

## Quixotic

by

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Don was his name, not Don Quixote. His full name was Donald Evar Small. Although a Small, his thoughts were big, bigger than most people's. Some might say they were strange thoughts, weird, maybe. But, to many they were just plain stupid thoughts.

But, his best friend, Paco, listened intently whenever Donald Small waxed eloquently about his plan to save the possum. For Donald believed that far too many possums were losing their lives on the state highways, and that it was his particular calling to put an end to this wildlife genocide.

And, despite the ridicule and social disenfranchisement Donald Small received whenever he stepped up on his soapbox, strategically planted on the busiest corner of the counties administrative buildings, and vigorously championed his causes, Paco would stand tall, diligently at his side, wearing a bright white sandwich boards that hung clear down to the tops of his flip-flops. They had bright red hand-painted lettering painted on them that read, *Save the Possum, Stop the Carnage*.

One time, Don and Paco scooped up the smushed carcass of a possum off Highway #1 and placed it in a child sized, hand built, casket and left it on the steps of the Court House, with a note pinned to the inner lining of the lid, that read, *Save the Possum, from the Citizens against Possum Genocide, affiliated associations, PETA, and various environmental and prayer groups*.

The County Sheriff was apparently not as concerned about the well being of possums and gave Don and Paco citations for littering and unauthorized protestations on government property. The latter came with a steep fine. But, what offended Don more was the notion that the poor deceased creatures of the brotherhood of all living beings had been considered litter.

Don and Paco established a rescue clinic to harbor all injured possums. It wasn't a large facility, more like a shed out back of Donald's house that was once a two seat outhouse with a crescent moon cut in the door. A collector's piece, thought Donald; that could be put to some more important use. They traveled the highways most mornings in search of wounded patients to fill up the clinic, except for the day they had to report to collect their Welfare checks. Donald always drove his 1974 Ford Pinto station wagon because there was plenty of room for him and Paco to carry their equipment: his shovels and cardboard boxes, gunny sacks and what not.

While their efforts were noble, finding an injured possum was a difficult proposition. By morning, any creature crushed under the wheels of a callous motorist was already dead. So, Donald concluded that he and Paco needed to adjust their rescue mission to a nighttime affair. Donald was sure he and his trusted right-hand man (who is actually left handed) would have more success if they can get to their patients in a timelier manner.

Donald painted a big white circle on each side of the Pinto and a larger one on the roof top, then, painted a big red cross inside of the dots, just like the ambulances he had ridden in. In bright yellow lettering just above the side dots, he painted the words, POSSUM RESCUE VEHICLE, on both sides. Donald considered purchasing a red flashing light that he could plug into the cigarette lighter, with a big suction cup on the bottom that would stick to his roof top. But, Paco thought that the County Sheriff might take exception to the use of a red light, since that was reserved for official police and emergency authorities. So, Donald settled for an amber one.

With his vehicle looking official, equipment loaded, amber flashing light mounted and plugged into the cigarette lighter receptacle, all that was required to finish off the officiality of their mission were uniforms. Coveralls seemed appropriate to Donald. He shopped at Tractor Supply and found rather inexpensive green coveralls in his and Paco's size. Not quite satisfied that plain green coveralls were official enough looking for such a noble endeavor, he designed big patches that he had Paco's girlfriend, Esmeralda, hand stitch on the back and name tags for the front, just over the left side breast pocket.

Don and Paco's first night on patrol was also the first night they had put on their uniforms. Esmeralda was excited as she waited for her man to walk out of the bedroom in his uniform. She held the white construction helmet that Donald had purchased at the local surplus store, waiting to set it on Paco's head to finish off his uniform. Giddy with anticipation she stood with a broad toothless smile waiting for her man in his uniform to strut out. Man, how she loved the look of a man in a uniform.

Paco stepped out of the bedroom with a peculiar gait. It seems that the coveralls were designed for people with a short torso and long legged, and Paco was more agrarian, with a long torso and short stocky legs. The laws of physics being what they are resulted in there being a particular binding, especially at the shoulders and the crotch, down below. Such was the binding that all parts of Paco's southern anatomy came under a peculiar rearrangement and silhouetted like two buttocks split by a thong. Esmeralda laughed herself silly saying, "Perhaps they will stretch out." Paco smiled sheepishly, hoping she was right.

Unwilling give up their normal nightly routine of drinking themselves to bed, Donald loaded a cooler with a case of beer in it onto the back seat of the Pinto. They began their tour of duty at sunset, convinced that if they can find an injured creature in time they will be able nurse it back

to health, returning it back to its natural habitat. And, in doing so, demonstrate the merits of their cause and convince the community to join their rescue movement—that at present was quite still.

By two am, Don and Paco had only driven past a few raccoon splayed out on the blacktop, and they had only six beers left in the cooler when they came upon a deer, lying along the roadside. Don believed he had seen the sizeable doe move one of her front feet, so he stopped. Offensively grating the gear shift into reverse, Don backed the Pinto to just in front of the deer, stopping with the rear hatch door just at the deer's head. This, he was sure, would make for easy loading, assuming there was any life left in the battered critter.

Don and Paco circled the animal, carefully watching for any sign of life. To their amazement the doe made a gasp for air and one of its hind legs twitched. They were in luck, and it reinforced Donald's strategy of getting an early start on nightfall's deadly killing season.

With a sense of urgency that only a dedicated paramedic could understand, Donald flung open the rear hatch and put in place the trusted cut off broom handle in place to keep it propped open. Like mothers handling newborns the two men gently put their hands under the deer's neck and each grabbed a front leg, then they tried to lift the limp noodle deer into the back of the Pinto. Pulling and pushing against one another while lifting the dead weight of the doe for the better part of a minute which seemed like many more, they final dropped the deer with a thud. It now lay perpendicular to the back of the car.

A more coordinated effort would be necessary to handle such a heavy animal they both concluded. After another can of beer to restore their energy, a heated debate arose about who should lift what, who should pull in which direction and who should push. It nearly resulted in a fist fight had the doe not gasp again, drawing the two WLP's (Wild-Life Paramedics, that was also embroidered on the breast pocket patch) drawing their attention back to the task at hand. Don did make a mental note though, that for future rescue missions they would need some sort of gurney or long board would be useful to ease the lifting of large creatures.

After great effort and several attempts, their patient was nestled among the equipment and boxes. It rested partially on its back with the legs draped upward over the boxes. The deer's head lie across the folded back seat, its nose nearly touching the center counsel between the front seats. The body still felt warm to Paco and the nose was still wet, a good sign that it was still alive.

Paco grabbed two more beers while Donald adjusted the amber flashing light more to the center of the car's roof, then, flipped the switch on. Satisfied that it was a fine flashing light able to seen from afar, Donald jumped into the driver's seat, started the engine, opened his beer and took a long swig—the effort expended thus far in their first rescue attempt required replenishment of bodily fluids—just to be on the safe side. Donald looked admiringly at Paco and raised his beer can to him and Paco tapped his can against Don's in a manly salute.

A slight chirp of the drive wheel and the whining plea for mercy of the Pinto's feeble four-banger announced their departure. The car wobbled back and forth across the centerline as Donald shifted gears and hoisted his beer for another sip. He was steering the car with his knees, while pushing in the clutch pedal and down on the gas pedal. Paco sat hunched over, staring at the rubberized floor covering that most low-end vehicles of its age often came with. He was trying to provide some relief, and, no doubt, improve the circulation to his nether region. Otherwise, Don's haphazard driving might have created a tad more anxiety for Paco than what he was hearing from the whining engine and grating of the gears.

Once accelerated into fourth gear, Donald finished off his beer and crushed the beer can against his forehead in some sort of masculine ritual. His eyes began to water. Then, he let out a yelp, throwing the crushed can out of his side window and told Paco to get him another beer.

Unfolding from his hunched over relief, slowly, so that the coveralls did not perform a classic Pincer Movement on his gonads, Paco threw his empty can out of his window. He turned backward, in between the two front seats, reaching for the ice chest. A warm moist wisp of air brush across his left ear. Turning in the direction from where it came Paco looked straight into the nostrils of the now upright doe. He glanced up, looking over the long muzzle into the deer's bulging eyes—it must have assuredly been wondering, no doubt, just how it had come to be in this strange place with two familiar looking creatures who normally are trying to shoot her.

When the deer blinked, perhaps to clear out the cob webs from being knocked silly by the van that hit her earlier, Paco screamed something like eeyie, eeyie, eeyie in a high operatic soprano's pitch. Such was the volume, that dogs began howling from as far as a half mile away—which is a good thing that will become more apparent later on. As he screamed, he pushed himself backwards until he hit the dash and he kept pushing backward as if he intended to exit out of the front windshield.

When Paco commenced his distress call, the doe gave a deer's patented snort that slimed the back of Don's head with mucus and blood, causing him to wince forward just about the time Paco hit the dash. Donald looked up into the rear-view mirror and saw the deer staring at him and he joined the chorus Paco had begun, albeit at more of an alto's pitch. He jammed on the breaks, causing the tires to screech and howl across the blacktop adding to an eerie harmony to the choral. Well, actually, it was more of a moaning howl.

Nature's fight or flight instinct kicked in for the deer and it began thrashing about in an effort to get turned away from its most lethal predator, and the ungodly screeching they were emitting. Kicking and pawing, it smashed its front hooves against the side window while the hind legs kicked like a jack hammer against the back of Don's seat back. After the fourth or fifth kick the latch holding the seat back broke. With each subsequent adrenaline fired kick, Don was slammed forward against the steering wheel, causing him to lose control, sending the Pinto wagon in a long screeching arc toward a deep drainage ditch. Occasionally, a hoof would clear the seat top

and smack Don on the back of the head. One smack from the sharp hoof cut a new part down the middle of his skull clear to his forehead.

Paco continued eeyieing even after he lost Don's accompaniment after a hoof blow knocked Don loopy. But, when he felt the weightlessness of the car flying off the edge of the ditch, doing a sort of banking spiral, something like he had seen the Blue Angels do at the county fair last summer, Paco vocalized a singular but extended eeyieeeeeeeee... until the car impacted the opposite bank, rendering him breathless, unable to breathe for seemingly minutes.

The impact of the crash resulted in substantial damage to the Pinto—commensurate with the high rate of speed Don had been able to squeeze out of the old Pinto's engine - including the explosion of the back side window on Donald's side of the car which just so happened to end up pointing skyward as the car stopped its flight, landing on the passenger's side. Wasting little time, the doe took advantage of its escape opportunity and clawed out the shattered window, clambering up the ditches outer bank. It stopped at the top and looked down at the crumpled car and the strange flashing object lying on the opposite bank, wiping bright yellow strokes across the roof of the car.

Fortunately, the howling dogs—reacting to Paco's eeyieing (I told you we'd get back to this)—woke their masters in time for them to hear the screeching tires and the sickening thump sheet metal on cars make when it hits an immovable object.

While his wife called the County Sheriff to report the accident, a nearby resident grabbed a flashlight and his coat and walked up the road toward where he thought the thump had come from. It didn't take him long to find Don's Pinto. All he had to do was follow the tire tread marks that waved in long swirls down the road, careening off the road into the big drainage ditch. The first thing the Good Samaritan saw as he walked up to the crash scene was the deer standing on the opposite bank. Then, it snorted and bounded away with its white pointed tail waving—perhaps saying, *See you later*, or maybe, *They're all yours*.

After the County Sheriff and his deputies were able to help the ambulance crew safely extract Don and Paco from the Pinto, placing them in the ambulance standing at the ready, he asked Paco, who seemed quite alert, what had happened. Paco explained their efforts at animal rescue through puffs of stale beer breath. The Sheriff instructed the ambulance driver to hold up a few minutes, sure that neither man's life was in danger.

When the Sheriff returned to the ambulance, he found that Donald had regained consciousness. He told Donald how pleased that he was awake and fought to constrain a grin from bursting out into gut busting laughter as he handed Don and Paco their citations.

Donald's citations were for Drinking While Driving and another for Poaching Out of Season Wildlife. Paco's were for Poaching and Indecent Exposure. Apparently, sometime during all the

excitement and eeyieing, Paco had split the inseam of his coveralls open, fully exposing his boys and friend.

The ambulance attendants laughed out loud as they closed the pure white back doors that had big precision red crosses painted on them. The driver turned on the siren and red flashing emergency lights that lined clear across the roof, and they slowly accelerated up to speed.

As they rumbled toward the hospital, Paco looked at his citations and turned to Donald, telling him that he needed a larger size coverall. Donald told him, ok.