

# The Road to Commonwealth

By Ed Marshall

The night was clear and lit by the moon as Lyle Mackey drove with the top down in his Thunderbird convertible heading south, somewhere between Fence and Armstrong Creek on Hwy. 101

Mackey had started the loop in Aurora and through to Kingsford, Iron Mountain and on to Florence, where he'd had his last of four beers. He thought of stopping in Fence for one more but quickly nixed the idea. He needed to get home to Goodman. He had to be up at 5:30 a.m. to grade lumber; he knew if he ran into Jerry or Roger he'd pay the price in the morning.

He leaned back and enjoyed the beautiful night as his T-Bird glided down the moon swept highway. He thought about the young woman he'd just met in Kingsford at some little corner bar on karaoke night – Danni, short for Danielle. He smiled. ...

Suddenly, Mackey jerked the steering wheel and swerved left! The T-Bird's tires squealed as the convertible slid sideways toward the northbound ditch. Mackey swung the wheel right, and the car began to lose its grip on the road. It spun 360 degrees and ended up pointing south on the opposite shoulder of the road. Clouds of dust floated in the air, making unusual swirls through the headlights.

Mackey thanked God no one was coming from the other direction, and he eased his car onto the correct side of the road as his pulse raced from the adrenaline rush. Breathing hard and fast, he turned to look behind him – half in fear, half in astonishment.

"What the hell was that thing!?" he muttered on his breath. "My God. Was that a human!?"

It had come from off the shoulder of the road – a dark staggering figure. Mackey hoped he hadn't grazed it with his car. It appeared to have legs, human-like legs. It had odd, jerky movements.

Then Mackey heard something a hundred feet or so back down the road, close to where he nearly nailed that thing. It sounded like a moan.

Mackey swore a blue streak to himself and felt fluttering in the pit of his stomach. He might have just killed someone! He turned and walked toward the groaning and began shouting. "Hey, hey you in there!" Can you hear me?! Where are you?!"

Then he saw what appeared to me an old man struggling to lift himself out from under a tangle of bushes.

\*\*\*

"Hey, are you okay?" Mackey shouted as he walked over to the man. The old fellow simply stared at Mackey as if he were an alien.

"Hey, what's your name?" Mackey asked the man, who wore tattered, filthy old clothes. His pants looked to be dungarees caked with mud and soil. His face and hands were smeared with dirt.

The old man blinked at Mackey and then uttered his first words. "Where am I?"

"You're on the side of Hwy. 101 somewhere between Fence and Armstrong Creek. Are you hurt? Maybe I should take you to the ER in Iron Mountain."

"No. I'm okay. I need to get to work."

"Where are you going this time of night?" asked Mackey. "Where do you work?"

"Are we close to Commonwealth? I work at the Davidson mine in Commonwealth," the old man replied.

"The Davidson mine?" Mackey said incredulously. "That's been closed for a good 60 years or more. All the mines around here are closed. All the iron's gone. Look, I think I should take you in. Maybe you hit your head. Come on, let's go."

Mackey noticed an abrasion at the top of the man's forehead; though it didn't appear fresh.

"I'm not getting in that thing!" the old man said as he stared at the car. "I've never seen anything like that!"

"It's just a car," said Mackey. "It's a 2014 Ford Thunderbird convertible. It's not all that uncommon. We'll put the top up if you want."

The old man staggered forward and eyed the machine. "This ain't like no car I ever seen," he said. "And you. What's up with you and that getup you got on?"

Mackey looked himself up and down. "What getup?"

"Them clothes! Them shoes! You from outer space or something!?"

"Look fella," Mackey replied. "I'm not sure what's going on with you, but I think we should take you in to see a doctor. You don't seem to be thinking right."

"I don't need a doctor! Just point me in the direction of Commonwealth. I need to get to work. I can't be late. I'll be fired!"

"Look pal, we're 15 to 20 miles from Commonwealth. That's a long way, and you're in no shape to be walking that far. If you don't want to ride with me, then I'm calling for help."

Mackey eyed his cell phone, checking for reception bars. It was always hit or miss out here. He saw half a bar, and even though he'd had a few drinks, he knew he had to call. He reported the situation to a dispatcher. "There's an elderly man out here. He seems real confused. I nearly hit him with my car. No, everyone's conscious, no injuries, at least not that I can see. But there's something wrong with him. He's not right. We're just about to County F on the west side of the road. The flashers will be on."

The bedraggled old man stared at the cellphone in astonishment.

"Darndest little walkie-talkie I ever seen!" he said. "Who in the blazes

were you talking to? Why'd you tell 'em something was wrong with me?"

"I was talking to the Sheriff's Department, and they're sending someone out here. Probably an ambulance, too."

"I told you I ain't hurt!" the old man said angrily. "I ain't got time for this nonsense. I need to get to Commonwealth!"

"Well, they'll take you right past Commonwealth," Mackey replied. "They'll get you there a lot quicker, too. You can tell them your whole story on the way."

The old man signaled with his hand that'd he heard enough. He turned to walk north along the highway's shoulder.

"You wait if you want. I'm leaving."

Mackey trotted after him.

"Hey, I never caught your name. My name's Lyle ... Lyle Mackey. When they come, they'll want to your name. What should I tell them?"

The man gave Mackey a blank look. He shook his head. "None of your business; that's my name."

"You can't tell me can you? You don't know your name. I'll bet you can't even tell me where you're from."

"None of your concern! That's where I'm from!" the old man snapped. "Just leave me be!"

"I can't leave you alone because I nearly killed you. And if we don't get some help, someone else might kill you. Mister, you're hard to see dressed the way you are."

He reached out and grabbed the old man by the back of his collar. "You're staying here with me Mr. whoever you are."

"You try to kill me with that contraption you call a car, now you're going to bully me around, huh?"

"Whatever it takes."

Suddenly the old man placed his hands on both sides of his head.

"I feel a little wobbly," he said. "I gotta sit down."

See page 13



**Whisler  
Outdoors**

**We're Your Fishing  
Hookup!**

In the field, at the range or on the water, we are the local sportsman's one stop shop for everything hunting & fishing.

**Open 7 days a week**

**715.528.4411**

628 Central Ave, Florence

**24-hr Live Bait Vending Machine**



US-2, Spread Eagle WI,

**715-696-3910**

**OPEN Mon thru Fri 9-6  
Sat & Sun 9-4**

**Perennials, Trees & Shrubs  
Many Deer Resistant  
Varieties To Choose From**

Bring in your garden ideas and pictures and let us help you select the right plants for your garden or landscape project.

**Houseplants & Accessories**

*Now taking orders for our Beautiful Custom Grown  
Hanging Baskets & Containers for 2023!*