

A Good Day in Pennsylvania

By AMS2 Gordon R. West
VAW-120

It was a nice day for winter in Pennsylvania. Even though the air was brisk, the sun was shining—not bad for a trip to take my 80-year-old mom to the Social Security office in Corning, N.Y. However, by the time we got to Corning, there were a few snow flurries. When we left two hours later, we were in a full-blown snowstorm—the kind where snow turns to ice as soon as you run over it.

About two miles south of Corning, a man in a beat-up pickup truck passed us. It was obvious he had little regard for the deteriorating road conditions. He was all over the road and going way too fast. Being concerned, I told mom to tighten her seat belt in case we started sliding. My mom would usually argue with me, but this time, she didn't say a word. She just gave her belt a tug.

With the man in the pickup truck out of sight, everything looked fine. There was very little traffic, and those cars on the road were going slowly. Then I rounded a curve, and there was the pickup truck, in the middle of the road and blocking both lanes.

Evidently, the driver had tried to make the exit to Presho, N.Y., and had been traveling too fast. I slowed down as much as I could, but discovered I was also going too fast for road conditions. I could see I wasn't going to get around the pickup or be able to stop in time. I quickly assessed three choices: hit the truck, go into a ditch, or try to go up the exit ramp. I decided the ramp offered the least severe consequences.

I made it up the ramp about 15 feet, when my truck started sliding sideways. It slid off the ramp





and into an exit sign supported by three poles. The sign snapped off at the base and flew over the cab. The poles caved in the front fender, the door and the extended-cab compartment. The driver's door window shattered, and glass sprayed into the cab area.

I leaned toward mom to shield her from the glass. It was a fortunate move, because a section of the center pole had broken off and had come through the side window. If I had been sitting upright, the pole would have hit me in the head.

A police officer arrived about five minutes after the wreck. He was on his way to another one when he saw me and pulled over to help. He helped me change the front tire, which had blown, and get my truck back on the road.

He said he had seen the other truck drive off and could tell where he had been in the road. He also asked my mom if she was all right. Her reply was, "My back hasn't felt this good in months."

The end result of this wreck was \$5,200 damage to my truck, an increase in my insurance premiums, a destroyed road sign, and a wild ride that "fixed" my elderly mom's back problem.

Normally, my mom would make a fuss about wearing a seat belt, but that day she listened to me, and neither one of us was hurt. It was a pretty nice day after all. ❏

AMS2 West carries this photo of his truck in his glove compartment. He says he uses it to remind him of his close call and to convince his passengers to buckle up.

Good Lessons Here

By William Cosby
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There are some important lessons about the process of risk management in AMS2 West's story. Things can happen very quickly on the highway, especially in hazardous conditions such as winter driving. AMS2 West was able to make complex decisions that minimized the results of the crash. That's ORM happening in real time. He assessed the road conditions, other drivers' actions, and adjusted his driving. That's planning for the immediate future. He also wore his seat belt and insisted his passenger wear one too. That's implementing ORM controls—or long-term ORM. ❏