

# The Night I Met “the Other Driver”

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**W**e’ve heard it before—“It’s the other driver you have to worry about.” One night in Texas a few years ago, that warning took on special meaning.

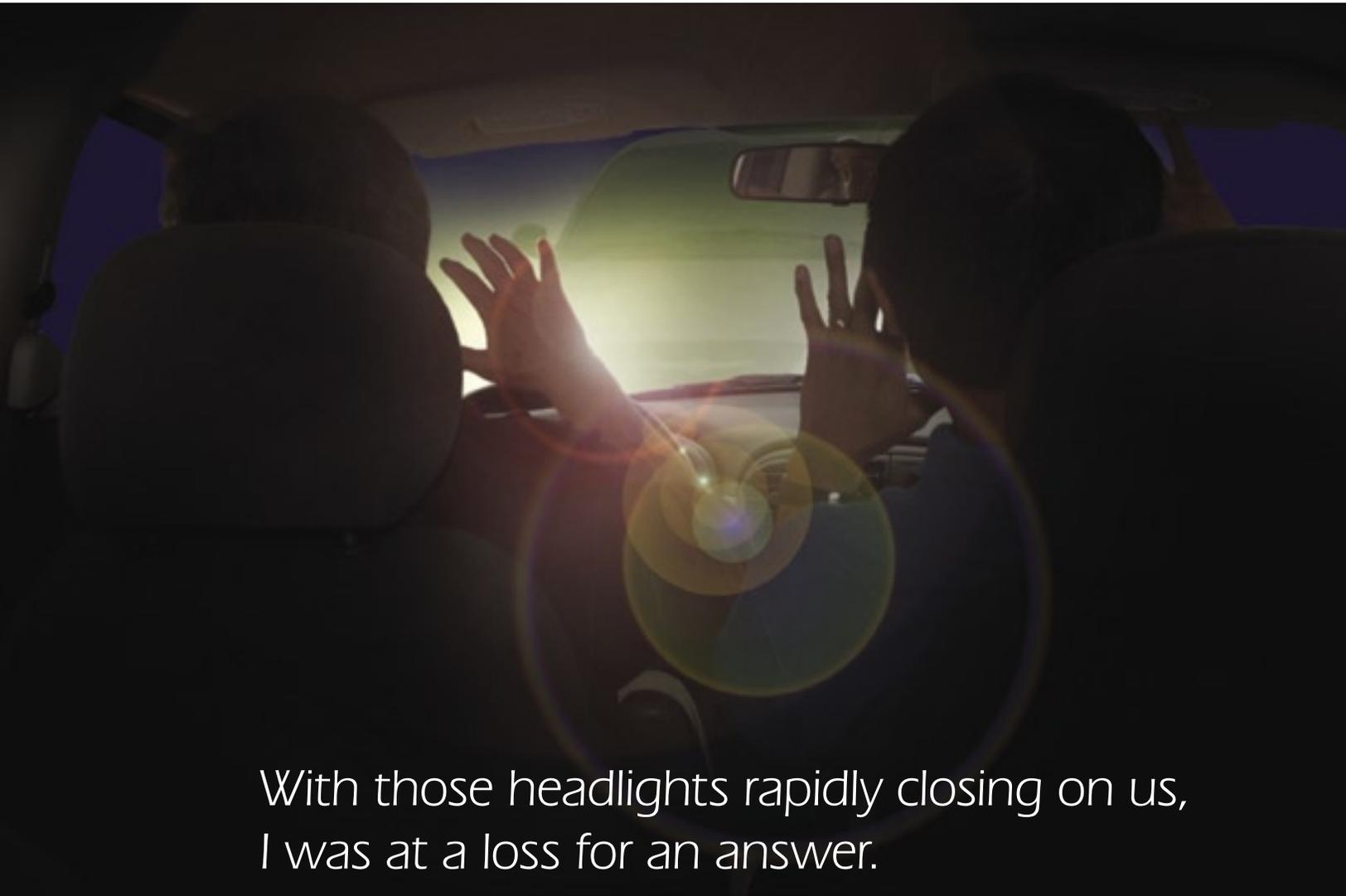
I was visiting with my family for the holidays. On my last night home, I decided to go into town and shoot some pool with my cousin, Alex. We played for about two hours, then left to grab a bite to eat before calling it a night. I was tired and had to get up early the next day, so I wasn’t in the mood to drink and stay out late.

Five minutes from my house and the nearby Taco Cabana, where we had decided to eat, we were talking when I suddenly noticed an odd sight in the distance. Headlights were approaching—on our side of the road! For the next few seconds, which seemed like an eternity, I was in shock. After all, I never had been in a situation like this.

What the heck was I supposed to do? With those headlights rapidly closing on us, I was at a loss for an answer.

Finally, I started honking my horn and flashing my headlights—a strategy I maintained for only a few seconds. When I looked up again, the headlights were just yards in front of me. I realized I had no choice but to leave the road. I yelled at Alex to hold on, then turned the steering wheel of my old Chevy Cavalier hard right. The car veered quickly but not soon enough. After hollering a few expletives, I closed my eyes, braced my body, and hoped for the best. Our vehicles collided head-on, driver-to-driver.

For moments right after the crash, it seemed like I was in a dream state—everything went black. Then, I woke up and realized I still was alive. I looked around to find blood everywhere, so



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Photo by Fred Klinkenberger. Composite.

I knew one or both of us was hurt. I soon figured out the seat belts in my old Chevy hadn't lived up to their full potential. They had kept me inside the car, but they were loose enough to let me fly forward, and my face had hit the windshield.

I looked over at Alex and asked him how he was. He said he couldn't move and was having trouble breathing. Fearing the worst, I tried to get out of my car. Unfortunately, the roof and door on my side had crushed downward and inward, forcing me to look for an alternate means of escape. I unbuckled my seat belt and crawled out the backpassenger door. Seconds later, Alex also managed to climb out of the car. He was fine, except for being in shock and having the wind knocked out of him.

Within minutes, we found ourselves in a sea of onlookers, police, emergency-medical personnel, and a news crew.

To make a long story short, my cousin and I were very lucky. He suffered a strained back and

neck and two broken ribs. I had cuts on my head, a strained back and neck, and lots of bumps and bruises. The other driver didn't have a scratch, but the police arrested him for DWI. His BAC was 0.20, more than twice the legal limit in Texas. At the time of his arrest, he couldn't walk a straight line, and he still had no idea he had caused an accident.

Even though you may choose not to drink and drive or to have a designated driver doesn't mean you'll get home safely. You still have to worry about that other driver—the drunk who gets behind the wheel and tries to drive home on your side of the road. Incidentally, the other driver in this case pleaded guilty to DWI. 🚗

*The author was assigned to VQ-3 when he wrote this article.*

For more info, go to: <http://www.roadtripamerica.com/DefensiveDriving/Rule 31.htm>.