

## Masked Lua Stories

*Three anecdotes from the life of the Masked Lua, a young Information Technology worker living in the U.S. Deep South state of Mississippi: Trucks, about vehicles, life, and death; Dude the Cat, about a lazy cat; and Venus Fly-Traps, about plants that make the best of a difficult environment.*

*I saw the truck on the right myself in 2014.*

### TRUCKS



The first photo, on the left, is the Ford Ranger. The second is the Toyota Truck. It is also called a Hilux. The Ranger is 2006. The Toyota is 1986. Both are blue. My favorite color.

I use the Ranger daily and the Toyota on and off. The Ranger is my daily ride but the Toyota is my favorite. I use the Toyota for fishing trips when I can and for general fun trucky things.

I haven't looked much into cars. Only one car in my life have I ever really liked. Mitsubishi Mirage Coupe. I learned to drive in it. It was sporty.

Trucks are better. They are more capable than cars. When you need to move something, it will fit in the bed some way or another of the truck. The truck is the perfect utility vehicle. If the truck can't do it, you can't really buy another vehicle that can.

You can pay someone else to use a specialized vehicle. But you would never own said specialized vehicle. So truck is essential.

If I had a newer Toyota, I'd get rid of both vehicles. But for now it makes sense to have two. If one breaks down, and can't afford to fix the other, hop in the second, main reason. Second reason is... the Toyota is a 4x4, the Ranger is not.

The Ranger is better for long trips due to comfortability. Suitable for dates and business. It's also roomier. I can transport more computers in the Ranger to and from places than in the Toyota.

I've been driving since 14 and a half. The region where I live recently changed the rules. Now you can get a permit at 15 and a license at 16 I believe. But you could get a permit at 14.5 and a full license at 15 when I did it.

I learned on stick shifts. I only own stick shifts. This means more control. 4x4 without a stick shift is wrong. You have all the power but no control over it.

If you get stuck in a hole while driving an automatic, you have an issue. You gain traction, gearing goes up, it loses traction, gearing goes back down, infinite loop. You'll never get out of the hole. If you get stuck with a stick, you have control and can start in whichever gear will let you get traction.

The Toyota has two gear cases. You can put it in low 4x4 and then put it in any of the five gears and start from there. In low 4x4 it uses way larger gears for higher traction. Making speed to RPM ratio lower. Close to 1:1. Torque is increased.

If you can't get out in low 4x4 of deep mud then you are stuck. I can take the Toyota through mud that goes above the wheels no issue.

The Toyota is more powerful. It has the perfect engine to move its exact weight. You add more weight to the Toyota, it loses power. However, if you are on dry land, someone else in mud, the Toyota will pull the stuck vehicle like none other.

The Ranger is nice in some respects. The interior is great. It has more horsepower than the Toyota but horsepower is mostly for speed. I don't need horsepower or speed. I value my torque more. The Toyota has great torque. The Ranger is average in this respect.

Torque operates in relation to weight. 50 torque and 1000 lb vehicle is better than 75 torque and 2000 lb vehicle.

It works like traction. If you have the perfect lab environment, the amount of slippage of a wheel is zero.

Which means the whole spin of the wheel is used to move the vehicle. Whereas with lower torque, more slippage. Lower torque means you get stuck easier because you slip more.

I've had the Toyota longer than the Ranger. The Toyota is unbreakable. I blew the third cylinder exhaust valve. It still ran and got me over 55mph on three cylinders. I've since had it fixed.

The Ford is wimpy but still nice. A clogged cat, catalytic converter, barred it from cranking. The truck is only six years old. My Toyota has a cat too and it hasn't clogged in over 20 years.

Old things were built to last whereas new things are built to make money for their respective companies.

Ford makes a very dependable engine. But it is not my favorite. Toyotas are built to last. Toyotas may not be comfy internally, but are more capable and the engines are extremely dependable.

My Toyota is at over 250,000 miles. You can see Toyotas with 500,000 miles on them. Still running like a charm if well maintained.

You don't see that anywhere else but diesels. I would like a diesel, more torque, but the price of gas says no, and no good diesel option in small truck says no as well.

Also, older vehicles survive in a wreck better. They use real metal. Newer vehicles use flimsy material.

I had a wreck the day before my dad died. I almost died. If I had of driven a different vehicle I would have. But no injuries at all. Logger truck hit my 1982 Chevy C10. T-boned the Chevy.

It was automatic, but I loved it. Something funny. My dad was against me getting that truck. The Chevy, he said it was a gas guzzler, was too powerful. Too much unneeded power. A waste of money in the long run.

But I was 17. I really needed a vehicle of my own. For some reason I wanted a V8 badly. So I insisted. He was glad I got it after I did. Because I had made my own choice.

But it is also a sad vehicle... The last time my dad could of went to church, even though I'd have put him in and out of the vehicle I was driving, he couldn't go.

It was too tall, and it aggravated his cancer. He hurt badly. We went first to pick up cookies for church snacktime. Then he had me take him home. If it wasn't for that, he would of visited church one last time. He sat at home and cried because he couldn't go no matter how bad he wanted. We would of took him but he knew he was in no shape to make it.

I wish I still had that truck. Because it is the only decision of mine I can remember in recent times that he made it known he was proud of.

I wasn't with my dad when he died. I was there but mingling with family in the other room.

It was on Thanksgiving. All the family was there. Thanksgiving was his favorite holiday because he was thankful in so many ways.

He liked Thanksgiving more than Christmas. He was very practical. Christmas cost him money. It couldn't top a holiday where little money is spent and much happiness is there.

He held on until Thanksgiving and told my uncle and a couple of others goodbye, I love you.

Held on for a real good reason. Besides the holiday. My little brother had not accepted yet that his dad was going to die. Thanksgiving was the last day though. It would of broke my brother's heart if he wasn't prepared and in many ways it did, just not as badly.

My brother finally told my mom the day before my dad died that it was time for his father to meet Jesus so he could stop suffering.

At the end, me and my dad were close. If it wasn't for that I'd be a different person. Something came between us when I was 13. I thought I was right at the time but I now know I was wrong. After that my dad and me weren't close for a good while.

But we worked it out. Especially during his last two years. I brought him food that cost me 10 dollars a day. My whole month's pay check at the time. Because otherwise he wouldn't eat. The cancer took away hunger. He was in too much pain to eat. His throat would hurt too.

I think he ate the food because I bought it and he didn't want my money wasted. But he needed to eat regardless and if that was the reason I'm just glad he ate.

We watched "Saturday Night Live" parodies on the upcoming elections in 2008. Stayed up past 11 every night. I'd fall asleep in the green chair. He'd wake me and tell me work out, take a shower, and go to bed.

I think we settled things. This is more based around some of his last words than anything else. Things he told me and addressed to me versus anyone else.

He died in 2009 when I was 17. It's been 3 years.

Damn it, I just realized... I failed him. In a dream, he asked me to help keep the family together. Then he said something in my mother's ear in that dream that I couldn't hear. And then he noted to us both that times would get harder. And now... I'm about to move out. But how it is currently I couldn't take care of the family as I would like anyway.

My thoughts have kind of hit an auto stop... some little brick wall that keeps me from being sad about something. I don't allow myself to be sad in the house or in public. I go off to myself and try to deal with it, because the way the rest of my family handles it my mom says nothing to be sad about, my brother can't see that I'm sad cuz I'm supposed to be strong.

Maybe sad isn't the correct word. More of extremely miss him.

I think the biggest problem is I have never been allowed to think through this... the rest of the family avoids the topic... I'm supposed to be the one who is strong. Can't start the conversation on that topic. Because it makes everyone else sad.

It isn't regrets. I wish we hadn't lost some time. But I don't really regret nothing. Just be sad he isn't here anymore to see how things are going, to be part of my life.

He got to go to his oldest daughter's graduation, and this is the same daughter who I doubt loved him in any way at all. But he missed mine. I guess I feel a little robbed of experiences to be shared between father and son.

His last words to me contradict what others are looking for me to do. He lost his father when he was six. Very young. He ended up being responsible for everything. Didn't want me to feel that way. He said at the end that responsibility for the family is not to lie with me.

My dream and what was said in the waking world contradict. I hadn't thought about this before.

I think that the explanation revolves around what a dream is thought to be. Is a dream created by the dreamer or is it from elsewhere? Whichever it is, is it always this? Or are sources for dreams allowed to change and mingle?

Regardless I think I had my father's respect at the last. If I was successful outside of my mother's proposed plan for my life I might gain her respect and pride as well.

## *DUDE THE CAT*



I've had fish as pets, a fiddler crab, and I caught and had snakes and a salamander, but I always let them go after about 2 or 3 weeks. They were more of a fascination, though I kept the fish until they met their end.

Of all our pets, I really like the cats. They have more of a personality. Snakes in my mind don't possess the capability to be a friend especially if caught wild. Cats are more of their own mind. A wild cat can be tamed, can be befriended.

We have had a couple of cats that really were wild but grew to like us as we fed them more. Followed us around until one day they entered the house.

Cats are also learners. They do perceive stuff and remember, and act upon it.

If I were to treat one meanly, they will avoid me for a while, maybe forever. If I treat them nicely, they will come to me, and look for me.

If I show them something, they will learn whether it is good or bad. If I give them food with hot sauce, they will avoid that food from then on. Only my first cat loved spicy foods that much. This can be used to teach them to dislike human food and seek out natural or cat food only.

They seem to know things. Know things even I don't know. They can sense how another cat or another person feels. They will act certain ways depending upon what they sense.

What I really think lead me to like cats, was that no matter how much my dad, deceased now, said he disliked them, he always treated them as if he liked them. When he had cancer, my first cat was always there to comfort him. She even could tell the day when he was going to die :-)

My dad loved that cat (he would never say it).

I think we've had over 10 cats. We started out protective of them, forced them to be house cats, and eventually allowed them to be more free as I believe them to need.

We have a cat door, though it is not in a door, it is in a window. The window is high. After a cat grows to like us, we show them the window and force them in and out of it. That way they know they are free to go and come as they please.

Some have went and never returned. Some have went and encountered trouble that ended their lives.

My brother has had all his cats get ran over :-) He no longer has any cats. By "has cats", that's not the correct term, I don't think one can "own" a cat.

This is Dude. Dude is lazy even by cat standards. He will not come to you. You have to go to him. He will beg for food. Meow constantly if he feels that attention towards him is lacking.

He is not a scaredy cat. Things that scare our other cats do not scare him at all. He is nonchalant, doesn't let things bother him, seems not to give a care, and is very stubborn.

He is also best friend to my sister, any time she is feeling down it seems that he senses it. It's only then that you can find him seeking attention. He goes to my sister and takes a nap by her. He does not like laps.

## *VENUS FLY-TRAPS*



The Venus Fly Trap is a finicky plant. It needs nutrient-poor soil. Lots of water (it must be constantly damp).



It gets all its nutrients from water, sun and bugs. Any added nutrients, even those found in tap water, will burn its roots.

You could apply a drop of nitrogen to each leaf if you were to know what you were doing but if it drips into the soil you have weakened the plant to near death.

They grow well in peat moss and perlite. However, they are hard to take care of if you try to care for them like a regular plant. But once you know the ins and outs, and acquire what is necessary, they will thrive.

I've had this plant for 3 months. Grew it from dormancy. They grow a couple of leaves to collect sunlight, then they sprout and bigger traps. The leaf to the far right which is cut out of the picture was one of the first leaves it grew.

The plant is inside to protect it from the weather. I got it when it was still cool outside. They don't handle growing in low temperature environments well at all.

This one has ate 2 gnat type bugs. A plant eats around 3 to 5 bugs per trap before the trap starts to wither. And even if it never caught another bug, it would still thrive off of the sunlight alone.

It must be put in direct sunlight for a minimum of 4 hours a day. Without sunlight it will wilt in about a week.

This is the only plant I've been able to actually grow, which is odd because I have to care for it, and do things for it that would be abnormal for regular plants.

They are very neat. I have tried in the past to grow them unsuccessfully. And I grew attached to these type plants.

My former attempt was ruined by a neighbor kid uprooting them for a day. They died the same day due to being without water and I was felt sorrow for them. One of the reasons I won't place them outside.

They are finicky but fragile. But if properly taken care of they grow strong. If I were to water this one with tap water once, it would be hardy enough to handle it. I'd have to immediately switch back to distilled water though.

It was one of a pair, the other died because there likely wasn't enough space for it in the same pot.

This winter I'll have to put it thru dormancy. They need a dormancy period, and while they can be forced to do without one, it'll shorten the lifespan of the plant.

If this one will survive one dormancy, I'll likely invest in a more exotic variant. Then when spring comes back around I'll reawaken it hopefully.

These plants reproduce 2 ways. They can split at the root and become 2 plants. Or they can flower and sexually reproduce. This one has grown so many traps I'm sure it has split. I may attempt to separate them later and repot in larger pots.

Hopefully, if it is 2 plants, then at least one will survive a replanting and a dormancy period.

I didn't grow them, simply helped them grow on their own, just as one does with animals. Just making 2 animals reproduce doesn't make the one who forced the issue the creator of the newborn.

It looks quite happy with what it has been given upon which to thrive :) This is the only plant that I know of that has a smile, and looks content when filled.

We should all have this much. And, thru it all, we should be content with what God has given :)

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