

As the sun rose in the small town of Elkton, Kevin woke up to the sound of his alarm. It was the last day of high school, and Kevin couldn't be more excited to be done. Kevin was an average kid. He kept up his grades and had a bright future ahead of him. He just didn't really know what to do next once he was done with school. After hitting snooze on his alarm clock countless amounts of times, he finally rolled out of his bed. He threw on the clothes he had hanging on the back of his desk chair, brushed his teeth, combed his scruffy blond hair into a neat part, and sped down the stairs, ready to graduate.

He hopped into his small, beat-up pickup truck, realizing that he was almost going to be late for his own graduation. He backed up out of the driveway of his dad's small suburban home and made his way down the small cul-de-sac toward the main road. As he drove, he couldn't stop thinking about all the things he wanted to do after being done with school. Although, as he thought about how much work it would take to become a doctor, lawyer, or astronaut, he felt sick to his stomach. He didn't mind working hard, but only if it was something that he enjoyed. The only thing he really knew how to do that was going to help him move forward was play guitar, which he knew playing in a band was a long shot. He also didn't have a band, so that seemed out of the picture, and he also knew how to work on his truck because something was almost always wrong with it. As he continued to drive, he was so wrapped up in his own thoughts that he almost ran a red light. The only stoplight in the town.

Kevin went to a very sparsely populated high school. Elkton was a small town out in the sticks. The only good thing Kevin thought was good about the school was the auto shop. He learned a lot from the teacher and enjoyed the class. Thinking about all the good times he had in the class made him lean even more toward maybe wanting to do that after getting done with school. As Kevin pulled into the school football stadium parking lot, he threw his graduation gown over his rock and roll band t-shirt, torn-up jeans, and sneakers. "Well, this is it." He murmured to himself. He walked through the entrance to the stadium and found his seat.

As Kevin looked around, he saw so many excited parents. Ready to watch their son or daughter walk across that stage. No one was there for Kevin. He didn't even have good friends to celebrate with afterward. He had plenty of people he would hang out with from time to time, but not really anyone Kevin was going to keep in touch with. He got along with everyone but had no real, long-lasting friendships. His parents separated just a year prior after a rocky split. His Dad was a retired Drill Sergeant who spent Kevin's childhood in the Army. He treated Kevin like one of his little soldiers, or at least that is how he saw it. Kevin's mom got really into drug use after the divorce. She was a typical Mom before that; they were a normal family until things got bad. His parents got to a point where they were always fighting, and Kevin wanted nothing to do with it. Over the last couple of years, Kevin spent time living out of his beat-up truck or bouncing from friend to friend's house. It wasn't until recently that he stayed at his dad's again, although he despised his dad.

As the graduation commenced, the guest speaker took the stage. Kevin didn't even pay attention to the opening speeches. Kevin was still perplexed by life's choices.

*Why have I waited this long to get things together? What am I going to do? I thought high school was going to set me up for my future. I'm looking around, and everyone else looks so ready for their futures, for college. I don't even know what I am going to eat after this.*

It was like he had to plan his entire life right then. He felt stuck. He didn't want to go live with his mom; he didn't want to be around that lifestyle. He hated his dad; they didn't get along well anyways. So now what? Kevin's name was called over the loudspeaker. He would have missed it if the person next to him didn't give him a celebratory pat on the back. Kevin walked up to the stage, grabbed his diploma, and walked across to the stairs on the other side. As he did, he could see his auto shop teacher, Mr. Spitzer sitting in the teacher's section. He gave him an encouraging nod as Kevin walked back to find his seat.

Kevin felt it may have been a nod that his thought of working in the automotive industry in some form or fashion may be the right call.

Now that Kevin had officially graduated, he hopped back into his truck and headed home. Kevin glanced over at his diploma sitting on the torn-up seat sitting next to him. He really didn't want to go home but had instead worked himself up so much that he decided to drive around and look for a job. He went to every auto repair shop he could think of. He didn't have any real experience, hardly any tools of his own, and didn't have any fancy certifications. He was turned away from every place he went, or they just weren't hiring. Kevin's motivation quickly fizzled out. "I wish I would have asked Mr. Spitzer if he knew anybody who would hire me." He muttered as he turned up the Metallica song he was listening to. "Maybe he is still at the school," He thought. He turned back towards the school. Mr. Spitzer, who Kevin always thought looked like a fatter version of Kevin Bacon, was walking out to his car as Kevin pulled up. He knew that Spitzer always parked out by the shop. "Hey, Mr. Spitzer, you know anywhere I can find some work?" Kevin yelled out his window. "Well, if you don't mind getting a little dirty, one of our church friends has a shop out of town a little bit." Mr. Spitzer replied as he shoved a box full of books and other supplies into his back seat. "If he will give me a shot, I will roll around in as much dirt and grease as the guy wants me to," Kevin replied. Mr. Spitzer jotted down a name and address on a sticky note and handed it to Kevin. Mr. Spitzer always knew something wasn't quite right going on with Kevin's living situation and always seemed to have his best interests in mind. "Good luck, kid." Mr. Spitzer said, walking around to hop in his car. Kevin felt slightly more encouraged and sped off toward the address he was given.

Kevin raced across town and found his way toward the road listed on the address he was given. He had never had any reason ever to be out this way, as the area on the other side of town was mostly farmland. He only knew the road because a buddy with whom he played football with lived on the same road. Kevin found the mailbox matching the address and pulled down the long gravel driveway.

Eventually, he pulled over the crest of a sloping hill and found a large five-bay garage. As Kevin pulled up to a large blue structure, he glanced at the sign. Hoover Hill Diesel and Machine read the hand-painted sign hanging above the entrance. “I don’t really know much about diesel, but how hard could it be?” Kevin mumbled as he walked up to the front door. As he entered, he found a bearded man wearing a set of blue, partially unzipped coveralls pouring a cup of coffee. The man was short, partially bald, and slightly out of shape, but looked friendly. “Um, my auto shop teacher said you might be hiring; I am just out of high school, but I work hard, and I know how to turn a wrench,” Kevin said in the most confident way he could. The man turned toward Kevin and smirked. “Can ya change oil, kid?” the man asked. “I can,” Kevin responded. He read the name off the coveralls he was wearing; the sewn-on badge said Mike in large golden font. Just the guy Kevin was looking for; his name was the name written on the set of directions he was given. “How quick can you change the oil on that beat-up dodge pickup out there?” Mike asked. “Um, 30 minutes.” Replied Kevin. “You need to be quicker than that if you want to work here.” Mike chuckled in a joking manner. Kevin took him seriously, though. “I bet I could do it in 25.” Kevin blurted. “That’s still slow. But it’s hard to get good help these days,” Mike chuckled as he pointed out towards the garage through the office window. Through the window, Kevin could see two men wearing the same coveralls tossing a football back and forth. “When can ya start?” Mike said as he sipped his coffee. “I will start whenever you let me!” Kevin said excitedly. “Good. Come by tomorrow, be ready to work.” Mike said sternly.

Kevin went to work the next day; he got to know all the guys and received his own coveralls to wear. Even though the name tag still said someone else’s name. Kevin didn’t mind. He quickly unloaded his toolbox from his truck and grabbed as many open jobs as he could. He worked hard and quickly became a rockstar over the first couple weeks of becoming a diesel mechanic, even though he didn’t fully grasp diesel engines. He quickly found that it was almost easier to perform jobs of larger equipment because you don’t have to squeeze your hands into such tight spaces.

Over time, he got to know Mike very well and really looked up to him. Mike knew everything about turning wrenches and was seldom wrong. Although he couldn't quite figure out how he was Mr. Spitzer's church friend because he used foul language, told dirty old man jokes, and seemed like one of those guys you would find at a Lynyrd Skynyrd concert yelling "Play free bird!". When he asked Mike about going to church with Spitzer, he replied, "I only go for the cookies and wine." Which Kevin knew wasn't true; Mike was a recovering alcoholic and hasn't drank in years, according to his wife Debbie, who stops by to bring him lunch from time to time. One of the times, she invited Kevin over to dinner. Kevin, who didn't really do much else but spend time at work, agreed to the home-cooked meal.

Mike had told her about Kevin's home life, and she kept inviting him back. They didn't have any kids, so she loved to have someone else but Mike to feed. Come to find out that Debbie was really the more religious one. When Mike gets home every day, he eats and spends hours working in the garage he built behind their house. The garage perhaps is even nicer than their house, thought Kevin the first time he saw it. Mike eventually offered to have Kevin help him with his side hustle, working on church goer's vehicles in his spare time. "Ahh, so this is why you really go to church, old man." Kevin jokingly told Mike. It's a win-win situation. Mike got some help, as he isn't getting any younger, and Kevin didn't have to spend any more time than he could stand staying at his dad's place.

Many years go by, and Debbie calls Kevin on the phone on his way home from a local restaurant. "Mike is hurt. Can you make it to the hospital?" Cries Debbie. Mike was hit head-on by a drunk driver on his way home from work that evening, shattering his pelvis and both legs in the crash. As Kevin enters the hospital room, Mike was stable. "I will be fine," Mike said. "Here's my shop keys. Can you keep after it for a bit, bud?" Kevin held back his tears. "Of course." Kevin whimpered.

Mike passed away two days later after multiple surgeries. He was 58 years young.