

Going 15 on 95

By Denise Duhamel & Julie Marie Wade

Cindy remembers a woman in a black Jetta with one bare leg on the dash. She was shaving with one hand, steering with the other, going about eighty in the HOV lane. “Did she have any other passengers?” I asked. Cindy laughed. “Is that really the question you want to ask?”

I’ve always wanted to ask: Who is Don Bailey and why would he pose nude on billboards to sell his carpets? Shags were big in the 1970s and so was Burt Reynolds, movie star turned *Cosmopolitan* beefcake. Bailey asked “Why not me?” He remains a fixture from Deerfield Beach to Miami.

At the off-ramp for LeJeune Road, John watched a man climb out of his car, approach the SUV in front of him in the steamy gridlock, reach inside the half-open window, snatch a cell phone, and throw it far into the distance with the controlled arc of a Marlins player.

Emma gave me a “refresher” driving lesson when I came to Miami, explaining it wasn’t like any other place. I held my breath and put on my directional hoping to merge into the next lane. She gasped, “Don’t use your clicker! They’ll smell your weakness and never let you in.”

The truth is, I sometimes admire them—the cars that brake for no one, that weave the traffic like a tapestry, that only see green.

Sometimes I even admire the pink Humvee limos with tinted windows carrying escorts or prom dates or tourists.

One Florida headline from 2016 proclaims, “A Couch Potato’s Dream.” The story recounts how a Budweiser truck and a Frito-Lay truck collided on 95, transforming the road into a river of beer, corn chips spreading out in the warm foam and floating for miles.

Ariel once tweeted, “If the oldest woman in the world lives in Italy, why is she always in front of me on 95?” There are slow pokes out there as well as speed demons. There are potholes the size of small ponds and palm fronds the size of small buses. Once, I saw a semi hauling port-a-potties, ten on each side, secured with a single chain. When I passed by in the other lane, I noticed one was missing.

Things I have seen strewn on 95: A tire. A mattress. A spattered dog and blood. A rubber raft. Shattered glass. Swerving cars slowing down to 15 mph.

And the landscaping trucks with their two-wheeled trailers, bouncing along with bravado. The rakes and brooms clang together in an unholy tango, while the decal reads *Jardins de Jesus!* or *La Sangre de Cristo Yard Care!*

Workers seated in the beds of pickups (no seat belts.). Sometimes they drink from thermoses, coffee dribbling on their white tee shirts, boom box blaring right through my closed window, louder than my AC and Pink CD.

Another headline from 2011: “That’s Something You Don’t See Every Day—Even in Florida.” A seven-foot alligator roaming I-95. A hook in its mouth. A slow, flashing police car chase until the trappers arrived.

Drivers I have seen strewn on 95: A business man with a newspaper spread over his steering wheel. A woman in a convertible leaning to kiss her companion in the passenger seat. A radical whose side view was hanging by wires turning her head to see if she could switch lanes.

The Florida Man? I’ve seen him: shoes slung over his shoulder, marching barefoot and steadfast, eyes straight ahead, toward the exit for Hypoluxo Road. Traffic roared past. He seemed indifferent. His former mohawk had wilted in the heat, but the gold chain glinting at his neck preserved its perfect homage to Mr. T.

Matt and I once saw a garbage truck catch fire. Angie and I saw two hearses, one black and shiny, the other silver and rusted through, drag-racing down the middle lanes. But whenever I drive on 95, I’m still thinking about that port-o-potty, the one that got away.