

## **Episode 120: Todd was stranded in a snowstorm**

I think that no matter where you live, there's the possibility of experiencing some kind of bad weather.

We lived in Maine for about 13 years. And since I was self employed and could pretty much dictate my own schedule, I decided to work part-time for my town's EMS service. So I got trained in emergency response, and was often called out when someone called 911 with a medical emergency or an injury. And usually I was working with a paramedic, who was pretty much in charge of the situation because they were more experienced. I would do whatever was needed to assist them and the patient, and a lot of times that meant I was driving the ambulance to the hospital while they took care of the patient in the back.

There's one call I remember pretty clearly. This was in the winter, at night, and we had just had a big snowstorm so the driving conditions were pretty bad. We got a call about a car accident. This was just a single vehicle crash – the person had lost control and run into a tree. We got there and found just one person, the driver, and she was still in the car with some broken bones. Her worst injury was her broken pelvis – she had what's called an "open book" fracture, where the pelvis is broken into right and left halves. It's really painful, and she was conscious and experiencing all of it.

We got her out of the car and into the ambulance, and I was not looking forward to this trip. It was still snowing pretty hard, and it was dark, so the visibility was poor, and the roads were slippery. And this is rural Maine, so the hospital was not close by – we had to get to the hospital down in Portland. In perfect weather, it was about a 30 minute drive. On this night, it took more than an hour.

And that was some high-stress driving. I had to kind of creep along and make sure I stayed on the road and didn't slide off into the ditch. And there was the added pressure that this poor girl in the back was depending on my driving to get her to the emergency room. On top of that, she's lying on her back with a badly broken pelvis, and every time I hit a bump in the road she would scream in pain and I would feel terrible because I hit that bump. We eventually got there, but that ride seemed to take forever.

My guest today is Todd. He lives in Canada, and he has seen his share of bad winter weather. He's also a truck driver, so in a lot of cases he finds himself driving his tractor trailer in those conditions. Most of the time, it's no big deal. He's used to it. With poor visibility and slippery roads, everyone on the highway just keeps moving forward, slowly and carefully, and eventually you get there.

But there was one time he was driving during a bad snowstorm, and that slow forward movement came to a stop. And that's where he stayed.

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### **Scott**

When this happened, you were fairly new to driving a truck. What attracted you to that kind of work?

### **Todd**

I kind of fell into it, actually. In high school, I took trades and everything - electrical and machine shop and automotive. I just got a job out of high school at a factory that my dad worked at. It was paying well, so I've kind of stayed there for 15 years. I lost my job when they decided to relocate but I didn't want to. I'd say it was, kind of, like, a backup plan, I guess, and I fell into it.

**Scott**

There's some kind of attraction about having a job where you get to be by yourself on the road. What do you like about that?

**Todd**

The freedom, I guess. I mean, it gets frustrating at times because of the way people drive and everything, but my company is pretty good too. They tell you where you're going and they don't ask you why it took so long to get there or why you went a certain way there, so it's pretty good. You're kind of your own boss, I guess, in a sense.

**Scott**

Are there any special skills involved in driving a truck on the highway as opposed to city driving? It seems like driving on the highway might even be a little easier since you just put it in gear and just go.

**Todd**

Yeah, in a way. It's definitely more challenging to navigate around streets, cars, and stuff in the city. I mean, eventually, you still have to get off the highway and go to a customer. But yes, it's probably much more difficult in the city all the time.

**Scott**

At this time, you were fairly new to driving a truck. How long have you been driving?

**Todd**

I got my license in 2008 but I didn't really utilize it too much until 2009. I was, kind of, running trailers around the city. January of 2010 was when I started on the highway. This happened in December of 2010, so not even a year on the highway.

**Scott**

Yeah, less than a year. Was your truck one of those that was set up with a bunk behind the cab so that you could overnight?

**Todd**

Yes, I had a bunk in the back.

**Scott**

What kind of facilities do you have in that? I mean, there's a bed obviously. What else do you have back there?

**Todd**

There is a bed and some heater controls - like a fan and temperature control - that are attached in the front. Then, that truck also had a separate bunk heater, which is tied into the diesel fuel - it's a separate heater, so you don't have to have the truck running to get heat. Other than that, it's just cupboards, storage, and a TV thankfully.

**Scott**

It sounds like a little micro-size apartment.

**Todd**

Yes, it is. Actually, the truck I have now has a lot nicer setup, bigger space, and everything.

**Scott**

All right. Well, let's talk about this trip. You live in Canada, in Ontario. You started this trip from Brantford, Ontario, Canada. Where were you headed?

**Todd**

I was headed to Port Huron, Michigan, which should have been about a 2.5 to 3 hour drive total.

**Scott**

And the distance is, I think, like you said, around 130 miles, which would be 210 kilometers.

**Todd**

Probably around that area.

**Scott**

All right. And what were you hauling?

**Todd**

I was hauling little cardboard tubes that you see inside of, like, your duct tape, painter tape, or scotch tape. They come in certain lengths or cut up short, so not much weight whatsoever.

**Scott**

So a fairly light load then...

**Todd**

Mmhmm, yep.

**Scott**

This trip involves 3 main highways.

**Todd**

Yes.

**Scott**

This was on a Monday. What time did you start driving?

**Todd**

I can't remember exactly what time I left but I believe it was probably around 4 o'clock in the morning.

**Scott**

So, you get started really early then.

**Todd**

Yeah, that customer at that time wanted us there early in the morning. It had snowed overnight, which was nothing unusual, I guess, for the wintertime. As I got on the 403, I started noticing that the plows have gone through one lane, but it was just that type of snow that once the plow

goes through or once the cars drive on, it turns to almost like a sheet of ice on top of the snow. So it was pretty hectic, I guess, to navigate through that. I just took my time. Those were the conditions for that stretch. It was probably about a half an hour normal drive on that road.

**Scott**

Did you ever consider not making that trip because of the driving conditions?

**Todd**

I definitely did when I got on the highway, but the problem is there's not really any very good place to turn around. You can't get off, turn around, and go back the other way at a lot of the on-ramps. It kind of crossed my mind, I guess, but I just started trekking it on. As I hit the 401, which was in Woodstock, Ontario, the icy conditions were gone, but the wind had picked up. Then, there was much more snow on the highway. The plows have gone through but they just couldn't keep up with the amount of snow that was coming in plus the drifting. So as I navigated down there, pretty much just the middle lane was clear. The right lane was kind of iffy. Then, the problem with the left lane was the plows had gone through but then, at certain points, they stopped plowing so that people would go to the pass. Then, mid-pass, all of the sudden, there'd be, like, a big pile of snow - not a pile of snow but the un-plowed road in front of them. So, twice along that stretch, cars actually slid sideways beside me and I thought, "They're gonna come into me," but they luckily saved it.

**Scott**

I know people who live in cold climates are kind of used to driving in snowy weather and bad conditions. Was there a lot of traffic on the highway?

**Todd**

In that stretch on the 401, there seemed to be a lot more than usual. I don't know whether people had left early because of the storm or just people slowed down because of the storm - it kind of all got congested - but that is a pretty busy stretch alone there.

**Scott**

Finally, you got to the third main highway. This is the 402.

**Todd**

As I got on there, I was pretty much just in the right lane. You could see, like, the tire tracks of cars and everything else was snow. By the time we got there, we were probably only doing, like, 40-50 kilometers an hour. At the very start of it, there were a couple of trucks and a couple of cars passed. Then, after that, it was pretty much single file the whole way till probably 70 kilometers - it was just like that pretty much. The Fast Lane was— I mean, it was hard to tell what lane you were in at that point. So there's pretty much only one clear lane of traffic so, like I said, at the start of it, a couple of people got brave and passed some people. But it was just too dangerous to try to go out there. As we navigated down the 402, we were doing both 50-60 kilometers an hour - it wasn't too bad - and probably got halfway down when it was starting to slow down a little bit. We got to around the 35-kilometer mark and we stopped. There were trees on both sides of me, so I was kind of sheltered a little bit from the weather. We stopped there for maybe 5-10 minutes. Then, we moved again a little bit and stopped again. We were stopped for about half an hour and I was going through my head and thinking, "Is this it? Are we stranded now?" You don't know what's happening. Then, finally, we started moving again. It's okay now. We're good to go now. We're going slowly. Well, I got about another five kilometers and it stopped again. This time, I had an open field beside me and the snow was just blowing across.

They couldn't see the car in front of me when we were stopped half the time. We just kind of sat there for a while. Eventually, I realized that we weren't moving.

**Scott**

With heavy wind, your truck is a big target. Was it kind of swaying? How was it affected by the wind?

**Todd**

Yeah, it was getting rocked. I was never in fear of it tipping over, but it was rocking back and forth pretty much the whole day and night the first night.

**Scott**

In your truck, you got a CB radio. What were you hearing? What other reports were you hearing from other people?

**Todd**

When I first got stopped, of course, everybody was asking, "What's going on?" After a certain amount of time, we determined that the highway wasn't moving. I could hear other truck drivers saying, "Oh, well, I'm on this road and we're still getting through." Then, another one would be, "Oh, I'm on this road and I'm getting through." Then, eventually it was— I mean, it wasn't funny, but it was kind of comical to hear every road got shut down one by one because somebody's getting stuck in the middle of the road or going in the ditch and blocking a lane. Just over the course of the day, everything just got shut down.

**Scott**

Was that the actual reason for the eventual stop and traffic - because some car up ahead had spun out or gotten in a ditch and was blocking the road?

**Todd**

To tell you the truth, I'm not exactly sure why we even stopped. When I eventually got out, I had to weave around a bunch of stopped cars, but I never saw anything blocking the entire road unless they'd cleared it out before I got there. Honestly, I think people got stuck in the middle of the road at some point in time - maybe it got drifted in and they couldn't go - so I'm not exactly sure why we got stopped.

**Scott**

The outside temperature must have been pretty cold. How cold was it inside your truck? I mean, you got a heater.

**Todd**

Yeah, so the problem was I had troubles with the heat in my truck - the heat from the engine - and I hadn't had a chance to get it fixed, so it was pretty cold in the front of the truck, but I had my bunk heater cranked on. If I had the bunk heater on, like, full blast, it would cook out of the truck - it worked really well. The first day, I had it turned out more than normal, just to keep warm. I think the outside temperature was only about -10 degrees Celsius, but with the wind, I'm not sure - it was -25 or something like that.

**Scott**

Were you in communication with anyone? Like, you must have, like, a dispatch operator or somebody who keeps track of where you are and things, right?

**Todd**

Yeah. When we stopped, I think, the first time, I think I called my dispatch just to let them know that I was probably going to be late because of the weather, obviously, and we got stopped. I don't remember how long after we stopped that I let them know, "We're stopped now. I don't know when I'm gonna get out of here or if I'm gonna get out of here." Obviously, I let my mom know what was going on.

**Scott**

What did she think of this?

**Todd**

At first, she wasn't too worried about it. Of course, after she started watching the news and seeing how bad it was, she definitely wanted me to get out of there.

**Scott**

I understand there was a car in front of you. Everybody stopped at this point and there's a car in front of you, which is a VW Jetta. What did you observe about that car?

**Todd**

A lot. When we first stopped - I think I sent you a couple of videos - it was blowing so hard that you couldn't even see it sometimes. I was sitting there and I spent some of the time in my bunk. I just, kind of, got bored. I kind of peeked out and I started noticing snowdrifts actually drifting up the side of the car. After a while, I looked out and the snowdrift was actually almost to the roof of his car on the driver's side. I may as well get out and see if they're okay. Just as I got out and got bundled up, they were getting out of their car - it was 2 businessmen in suits. The driver crawled out the passenger side. So, the 3 of us actually shoveled the snow drift away, so we wouldn't get buried.

**Scott**

Of course, now that you got shoveled the snow away, you still can't go anywhere.

**Todd**

Yeah, exactly. You can see the pictures I sent you. The drift was actually drifting around my truck as well. After a while, it was just impassable. Like, there's no way anything gets through, except for a snowmobile.

**Scott**

At some point, you took some pictures and sent them to a local news channel.

**Todd**

Yes. After a while of sitting there, I obviously got bored and stir-crazy, so I got bundled up and started walking around. Part of the reason I got out too was to make sure some of the cars that were close to me had water, food, and everything. I started taking pictures. I thought, "Well, I'll just send pictures to the local news channel that I usually watch because they actually had - I forget what they called it now - advertised to listeners to send in pictures of the weather, like sunrises or whatever. So, all of a sudden - I had no intentions of anything - I just sent the pictures to say, "Hey, this is the pictures of what I'm going through." It wasn't long after that when they called and emailed me back and said, "Would you be interested in being on the news?" So I said, "Yeah, I guess so." That was when we got stopped at about 9-something in the morning. They have an 11 o'clock news but it was past that, so they asked me if I'd be on the 6 o'clock news. Then, I was on at 11 o'clock that night and, then, the morning show the next

day. That was kind of funny because another news channel contacted me because they had seen me on that network - it wasn't TV, it was just a radio show - and they asked me if I'd do a segment for them. As soon as I did that segment for that one, the first news channel never contacted me again.

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**News Anchor**

The OPP is strongly advising people to stay off the roads. Highway 402 is closed near Sarnia because of extremely snowy conditions. There are reports that wind gusts reach 90 kilometers an hour at times today. Now, the good news is the wind warning has ended for that area. The bad news, snow squall warnings continue. Right now, more than 500 drivers are stranded on the 402 and many have been there for more than 8 hours. Todd MacDougall who drives a truck for a living and is a regular viewer of the evening news six sent in these pictures to us today. They were taken on the 402. He also joins us right now live by phone. Todd, I understand you're stuck on the highway. How long have you been stuck? How much longer do you think it's gonna be?

**Todd**

I'm not too sure. It's been about 9 hours now. I haven't heard any word whatsoever or have any idea when we might be out of here. I would only assume now that we'll be here probably overnight.

**News Anchor**

Todd, what exactly are you driving and what have you been doing for these 9 hours then?

**Todd**

I drive the tractor-trailer. Unfortunately, I don't have a whole lot of weight to help me when I was driving. I've just been in the bunk here watching DVDs all day and listening to the chatter on the CB.

**News Anchor**

Unbelievable. Now, how are you able to stay warm? Where can you keep warm? Do you have food? Do you have any supplies just in the event of something like this?

**Todd**

Yeah. Luckily, I've got a bunk heater in the truck. I've had the truck run just to try to keep the windows de-fogged. It's so windy and so cold. It's hard to keep the temperature up in the engine to actually heat the inside of the truck. I usually have extra food and water, especially in the wintertime just in case of something like this.

**News Anchor**

It's good that you're prepared. These pictures— we're just watching them come through on the screen. These are unbelievable shots. It looks like, in some cases, you've been parked there for so long that the snow is just, sort of, building up and blowing up all around you. I mean, has anybody moved? Do any other drivers have any better luck than you?

**Todd**

No. As far as I can see - the visibility isn't very good - I haven't seen anybody. I've seen a couple of cars sneak past in the fast lane at first in the first couple hours but, from what I'm hearing, they didn't get very far. There's a little Volkswagen Jetta in front of me there and I actually got

out there a while ago and helped them dig outside of his car. It was actually almost at the top of the driver's window - the drift was piled up there.

**News Anchor**

Yeah, we can kind of see that in the picture we have up here now. We can see the Jetta you're talking about and how much it was certainly built up there. What about the police emergency crews? Have you seen them? Have you heard from them? What are their efforts like?

**Todd**

I heard quite a while ago that they're out on their snowmobiles and ATVs. It wasn't until maybe 20 minutes ago that I saw two snowmobiles go in the other direction - they went east on the westbound lanes. I'm not sure where they went through but they didn't stop here.

**News Anchor**

Has anybody been in touch with you to, sort of, let you know what's going on and what kind of efforts they're making?

**Todd**

No. I just had the radio stations on. From what I heard from the other truckers on the CB's - there were different stories here and there - we're not really hearing anything too promising.

**News Anchor**

Todd, do you have any sense at all as to when you might get out of there or is it just a complete mystery to you?

**Todd**

It's a complete mystery. I've heard the other guys saying that the storm is supposed to last till Wednesday - hopefully, not that long. Like I said, I'm pretty sure I'll be here tonight at least.

**News Anchor**

Yeah, I certainly hope not. Okay, Todd, we're gonna keep in touch throughout the evening, and we'll try to get an update from you to let them know. I hope, at that time, you're back home at least, but we'll check back with you. Thanks a lot, Todd.

**Todd**

Okay.

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**Scott**

Okay. So there you were in your truck all alone but everybody nearby was hearing your voice.

**Todd**

Yep.

**Scott**

Do you feel kind of like a celebrity a little bit?

**Todd**

Maybe for a couple of minutes, I guess. It wasn't very long lived, I guess.

**Scott**

So the weather wasn't getting any better. No cars or trucks are moving. You were just stuck there. How boring was it? What else did you do to pass the time?

**Todd**

I was actually lucky I had just a small TV on my truck with a small DVD player. I had just bought the DVD set for Seinfeld. So, I've pretty much managed my time between watching outside, seeing the snow, and watching Seinfeld.

**Scott**

You're sitting there doing nothing, so you watched a show about nothing.

**Todd**

Exactly, yeah.

**Scott**

Were you concerned about running out of fuel?

**Todd**

No. For some reason - I don't know why - I've gotten the idea to keep it above half a tank in the wintertime just in case something did happen. Thankfully, it was not a concern of mine. I could hear a couple of guys from some of the trucks on the CB, when we first got stopped, saying "Oh, I've only got a quarter tank of fuel. What am I going to do?" Somebody else was saying, "I've got an eighth of a tank of fuel. I'm gonna run out sick." I just don't know why they wouldn't think to not put themselves in that situation.

**Scott**

Yeah. You're the rookie driver and you're better prepared than these other veteran drivers.

**Todd**

Yes. By pure luck - I don't know - probably a month prior, I had decided that I better stock up my truck with water and canned food in case something happens. So, I was all set for food and everything like that to stay there for a week.

**Scott**

You were ready. What about when you had to use the bathroom? Does your truck have, like, a little toilet in it or anything?

**Todd**

No, it doesn't. Some of the bigger ones do but most of them don't. I got lucky as far as the BM goes. Anything else, I had to go outside. I can hide between the truck and the trailer, so nobody can see you, but I'm not sure about what the people in the cars were doing.

**Scott**

Yeah, they're in a pretty tough spot there.

**Todd**

It would have been a long night.

**Scott**

At what point did you realize, "I'm gonna be here for the night"?

**Todd**

I think, in the news channel, they actually asked me if I had any idea when I was gonna get out of there - I think it had been 9 hours at that point. I think it was around then when I said to him, "At this point, I can only assume that we're going to be here for the night, at least." I just assumed that the morning would come and everything would clear up and we'd be out of there - it was probably later on that day.

**Scott**

Were you okay with sleeping overnight or was it warm enough in the truck?

**Todd**

It was at first. I definitely slept in the truck many times before, so I went to bed. I had just regular bed sheets. I went to sleep and the wind was rocking the truck so bad. I woke up partway through the night. I was cold and I couldn't figure out why. I have a little alarm clock in my truck that has the temperature on it. It was good. It had gotten down to 4 degrees Celsius inside the truck because the front heat wasn't working well enough and the bunk heater wasn't turned up enough. I had a thermal sleeping bag, so I ended up getting that. I put all my clothes back on, got in the sleeping bag, and slept that way.

**Scott**

Four degrees Celsius - that's, like, 39 Fahrenheit. So that's just barely above freezing inside your truck

**Todd**

Yes, inside my truck. The second day, I woke up - I think I sent you those pictures - opened up my curtains, and actually had snow inside the truck because the heat in the front wasn't working enough to melt the snow and it was blowing so hard inside the truck.

**Scott**

How was it getting in?

**Todd**

I'm not sure. It must have been coming through the fresh air vents, I guess. The important part of it must have been frost because the passenger side window was completely frosted over on the inside to the point where it looked like snow. When I woke up on Tuesday, I opened the curtains and it still wasn't letting up. The weather was just relentless. It was still snowing pretty much just as hard as it was the first day. I opened up and looked outside. At first, there was nothing happening - just cars stopped everywhere. At certain parts of the day, the neighbors found out what was going on - heard the news that everything shut down - so they got on their snowmobiles and started coming around and checking on everybody.

**Scott**

I'm thinking about everyone in their cars. It seems like their cars would run out of gas and people would just freeze to death. Was it that cold? Was there any possibility of walking somewhere or was the snow just too deep that it wasn't able to get through?

**Todd**

A little bit of that. The fact that the visibility was so terrible— like, there was a bridge, I think, maybe an eighth of a mile in front of me the whole time, and I didn't know that bridge was there till like partway through the second day. Like, it was snowing and blowing that hard.

**Scott**

You started hearing snowmobiles coming. Who were those people?

**Todd**

Some of the locals - the neighbors and stuff. The only house I could see was, like, a farmhouse on the other side of a field. It was ways away, but I'm assuming people have seen the news and realized what was going on. They were actually very nice. I heard from other people that they brought sandwiches and water. So, the whole day was on the locals buzzing up and down with the snowmobiles. Then, I forget at what point in time that day - maybe mid-day - when the OPP started showing up and evacuating people off the highway.

**Scott**

You talked to some of the people on snowmobiles, and they offered you a ride down, right?

**Todd**

Yes. Well, when I was out taking pictures one time, a couple of them came by, stopped, and asked me if I wanted to get out of there. At that time, there were people in cars who didn't have any supplies and heat like I did, so I just told them, "I'm good for a while. Worry about the people in the cars first because they obviously have less room and they don't have food." So I thankfully declined their offer.

**Scott**

Yeah, if you're in a VW Jetta, you don't have a bunk and a heater to spend the night.

**Todd**

Yeah, not too comfortable.

**Scott**

Right. Then, you saw that the policemen were starting to show up on snowmobiles, right?

**Todd**

Yes. They were running back and forth beside me up and down the highway and, like, getting people off. The funny thing was there seemed to be hardly any cars stuck over there on the other side of the highway. I don't know whether there was just less traffic or it was just the spot I was in. From what I heard, a helicopter was landing over there and taking people to churches and libraries and stuff like that to get them off the highway - just evacuating. I was talking to mom and mom was watching the news. She was like, "Oh, they're planning on having everybody off the highway by the end of the day, so you should be safe at the end of the day." I said, "Okay." So, the whole day was just like, there were, like, a buzz or bees of snowmobiles running back and forth.

I think I was out in the evening. It was getting that close to dark and I was out taking pictures. A couple of OPP snowmobiles came up - they both had 2 seats on both the snowmobiles. They stopped and asked me, like, "What are you doing?" "I'm just out taking pictures and whatnot." He said, "Well, we're evacuating everybody off the highway. You have to leave. You can't stay here tonight. We're getting everybody off. There are 2 more OPPs." The OPP is the Ontario Provincial Police. He said, "There are 2 more OPPs coming behind us in about half an hour. We'll tell them to stop and get you. Just get in your truck and turn your lights on so they know what truck you're in and they'll get you." I said, "Okay." So I got in my truck and sat there for at least 1 - 1.5 hours. It was getting so cold because I was sitting in the front where the heat wasn't

working. It was getting so cold. I thought, "Okay, I gotta go warm up in the bunk." So I went into the bunk. Literally, 2-3 minutes after I got back there, I heard the snowmobiles coming. By the time I got out of bed in the front to try to flash my lights or whatever, they were gone. So, they don't know if they didn't get radioed to pick me up or if they didn't see the trucker - I'm not sure why they didn't show up. Like I said, my mom was watching the news and she was telling me, "Oh, everybody's gonna be evacuated." I told her what happened there and she was getting pretty, pretty worried. She definitely didn't want me on the highway the second night.

**Scott**

Maybe you should have just told your mom, "Hey, I'm at a farmhouse. These people are taking great care of me. You got nothing to worry about."

**Todd**

Yeah, I probably could have just taken the worry off of her a little bit.

**Scott**

So she was hearing reports. I mean, the police were saying, "Yep, everybody's evacuated. Everybody's off the highway." But she knew differently.

**Todd**

Yep. She had texted or called me or something - I guess, back then, I probably called more than texted - and she said that. "Yeah, the news is saying everybody's off the highway. They don't even know you're there. If something happens, you're out there all by yourself." I was like, "Mom, just relax. I've got food. I got water. I got heat. I'm fine. I'll be okay." Finally, I put her mind at ease. She said, "Make sure you call first thing in the morning and tell them to come to get you." So that was my agreement. I told her that I'd call first thing in the morning. To the best of my knowledge, I was the only person on that highway on the second night.

**Scott**

Yeah, that had to be kind of a weird feeling. I mean, on the first night, you're all going through the same thing together, even though you were better prepared than most of them. But on that second night, you're all alone. Was that kind of creepy?

**Todd**

It was. I wouldn't say creepy because it was definitely weird. After dark, I kind of got the urge to go outside and walk around but I thought, "It's cold out there. If something happens, then I'm definitely screwed." so I just decided to stay hunkered down again. On Wednesday, it was definitely a lot clearer. It was sunny out. I think it was still snowing or blowing a little bit. I got up in the morning. I promised my mom that I would call the OPP and tell them that I had gotten missed the night before and roughly where I was. So they said, "Okay, well, it'll be a while. We'll send somebody out to get you." I said, "Okay."

I can't remember how long has passed since that phone call when I started noticing cars all around me. I couldn't see that well, but I started noticing something up ahead, so I looked, and it was a bunch of farm tractors with giant snowblowers. They were working their way down the highway, like, weaving in between all the abandoned cars and clearing out their sides of the roads and in between them all. I kind of had nothing else to do, so I thought I'd sit there and watch them. They slowly made their way back and they got close to me. I was kind of wondering what was gonna happen when they got to me. He did a double take, looked over, and saw me, so he pulled up beside me and - I forget exactly what he said - asked me if I was okay or

whatever. He asked me if I stuck - that's what he said. "Are you stuck?" I said, "No, I don't think so."

He said, "Once we clear the snow around here, you can go." I was thinking to myself, "Well, where am I going?" Like, I didn't know. I didn't realize I could get through up ahead. So, I asked him, "Well, go wherever you're going." I said, "Oh, are you sure?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "Okay." He said, "There are probably cops all around. If anybody ever stops and asks you what you're doing, just let them know that I told you to make it easier for us to clear it away, that I told you to go and just take your time." So it was Wednesday, almost exactly 48 hours from the time I got stopped, when I started rolling again.

**Scott**

Weren't you surrounded by other vehicles, though? How did you get your big truck weaving in between them?

**Todd**

Right where we stopped there, one of the trucks that passed me when we first got on the 402 was in the ditch beside me - you can see that red truck. The transport truck was in the ditch. I thought that, because he was in the ditch, no cars came up beside me. Again, it was pretty much all single file. So I was able to, once the snowplows had cleared the shoulders. We kind of stopped in the middle of both lanes, so the snowplows were able to clear on both sides of all the vehicles in front of me. So I just had to weave and, kind of, pick the best route and see which way I had the most room and I made it through.

**Scott**

Okay. So you weaved your way around through all the abandoned vehicles. From that point, was it just smooth sailing the rest of the way?

**Todd**

Not really. I got probably about 5-6 kilometers past where I was. Of course, I was going slow because I had to go around all the cars. I could see 2 OPP officers - I'm not exactly sure what they were doing. They were up underneath a bridge. As soon as they heard the engine, they probably thought I was a snowplow at first or snowblower. As soon as they realized it wasn't, they did a double-take. As soon as they saw that, they came walking down that hill with authority, like, getting ready to not slap the cuffs on me, but that's kind of the way I felt - like, what are you doing here? Where did you come from? What are you doing? I don't know if they thought I was stealing the truck or what. He came over and asked me, "What are you doing? Where are you coming from?" So I told him the story about the snowblower and he said, "All right." He's kind of hesitant about it. He said, "You've made it this far. Just take your time. There are cars all over the place up there. Just take your time and weave your way through. I said, "Okay," and carried on my way.

**Scott**

Obviously, since you're going from Canada into Michigan, you have to go through customs. What was involved with that?

**Todd**

Before customs, there's a toll booth where you have to pay to cross the bridge. I remember rolling up there thinking that this guy hasn't seen anybody for a couple of days. The other thing was I wasn't even sure if anybody would be there because there was no traffic. Why would they even be there? So I pulled up to the toll booth and the guy was looking at me pretty funny, but

he never said a word. He took my money and I went away. The customs— for anybody who has never crossed the border, some of them are very professional as they should be because it's an important job, but some of them are just like your buddy type of thing on the street - they joke around and they talk to you like you're normal or whatever. Some of them are very, very serious - they go right to the point, they don't joke around, and they don't ask anything other than business. I heard that border is a training border, so they're even more that way. I didn't know what to expect when I pulled up to the custom's booth, so I rolled up there, rolled my window down, and shut the truck off. He opened the window and said to me, "Where the fuck did you come from?" That just threw me because, like I said, they never joke around, they never swear. So, I explained to him the story, and he said, "You've been stuck there for 2 days?!" I said, "Yeah, I was on the highway for 2 full days." They asked me a couple of other questions and he basically said, "It looks like you've been through enough, so you're on your way." I left and I finally made it to the customer 2 days later.

**Scott**

Yeah. It's ironic. You mentioned the customer wanted you there early that first day, and you ended up being 2 days late. What was their reaction?

**Todd**

We don't actually see that customer. We would just drop the trailer in the door and take the other one out. I'm sure when I called dispatch on the first day, they were notified of what was going on. Plus, it was pretty snowy there too.

**Scott**

I'd say you had a pretty good excuse.

**Todd**

Yeah, exactly. I didn't have much choice.

**Scott**

Now you had to turn around and go back. Wasn't the highway kind of still clogged with cars?

**Todd**

Yeah. I can't remember who told me but I wasn't even thinking. They said that the 402 is still not open, so my focus was getting off the highway. I ended up at a truck truckstop in Marysville, Michigan. I had to sit there for 3 hours before the highway was opened across and go back.

**Scott**

So three more hours with nothing to do.

**Todd**

Yep. I guess, at that point, I was used to it. Then, I got across the 402. I was actually shocked they even opened it that early with that icy conditions that I had on the 403. There are a lot of curves around Sarnia and I remember taking my time and thinking, "Man, it wouldn't take much for somebody to slide out and go in the ditch on this road." Like I said, I was surprised that it was open, but I wasn't stopping.

**Scott**

It seems like it would just take forever to get the highway open again because of all the abandoned cars. I mean, all these cars are sitting there. The drivers or owners of the cars were

nowhere to be seen - they're safe somewhere now. I'm sure they're thinking, "Wow, when can I go back and get my car?" but it just seems like such a huge project.

**Todd**

Yeah, the towing companies would have been definitely busy in that part of it. I'm actually glad that I didn't get evacuated because I think it would have been a very frustrating situation because I heard people didn't know where their cars were. They took the driver to the church somewhere and their cars were wherever, so I heard it was kind of a nightmare trying to get back to their vehicles.

**Scott**

Were their cars mostly still on the highway, or did the cars get towed?

**Todd**

By the time I got back there, they were definitely cleaning them off. There were still a bunch still on the highway. When I was going back - that's the weird part, like I said earlier - going eastbound, there wasn't - I don't know whether they started on that side first or what it was, but I didn't have to weave around any cars going all the way home. There were cars and trucks in the ditch still, but not on the road.

**Scott**

Mom must have been pretty glad to see you.

**Todd**

Yep, she was pretty happy when I got off that road for sure.

**Scott**

This happened back in 2010. Have you seen anything like this happen again since then?

**Todd**

I've been through a couple of storms probably just as bad. There was another one - probably, in 2012, I was going to Holland, Michigan. In that one, I was behind a car or an SUV and we couldn't see the road. Like, we couldn't see anything and were just taking our time. I remember seeing taillights that were kind of funny and I was like, "What are they doing?" I realized, "Oh, that guy went in the ditch. They didn't know it. I guess I better not follow him anymore." I was literally driving down the road and hit the rumble strips. I have to look up at my side window to see, kind of, which side of the road I was on to see which way to go. Actually, that trip too - I mean, I finally made it to Michigan. My headlights were probably like the size of a 2d each. That was all that was showing. I got there and it was automotive stuff. You had to call the dispatch whenever you got there, so I called in. Again, this is another funny one, it was a woman that I'd never heard swear before. I called in and I said to her, "It's Todd. I made it." She said, "You made it where?" I said, "I made it to Holland." She was, "How the fuck did you make it there?! Everybody else is in the ditch!" So I've definitely driven through a couple of other storms that were just as bad but didn't get stopped, thankfully.

**Scott**

If there's any way of getting through a storm, it sounds like you'd find a way

**Todd**

Yup, usually. It's kind of funny too. I can't remember if it's later that week or the next week, in 2010, I was going in the same direction and I was kind of noticing the same conditions. I

stopped in London. There's an actual truck stop where I parked. My dispatcher at the time was—you didn't know how to take them. Sometimes, when you call them, they'd be like, "No problem." Other times, they'd be, "Why would you do that type of thing?" So I called him and said, "Yes, I'm parking at the truck stop because it's snowing pretty good." He had some things to say and I told him, "I spent 2 days stranded on the highway. If I'm gonna get stranded in the storm again, I'm gonna be at a truck stop." So he said, "Okay." I sat there for - I don't know - a couple of hours until it cleared up at that time, so I went on my way.

**Scott**

So you already carried extra supplies. Did going through this change any of your practices or any of your driving routines?

**Todd**

Maybe, I'll be quicker to pull over, I guess, if I am on that course - after telling you the story that I just told you, I guess it's not really true. But the company I'm with now really pushes that if you're not comfortable, the equipment and your life is more important than trying to get a load there. So now, maybe not right away, I would stop a lot sooner now than I would have back then, probably.

**Scott**

Yeah. Driver safety has to be the priority.

**Todd**

Yes. It's very, very stressful and tiring driving through that stuff. I'm getting too old for that.

**Scott**

Sometimes, when you're driving and you see the condition start to deteriorate, does it kind of go through your mind, "Uh-oh, here we go again."?

**Todd**

It definitely does. There have been a couple of situations where that goes through my mind, I guess. I think it was last winter when we had a really bad storm. I got to my 4x4 pickup truck and I was going through drifts that were hitting the bumper. Another driver called me because he knew where I was going and I didn't have much weight, and he said, "You might want to call in and not go anywhere because it's pretty bad out here." So, thankfully, that day, I decided I'm not going anywhere.

**Scott**

I'm glad you made it through. I appreciate you sharing your story with us.

**Todd**

Thank you. Thanks for having me. I'm glad I made it as well.

**Scott**

In this storm, a total of 600 travelers were stranded for as long as 48 hours. Seven nearby communities set up shelters, and a lot of local residents even opened up their homes to some of these travelers.

Sadly, there was one person who died. On the first night, 41 year old Neeland Rumble, who worked as a security guard, and he was on his way to a security job at a solar farm, that was just a few hundred yards, or a few hundred meters, away from where his car was stuck in a

snowdrift. At the time, he was not carrying a cellphone, and he wanted to call his parents and then just walk the rest of the way to his job. He got out of his car and started walking toward a nearby farmhouse, but he never made it. His body was found in a snowdrift the next day. Police believe he became disoriented in the severe whiteout conditions, and he died of hypothermia.

If you like hearing stories about surviving severe weather, you might like episode 70 with my guest Aaron. He was in Thailand when the huge tsunami happened in 2004. Here's a short clip from that episode:

### **Aaron**

I looked out and I saw this wall of whitewater really far away. I saw this wall of whitewater and we've never had any surf in these beaches - it has always been absolutely calm. I said to Joe, "Do you guys get surf here? I've never seen anything like this. Check this out." His face immediately dropped and he said, "Something's not right. This isn't right." He lived there. He was, like, a climbing guide and a local. He knew instantly that something wasn't right because he'd never seen anything like this and knew that that shouldn't be happening here.

### **Scott**

If you haven't heard that episode, it's titled "Aaron survived a tsunami".

And we have a couple of voice mails. First, I heard from Jose, who listens to What Was That Like while he's working – as a tattoo artist:

### **Jose**

Hi Scott. My name is Jose. I am originally from Brazil, but I've been living in Sydney, Australia for 6 years now. I'm a tattoo artist. One fun fact I want to share with you is that your show is probably playing in the background of 90% of the tattoos I've done. After I discovered your show, I couldn't really go back to music. I was just listening to the same things over and over again. When I found What Was That Like, it just gave me the perfect amount of entertainment without taking my concentration off the stories that your guests were in. The way you told them is just a perfect level of distraction for me to work and still zone out without getting bored. So thank you so much for all the effort that you put into and keep up the good work.

### **Scott**

If you want to check out Jose's work - which is pretty amazing, by the way – you can see it on his Instagram, and his user name there is gordotaub. I'll link that in the show notes. If I ever get another tattoo, I might just have to make a quick trip to Sydney for that.

And we also heard from Sandra –

### **Sandra**

Hi, my name is Sandra. I'm calling from a small town in California. I just wanted to comment on episode 101 with– I cannot remember the young man's name. Sorry. He was being held by knifepoint. Anyhow, my point is he didn't hear the gentleman come in or the commotion because he had his earbuds in - or ear pods or whatever the heck they're called - and it just reminded me, kind of, that I need to be more aware of my surroundings. I'm a custodian of the school district and I also work by myself. It gets dark out and I always have my earplugs in. I'm always listening to podcasts all day long. I never thought that I might hear somebody coming up behind me or any of that kind of thing. So, thank you for having that story aired. Now, I'm going to definitely keep one of them out so that I can hear my surroundings, what's going on, and all that

stuff. So, thank you. Your show is amazing. I love it. I'm completely addicted, and I can't wait for the next episode!

### **Scott**

Thank you Sandra – and the episode Sandra was referring to was episode 101, titled “Garret was held hostage at knifepoint”. And yes, being aware of your surroundings is very important.

If you have a comment about the podcast, or a particular episode, or anything really, just record a memo on your phone and email it to me. Or you can call the podcast voice mail line at 727-386-9468 and leave a message there, anytime day or night, because it's never answered by a human. I would seriously love to hear from YOU. Because you know what? Out of all my listeners, you're my favorite.

Okay, so now we're at this week's Listener Story. And it's from someone you've probably heard me talking about, because I listen to his podcast all the time. This story came in from Jordan Harbinger. He's the host of the Jordan Harbinger Show, and he talks to interesting people all the time so the story you're about to hear from Jordan, he gets these kinds of stories from his guests – many of whom you have probably heard of. You can find his show by just doing a search on your podcast app for Jordan Harbinger, or at his website, [JordanHarbinger.com](http://JordanHarbinger.com).

Jordan's story is about a scary incident he had in Mexico City.

Stay safe, and I'll see you in one week – that's right, just one week from now because I've got a special BONUS episode coming out on Friday, November 4 – one week from today. See you then.

### **Jordan**

In the year 2000 - which sounds like the future, but it's really the past - I was a young kid who had no money but wanted to travel around all the time, of course, like many young kids. So I went to Israel and there was an uprising. My parents were freaking out every day, so I went backpacking in Egypt for a while and they freaked out even more because I couldn't go back. I finally left in the middle of a college semester. I couldn't just rejoin my university, so I headed down to Mexico to take some Spanish classes to kill some time until the following semester. Of course, I had nowhere to stay, so I found a place through friends of friends of friends, literally, on the roof of these old people's house in Mexico City. This wasn't in a normal neighborhood. A lot of the houses were unfinished cinderblocks. There wasn't a whole lot of public transport around. There were these buses that would take you somewhere for a buck. Occasionally but very rarely, a taxi would drive by.

One day, about 7-8 PM, I was going to meet a friend of mine down in the center of Mexico City. I decided, “I'm dressed nice. I'm going to take a taxi. I don't want to take the bus and walk and be all dirty.” So I flagged down a taxi. It took me a while but I got kind of lucky when one drove by. I didn't have any cash, so I told the driver, “Hey, I need to go to the ATM. I only have a credit card.” He said, “No problem. No problem.” This is Mexico City, I wanted to go directly to the center, right near the presidential palace - it's called the Zócalo. Every driver knows what this is. Well, the taxi driver was driving further and further away from this, and that was weird to me. Mexico City is shaped like a bowl. If you go up, you're going further away from the center. If you're going down, you're going towards the center. Essentially, the whole city is sinking, so it's really easy to navigate by sight when you're going to the center anyway.

I knew we were going the wrong way so, finally, I asked him, "Where are we going?" I thought maybe there's traffic, maybe there's an accident. He said, "I'm going to ask my friend for directions." This was a major red flag because this is, like, a cabbie in Washington DC saying that he's going to ask for directions when you want to go to the White House or a New York cabbie having to ask for directions to take you to Times Square - it just didn't add up. It didn't make any sense. This is before mobile phones, so I wasn't scrolling Instagram or social media and distracting myself. I was looking out the window and worrying if I was about to get kidnapped. My brain was thinking, "Well, you've never been kidnapped before, so why would you get kidnapped now?" I realized that was a logical fallacy and I started to think, "What if I am getting kidnapped? What if this guy has taken me to the proverbial place where nobody can hear you scream? I don't really want to do that to myself. I got a whole life ahead of me. What is going to happen?"

I told him to just let me out. He said, "No." I told him to drive me back to where I was and I would pay him. He said, "Hey, I thought you said you didn't have any cash on you." I was like, "Damn, of course. I should have played that one closer to the vest." That's when I realized that I'm either going to get robbed - people are gonna get in the car and take me around - or I'm gonna get chopped up into little pieces or something like that in the basement. I don't want to find out which one of these it is. I tried to get out but the door locks actually sunk below flush with the door handle, and I couldn't get the door open. I thought this is actually a kidnap mobile, intentionally or not. The doors won't open. I can't get the door open at all. I can't unlock it myself. The driver kept going. I kept trying to finagle and figure out ways to get out. He kept sort of acting friendly, but a little agitated because he knew I was agitated, and I knew something was up because if somebody wants to get out of your car that bad and you're not up to something, you'll let the creep out of your car, but he would not go for it.

Finally, he stopped in front of this cinderblock house and it's really looking bad. This is a really rough area. There's no street lighting. The roads are really awful. I was thinking that this was sort of a bad neighborhood. This is not a place where happy, productive people live and work and play. I was sitting behind him. He didn't really notice that I slid from behind the passenger seat to behind the driver's side. I put my arm between him and the door quietly and I said, "Don't get out of the car. Keep driving. I don't want to get out here. Go back to a place that has better lighting." He said, "This is my friend's house. Relax. I'm just going to ask for directions." Remember, again, pre-mobile phones. He couldn't call anyone to ask for directions. He couldn't get directions online. He also couldn't warn anyone that he was coming in advance. So, I figured he's going to run out, go to the house, get a couple of thugs to get into the car with me - that's the best-case scenario. The worst case is they drag me out of the car and nobody ever hears from me again. So I told him again in no uncertain terms to get out of here.

We are leaving. We are not getting out here. Instead, he made a fast one for the door. Again, remember I had my arm between him and the door. He didn't make it out of the car. I was 20 years old. I worked out twice a day and I ate carne asada nonstop. He was 50-something years old or even older and he sat in a cab all day, maybe, eating the occasional burrito or rice bowl - he was not in good shape. There was a physical altercation. He ended up losing that physical altercation. He got choked out basically by me from the backseat and still couldn't get the car door open. I pushed him out of his driver's side door and tried to drive the 1968 stick shift. Not only can you not drive that if you don't know the trick with the clutch and the shifter and all that stuff, it's an old car. Even if you can drive a stick, you're freaking out. You're vibrating at about 1000 RPM or whatever your wrists and hands are doing at that point with all that adrenaline. No way was I going to figure that out at that moment, so I took the keys, threw them - 2020, in

hindsight, I should have kept the keys so nothing ever came of it - and ran until I couldn't run anymore.

I got to the main road and a couple stopped and picked me up. They didn't want to pick me up - I looked like a crazy person - but I was wearing Banana Republic chinos and a nice blue dress shirt that I had soaked through with sweat. I had fake blonde hair. I was 20. I had fake blonde hair. Finally, someone stopped and said, "What's going on?" I said, "I got kidnapped." They said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "Get me out of here." They're like, "We're not letting you in the car, you sweaty gringo." Finally, I offered to ride in the trunk of a car, but they didn't make me do that. They let me sit in the backseat and offered to take me somewhere. I said, "Take me to the police," which was when I got a nice, sort of, tongue-lashing about how the police are probably in on any kidnapping scheme that's going on in the area. "Also, where's that cabbie? Is he still alive? If he's not, you could be in deeper trouble than you think." I thought these are all very valid points. So, the guy wouldn't take me home. He didn't want to know where I lived, so he took me to a metro station. That night, I packed up all my crap in the middle of the night and got the first bus really, really early. I spent most of the time at the bus station, moved to a different city, and never went back.