

## The Great Lobster Story

### AKA The Legend of the Heart-shaped Bed

Many people remember David Maidenbergl, or DM, as his college buddies referred to him, as a button-downed model of having it all together, a smooth operator, totally organized and in control. Having spent quite a bit of time with DM through the years, I was fortunate to also see his more wild and crazy, spontaneous side, that he rarely showed but every once in a while, peaked out from under his floppy hat.

The first time I saw this side of DM was in college at Indiana University, and it launched a spontaneous and miraculous weekend adventure that we shared.

It all began on a Friday afternoon when DM stopped over to the trailer Jeff Shulkin, Ron Russ and I were living in at the time. DM and I were having a conversation about how much we liked lobster and DM said, "Best lobster is in Boston, I have some good friends there..."

Well, that led, in about a minute and a half, to our decision to leave immediately and make the 16 hour-trip to Boston for a lobster weekend. We'd make up the plan on the way, call his friends from the first gas station and let them know we were coming.

So, we grabbed the minimum supplies needed by 22-year-olds and hopped into DM's yellow Buick Wildcat, named Marvin, and started heading East. We left Bloomington, Indiana, at about 3:00, figuring we'd drive all night and make it to Boston by Saturday morning for breakfast.

About six hours into the trip, we were on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. I was driving at highway speed. All of a sudden, coming around a curve, I saw a station wagon stopped dead in front of us in our lane. There was no time to maneuver, all I could do was slam on the breaks and pray.

About a minute later I opened my eyes, looked over at DM and said, "Are we ok?" We both checked our bodies out top to bottom and decided we were unhurt. But what about Marvin, the car we were sitting in? It was dark we weren't at all sure of where we were and how we got there. And just as we started to try and put the pieces together of what happened, a flashing red light approached us and stopped.

It was a tow truck, from the gas station next to the turnpike overpass. And it just so happened that, at that moment: 9:30 on a Friday night, there were six auto mechanics playing poker at that gas station.

They told us they were watching helplessly as the station wagon with six people in it left the gas station and headed the wrong way down the exit to get back onto the turnpike, and then stalled in the middle of the road.

The mechanics were horrified seeing that an inevitable disaster was about to happen. As it turned out, DM and I were the first car that would have started the chain reaction. But, rather than crashing, we spun uncontrollably up an exit ramp and hit a retaining wire that slid between Marvin's tires and bumper, suspending us above a 30-foot cliff that we otherwise would have fallen into.

Fortunately, the cars behind us saw our spin and were able to avoid the massive pile-up that could have been.

The mechanics in the tow truck called it a miracle and said they would be happy to work on our car that night and see if they could get us back on the road. One of them even scaled down the 30-foot cliff at two in the morning to retrieve our springs and shock absorbers that had popped out when the retaining wire went under the car.

So, they towed Marvin up to the garage and as they were raising it to assess the damage DM and I tried to figure out where we were and what we were going to do. There was a map on the wall that showed we were in the middle of Pennsylvania, not near any major cities or places we'd heard of...except for one. Turns out we were about 7 miles from the little town of Brownsville. I had heard of Brownsville because a couple of years earlier, in my undergraduate days, I had a fraternity brother who came from Brownsville, PA.

Next to the payphone was a phone book of that part of the state, and luckily it included Brownsville. I opened it up to the S's and found one listing for "Shinbrood." It had been several years since I had seen Mark Shinbrood – a nice guy as I remembered, though I didn't know him well. But here we were, and it seemed worth a phone call.

A woman answered and I apologized for calling so late and asked if there was a Mark Shinbrood at this number. She answered Mark was not home but what was this about? I explained to Mrs. Shinbrood what had just happened and she said, "I'll be right there."

In about 10 minutes she appeared at the gas station and said we could stay at their place until the car was ready. Then she drove us back to the Shinbrood residence, where she made us dinner and made up two beds in the guest room.

At about six AM their phone rings and it's the mechanics who say the car is ready to drive again, so we pop out of bed and Mrs. Shinbrood drives us back to the station where Marvin is ready to continue on our way to Boston. We ask the head mechanic what this will cost, fearing that on our college budget this could be a financial disaster. He says, "It's on us." They were so relieved that it wasn't the mess it could have been.

Back on the road again the past 20 hours or so had left us both somewhat hypnotized and in a daze. Nonetheless we kept on track and made it to Boston by late Saturday afternoon.

We pulled in to DM's friends' house and proceeded to tell them about what had just happened and they said we needed to celebrate. So they called a bunch of friends and constructed an instant party for us at their favorite Chinese restaurant. There were about a dozen of us there but the only thing I remembered about the meal was the acrobatic bussers clearing the table who collected the tableware so quickly and neatly that it looked like skyscrapers rising in their arms.

We apparently had quite the party that night because I barely remember any of it. We slept in late, had a nice Sunday brunch with Dave's friends and then got back in Marvin for the long haul back to Bloomington and the Monday classes that I was sure we would sleep through.

After several hours on the road – it was about 7pm – and all of a sudden it struck us that we didn't have the lobster that we had driven to Boston for in the first place! It was too late to turn back but we decided we'd take the next exit and find a restaurant where we could get them.

The next exit was for the Poconos, a resort area that had several restaurants. We pulled into one and had the BEST LOBSTER EVER. We savored it and stuffed ourselves, after what we'd been through. And by the end of the meal, we decided that we'd better stay over there, as we were now exhausted and neither of us were up for driving all night to get back to Bloomington.

The restaurant had a group of cottages they rented to travelers, so without looking further we paid for one, got the key and walked over to our cottage. What we didn't know at the time was that the Poconos was a Honeymoon retreat area, and when we got to our cabin and opened the door, we saw one heart-shaped bed! We asked to switch to another cabin, but they all were similarly furnished.

So, we laughed, collapsed on the two halves of the heart-shaped bed, and promised not to tell anyone where we slept that night.

The rest of the drive back to Bloomington on Monday was otherwise uneventful.

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And I'd like to close by saying DM was one of the most kind-hearted people I've ever known. He was also brilliant and compassionate in the way he looked at the world and the people he interacted with. I read recently about a Jewish tradition that when a parent passes, the children each take on one of their most admirable qualities, make it part of their personalities and keep their parent's spirit alive and contributing in the world. Lisa and Dory, I know you've already incorporated many of your father's best traits and attitudes into your lives and that's part of what has made you the amazing and wonderful people you have become. So,

thank you two for keeping your father's good energy alive and well in a world that really needs it right now.  
We'll miss you, DM.

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■ David "Dunes" Schwartz