

My name is Travis McKee. Maybe you've seen me and my Chevy Lumina on the side of an Interstate highway somewhere.

For some reason -- I have lost where I came from. I don't know if I have a family for sure. I think I do. I am not even sure if I am married or not. I just keep on helping people stranded on the side of the highways of our nation, well, because someone helped me in that same way.

So, if you see someone needing a little push, or maybe some gasoline. If you see someone with engine trouble or a flat tire or worse. Do me a favor, please. Don't just drive by. Check the mile marker and use your cell phone or a pay phone at the next exit and call the police and let them know. Pull over and help if you feel you can do it safely. Offer up a prayer for them or say, "I hope they get back on the road again soon."

It's that little pebble which makes the wave, not the big rock. And if you know my family - tell them I'm doing fine and will be home soon. I'm just taking the long way around Farmer Brown's barn.

And I'll be home soon -- when I know where home is.

The woman tapped the window on the passenger side. It was the only side she could get to. The large air bag deployed and saved my face

from hitting the steering device, but the passenger side bag never left it's holding place on the dashboard.

My things surrounded me as they flew when the car flew from the highway.

The last thing I recall was putting on my brakes as I drifted down that hill on the Cumberland Parkway. It was snowing -- snowing hard. The windshield wipers were going as fast as they could to get the snow away from the window and the defrosters were attempting to keep the car's windows ice-free. But when I applied the brakes, I forgot the first rule of driving in the ice and snow.

If you have to brake, pump the brakes.

I was trying to keep from driving down the hill at 83 miles an hour.

I felt the car move to the left, so I sent the steering wheel to the right, still with my foot on the brake. I then took the car around for an entire loop before it flew off the highway. It flew over a ditch, over a hay bale covered in snow.

That was the last thing I remember seeing until this woman tapped on the window.

"Hello!!! Please be alive in there!!" She yelled, tapping the window with her gloved fist.

"Oh!! Ow!! Can you at least keep your yelling down??" I remember responding. I was in more pain than I ever experienced. I could not remember when I felt so bad.

"An ambulance is on its way!! I was driving by and...can you move?? Can you get out?" She was in a black coat -- I don't know if it was a jacket or coat. I fumbled for the latch on the seat belt. It did not want to release. I tried again, pressing down harder on the latch. It finally released itself, and I was able to better manage the balloon that was partially in my face, as I looked at the woman for the first time. The car was no longer running, it had run out of gasoline a while back. I remembered that there was a half-tank of gasoline in the tank as I moved up the crest of the hill.

I looked at the woman. From Asian extraction, she had the slanted eyes and the gentle nose that would quickly mark her as an Asian woman. But she had light brown, almost dishwater blonde, hair that flowed down and covered her mouth and face sometimes when the wind blew hard. She had a hard time moving it from her face with the dark colored gloves she was wearing.

She looked at me with concern and with a bit of relief.

"Can you move?? If you can't don't worry about it."

I bent over and tried to open the door to the passenger side. Dumb electric locks. I pressed the button to unlock the doors. "Try now" I said, half out of it. She tried to open the door but it would not open.

"Won't open. Let me check the back door." She moved back and opened the backdoor on the passenger side and quickly moved in.

"Hello. My name is Su Jong Li. My friends just call me Lee, like in Bruce Lee." She smiled as she introduced herself. She must have been used to explaining her unusual name.

"My name. My name is Travis. McKee. Thank you for helping me."

"Can you get out of the car, Travis? It looks like your car hit a snow bankment. You are a long way from the parkway. You must have been flying from the hill." She moved clothing, books and papers around to try to get closer to me.

"I tried to slow down. That's what got me in trouble." I tried to move or open the drivers' side door, but the car was wedged against the snow and it was not moving open. "Nope, Lee. I can't open it."

"Then we'll have to wait until the ambulance and the wrecker gets here. I used my cell phone to call."

I wanted to get out of the car. I had to pee, but I did not know how to tell Lee that I needed to have a bathroom break.

"Let me see if I can roll over the seat and get out from your door" I said. Lee nodded and then she moved back out, opening the door and leaving it open as I rolled over, pain still hurting my head and shoulders. She stood outside, looking back at the highway in time to see the wrecker arrive. It had to pull out two sheets of wood to place it across the narrow ditch.

I pulled myself over the front seats, and into the backbench seat of the Lumina. I then moved out, head first, into the cold air and the snowbank. Lee helped me as I pushed myself out of the car.

"I am so glad you are alright, Travis. From the highway, your car looks totaled."

"Thank you. Thank you." I stood and looked at my silver-colored automobile.

Everything then went black quickly.

I woke to find myself in the sterile atmosphere of a hospital room. Tubes and cables were connected to various places on my body, and as I opened my eyes I saw Lee again -- this time without the dark jacket and gloves. She had her face away from me but I knew who she was. She was talking with an older man, one of those Doctor Kildare types, before looking back at me. She recognized that I was awake.

"I hope you know that you owe me some money for peeing on my new wool jacket!" She smiled at me as she walked toward me. "How are you feeling, Travis?"

"Like someone kicked me in the groin and face. You didn't do that, did you, Lee??" I smiled weakly at the woman who touched my head as if she was taking my temperature. She then looked up at a set of boxes as she looked at me.

"You're at Danville Regional Hospital. Can you read the time on the clock over there?" She pointed to a clock embedded into the wall facing the bed.

I looked at the clock and had to think a bit about that "big hand" and the "little hand" before I gave her the answer she was seeking. "4:22. I don't know if it's am or pm though."

"PM", Doctor Kildare responded. He signed a piece of paper on a clipboard and then looked over my face as he introduced himself to me. He had something with garlic for lunch and it has stayed with his breath.

"I'm Doctor Gurtowski. You've already met Doctor Lee here, as she brought you in here. We're going to keep you here for a couple of days. You and your car were so very lucky. I can't explain it, but the police says that there's very little damage done to your car, which means that it saved your life. Which means that we can concentrate on making you better."

"Maybe Chevrolet will put me in a commercial," I quipped. Then I tried to do something I should not have done. Smiled too largely. Pain shot up my back and side and I yelled in the middle of my smile. It was no longer something to be smiling about.

"Where's the pain??" The doctor looked at a set of readouts on the strip of paper running continuously beside me. "Where does it hurt, Travis?"

"It feels like someone hit me on the head with a baseball bat" I told him.

"Is there someone we can contact for you, Travis?" Lee asked, a clipboard and pen at the ready to document the answer.

I sat there. I heard the question, but I had no answer. My mouth could move. It was as if my brain was stuck somehow and could not produce the answer. "Are you married?? How about your mother or father?" Lee could see that I was trying to recall the information for her, but it was not coming out. After waiting a few seconds, she looked at the doctor and said, "We'll ask again later. In the meantime," she said looking at me, "you get some rest. Don't worry about anything...just rest."

"Okay."

Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" was playing in the background. I loved that song. It was played over and over during the days when I was younger. It was used in a movie...what was the name of that movie? I

can't recall the movie's name. Whenever I heard it in the car, I would turn it all the way up -- so loud that the speakers would buzz.

"Anywhere the wind blows," I started to sing out loud. Then I realized where I was, and stopped. Besides, my voice was echoing and I did not want to give the impression that I was having a good time. Especially when I was clearly not having fun.

But the music -- the song by a band I grew up with -- that song brought back memories. Of a group of us all trying to keep up with Freddy Mercury and company as they sang "Will not let you go..."

I felt my legs and toes as I tapped in time to the song as I lay there. Why can I remember the words to a 70s rock song when I cannot remember about my life now? Am I married?? Where is my wallet...surely someone has my wallet. I am sure that someone will find me...my wife will come in, hug and kiss me and probably slap me for being so stupid. My kids will come in and hug me, telling me about how much they missed me and asking me if I could make the bed move up or down.

Do I have someone out there? Will they find someone who knows me, maybe from work...do I work?? What do I do? Think, Travis, THINK!

Nothing comes out. No memories of little boys or girls. No memories of a...well, there is that memory of Halle Berry with her arms around me, kissing me softly and telling me that I am hers. Maybe I'm married to Halle Berry. No. If I were married to her, I would not be driving a Lumina.

It'll come back to me. I know it will.

Anywhere the wind blows.

I woke up in a sweat. My mind replayed what happened to me on that cold December afternoon. I have no idea of what happened after the

airbag deployed. That is, until a doctor named Lee woke me and helped me get out of my car.

I looked around the room. It was dark, but one of the staff members left the blinds and curtains open. I could see from my bed the lights in the small Kentucky town -- Danville, they said I was at. I have no idea of where Danville is. Was it the Capitol City of Kentucky? Was it a small village outside Louisville? I know Louisville. I always wanted to be there during the Derby. Work -- Ray -- would never let me get time off to go.

I just remembered something. I work in an office for a man named Ray. What was Ray's last name?? Started with an R, or T.

I was the only person in the room. A television set hung from a corner, sitting on a platform. A large sink and mirror was in front of me -- at the foot of the bed -- with a small set of chest of drawers under it. I saw no telephone. No computers. Why was that important to me? Did I do something with computers before?? I shook my head. My body reminded me that it was time to use the bathroom. I looked around the room and found the room containing the commode and a shower shall.

I moved off the bed, my head still swimming. Whatever they had given me for the pain really worked, because I don't feel any more pain at all. The machines I am connected to still beeped and whirled as I moved the stand holding some sort of liquid in a bag with me toward the toilet. I had to stop for a minute and move another console with me as I was connected between my hairy chest and whatever that machine did.

Good thing they were on rollers. Good thing my momma always told me that I had a good bladder.

I could not close the door while I was standing, so there was no way for the night nurse not to see me as I expended my wastes into the bowl.

"Oh! Sorry! I heard some moving around and..." she said, startled to see me out from the bed.

"That's okay...I'll be done in a minute. It's good to be able to stand up again without falling!" I told her.

"How do you feel, Mr. McKee? Are you dizzy?? Do you feel okay??" The nurse stood back, allowing me my privacy while she checked and initialed a piece of paper attached to a clipboard that was attached to the foot of my bed.

"I'm still a little drowsy but I'm okay. Are my pants hanging up out there?? I want to get some things from it." I flushed the commode and came out, bringing my rolling partners with me as I moved back toward the bed. The nurse found my pants, hanging up in the closet, and offered them to me.

"You're not leaving us, are you??", she asked.

"No Ma'm. I just need to see some things in it, that's all." I accepted the pants from her and added, "Thank you."

I first looked in the back pocket. I found my wallet. I silently expressed a thankful prayer and then I opened the wallet up and started to pull out things. The nurse turned on a lamp above my bed, which blinded me for a second or two until I got used to the increased lighting. I looked her way and thanked her again.

"Still having problems with your memory, huh?" she asked, soothingly. She then walked over to a cushioned seat and sat down as I poured over the contents of my wallet. I sat on the side of the bed, pulling things out and placing them onto the bed covering.

There were receipts. A deposit slip from a bank in South Carolina. I could not see the date of the deposit -- it has been in my wallet for a long time. A store receipt for nine dollars. A Powerball ticket, with the date December 19th. "What's today, Ma'am?" I asked.

"The name's Janice and today's the 27th of December."

I missed Christmas. Or maybe I didn't. I looked for more clues

I continued to fish through the wallet. I had no credit cards. No bank cards. No ATM cards. There was a card identifying me with a bar code on the front, a magnetic strip alongside the top edge on the back, and the word "Advantage". What was "Advantage?" What that where I worked?? What is "Advantage?"

"Ma..Janice. Have you ever heard of "Advantage?" " I asked her. She shrugged her shoulders. "No" she added.

I looked through and pulled out all of the items held in by plastic. The first thing I found was my drivers' license. I expressed a sigh of relief as I looked at the photo of the man on the plastic card. It was me. I read the card aloud, almost as a factual decision of my identity.

"Travis Wayne McKee. 1538 Wheatstone Road. Ardens, South Carolina"

"So I do have a name and address!" I remarked to myself, with Janice hearing me. She smiled as I looked at her. I returned to looking at the rest of the things in my wallet.

There were business cards. A man from Illinois, with a note on the back saying "Great working with you, Travis!" A woman's penned note on the backside of her card saying, "Stay in touch, please!" I looked at the front and noticed the name.

Catherine.

My brain clicked when I read that...it knows something about that name. Involuntarily, I started to smile. Why was I smiling when I read her name??

"Janice. Can you do me a favor please?? Can you please call this number for me? There is no phone in this room."

I handed her the card and she examined it on both sides. "For some reason, when I think of this person, I smile. That's got to be something -- a clue. Please call her and explain to her what's happened. Maybe she knows me and will be able to help!"

Janice nodded and said, "It's after midnight there in California, Mr. McKee. But I'll call her. I'll be back in a few minutes."

Janice looked back at me, a man trying to recapture my identity, before she opened the door and went to the nurse's station.

"How's Rip Van Winkle in there??", another nurse asked Janice.

"He's fine. Caught him using the toilet though....I think he's just a little modest. He found a card in his wallet and wants me to call it. Might be someone he works with." She picked up the phone.

The other nurse walked by and noticed the note and said before she walked away, "It could be his mistress."

Janice looked up at the woman before she returned to complete the phone call. She then turned to look at the clock on the wall. It was close to 3am. Which meant that it was close to eleven on the West Coast. She pressed on the keypad and held her head close to the receiver.

"Ardens, South Carolina please. Yes, I need the number for a Travis Wayne McKee." She stood, looking around the nurse's station as if she was doing something wrong. The operator came on the line and asked again for the name.

"I don't show any Travis or Wayne McKee. I do have a T McKee but he is in Lincoln." She thanked the operator and hangs up the phone.

She then picked back up the phone and called the home number listed on the card.

"Hello! I am so very sorry to bother you. My name is Janice Huff, and I'm a nurse at Danville Regional Hospital in Kentucky. Am I speaking with Catherine Embury??"

The voice on the other end sounded slightly drunk. "Cat hasn't lived here in almost four years. She's gotten married to some carpenter living back east!"

"I'm sorry. We have a man here who was in an automobile accident and he had her card in his effects. He cannot remember who he is or where he lives. You understand that we need to know these things - if you can help..." Janice replied.

"Sorry. When Cat left here, I lost all concern for her. She was going to be a woman of wealth. She was going to have everything. And she had to take up with a CARPENTER. Good bye!" The phone slammed so hard that it caused a slight ringing sensation in Janice's ear. Janice exhaled a long breath, and then took the card and brought it back to my room.

I continued to look through the things held by plastic. There was a photo of a woman. A blonde woman, with dark eyes. The photo was faded and parts stuck to the plastic holder as I pulled it out. I turned the photo over to read to myself "Katy. I did. I love you."

I know this woman. Was this woman my wife? Another photo was of a girl. She appeared to be around four or five. She had the eyes and nose of the woman but she had dark brown wavy hair that cascaded around her shoulders. She smiled as she held an oversized crayon in her photo. I turned it over to find no message. She does not register anywhere in my mind.

I turned the photo around again and examined the photo. Was this child mine and the woman -- Katy -- my wife. Was this my family? Where are they?? Are they in South Carolina?

There were two other pieces of paper and a card. A lawyer. Nicholas Ramsey, the card read. Attorney-at-law. It gave an address in North Carolina, along with an email address, a work and a home number. Nothing on the backside.

"Mr. McKee." Janice came back into the room as I made the discovery of the lawyer's card. "I called the home number on this card. The person answering said that Catherine Embury had left there four years ago. She no longer is," she said, looking at the front of the card, "an account manager with Fingerhut."

I sighed. I also started to well up. Do I belong to someone? Have they started to look for me yet?? Am I really alone in this world? "Look at these, please. Do I look like someone who would have them as a family??" I handed the two photos to Janice. She looked at the child's photo first, and then to the adult's.

"You could be. I don't know."

Lee could not sleep. She awoke, looking up at the ceiling as she thought about the day. More about her entire life.

Five failed relationships in the past five years.

She turned on the radio to find relief from the quietness of the room. She settled on a station playing classic rock. That's what the announcer stated before the song started.

Neil Young's Heart of Gold started.

"Just what I needed to hear," Lee rolled back over on her back. "A song about looking for a heart of gold."

Lee came to Danville to get away from the last of her previous relationships, a doctor who shared the same specialty as she: psychology. She thought that two shrinks would equal a practice and increased security.

She was wrong. What it equated was two egos the size of Montana, both competing with each other for the prized books, the papers which would get read and entered into national journals, and the fame which came from being tops in the field of mind-examining and interpretation.

"I needed MY brain examined for ever BEING with Ralph!" she fumed, pulling the covers over her face. She then thought about her patients -- in particular, the man that she assisted with getting out of his car the previous morning. "Ralph would have just drove by. That man has so little concern for life!" Lee thought.

"Who is this man. Travis something or another. Why won't his mind tell his voice to give up more than what he is? Is he faking it for a warm bed and three meals a day? If that's the case, he's pretty damned good." Lee continued thinking, looking at the textured pattern of her ceiling through the darkness.

"The tests will confirm if he's lying or not. Still, I feel sorry for the man. Someone by now must know he's missing. Someone must know that he's absent from their bed, from their home." Lee shrugged her shoulders, turned over, turned the radio off and puffed her pillow up.

She then returned to sleep after looking at the green beams from the clock radio. It was a little after three in the morning.

I borrowed a pad and a pen from Janice, the night nurse, and together we went through everything we could gather about myself from the various cards, photos and slips of paper in my wallet.

"Okay. We know that I live on this street in some town in South Carolina," I started, pointing to the drivers' license that has my name and photo on it.

"No" was Janice's response. She sat in a chair near the doorway.

"No? How do you know??"

"I called directory assistance. I was hoping to reach a wife, a child, your mom. Someone. They don't have a Travis or Wayne McKee there in that town. Did you move sometime??" Janice crossed her legs, the white

hose required of all nurses working at the hospital flashed unnaturally as she moved her body around.

She looked at the clock on the wall. It was 4:19am.

"I don't know. I can't even remember what home is or what it looks like" I answered.

I looked at all of the various cards and photos and started to catalog their contents. There were the business cards. The two photos of a woman and a girl. Two snips of paper - a Powerball ticket and a bank receipt from about a year ago.

My entire life reduced to cards and photos.

"If I just could remember...." I said, tossing the pen onto the bed.

"Don't worry, Mr. McKee. Lots of people have lapses like this, but their memory comes back clear and intact. You have a MRI scheduled for this morning after breakfast. Why don't you just get some rest and let us do the detective work?"

I looked at Janice and scowled. "If you didn't know who you really were, would you rest?"

Janice lowered her head and started to get up from her seat.

"Hey -- hey Janice!! I'm sorry.." I started to get off the bed but she stopped and sat back down. "I'm sorry. This is really bothering me something fierce. Why can I remember how to go use the bathroom, how to be nice, your name, how to recognize things in this room -- and I can't recall where I live, or what's the name of my wife or child is?"

"You're not wearing a wedding band, Mr. McKee..." Janice noticed.

"Travis. You sound like you're addressing some old man!" I responded. Janice clasped and unclasped her hands as she sat there and looked at me. I looked at my hands. There was no visible band around my right or left fingers. So either I was never married or divorced for a long time.

"Put this down on your pad. You may be a divorced man." Janice spoke.

"Or a man who was seeing this woman," I spoke, getting a second wind at this process. "Why then, does that child look so familiar??"

"It could be the daughter of the woman you're seeing, Travis. In case, you're a very special man to carry photos of both the woman and her daughter in your wallet with you." Janice replied, getting up out of her seat.

"I've got to finish my work. You're not the only patient on this wing, you know...but I'll be here until after breakfast. I work nights, so...." Janice moved toward the doorway but looked back at me.

"Thank you. Thank you, Janice!" I told her, as I started to remove all of the paper and plastic from the bed. I carefully got myself back onto the bed, readjusted the tape holding the various tubes and cables to my body, and lay back down on the bed. I could not sleep, so I turned on the television set. It came on and immediately went to the channel that showed slides of various bits and pieces of information while playing recorded music in the background.

Elton John's "Rocketman" had just started. I loved Elton John. My first sexual experience was to "Good Bye Yellow Brick Road." Whoa! Where did that image come from??

I thought again about the song. It was getting in the way of the later John song. She was sweet. Her lips covered mine as we kissed. She looked into my eyes and I looked at her lips. She smiled and revealed a pair of silver braces. I kissed her as if we were two experienced lovers, all alone, never to see each other again. She kissed me back. I remembered her name...it was Nancy. I called her Nan. We were in the same school classes together at Hickman School. Hickman Street School. Seventh grade. Springfield, Illinois.

Wow.

I sat up and fished around for the pad and the pen, and quickly wrote down the details. I then laid back down. The drugs were taking effect again. Or I was just tired.

The last thing I remember hearing was the last phrases of Rocketman, sung over and over by the piano player man:

"And I think it's be a long, long, time...."

The song provided an unnatural soundtrack for the scenery outside. Outside, the gray sky was about to produce snow, not rain. And nothing

like the storm being portrayed in the song "Riders of the Storm". It was being played through the small speaker on the front of the suspended television set in my room.

I lay there in the bed and waited for the nurse to come in and bring breakfast. Of course, before breakfast, they were responsible and I was obligated to be poked, prodded, and a plastic tube stuck into my mouth until it beeped.

The young woman performing the vital exam was neither friendly nor gentle. She may have had a rough time getting to work, and the patients was going to get the benefit of whatever happened before she stepped into the hospital door.

"Tell me," I asked while holding the plastic tip of the electronic temperature metering device under my tongue as instructed, "where is Janice this morning??"

"Had to go. Something about being a detective." Young woman responded, looking at me and then at the television set. She turned it off in the middle of the Doors.

"Old people. They don't know music when they hear it!" she muttered as she waited for the blood pressure cup to expand. She then applied a stethoscope to her small ears and bent over, the roots of her yellow hair revealing the fact that she had bleached her hair blonde. She was actually a brunette.

"Breakfast will be here in a few minutes." She attached the cold end of the listening device against my skin and released the pressure on the cup. She looked at a LCD screen as the numbers were also recorded onto a strip of paper. Finally, enough of the cup's pressure was released and she raised up and stopped listening.

"The Doctor will be in after breakfast. You have a MRI scheduled for this morning at ten. Don't be late."

I guess that was her way of lightening the tension. Or making a funny.

Either way, it did not work. I looked at her as she marked the clipboard at the foot of my bed and then marched herself right out the door. No "See you later", "Have a nice day," or even "Kiss my ass on the way out the door."

Too professional.

But then, I knew about being "professional." I was a professional man of some sort. I can't remember where I worked, but I worked for a guy named Ray. Or maybe that was his last name -- Ray. Something Ray. I tried to think about the kind of office I worked in. The only thing I can remember is my office had a lot of wood. For some reason, I loved the smell of wood. A clean smell.

Janice walked down to the suite of offices used as management centers for the supervisors of the nurses and other health-care professionals in the office.

"Hey Lacy!" She waved to a black woman who was looking at a computer screen while wearing a set of headphones on her head. Lacy waved back as Janice moved onward to the back offices.

She knocked on the door and was told to come in.

"Abby. I need a couple of days off."

Abby looked up from her papers and motioned for the older woman to sit down. "Is there anything wrong at home, Hon??"

Janice shook her head from side to side. "No. I just need a couple of personal days off."

"You know, we're a bit short-handed around here, Jan... I need more than "I just need a couple of days off" to get this through Kennedy and the board." Abby looked at her charge more carefully.

Janice took a deep breath and exhaled it. "I want to help the patient in 3 west. The one who lost his memory." Before her boss could object, Janice continued. "I know, I know -- I get too attached to the people who come in and out of here! But trust me, there's something special about that man's circumstance. I want to help him."

"You can't help yourself, Janice. You have three small children. This is the only job holding you from AFDC. Why do you waste your time on trying to help these people. They have programs to help people like that. You don't even know this man. He could be a criminal and can't remember where he place his money -- or a gun." Abby moved some papers off to one side of her desk.

"All I know, Abby, is that I watched this man pour out everything he had to try to find out where he came from and who he really is. Everyone needs to know where they came from, who they belong to -- they need to know." Janice sat there, hands in her lap, as she addressed her boss.

"Besides, he's cute." She smiled.

Abby frowned. "I was wondering when you were going to get around to saying that. You don't need any more cute in your life, lady. You've already got three boys!"

"And I can't have any more. The baby-making machine has been torn up. Besides, I think the man's married."

"You think." Abby picked up a binder and opened it. She looked down to find something and then used a ruler laying on her desk as a straightedge.

"You've got -- when was the last time you took any vacation, missy??" Abby looked at the sheet and then at Janice. Janice looked up at the ceiling as she tried to recall.

"I don't know."

"According to this, you've NEVER taken a vacation day. We owe you almost a month off. I've GOT to tell Connie and Billie to watch these numbers closer! When do you want to take off??" Abby opened a drawer and pulled out a small sticky notepad.

"I just need a couple of days." Janice remarked. "I can't afford to be off more than that."

"You don't understand. We HAVE to place you off or else you'll end up with more vacation time than we can afford to pay you! Take a week off. Spend it with that guy or with your kids or however you like."

Breakfast was good for a change. Pancakes. Bacon. Greasy eggs. And orange juice from a carton.

They moved me -- bed and all, as if I could not walk -- down the hallway and upstairs using one of those industrial-strength elevators. The man in the white coat identified himself as "Dr. Nate" and he along with two nurses monitored the various bags and wires attached between my body and the various fluids, machines and boxes also attached to one side of the bed.

"Mr. McKay," Dr. Nate started.

"McKee" I corrected him. "Oh, yeah. Sorry. Travis, right?"

The doctor looked at my face as he asked.

"Yep. That's me." I was beginning to worry.

"Sorry to frighten you. There's nothing to worry about -- the MRI doesn't shoot laser beams and it won't sterilize you."

I thought to myself "That's a comfort, unless of course, I'm already sterilized." I looked back up at the man's face, basically because there were very few other places to look. The two nurses had turned to face the front of the elevator and waited for the container to stop on the fourth floor.

"The MRI takes detailed photos of your brain using specially-charged magnets. Basically it's like a x-ray, except it's in color and we can see your brain activity. We're going to ask you some questions and all you have to do is to answer them while you're in the tunnel. We'll see if you've suffered any damage to your brain and nervous system, and then we can work on a treatment plan."

"Do you know how long I'm going to stay here??" I asked innocently. Like where else would I go??

"Today and tomorrow. Unless we find something here." The doctor responded as the doors opened and the two nurses walked out first, one pulling the side of the bed as the doctor and another guy pushed the wheeled bed onward to its destination.

I saw the signage identifying the MRI center and then I was rolled through a set of double doors. As I turned my head, there it was.

The tunnel was all white, with a large General Electric logo on the side and the wording "Magnetic Resonance Imager II."

I had to smile as I recalled something else: GE's little catchy phrase.... "...We bring good things to light." Or was it life? I remembered the commercial with the little girl getting a glass of water from the fridge door. Made me get one of those water dispensers, along with the oven without the burners, the microwave oven and the television sets.

Did I work at GE? Maybe someone who did work with GE?

The nurses attached a harness to my head and instructed me not to move around too much. Then one nurse, a blonde woman, asked me "Do you have a fear of closed-in spaces??" I shrugged my shoulders as I responded, "I wouldn't know. I don't think so." They removed much of the machinery attached to me but kept the pads and needles embedded in my skin.

"You'll be in here for well over 30 minutes. That's why I ask."

"Is there a radio in here?? I could spend the time listening to the radio," I said. The nurse shook her head in the negative and pointed to a sign reading "no electronic devices allowed."

"Do you wear a pacemaker, Mr. McKee??" The doctor asked. I shook my head no. "How about plates. Do you have one in your head or anywhere else??" Again I shook my head no.

"You CAN talk to us, Travis. We just ask you don't move around too much during the shooting."

Shooting. That brought up a memory, but a fuzzy one. Did I witness a shooting? Was I involved in a shooting? I started to feel a little fearful for my own life -- and for the person whom I shot. I shook my head as if to loosen something from it.

"You okay??" The doctor looked at me before they rolled me up to the entrance to the long tube.

"Yeah. Can this machine read minds?? Because if it could, I would certainly want to know what it said about me!"

"We're recording everything which happens, Travis. We'll make the tape available to you if you like, but to be honest, you'll find it quite boring." The doctor patted me on my shoulder and then walked quickly away. I saw the nurses move the bed to the entrance to the MRI tunnel and they slowly rolled the bed and me into the tunnel. Once they placed me inside the tunnel, they too moved toward a glass-enclosed room.

"Travis. We're going to ask you some questions. Give us the first thing which comes into your mind when you hear that word." The voice

came from the tunnel -- more specifically the small speakers at the foot and head of the tunnel. Someone had a radio on. Or maybe a CD. "Welcome," the tune harmonized, "to the machine!" I smiled as I recognized the Pink Floyd tune. Why can I recall the singers to a snippet of a song when I can't remember....

"Ready??" The voice stated in the middle of the refrain of the rock band. "Yep. I know...welcome to the machine!"

"That wasn't part of the test," the doctor stated. I could hear some others giggle in the background. "Give us your name, please."

"Travis Wayne McKee." I knew this.

"Do you remember where you live?"

I recalled the name of the song by the Eagles, the next song being played on the hospital's intercom system. I could hear it as they kept the microphone open as they adjusted the dials and knobs. It was Hotel California, where you could "check out anytime you like but you may never leave." I thought that was kind of stupid. If you could never leave the hotel, why try to check out??

"Do you remember where you live, Mr. McKee?" the voice asked again.

"No. All I could remember is the Hotel California."