# The View from Right Field

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Yukon Farewell

She was quietly professional, somewhere in her twenties, considerate enough to express worry about the tires of her long, Bach's Service flatbed tow truck rutting our lawn a bit as she backed in. I assured her we weren't that kind of people; she could do whatever made her job easier. Tire tracks on the lawn were the least of my worries.

She was also intuitive enough to read the hangdog expression on my face and notice the elegiacal (RIP Snake) slouch that had spread from my face to the soles of my feet.

"What's going on with it?" she asked, the same way she might have asked about a sick pet or a house plant dropping its leaves.

"I'm afraid the Yukon is done. Won't crank, 185,000 miles on her*. It might be time."

"Ah," she said giving that slight, half nod with the lips pursed in condolence. "What year is it?"

"2000," I said, "Woulda been ready for the antique car show this year."

I didn't cry, although the tears were in there, looking for an opening. Instead, we shared a silent, sad smile at my bittersweet joke. Although the Yukon rested before us in plain sight, the driver pretended not to notice that she was no longer car show material, having begun to show her age—bubbling paint on the aluminum back hatch, the skeletal remains of a long-defunct rear windshield wiper on the window that didn't quite latch anymore, the perforated bumpers, the missing running boards I meant to replace but didn't get to, the incipient rust on the rocker panels.

"Well, she's not much to look at," I offered, but the driver from Bach's had work to do, getting my longtime friend chained to the flat bed for its ride to the shop, perhaps as close to a funeral procession as she would get.

Damn. We had ridden so many miles together; it was easily my most comfortable car, if not quite the most economical. I joked that I measured gas efficiency in yards per gallon rather than miles. I doubted that even my wizard of a mechanic, Dave Allen, would have enough magic to bring my Yukon back from the beyond.

She didn't have to wait long for Dave's diagnosis…or, as it turned out, the results of the autopsy. A 2000 GMC, the Yukon had begun life in Texas, went through a couple of owners before coming into Kateri's son's possession. When he left to play music on cruise ships so many years ago, the Yukon took up residence in one half of Kateri's garage. There it sat for four lonely years.

When one of my many work vans stumbled into its inevitable and irreversible decline and was donated to NPR, I needed a vehicle, badly. Would the Yukon rise from its long nap like Snow White? Dave Allen, always looking for an excuse to get out of his shop, jumped in his flat bed and winched her aboard. Three days later, his vehicular CPR had done the trick. For $1,200 in repairs and a nominal payment to Kateri's son, I was back in business.

Not so this time around. Dave gave the Yukon last rites, an undertaker from Bowmansville put her on another flatbed/funeral bier where she would end up the in vehicular equivalent of a crematorium, a crusher, after which $500 would find its way to Karz4Kids or a similar charity while I claimed a tax deduction.

The Yukon was one, perhaps the last, in a long line of vehicles I'd owned that wouldn't win any beauty contests but served various purposes, however briefly. I wonder if I can name all her predecessors: my first vehicle, the '62 Dodge pickup truck I bought at age 19 for $400, a number that nearly doubled after its inspection visit to Woody's Gulf at Main and Park Place. As I recall, it caught fire on the Dewey Thruey (Interstate 90) and saw limited service after that. The '61 Volkswagen Bug with the heater that worked only in the summer and the sliding vinyl sunroof, which I used to carry ladders in the early days of my painting business. What a sight. I moved on to a few very used Fiats from Kelver's Studebaker, FIAT standing for Fixing It Again Today, or something like that. A Datsun that hemorrhaged a vital internal organ part on the 190 near the Peace Bridge; a Ford Galaxy I somehow ended up with during the Oil Embargo of 1973-74, when gas was rationed by odd-even days determined by license plate. (Hopefully the statute of limitations has passed and I can admit I carried two sets of plates, so I could get gas in an emergency.) And a succession of others—an International Travel-all called the Whale, a Rambler station wagon, a Dodge "Trust me, I'm Lee Iacocca" K-Wagon, even a brief romance with a sporty, hopelessly impractical arrest-me-red Dodge 024 with the spoiler on the trunk lid to keep me from going airborne at speeds in excess of 200 mph.

Sooner or later, I succumbed to the realization that, as a painting contractor—dreams of a writing career having been put on hold, alas—I needed a van, a full-size van. Over the ensuing years, I'll bet I owned every species of used van: Chevy, Ford, GMC, Dodge; each of which metamorphosed into, as some wiseacre said, "a dumpster on wheels."

Which brings me back to Yukon. After my umpteenth van died and this well-preserved black beauty arose, Phoenix-like, from her garage imprisonment, she would be my transition vehicle from the succession of work vehicles—presentable enough (at first) for suburban parking lots, roomy enough to carry tools in the way back and a grandchild or two in the back seats. The most comfortable vehicle of the what? dozen, dozen and a half I have owned. I would happily have driven it for another 185,000 miles.

Well, no use crying over seized pistons, I guess. If anybody out there knows of a vehicle that might be a worthy successor to the Yukon at a ridiculously low price, please contact me. It's a small town; I'm easy to find.

*Note: I realize I'm on shaky ground here, presenting the Yukon as feminine. "It," however, would sound uncaring, "he" or "him" sounds like we're frat bros and Native American author Robin Wall Kimmerer's all-encompassing "*ki*" from her tribal language too presumptuous for a senior citizen from the middle-class suburbs. She was a she.*