

Breaking the News

I told the cabbie to stop a few houses down from my parents' so they wouldn't become suspicious. The driver, Eddie, turned off the meter and jogged across the intersection to Rocky's Subs. The sandwich promised to deliver a punch. Eddie said he'd be the judge of that. I told him to take his time. Asked him if I could hang out for a few minutes to prepare. He said no problem. Delivering news like mine ... well, my parents were in for a shock.

From the back pocket of my jeans, I pulled out a list of opening lines and started rehearsing out loud.

"Mom, Dad, you can start painting my room. Sorry about the black."

"After careful consideration, I have decided to pursue an international career."

"I have discovered my inner granola bar."

"I found a way to defer my student loans for two years."

"The toughest job you'll ever love ... ring a bell?"

"Paid housing, travel, health benefits, and a monthly stipend; sounds ideal doesn't it?"

"Early in his acting career, Tom Hanks starred as one of these."

"Got a gig in Guinea, Africa. I leave in five minutes."

The angles varied. Do-gooder, financial advantages, international career, the kid finally leaves home not to return for at least two years, game show hints, and straight to the point. They were all pretty good but I had to pick one.

Eddie appeared at my window, a chunk of bread hanging out of his mouth. I shook my head back and forth and held up my paper. He nodded and slid in behind the wheel with a brown bag and twenty-ounce Styrofoam cup.

He peered at me in the rear-view mirror. "Hey, man. You need some help or somethin'?"

"Yeah. You gotta minute? Could you listen to my openers and tell me which one is best?"

"Hit me, bro."

I read each one with conviction, trying to ignore the crunch of potato chips, and the slurping sound of liquid sucked through a straw. The odor of onions and jalapeños didn't help my queasy stomach, either. "What do you think?" After reading the lines a second time, I was leaning toward the loan deferment pitch. My parents grumbled about money constantly.

"You're a comedian, man," He smacked, licking his fingers.

"Thanks." The one about the granola bar was funny.

"And I gotta tell ya, that sub most definitely packed a punch. But back to your problem. All them openers sounded good. But I gotta tell ya, nothing you say is gonna ease the blow, man." He shook his head in sympathy.

I cursed and crumbled the paper into a ball. "How I'm I going to tell 'em then?"

"Way I see it, you got two options, bro. One, you drop them a note when you get to Ghana."

"Guinea," I corrected.

"Whatever. Two, you got a cell phone, right?"

"Yeah."

"Then, text 'em when you land in Ghana."

"Guinea. I won't have service over there."

"Then text 'em right before the plane takes off." Eddie took a last drag off his soda then bagged up his trash.

"Isn't that kind of wimpy?"

"You want to watch your Momma sob her heart out? You got time to argue with your old man?" He demanded.

"No." That's why I was sitting in the cab, asking him for advice.

"There you go. I gave you two solutions, bro. Now pick one. I gotta drive."

Three hours later, a yellow cab drove up to my parents' house. The driver rang the doorbell. He handed my mother and father a note. After they read it, the driver assured them that he had delivered me to the airport and had watched me get on the plane. He promised that as soon as I reached the Peace Corps office in Ghana, I would call.

"Oh, and ah, your son said you'd cover my fare. Two hundred and fifty, please. Not including tip."

Before he left, the driver suggested using an industrial strength primer to cover the black paint on my walls.