



Mental Health and Wellness

September 2025

The following is excerpted from *One Mile at a Time* by Jason Johnson. Jason has been part of the trucking industry since 2002, building a career that spans coast-to-coast miles, certified driver training and recognition as the Wisconsin Motor Carriers Association Driver of the Month in 2020. He is also the founder of the *One Mile at a Time Support Page*, a space for anyone facing life's hard miles—whether behind the wheel of a truck or not. It's a place where stories are shared, people are seen and no one has to walk their road alone.

Jason speaks openly about mental health, challenging outdated systems and advocating for human-centered solutions. His advocacy is fueled by both personal experience and professional commitment.

This isn't a story of perfect healing. It's a story of brutal honesty, hard miles, and the fight to stay human in a job that often forgets you are one. *One Mile at a Time* is a living journal turned lifeline—written from the cab of a semi-truck by a man who was falling apart while the freight kept moving. The book is for every truck driver who's ever cried between stops, every partner who's watched a relationship bend under the weight of the load and anyone who's ever needed to hear: *You are not alone.*

"There were nights I sat in my truck, staring out at the rain, thinking the world might be better off without me. I'd scroll through Facebook looking for comfort and instead found posts that made me hate myself more—confirmation bias disguised as truth. Words that echoed every lie my own mind was already screaming: *You failed. You ruined it. You deserve this.* And in those moments, I didn't know how to reach out—not because I didn't want help but because I didn't even know what help would look like. How do you ask someone to carry what you can't name?

"There's a unique kind of silence that comes from sitting behind the wheel of a semi with a shattered heart and a job that doesn't care. You can be halfway through a breakdown, halfway across the country and the only thing anyone wants to know is whether you're on schedule.

"There's no formal support system for truck drivers going through personal crises. No mental health resources button built into the ELD. No standard protocol for asking if a driver is okay—just protocols for whether the freight is moving.

"According to a 2023 report from the Centers for Disease Control, truck drivers have one of the highest suicide rates of any profession in the U.S. And yet, when we talk about safety in this job, it's always about brakes, hours of service and inspections. We don't talk about the man in the cab who hasn't eaten in 18 hours because his brain is fogged over with grief. Or the woman staring at her wedding ring between shifter pulls because her home life just crumbled. We don't talk about how silence in a sleeper berth can become unbearable when your whole life is falling apart.

"There was a stretch—days into my own unraveling—when I realized I had gone nearly an entire day without eating. I'd been drinking water but food? I couldn't even process the idea of it. There wasn't an appetite to ignore, just an absence of function. All I could do was drive, cry and try not to collapse under the weight of everything I was carrying.

"The music made it worse. I played songs that matched every dark thought I had about myself. Songs that validated the self-hate. Songs that told me I deserved to be alone. And mile after mile, I believed them. The

tears became part of the routine. Freight had to get delivered. That's what mattered—not the man behind the wheel.

"And what happens if you miss that delivery window? Maybe someone doesn't get their shipment. Maybe there's a fee. Maybe dispatch gets frustrated. Maybe you lose that lane. But no one ever says, *Are you okay?* Not really. Not if they're being honest.

"One night—not long ago—I sat in my truck after a long conversation where I laid everything out: the good, the bad, the broken. I told someone I trusted that I didn't think I deserved grace. That I was the villain in my own story. That everything that happened to me was a consequence I'd earned.

"And they didn't accept that. They didn't give me some speech full of sunshine or empty reassurance. They just stayed with me. They reminded me I was still showing up. Still fighting. Still driving. Still here. And maybe that's the point. When everything else is stripped away, what matters isn't being perfect. It's being present—even when it hurts.

"This industry will never tell you this, but I will: your feelings matter. You are more than your deliveries. And there's no shame in saying you're not okay.

"This chapter isn't here to solve everything. It's here so someone like you knows that what you're feeling isn't weak, rare or selfish. It's human. And you're still allowed to take this one mile at a time.

"This story isn't finished. I'm still walking it, still stumbling, still learning how to forgive myself and find some peace in the pieces. But I believe there's someone out there who needs to hear this—someone sitting alone in a truck stop, or a bedroom or on a break at work, trying to hold it together. And if that's you, I want you to know: I see you. I am you. We'll walk this one step, one mile at a time."

*The NPTC Monthly Driver Safety Letter, jointly sponsored by NPTC and **Centerline Drivers**, is a Microsoft Word document that you can print out and post as is, if appropriate, or modify any way you wish to make it a better fit for your drivers, including adding your company logo. If you are already doing an in-house letter, you may find information here that you can cut and paste into your own letter. If you are interested in specific subjects, or have any comments/feedback, contact Tom Moore, CTP, at tmoore@nptc.org or (703)838-8898.*