

The Tale of the Tumbling Jeep

1983 was a record year for weather in north Texas. The summer saw some of the hottest weather in years, while the winter set records for freezing temperatures.

It began to snow during the night of December 15th. I woke up around 0330 hours to check how hazardous my morning trip to Central Station might be. I was surprised to see that we had about eight inches on the ground with more still falling. That was a lot of snow.

I decided to take Rhonda's CJ-5 instead of my van, because the Jeep had 4-wheel drive. I dressed asap and got on the road. I had fifteen miles of bad road to travel and I soon found that the going was rough. The warm roads of the day before had caused the earliest snow to melt and the subsequent single digit temperature just after midnight caused the snow melt to turn into the *feared and hated black ice*, the bane of Texas winters. Black ice is simply a sheet of ice on the roads that is smooth as glass and slicker than a greased pig.

I did not drive over twenty miles per hour. I was doing fine until I had to go down a long and very steep hill. Gravity overcame my slow-moving vehicle and the Jeep began to slide on the ice. I kept it in the road for fifty yards or so, but then the vehicle began to fishtail from side to side. It had almost stopped when it began to spin around and soon I found myself going backwards down the hill at about five miles per hour. I had the brakes engaged hoping to get a little traction somewhere. That was not to be.

Still in downhill motion, the Jeep began to also slowly slide sideways toward the steep road ditch. There was a clump of foot-tall grass covered with snow and ice at the edge of the road and I slid into it backwards and sideways. I knew it would be trouble when I hit the icy clump of grass. I was right. The jeep had just enough momentum to begin to tip over after hitting the obstruction. There was nothing I could do except put both hands under the frame of my seat and hang on for dear life. Still in slow motion, the jeep turned over three times as it rolled down the soft snowy road embankment. I had a death grip on the seat's frame, so even though I tumbled several times, I never lost my grip and therefore didn't get tossed around or thrown out of the cab.

It was almost fun.

There was no way to get the jeep back on the road, but fortunately I could see a wrecker coming slowly down the hill. Apparently, we were the only two fools on the road before dawn that morning. He stopped when he got to me and offered to give me a lift into town. We both knew there was no way he could pull the jeep out in all the snow and ice. It was still well before daylight as we chugged slowly along, headed to Plano. He dropped me off at the Tom Thumb grocery store at Jupiter and 14th in 3's district and I used their phone to call Central. Captain Bell sent Engine 10 to come and get me. Engine 10 had their tire chains on and we made it just fine back to the station, but I was disappointed that I was fifteen minutes late for shift change. I ran

into Assistant Chief Paul Mayfield later that day. He said that was the first time ever for a fireman to roll their automobile three times in a wreck and still come in to work.

I suppose he had a little sympathy for my predicament, because I noticed on my next paycheck that I did not get docked for the fifteen minutes I was late.