

Fuzzy Dice

My birthdate was Friday, September 13, 1940. On that day my Dad became a father for the first time. At age 47.

This was probably a beautiful early-fall day. I was there, but for the life of me...I can't remember a thing.

In that moment I doubt that Dad gave any thought whatsoever to the wide age gap between us.

That first occurred in October of 1956.

The Gap

When I was sixteen my Dad was sixty-three, a very frustrating time for me because I couldn't teach him a damn thing.

Happy Days

My teen years were very much like those depicted in the TV show, 'Happy Days'. Do you remember Richie Cunningham's father, "Mr. C"?

That wasn't my Dad.

Wheels

My sixteenth birthday fell a week or so after the start of my senior year in high school. My classmates had been driving for a year or more, but not I. In Pennsylvania you had to be sixteen.

To me the wait seemed like 'forever'. It was about to end.

Dad: "Happy Birthday son. Here's your learners permit."

Wow! Another lucky Friday the thirteenth!

The following Monday, September the sixteenth, I took the driver's test and passed.

Aside: No big deal. I'd been driving on our farm since I was thirteen.

Sur-Prise, Sur-Prise

A couple weeks later...and I mean right outta the blue...Dad hits me with this:

Dad: "Son, I found a car for you. Six hundred bucks. You put up half the money, I put up the rest and you're in business. I'll pay your insurance. You'll buy your gas and pay for repairs.

Your first speeding ticket 's on me. After that one you're on your own. Got it?

You're welcome

C'mon. Let's go get it."

Crazy 'bout My Mercury

Off we go, way up High Street to Witty's Garage where sat a 1953 Mercury.

Salmon-colored body, white roof, black fender skirts. '55 engine, duals, stick shift, AM radio. Ett cetteraaah.

It did need a few accoutrements (more to follow) but other'n that it was the perfect car for me as I exited my James Dean phase and entered my Elvis.

Note: My parents made sure that my 'Elvis phase' was extremely short-lived, quickly transitioning me to a Pat Boone phase!

Put 'er Here

A two-car garage sat at the end of our driveway, some forty yards behind the house. Dad parked on one side of the garage, Mom on the other.

Entering from the street, our driveway to the garage went past a small side porch on the west side of the house (the entrance we used the most). A bit past the porch (to the right of the driveway) was a short 'pull-off' area where I parked my car.

Every so often Dad would get home from his office early, just about the same time I arrived home from school. When that happened he'd pull into the driveway and head for the garage. On these occasions he'd be walking toward the house as I pulled into my parking spot, so we'd go into the house together.

Goofus or Gallant

Boys of all ages treasure the independence gained when they have unlimited access to a car. "Wheels, Baby..Wheels!"

At times that feeling of independence pulled at me from different directions, one message coming from Richie Cunningham (Gallant) and the other from Ralph Malph (Goofus).

Gallant: "Don't be a fool. Behave yourself. Never do anything that would cast you in the role of 'bad boy.' Ever."

Goofus: "Relaaax, baby. You are so very cool. Check yourself."

Drivin' to school every day in yo' Mercury! An' after school, drivin' away with Barbie Love in the front seat. Mmm-Umm! Sooo very cool!

But hey! To be extra cool...ya gotta get some neat stuff for the car."

Truth? Most of the time I was 77% Gallant and 23% Goofus. (Soo...Galloofus?)

Every so often this formula did an unexplained 'swap-flipperoo.'

I liked Gallant.

I *envied* Goofus.

Dad loved Gallant.

Dad thought Goofus was a moron.

Fuzzi

In the mid-fifties Fuzzy Dice were all the rage and I had to have 'em.

One nice fall afternoon I left the school parking lot and headed east on Third Street, toward downtown and Sykes Auto...en route to get me a pair o' Fuzzy Dice.

A *large* pair. Black...with white spots.

I walked outta Sykes' and hung 'em from the rear-view mirror, then for good measure I made a couple of extra turns around 'The Strip'*.

You know. To get noticed?

*(*The Strip [def.]: A 'crusin' route downtown best used by teenage boys on Friday or Saturday nights in search of teenage girls. You head east on West Third Street and turn left on Market. Go one block and turn left on West Fourth Street. Go to Hepburn Street and turn left to West Third Street. Turn left. Repeat.)*

Confession: This method of 'picking up girls' never worked but hope always sprung eternal)

I took a couple of turns.

Mmm-mmm. Take A Look At Me! Cool---Ness On Wheels!

Then I headed home.

Getting Noticed

So...I'm pulling in to my parking spot just as Dad is arriving home early. He drives by me, parks in the garage and heads for the house.

I'm fumbling with my books and getting out of the car as Dad spots the fuzzies... hangin' from my rear-view mirror, merrily swingin' to and fro.

Dad: "What the hell is that?"

Me: "What?"

D: "Hanging on your rear-view mirror."

M: "They're (ahh...mmm) Fuzzy Dice, Dad."

D: "Fuzzy my rear end!" (He actually said that. I had a hard time stifling a laugh.)

"You get those damn things outta there right now. Ya pay attention to that kinda crap, next damn thing you're in an accident. Give 'em to me!"

I handed Dad the dice. He marched stiffly to the house, muttering under his breath.

D: "...grdlldzn...boys...dgrms...dumbest damn thing I ever saw...frngrzb... ybrvbmltsk."

The dice went missing.

Slow Learner

After school a couple weeks later as I'm passing Sykes Auto I remembered one of my buddies telling me he'd gotten a cool suicide knob.

(Suicide Knob [def.]: "A clear-glass door-knob mounted on a metal base of ball bearings and clamped at about 'eleven o'clock' to the steering wheel of a car, thus enabling the driver to steer the car with just one hand.)

At that moment Goofus once again reared his troublesome head.

G: "You don't have a hair if you don't stop right now and get one. Do it you sissy!"

I emerged from Sykes carrying my very own suicide knob, this one complete with a picture of a sexy scantily-clad girl staring back at me from the middle of the knob.

I proudly clamped it to my steering wheel and headed home. I'm steerin' lefty, right arm resting casually on the top of the front seat.

M: "I'm so cool ice would never melt in my mouth."

A couple of turns around The Strip and I head home.

'Noticed' Redux

As I'm pulling in to park I spot Dad, home early again and walkin' down the driveway.

D: "What in the hell is that?"

Aside: Please tell me: How do you say to your father, "Why, ahmmm, that's a suicide knob Dad."

Right. I couldn't do it either!

So I'm straining to get words out of my mouth as he interrupts himself.

"I know what that damn thing is. It's so you can drive with your left hand and have your arm around some girl."

Sidebar: I recall being amazed that he'd figured this out. I wanted to say, "Right-O Daddi-O". Instead, I chose life.

D: "What in the hell is wrong with you? Are you trying to kill yourself?"

(He was always great with rhetorical questions.)

*"Get that damn thing offa there...right now. **Giveittome!**"*

(March...mutter: "ForGodssakeIdon'tknowwhatthehellI'mgonnadowiththeseboys!")

I guess 'the knob' joined the fuzzies on a trip to nowhere. In any case I never saw either one again. Thankfully, Dad never mentioned it.

Final Thought

I know Dad believed he'd saved my life...twice.

He may have been right.

Peace

After the 'suicide knob incident' I threw in the towel.

I'd never been able to get away with anything with Dad so I decided to double-up on Gallant and sue Goofus for divorce.

Shortly thereafter the "Dad-Son Tension Meter" began to show lower numbers.

(Hmmm. Ya think it may have been Dad who changed?)

Not!

Retrospect

Try to imagine the word-picture that appeared in the head of a man who was born in 1893 and became a teenager in 1907 when I uttered the words 'Fuzzy Dice.'

As a teenager his 'transportation' was a horse and buggy, no doubt sans Fuzzy Dice. Or suicide knobs.

Barbie Love never saw either the dice or the knob.

Probably one reason why we've been together since 1956.