



CRANKY T-MODEL

We lived in town, and Granddad's farm was about twenty-two miles away. Daddy worked long shifts at the fire department but Mama and Aunt Lela needed to be with Grandma because it was 'canning time'.

Daddy was on 'duty', older brothers, Versil and Aubrey, were working; so, at twelve years old, about 120 pounds, and almost six feet tall, I was next in line for driving the T-Model Ford.

Mama said, "John, you will drive Aunt Lela and me to Grandma's in the morning." We had no drivers' licenses and no insurance way back then.

Early morning before dawn, Versil drove the car from the fire station and parked it in front of our house. I did some driver's practice with his help. He went through the driving instructions again. "Pull the spark down to about here. And the gas handle, put it just a little lower." He pointed to the floorboard, "You know the three pedals. And don't forget which one is the brake." He unloaded his bike from the back seat and rode off with a big bunch of newspapers.

After loading pans, jars, and other canning stuff into the back seat, I sat behind the wheel and waited for my big first day of driving.

As the time to leave drew closer, a problem popped up. I was not strong enough to crank the model-T. I had watched Daddy, my older brothers, and my uncles crank with the finesse of a baton twirling bandleader.

Nobody was nearby so I tried and tried to crank. I knew that I stood about right, bent over about right, and held the handle about right, but I couldn't pull the crank through even on my best attempts.

Mama and Aunt Lela brought their last load of needed stuff to the car. Mama said, "We're ready, son, let's go."

I kept my seat behind the wheel. "Oh, Aunt Lela, do you mind cranking for me?" She laughed, and Mama asked, "What's wrong?"

Lela answered, "He just wants to see if I'm strong enough to crank this handle."

I called out, "Ready!" She yanked the crank handle better than my best effort. But the car didn't fire-up. She did it again and again. We rested. Then she tried again. Finally, the motor roared. She hopped in and we were off and running.

The first five miles were on a paved highway. At Dew Drop, we took our left fork and hit the gravel and red clay road. By now, I was feeling strong and confident as wind whipped through our hair. We sped up to nearly thirty miles per hour.

Another slight problem: it had rained a few days prior to our trip, and deep ruts controlled where we went. We wobbled and bounced off one deep mud hole after another. I didn't need to steer – I only needed to hold onto the wheel.

Mama and Aunt Lela chatted and bobbed their heads in rhythm with the highway and at last we made it to the farm.

Another slight problem came up. Just as I should, I braked right in front of the house and shoved the spark and gas handles up to "off." The motor was supposed to stop, quit, not continue to run, and all of that. But it kept running. I couldn't keep the car from easing forward and had absolutely no control over the backfiring. This was not unheard of because a few times even Daddy had to take some strange actions when the car wasn't ready to stop.

So the only thing a man could do was to make another circle through the trees and pull-up again at the house. I did.

Mama looked at me, "Son, you can let us out now."

Some how, with only my sincere wishes, the car finally gave up the ghost.

At the end of my proud day, Aunt Lela kept silent about cranking the Ford; and Mama was too busy to speak of it. However, it was two years later before I sat behind the wheel again.