

*Hart Schulz*

## **Driving Home Alone**

“the stars trembled like a telescope in an earthquake”

— Richard Brautigan

Driving Home Alone came out struggling to be a poem. But who can ever say what will really happen? What he got was a sharp slap in the ass to set him right. So Driving Home Alone started out to be a crusty, grumpy character. He had to learn the resignation that living brings. Now he's alright.

I first met Driving Home Alone on the highway stuck in a canyon between the towns of Walker and Bridgeport. He had been walking on the road out of Walker and was heading for the bridge in Bridgeport. The little bridge over water flowing like a strap of leather with silver studs. It was June and snow was folding over, turning brown, and dying. Snow was running down mountains like naked Indians.

I decided to name Driving Home Alone Lee Melon after my old friend Richard Brautigan, the famous writer whom I met in a market in San Jose in 1966. He made a thumbs-up gesture with his fist. Then he said, “excuse me” and angled by me toward Canned Foods. This was the only conversation we ever had. But we became the best of friends. I wonder if the old Trout Fisherman appreciated the irony of angling by me. So I named Driving Home Alone Lee Melon after Brautigan's character all bundled up inside a book I had been reading in the back of the truck. Lee Melon was a dead man stuck between the pages of an out-of-print-of-print book. If the police had pulled me over, they would have found the dead body in the back of my truck.

“May I see your license, sir?” Then they would look in the bed and see the book and the dead body of Lee Melon. They would look at Lee Melon like people look at bums in bus stations.

I could have dropped the book in the snow and it would have buried itself in the heat of Lee Melon’s passion like a fiery casket. I think Brautigan was a visionary writer because he made that thumbs-up gesture in San Jose in 1966. So I named *Driving Home Alone* after the dead and buried and out-of-print Lee Melon.

Just past the town of Lee Vining 8 cinder cones came up in our window and looked inside. This is volcano country, I told *Driving Home Alone*, and I told him my story about how Mammoth Mountain would blow up like St. Helen’s and it wouldn’t matter if you skied or not. Nothing would matter for that matter. But *Driving Home Alone* would have none of it and just stared with an eyeless look on his face. For a guy who never says anything, he sure knows a lot. The kind of guy where if he did finally say something you’d probably say, “What do you mean by that, *Driving Home Alone*?”

For a guy who doesn’t say anything, you have to hand it to him. When you’re pulling at your head and screaming, “I just wish this fucking road would slow down under my wheels!” you’d look over to your side and there’d be *Driving Home Alone*.

The best part about the trip was stopping along the way at Convict Lake. There we were, me and *Driving Home Alone*, standing on a log looking over Convict Lake in the High Sierra. “Look, there’s *Driving Home Alone* and another guy,” Convict Lake might have whispered between little lines of wind waves. We looked just like a photograph at my girlfriend’s house. The photograph doesn’t fit in the little brass frame on top of the refrigerator. When I go over there on tuesday it looks matted with corrugated cardboard on the bottom and on one side. Then on thursday the matting has moved to the top and the other side. The picture is too small and the frame is too big. It is a photograph of her and her husband at Convict Lake, but she says it’s not Convict Lake. Sometime between tuesday and thursday the two of them step sideways and down like they are dancing very, very slowly. Her husband is in fact a convict. Or he would have been if he had gone to jail for growing pot in his bedroom. The police received an

anonymous phone tip and busted him, almost making him a convict. The lake is mountain water imprisoned by the Ice Age.

It wouldn't surprise us if it wasn't Driving Home Alone who placed the call.

"Hello, police? This is an anonymous call on the Neighborhood-Watch-Watts line."

"Yes?"

"There's a man growing pot in his bedroom, a husband."

"Thank you, sir. We'll get on it right away."

When we got down to the desert it rained cats and dogs. The cats would hit first and just sit there dazed and purring in the carpet of sand. Then the dogs would hit and the cats would come to and there'd be a frenzy of cats and dogs two feet off the ground, a ball that would explode and disappear in the desert heat. Without leaving a trace. The heat had come to the party early and was just standing around like a rude relative and feasting on cat and dog hors d'oeuvres. The heat spit out some left-over fur all over the gravity-stricken carpet and it shimmered like a mirage. The sand is a prisoner of gravity, filling the place with convicts. The desert was ready for summer but summer was busy chasing brown Indians out of the mountains.

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We slept in the back of the truck in the desert and watched my little portable black and white TV and a Joshua tree behind it. The Joshua entertained us during commercials, waving at me and Driving Home Alone with many of its furry hands. The rain stopped and the moon was gathering up evidence of the sun. Every time Driving Home Alone rolled over the moon bounced like a tetherball. By the next morning the moon had gathered so much

evidence that me and Driving Home Alone could be sure the sun was real. Case closed.

When we finally got home over the hill and into the San Fernando Valley, the stars trembled like a mirror in a thunderstorm. Each star representing a coincidence.

Lee Melon/Lee Vining

Cinder cones/Volcano Story

Convict Lake/Pot Growing Convict

The book in the back/The fact that Driving Home Alone  
of the truck                    turned out to be a story

Even though I'd named Driving Home Alone Lee Melon, I hadn't once called him Lee Melon. The pages of the book wiggled and bent up at the edges in the back of the truck. They looked as weathered as the face of Richard Brautigan in 1966. Lee Melon is dead. So is Richard Brautigan. And I had to resign myself to the fact that Lee Melon and Driving Home Alone really are the same person. That if me and Lee Melon and Richard Brautigan and Driving Home Alone were sitting around a campfire at night in the desert, there'd only be three guys there.

Maybe even two. Or one.