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That truck driver you flipped off? Let me tell you his story.

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Let me tell you a little about the truck driver you just flipped off because he was passing another truck, and you had to cancel the cruise control and slow down until he completed the pass and moved back over.

His truck is governed to 68 miles an hour, because the company he leases it from believes it keeps him and the public and the equipment safer.

The truck he passed was probably running under 65 mph to conserve fuel. You see, the best these trucks do for fuel economy is about 8 miles per gallon. With fuel at almost $4 per gallon -- well, you do the math. And, yes, that driver pays for his own fuel.

He needs to be 1,014 miles from where he loaded in two days. And he can't fudge his federally mandated driver log, because he no longer does it on paper; he is logged electronically.

He can drive 11 hours in a 14-hour period; then he must take a 10-hour break. And considering that the shipper where he loaded held him up for five hours because it is understaffed, he now needs to run without stopping for lunch and dinner breaks.

If he misses his delivery appointment, he will be rescheduled for the next day, because the receiver has booked its docks solid (and has cut staff to a minimum). That means the driver sits, losing 500-plus miles for the week.

Which means his profit will be cut, and he will take less money home to his family. Most of these guys are gone 10 days, and home for a day and a half, and take home an average of $500 a week if everything goes well.

You can't tell by looking at him, but two hours ago he took a call informing him that his only sister was involved in a car accident, and though everything possible was done to save her, she died. They had flown her to a trauma hospital in Detroit, but it was too late.

He hadn't seen her since last Christmas, but they talked on the phone every week. The load he is pulling is going to Atlanta, and he

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will probably not be able to get to the funeral.

His dispatcher will do everything possible to get him there, but the chances are slim. So he has hardly noticed your displeasure at having to slow down for him. It's not that he doesn't care; he's just numb.

Everything you buy at the store and everything you order online moves by truck. Planes and trains can't get it to your house or grocery store. We are dependent on trucks to move product from the airport and the rail yards to the stores and our homes.

Every day, experienced and qualified drivers give it up because the government, the traffic and the greedy companies involved in trucking have drained their enthusiasm for this life.

They take a job at a factory if they can find it, and are replaced by an inexperienced youngster dreaming of the open road. This i nexperience leads to late deliveries, causing shortages and higher prices at the store, and crashes that lead to unnecessary deaths.

It is even possible that is what led to the death of this driver's sister.

This is a true story; it happened last week. The driver's name is Harold, and I am his dispatcher.

Dan Hanson, of Belle Plaine, Minn., is a fleet manager.

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