

For elderly shut-ins, it
was ken's day out



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

For Elderly Shut-ins, It was Ken's Day Out I had just turned a few months past seventeen and with the privilege of driving came the gift of an old car from a neighbor who just wanted to get it out of his driveway. My new found fortune would give me the chance to move beyond Opieville and out into the real world. I made a pact with my Maker to find a way to pay the world back, and my golden opportunity came as I noticed a sign at the grocery store where I worked that read, " Volunteers Needed: Meals-on-Wheels Delivery Driver". I took this sign as an omen of fate, and it put me in a magic state of bliss, in awe of contributing to the mysterious ways of life. I eagerly showed up the next morning to meet with the staff promptly at 11: 30.

Ms. Shields thanked me for coming and said it was a blessing to meet someone my age with so much enthusiasm to help. I began to beam and swell with self-admiration when she added, " But I'm sorry. Our insurance won't cover you until you're older. Our drivers have to be at least eighteen". Her words fell at my feet like cold stones from a child's Easter basket. My swelling pummeled into a quivering pool of disappointment.

My thoughts raced like a balloon released before its time, wandering madly out of words and dropping hopelessly still. My face must have reflected the confused loneliness I felt inside as I could see Ms. Shields struggle for words that might comfort me. Her thoughtful eyes and graceful gestures gave me some hope. " I do have someone that might be able to use your help though", she said. " Ken is one of our more experienced drivers. Maybe you would like to ride with him today". I jumped at the chance as she motioned me to the kitchen where half a dozen ladies were arguing with an old man about the amount of pepper in the soup.

Ken was a robust man for 87 years old. The years had hardened his features,

yet left him a little pinkish from too little sun. He had an eager handshake, engaging and sincere, and said, " Let's get moving son, I've already settled the issue with the soup." We carried two large boxes to Ken's car, destined to visit the elderly and make sure they had a daily hot meal. I was a little nervous about Ken's driving at first, but soon found out that he drove like an Army Tank Officer. Not only did he have perfect vision, but he also had memories, still vivid, and sharpened by years of use. He knew these people, their parents, children, the alleys and the shortcuts to their back door. He would constantly tell me stories of their past, and their sacrifices made during the depression and WWII.

I rode with Ken all summer. He was always there to meet me at 11: 30 sharp, crossword puzzle about half finished, and ribbing his girls about their cooking. I learned more about my hometown that summer than most people had forgotten. I found out that this small town that I was struggling to escape had a rich and intertwined history of caring about each other. It's ironic that in my youthful exuberance to help the elderly, I had the fortune to meet a man that was taking meals to people that were young enough to be his children. Yet, I was the one that profited from the experience. I am a richer person for having met Ken, and a wiser person that sees we truly do get what we give away.