

“The Most Expensive \$1 Organ Ever!”
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I'd like to tell you a little story. It's not a long story, and to be honest, I'm not even sure there's a moral to it. It's a story about rock 'n roll but alas, there are no sex or drugs in it. It's a story about a band. A garage band. The type of garage band that plays just for fun and for the love of music. These boys have no aspirations to be the next big thing. Or the next small thing for that matter.

They play to play to hear themselves playing; if you get my drift. But enough about the band, because this story is really more about rock n roll than a particular band anyway. Besides, half the band is missing from 90% of the story.

The lead guitar player is a guy named Erich. To quote Dire Straits, “He's got a day-time job; he's doing alright.” Erich works as a pension actuary for a big down-town Chicago accounting agency. He lives in a nice house with his wife and two daughters, and drives a Jeep. It was just past Christmas time and Erich was thinking it would be nice to get some kind of Christmas present for John, the organ/bass player who worked as a cook at night and drove his Mother to work in Chicago each day. John kept a grueling schedule that would probably kill lesser mortals, including your narrator, truth be told. If anyone deserved a nice Christmas gift, it was John.

Thinking that there might be something worth picking up on Ebay Erich scrolled through the musical instrument section of the site during a break at work. He was looking for something simple. An effects pedal for keyboard probably. Nothing, nothing, nothing. Then, quite unexpectedly he came across something he wouldn't have expected in a million years. It wasn't just an organ effects pedal, it was a whole organ. Erich sat forward in his chair. He clicked. The accompanying picture showed a full sized wooden organ with double-decker keyboards, chord pedals, and multiple sound effects. The auction was supposed to end the next day and there wasn't a single bid on the instrument. His curiosity piqued, Erich checked to see if there was a minimum price placed on the auction. There was. It was One Dollar. A single piece of paper with Lincoln smiling back.

On a lark Erich punched in a bid for the minimum one dollar amount and clicked back to the main section to see if there were any effects pedals. It never really occurred to him he'd actually get the thing. But sure enough, the next afternoon he was sitting at his desk at work when his email informed him he'd received an email from Ebay. He'd placed the winning bid. He clicked through to the site and found out that the organ was actually on the New York side of Niagra Falls.

He checked into shipping prices and insane numbers kept coming up. Numbers like \$1000 and \$850. Now, Erich had a good job; but it wasn't that good. For a little while he figured, to hell with it, he'd just send the dollar and never bother actually taking the thing from the guy who was selling it. Then he reconsidered again. There was another way.

So Erich gets on the phone and asks Gary the drummer, “Do you want to drive out to New York with me to pick up an organ?” Naturally, Gary requests a little more information. Once he hears the story Gary wants to go, but being that his girlfriend was pregnant with his first child, he needed to get permission. With a bit of cajoling he convinced her to let him go. Plans were made for a remarkably early 3:30 AM start on

Saturday morning so they could pick up the organ and get back early Sunday morning. They asked Bill, the rhythm guitar player, if he wanted to come along but he declined because he'd spent most of the previous 3 months in a car driving between Illinois, Las Vegas, and Florida. It was, they all thought, for the best anyway since they planned on going in Erich's Jeep and there wouldn't be a great deal of room once they picked up the organ.

So at 3AM on Saturday morning Erich left his house to get Gary. A half hour later they were on their way. Almost immediately there was snow. This wasn't surprising, it was January at the time. The snow coated the highway all the way from Chicago to South Bend, home of Notre Dame. Because of its location South Bend has a tendency to get the worst of the lake effect snow that denizens of the southern end of Lake Michigan are all too familiar with. Thankfully the road dips south after the Bend and before long the road was clear again.

They made good time until they approached the Ohio/Pennsylvania border. It was apparent it'd been snowing there quite a lot. A two foot berm of snow, pushed there by the snow plow, lined the entire highway which was nevertheless covered in slush and snow. Erich was driving and they listened to a tape player playing a recording of the band.

Now there's a phenomena that happens exclusively on road trips. I like to call it "velocity acclimatization." Which simply means, you get used to going really fast. After six hours the two friends were thoroughly acclimatized to their velocity and in spite of the worsening road conditions it didn't feel unnatural at all to continue along at their 70 mile an hour pace.

It didn't feel unnatural until the rear end of the car began to swing out to the left as the car's wheels began to slip on some ice waiting surreptitiously beneath the slush. Erich swung the wheel into the skid in order to offset the slide, but to no avail. Instead the car simply swung past center the other way. For a moment Erich glanced into the rear view mirror, and had just enough time to be thankful there were no cars behind them.

There were a few moments when Erich thought he might be able to regain control of the car. Then he felt Gary's hand clench onto his shoulder like a vice.

"Oh shit man." Gary managed to say before he threw his arm up over his head.

The car hit the berm of snow and launched into the air like a rocket, the car revolving in the air like a top. Gary was one of those people who inevitably wasn't wearing a seatbelt and this was no exception. Erich watched as he launched up out of his seat and flattened out on the roof, his arms wrapped around his head for protection.

After two complete revolutions in the air the Jeep crashed into the ground for the first time, landing on its roof. The momentum from the crash dug the front end into the snow and again launched the car back into the air. Gary too was tossed again, sideways this time. His knee crashed into the side window and it exploded outwards (Gary would be pulling safety glass out of his pocket for a week.) in a hail of glass. The car spun two more times in the air before it came crashing to a stop in the median facing the wrong way.

A man named Peter Phillips was heading the other way down the interstate and he watched in horror as the Jeep went through its acrobatics. A good man, Peter pulled his own Honda to the side of the road and with more trepidation than he'd ever felt in his life approached the car.

Peter was shocked when both doors of the Jeep ground open with the sound of metal scraping against metal. Both Gary and Erich stepped out of the ruined vehicle with the dazed look of two men in shock. They tried to close the doors again once they were out of the car, but they were too far out of whack to close properly. When the car stopped Gary remarkably ended up in the front seat again. His leg was tucked underneath him cross legged, but other than that, he was in exactly the same position he'd started. In spite of blowing out the side window, he didn't get ejected from the car. Peter ushered the two shocked men to the side of the road and Erich, remarkably, had the sense of mind to reach into the pocket of his jacket, remove his cell phone, and call 911.

Peter, beside himself with joy that he wasn't going to be the only witness to two deaths, allowed his giddiness to get the best of him. "Boy fellas, I thought that was going to be the worst thing I'd ever seen. But since you're both fine, I imagine that was probably the coolest thing I've ever witnessed with my own eyes. Do you know you did four complete flips?"

They didn't. Gary, still in a bit of shock, returned to the Jeep and pulled out the box of tapes they'd been listening to when the accident happened. He also grabbed the tape recorder so that he could see what they were listening to when the crash actually happened. In his shock, what song was on the radio seemed like a very important detail to keep straight.

Within minutes there were police cars everywhere. To a person, everyone who looked at the car and then looked at Erich and Gary were astonished. By all rights they should both have been dead. Instead, their injuries appeared slight. Gary was limping, favoring the leg he'd landed on, but that was all. As a precaution both men were strapped to neck boards and taken to the nearest hospital to make sure that neither suffered any head trauma. Strapped to the boards, they were unable to look anywhere but straight up into the snow pregnant sky. It was, in its own peculiar way, the most beautiful thing they'd ever seen.

Gary couldn't help remarking as they were loaded into the ambulance, "I know we're somewhere on the side of the road. Please make sure no cars are going to go out of control and smash into us on these boards OK?"

The paramedics and police laughed, but still, they did take a long look down the highway before loading them in.

In the hospital ER the first thing Gary says to the nurses is, "I can't say anything about the rest of your hospital, but your ceilings are magnificent." They were given CAT scans and X-rays at the hospital. Everything checked out. Gary had a sprained knee and a twisted ankle, but all things considered he was in terrific shape. Erich was, in medical jargon, "really shook up;" more than a bit understandable considering he was doing the driving when the car crashed. At about five o'clock that same evening both friends were released from the hospital; both walking under their own power. Gary didn't even need crutches.

This is where the true spirit of Rock and Roll enters our story. Because friends, I don't think I'm out of line in thinking that a vast majority of people would've turned around at this point. I mean, the car flipped over four times. That's gotta be unnerving. But did this stop our intrepid adventurers? Nope.

In spite of Gary's blown out knee and the increasingly discombobulating migraine headache that was digging its nails into Erich's skull; they determined to carry on. They

called a few car rental places and were told that no trucks or vans were available. Again, some would've taken this as a sign to turn around and go home. Again, they said, no. Instead they decided to rent a UHAUL and truck on to Niagra Falls.

A few hours later they rolled into the town where the organ was waiting. Gary was driving because Erich was busy hanging out of the window, throwing up out the window from the intensity of his migraine.

On the way to New York they'd checked the tape player. They had to buy new batteries because the old ones shot out of the broken window during the crash. At first the tape wouldn't play. Surprised, they checked it and laughed when they saw that the tape was finished. It must have run out seconds before, or maybe even during the crash. The music ended, but the rock n roll lived on.

The man who sold them the organ was a very nice guy. When they relayed the story to him he looked shocked. He couldn't believe they were crazy enough to try to continue on. "You could've come some other day you know." He said laughing and shaking his head.

They loaded the organ onto the back of the truck, strapped it down and Gary and Erich were on their way with their treasure.

Instead of driving straight through they decided to get a hotel room and start home in the morning. The next day they drove home uneventfully, trying not to look at the tracks in the snow where their car had come to rest when they passed it going the opposite direction. They both looked though. There was even a brief conversation about stopping and visiting the site, but in the end they decided against it. They took it easy the whole way home, Gary still driving. They listened to tapes of the band almost the whole way. The tapes acted as a talisman, keeping them safe.

They got home late Sunday night and unloaded the organ. Gary's girlfriend picked him up and took him home.

They gave John the organ four days later. It sounded good. No one would imagine looking at it that it ended up costing the price of a Jeep, a UHAUL rental, a hotel room, and a single dollar bill.