

# Things that could only happen to Peck.



## The Gas Pump Story

It was around 1970-something, and I was working in the oilfield in Houston, Texas. My wife Toni and my good friend Ronnie were with me, visiting my home town of Cleveland, Mississippi for the weekend.

On Sunday night we left Cleveland around midnight in Ronnie's van on our way back to Houston. Ronnie's van was customized with satellites and solar rings painted all over the sides of the Van. We had captain's chairs and a bed in the back. Toni was sleeping in the back bed of the van when we stopped for gas in Winnie, Texas about 3 AM.

Ronnie had been driving, so I told him that I would drive the rest of the way back. I went to the bathroom and then I paid for the gas. When I came back out to the van, Ronnie was in the passenger seat sleeping, and I assumed he had put the gas pump back in its place. So, I jumped behind the wheel and took off. I heard this loud clunk and I looked in the side mirror and there was nothing but FIRE! I had pulled up the whole gas pump and was dragging it behind the van, on fire.

Toni was screaming "Fire! Fire!" She had a real good look at the flaming pump because there were big picture windows in the back of the van. Ronnie, of course, wakes up and is screaming, "Get the hell out of here!"

The pump is on fire, and the fire is climbing the hose to the gas tank which is full of gas. We're about to explode! I started driving down the service road, weaving back and forth trying to get this gas pump to let go of the van. Finally, it came loose and rolled over into a ditch.

I got out of the car and my heart rate was super high. I looked back at the gas station and fire was shooting

out of the concrete where the pump used to be. The fire was hitting the canopy of the gas station and flaring up to the sky about 30-feet high. I'm thinking this whole gas station is going to blow up. There were other people there getting gas when I pulled the pump up and they just threw their pumps down and drove off in a hurry. While I was watching the fire spewing out of the ground...all the sudden the fire shut off, and then just the wires that were coming out of the ground were sparking. I guess there was a safety shutoff valve.

A few minutes later, the gas station attendant comes marching down the service road towards our van. The pump was still burning over in the ditch. His blood vessels were poking out of his neck and I could tell he was really upset. He came up to me shouting, "You pulled up my goddamn pump! You pulled up my goddamn pump!" I tried to explain to him that it was an accident, and that I thought Ronnie pulled the gas hose out of the van, and he thought I had pulled it out of the van, and it was an accident. He did not want to hear any of it, screaming that he had called the police and for us not to go anywhere.

So, we waited for the police to get there, and when they did, we told them it was an accident and they agreed. They asked us to give the attendant our license number and names. The attendant was shaking so much that when I was giving him my license number I knew he would never get it right, so I just made up a number. Ronnie, Toni and I never talked about this incident to anybody else for a long time, but sometimes when I would be getting gas again and talking to the attendant, I would ask him, "If you had to buy one of those gas pumps, what do you think it would cost?"

I thought Gulf Oil might contact me one day and ask for payment. They never did.