I wouldn't go back to them for a million dollars...well perhaps a million dollars, but realistically today's world of trucking for lady drivers is much better than it was twenty years ago.

Attitudes of companies and our male counterparts for the most part, have changed, equipment is much better suited for women and women are being accepted more readily as capable truckers. We've come a long way ladies, from the good ol' days.