



Cruisin' News

April 2012

President – Clay Seachris
Vice President – Bob Schmeichel
Treasurer – Jayne DeBoer
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Gearing Up for Summer

By Clay Seachris
President's message

As I began this message, it was all about gearing up for summer and looking forward to cruising, eating ice cream, getting sunburned, battling mosquitoes, packing the bag chairs and all the other great things that make summer cruising so much fun. I quickly realized those things are already here and it's the beginning of April. A number of Wednesday socials have been nice enough to drive our hotrods and the weekends have also been good for cruising.

The hotrods have been plentiful on Saturday nights along Minnesota Avenue. We've been cruising back and forth between Burger King and Hardees, and both places are packed with a variety of cars.

We recently had a Progressive Eating Cruise of about 20 hotrods that met at Snook's in Harrisburg for ice cream and then cruised to Pizza Ranch in Tea. This event was on a whim at the prior evening's cruise location gathering. With our email network and some calling around, it was a good short-notice gathering.

We are hosting a Poker Run and the Children's Home Society root beer social this summer. I rely upon many volunteers with many hands to distribute the organizing tasks of these events, so let me know if you would like to be involved. Also, the Great Plains Street Rodders always do a wonderful job of supporting other club's events. The support and camaraderie between the clubs is great for our hobby.

As the off-season comes to close, I must share what a great off-season it was. The club is blessed with such a great group of friends coming together to make the winter just as much fun or maybe even more than the summertime. We have so many people offering their homes and garages for parties, supporting each other, sharing ideas and helping to organize social gatherings, sharing their time to participate, and sharing their laughs and stories. I say it many times...**thank you** for being Great Plains Street Rodders, you and your friendships make this club strong and fun.

For a color copy of the newsletter, go to our website greatplainsstreetrodders.com



Feels Blessed Today

By Bob Schmeichel

It is no surprise to me when I hear someone talking about a car they have, that is brand specific, that they remember their parents having when they were a child. Everyone piling into the car going somewhere, whether it was going on vacation, to the grandparents, or to town for one thing or another, it meant everyone was together as a family unit going on what could be an adventure. I remember there was always a comment coming out of the back seat if a drive took longer than a half hour, "Are we there yet?" Those times were filled with the old car smells, no seat belts, fogged-up windows, and the crowded warmth along with sounds the old cars made no matter what time of the year it was. Those memories usually are happy ones that with some work can be recaptured for their own children or grandchildren to experience. Gary Bowman is one of those people who thought highly of the 1961 Rambler 4-door classic his parents had.

In 1995, Gary spotted a 1962 Rambler convertible with a for-sale sign sitting at a filling station in his hometown of Hills, Minnesota. After speaking with the station attendant, he was informed that it was owned by the pastor of their local Lutheran Church. Getting excited about what he saw of this little convertible, he drove home and spoke to his wife about the possibility of buying this car and fixing it up as a project. She agreed with him getting the car and the next few years were history. Even though the car had only 65,000 on the odometer, Gary went through his processes of bringing the little Rambler up to a new-car look and feel as he could afford it. He started with putting new brakes in then attention was given to the six-cylinder engine to make it purr again as when it was new. He did say there was a bit of a learning curve with working on the transmission. He said it was called an E-Stick transmission, a 3-speed with overdrive, which helps the car get 25mpg even today. Gary did higher a bodyman and painter to freshen up the red exterior, and then redid the front seat upholstery and a new top himself.

Four years ago Gary got double pneumonia and wound up in Mayo Clinic diagnosed with Polymyositis. Today Gary can't push himself as hard as he used to, but feels blessed to be upright with the use of meds and oxygen. He enjoys the camaraderie of his grandkids for rides his little red Rambler whenever he can in convertible.



Sympathy Offered

Our thoughts and prayers are with Mel Holmbeck and his family during a difficult time.

Mel's niece (his brother's daughter) Pauline Kerber and her family, along with friends, were in a horrible accident in Kansas that killed five people and left 13 others injured.

Be Seen, Be Featured

When you're cruising, your car is noticed by spectators. It's also noticed and appreciated by members for supporting club events. Each month a member car is featured, the only thing you have to do is to be seen.

Bob Schmeichel has been thanking members since 2005 with his hand-painted artwork.



Youth Group Car Hop

Annual Methodist youth group Car Hop fundraiser is Sunday, May 20, 5 - 7 p.m.

An area is roped off for our hotrods. Good food, good fun and a great youth fundraiser at 204 Grand Avenue, Harrisburg.



The Prom

Checkout the story at the end of this newsletter to find out about Ray Connor, "The Jewel" and one special prom night.

Thank you to Karen Roe for sharing this fictional short story. It's a must-read story that draws you in and begs for a sequel. ☺



Saturday, April 28 at Metro Station, 906 E. Redwood Blvd, Brandon, 4:00 p.m. social, 5:00 p.m. dinner, and then Charles Handy live from 6:00 to 10:00.

Charles is in the South Dakota Rock-n-Roll Hall of Fame as the lead singer of the Pilgrims. He's also a high school classmate of a number of Great Plains Street Rodders. Many of us have heard him sing. Contact Roger & Cheryl and RSVP for \$10, which includes: food, drinks and live music. Cheryl, Ellen and Laurie will be doing the cooking/catering.

NSRA Inspection Day

On Saturday, May 5, you may get your hotrod inspected from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Renner Garage. The process is quick and free. Have your car safety checked for the season. Bob Schmeichel is an inspector, so ask him if you have questions.



April Birthdays

Debbie Yesda	4
Junie Herschberger	15
Patt Anderson	16
Lana Kullander	16
Mike DeBoer	17
Christina Jellis	18
Mark Bowers	20
Gary Jorgenson	21
Dianne Moore	22
Bob Van Noort	23
Joyce Aurit	26
Sandy Peterson	26
Kent Reilly	27
Jackie Heemstra	28
Carolyn Hood	29

April Anniversaries

Don and Betty Jones	2
Loren and Shirley Fick	4
Ken and Vicky Levene	4
Dean and Joyce Gough	17
Grant and Linda Geister	18
Art and Bev Umland	20
Don and Helen Jensen	21
Les and Mary Ramstad	24
Derrick and Sarah Stokes	26
Don and LaDell Mertens	28

May Birthdays

Bunny Brady	2
Cheryl Van Noort	5
James "Jim" Kuhle	6
Ron Heemstra	23
Gerry Phillips	24
Audrey Jorgenson	27
Roxie Edbright	28
Virgene Schrader	29
Candi Hanson	30
Darla Schmuck	30
Linda Geister	31

May Anniversaries

Brad and Darla Goebel	4
Kent and Terri Reilly	9
Mike and Sheila Miller	17
Ken and Barb Buchanan	27



Recent Event Snapshots



Burger King Doug & Karen Walker, '55 Chevy



Burger King
Don & Betty Jones, '47 Chevy



Bob Schmeichel
Tom & Joyce Olsen's, '56 Chevy



CiCi's Pizza
Jim Kuhle, '39 Oldsmobile
Mike & Deb DeBoer, '53 Chevy



Tea Steakhouse
Jack & Dianne Boatright,
'39 Chevy



St. Patrick's Day
Terry Jellis '32 Roadster
Miss South Dakota, Jill Furan



Sunday "Progressive Eat" Cruise



Photographs and Memories

by Tom Olsen

I'm a car guy and veteran Great Plains Street Rodder from Sioux Falls who developed an interest in cars in the early 1960s, and that passion has been with me all these years. Each month I'll share a picture or two in the newsletter and will offer a short narrative on each for your enjoyment. While I'm primarily a Chevy guy, I'll do my best to mix things up a bit so everyone sees something they might enjoy.

Lovro's 1966 Oldsmobile 442

Here are two shots of Mark Lovro's strong-running 1966 Olds 442. Both pictures were taken at Mark's Phillips 66 station, which was on the northwest corner of 41st and Western Avenue; it's now a title loan place. Mark raced this car extensively in the late '60's and was always very competitive, so much so that he was regularly "protested" to track officials. The October '66 photo (top photo) is early in the car's history and shows a variety of trophies won up to that point. The other picture is in drag race trim for D/Stock with the tow bar, deepened oil pan, 7" slicks, race lettering, etc. The car was running in the 12.60's at this time; this picture was taken in '67 or '68. Mark was later hired by Oldsmobile Division of General Motors and moved from the Sioux Falls area.



Meet-n-Eat Schedule

Every October, Great Plains Street Rodders transition to a supper social club. Hotrods optional. Please join us. Many of these gatherings have special group rates. Guests are welcome. Schedule is also posted on greatplainsstreetrodders.com

Apr. 18 – Pizza Ranch, Tea

801 E. Brian Street, Tea

Regular buffet menu items

Apr. 25 – The Dutch Inn

405 Garfield Ave., Dell Rapids

Special Beef & Chicken Buffet

Thank you! Meet-n-Eat Volunteers;
Terry & Sandy Peterson, Gary &
Audrey Jorgenson, Maritta Husman,
Linda Geister, Larry & Kris Golden,
Nancy Jellis and many others.

Car Council Schedule

Every May we join with everyone at the Wednesday Night Cruises coordinated as a member club of the Siouxland Car Council.

Schedule on siouxlandcouncil.info

2012 Summer Cruises

May 2 – Dareos

May 9 – 212 The Boiling Point

May 12 – CiCi's Pizza

May 23 – Grand Falls Casino

May 30 – Sherman Park - potluck

Jun 6 – Terry Koch Race Shop

Jun 13 – Executive Touch

Jun 20 – Handy-Man Cruise

Jun 27 – Children's Home Society

Jul 4 – No Cruise, Enjoy the 4th

Jul 11 – Jack Fox Park, Canton

Jul 18 – Poker Run, GPSR host

Jul 25 – Wall Lake – Ford Club

Aug 1 – Pontiac Club

Aug 8 – Snook's Drive-In

Aug 15 – Executive Touch/Subaru

Aug 22 – VA Car-n-Shine

Aug 29 – Bethany Meadows

Sep 5 – The Keg on W57th

Sep 12 – First Reformed Church

Sep 19 – The Cracker Barrel



Classified Ads
(FREE to All Members)



FOR SALE – Three Rooms Left, Kool Deadwood Nights, Aces's and Eight's Lodge. 1.5 paved miles from Deadwood. Approx. \$360 for the 3-day weekend. Other club members are going. Garage available. Large deck, gas grill, views of Boulder Canyon and city of Deadwood. Call Mike DeBoer 351-7434



FOR SALE – Garage/Shop Equipment, Parts Washer, Sioux Valve Grinding Machine, Sioux Valve Seat Grinder, R12 Air-conditioning Reclaimer, R134 Air-conditioning Reclaimer, A.C. Manifold Gauges, A.C. Vacuum Pump, Baer Wheel Balancer (spin on car), Metal Shaper, Niehoff Cabinets, Sunnen Rod Reconditioning Machine, Auto Repair Manuals. I need the space, Call 351-5599

FOR SALE – Mag Wheels, Four unilug mag wheels; two 14x7.50 and two 14x 6.75 tires. The whole package for \$200. Call 370-2315 Jack Boatright



FOR SALE – 1947 Chevy 2-Door Sedan, All original, Stored inside for many years, Solid project for a cool hotrod. Call Glenn Walker 336-7070

FOR SALE – Qwick Lift Style Drive-on car lift, portable, easy to set-up and use. Great tool to get under your car in minutes. Call Ron 332-4543

FOR SALE – 1976 Ford Torino Elite two-door hardtop, 351 c.i., auto transmission. Call Ken Buchanan 212-2821

FOR SALE – 1930 Ford Sedan, Runs and Drives Great, Chopped 3 1/2", New Tires, 8" Rear-end, 350/350. '32 Grill, Needs paint / interior to show. \$12,000 obo or possible trade. Call Terry Jellis 332-0811



Wanted

Classified ads for this newsletter. To place your ad, give written information to Clay Seachris in person or reply to any email from the President. You may also email President@GreatPlainsStreetRodders.com

Articles for this newsletter. Your ideas, input, short stories, recipes and pictures contribute a personal touch to the newsletter. Share your ideas with President@GreatPlainsStreetRodders.com

FOR SALE – 1974 VW Karmann Ghia, 4-cylinder, 4-spd Manual, nice driver ('74 was the last production year of this car) Priced to sell, \$3,800. Call Jules 361-1127



FOR SALE – 1987 Chevy Corvette, 93K, owned for 14 yrs, new tires, new brakes, \$15,000. Call Virgene 351-2019

Great Plains Street Rodder
Logo Items: Club Plaques \$20, T-Shirts \$7, Sweatshirts \$15, Caps \$15, Vent-Wing Stickers free if you don't have one.

FOR SALE – 1946 Ford Deluxe Coupe, Street Rod, 350ci, Auto, A/C, Pwr Windows, Remote Doors, Awesome Driver, Former GPSR Feature Car, \$25,000 Call Buck 351-2019



The Prom

By Karen Roe

Ray was about to bite into his sandwich when Judy Evans dropped something beside his plate. By the time he looked up, she had sashayed back to her table where she was eating lunch with a group of friends.

He unfolded the paper and read the short note. Are you going to the prom? Jeanette doesn't have a date, yet, and was wondering if you'd be interested.

In awe, Ray stared at the note as though it had been written and signed by Sandra Dee.

Was this some kind of sick joke? Jeanette Lane and Rodney Barton had been a couple most of the school year. Rod was a star quarterback and Jeanette was a cheerleader and one of the most popular girls at Granite Falls High School.

He ventured a look in her direction. He expected her pals to be smirking but they weren't paying him any attention. Jeanette actually smiled when they made eye contact. Maybe that was a good sign.

Ray believed in signs, omens, as his Grandpa called them. Like haze covering the sun was a sign that bad weather was coming.

Ray folded the note and slipped it into his pocket. After school, he'd get his buddy Joe's opinion. They both knew a lot more about rods than women, but Joe would be honest. If he thought they were playing him for a jerk, he's be first to tell him.

Later, Ray caught up with his friend before Joe climbed into his ancient Ford pick-up.

"Hey, Joe, I wanna show you something. I got this note from Judy Evans at lunch."

Joe read the note and scratched his head, "Is this for real? Either Jeanette's been hi-jacked and messed with by aliens or you're one lucky dude!"

Ray punched his friend in the shoulder, "That's what I'm asking you. I hardly know her. We're in the same geometry class and we say 'Hi' in the hall sometimes, but that's about it."

Joe read the note again. "Well, jeeze, Ray, when she sent it over, she wasn't moonin' ya or anything, was she? Maybe she just wised up and decided to go with a real man."

Ray grinned. Joe could be a little sarcastic, but at least he knows how to encourage his best friend.

"Okay," he decided, "I'll give her a call tonight. The worse that can happen is a broken eardrum when she slams the phone in my ear."

Later that evening Ray lay sprawled out on his bed, cradling a phone close to his chest. It was 8:30 p.m. and he knew he shouldn't wait any longer. He'd already dialed three times and hung up before the first ring. Finally, he mustered the nerve to call again but hung on long enough to hear a soft, feminine voice answer the phone.

"Hello."

"Is this Jeanette? This is Ray Connor calling."

"Oh, hi, Ray. I was hoping you'd call."

"Really?" The breath he'd been holding popped out like air from a punctured tire.

"Uh-huh. Did you read that note?"

"Yeah, but I figured you'd be going to the prom with Rodney."

"No, we broke up." Something in her voice made him think it wasn't her idea.

"Well," he proceeded cautiously, "I was wondering if we could go to the prom together." That sounded lame, even to him. When there was silence on the other end, he prodded himself to try again. "I mean...would you like to be my date for the prom?"

"Sure," she replied sweetly.

Still convinced that this all was too good to be true, he took one more stab at presenting his offer. "You'll go to the prom? With me?"

"Yes," she giggled, "What time will you pick me up?"



They made arrangements and Ray hung up the phone.

“Way to go!” he congratulated himself.

Jubilant over his success with scoring a date with the lovely Jeanette, Ray scooped up his basketball and began bouncing it, enthusiastically, off the wall.

Soon, his nine-year-old brother, Kevin, barged into his room. “What are ya doing, ya nerd? I can hear you all the way down the hall.”

Kevin ducked just before the ball hit the door frame.

Ordinarily, Ray would have grabbed the dweeb and put him in a hammerlock before he was out of the room, but not tonight. Tonight, not even his little brother could spoil his good mood!

Two weeks later on Saturday, Ray rose early to begin preparations for the big day. His first item on the agenda was to bathe the “Jewel.”

Ray was still in awe that his dad was willing to let him drive his beloved “jewel” to the prom. As he gently lathered the fender chrome, he thought about his dad’s love affair with the “jewel” that began the moment he spied her at the Granite Falls Chevrolet Dealership.

Though she was already two years old, the 1957 Chevy Bel-Air was in mint condition. Her previous owner had treated her like a queen.

She was a red and white hardtop, sporting a 283 cu. in. V8 engine with two fours (The salesman had claimed that the Bel-Air was billed as “the hot one.”) When Karl, Ray’s dad, had taken her for a test drive, he’d been immensely pleased with the dealer-installed four-speed, loving the sense of power he’d felt when shifting by hand. Upon his return, it was obvious that he was already enamored with the car. When the smug, elated Karl closed the deal, you would have thought Alaska had been purchased all over again.

Arriving home, the proud owner presented the Chevy to his wife, Marie.

“She’s a real jewel, Karl.”

The Chevy had been called that ever since.

Ray chuckled when he recalled the Christmas photo his dad had sent his uncle Frank. It was not a picture of the family, but of his father standing next to the “Jewel,” his hand resting lovingly on the hood. Ray knew that had the “jewel” been a woman, she would have been the most gorgeous, buxom, pampered siren on the face of the earth. The “jewel” seemed to glow from the photo, the result of endless hours of “spit and shine” that she was subjected to even in the midst of winter.

Ray finished washing the car, stopped by the florist, and then headed home.

Late in the afternoon, Ray stood patiently while his mother fussed with his tie.

“You look so handsome. Your grandma and grandpa would have enjoyed seeing you in all your finery.”

From the ottoman, Kevin snickered. It was one, in a series of many snickers, since Ray had trooped into the living room wearing the formal attire.

“Careful, dweeb, your time is coming,” he admonished his little brother.

Kevin’s sullen look only increased when his mother ordered him to get the corsage from the ‘fridge and put it in the car.

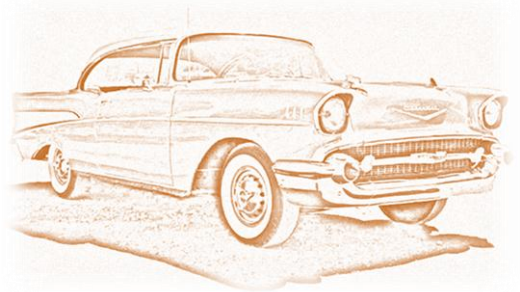
Kev had been a pain in the rear ever since Ray informed him that he would not have enough time that afternoon to help set up the electric train set as they had previously planned.

“We’ll do it next Saturday,” he’d promised.

Ready at last, Ray stood by the door suppressing a grin at Karl’s pained expression as he turned over the keys.

“It’s not like I’m stealing your girlfriend, Dad,” he joked. He laid a hand on Karl’s shoulder. “Don’t worry; I’ll take good care of the jewel.”

“Just be sure to park her a distance from the door-bangers. Watch your speed, and...”



“Gotcha, Dad. See ya later, Mom.” Ray scurried out the door before his dad could climb into the front seat and chauffeur them around all evening.

Ray pulled up in front of a stately, brick house. He grabbed the florist box and ambled up the walk to the arched entrance.

Jeanette answered the door wearing a pink dress with fluff at the top that reminded him of the froth on a strawberry soda, only way yummiier! She invited him in to meet her parents.

Doris, an older version of Jeanette, seemed nice enough. Her father, though, was more than a little intimidating.

Jeanette’s dad was a lawyer and Ray quickly surmised that Paul would be a worthy opponent. Jeeze, if he was facing him in the court room right now, he’d already have wet his britches!

Paul took Ray’s hand in a vice-like grip, fixing him with an icy glare. Finally, his lips parted in a steely grin that left Ray with little doubt. This was a guy who would eat his opposing clients for lunch, then pick his teeth with a screwdriver!



After the introductions, Ray presented Jeanette with the corsage box. A moment later, her loud shrieks drew all eyes to a rubber snake that had leapt, abruptly, from the box. Embedded with a tightly-coiled spring, it now flopped and gyrated for what seemed an eternity. Finally, the offensive thing lay inert, causing everyone’s attention to focus on the perpetrator.

Horried, Ray panned the faces of the small audience. No one seemed particularly amused.

Jeanette appeared as though she had just encountered Dracula, her mother wore a stunned expression, and the old man looked hot enough to blow both decks off the Titanic!

“It—it must’ve been my little brother’s idea of a joke,” he stammered. “I’m really sorry, Jeanette, everyone.”

“Well,” her mother said after another awkward moment, “there was no harm done. Boys will be boys.”

Ray gathered up the box and crushed corsage, pinning the roses clumsily to the bodice of Jeanette’s gown.

He mumbled another apology as he guided her out of the door, muttering under his breath all the way to the car. When he got a hold of his brother, Kev would be so hoarse from screaming that he’d be eating chicken soup for a month!

Luckily, Ray found a good parking spot only a half block from the school.

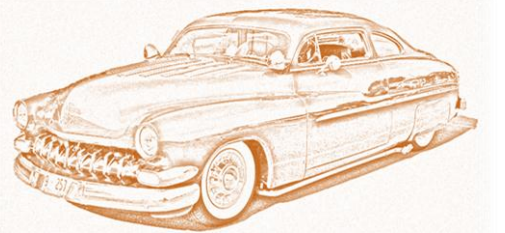
They entered the gym, found a table, and Ray fetched them punch to sip while they waited for Joe and his date.

Technically, Donna may not have been a real date. A friend of Joe’s mother had her niece, Donna, staying for the weekend. Since Donna had nothing planned, she agreed to be Joe’s date for the prom.

Ray was pleased that his friend, at least, would have a warm body, in female form, sitting next to him tonight. When it came to attracting chicks, neither one of them had ever needed to beat them off with a stick.

Ray noticed that Jeanette’s eyes kept wandering around the gym. He had a pretty good idea of who she was searching for. He was groping around for a topic of conversation, when Mel Sorenson and his gang swaggered in.

Mel owned a nice Artesian-red ‘50 Mercury. He’d modified it by switching to an Old’s engine and a floor shift. It was further decked out with French taillights and fancy flipper hubcaps. The coolest features, though, were the dual exhausts with lake pipes. They crackled and popped so loud that you’d swear it was the 4th of July



each time it rolled down the pike.

Mel was handy with a rod, but he and his pals were punks. They talked big but couldn't lick their way out of a paper bag. All, except for Dwight Hughes.

Dwight was built like a Sherman tank with an I.Q. to match his neck size.

Ray chuckled to himself remembering when a bunch of guys in Jr. High had wrestled him to the ground and penned "Duh" across his forehead. From then on he had been known as "Duh-wight," but behind his back, of course. Even then Dwight could shot-put a 10-pound weight like it was a marshmallow.

Finally, Joe and Donna arrived. His dad had dropped them off so they could all cruise home in the "Jewel." Joe introduced Donna.

They'd been discussing plans for the summer when Rodney sauntered over to ask Jeanette for a dance. At first, she seemed miffed, refusing the offer. The second time he asked, though, she got onto the dance floor and stayed plastered to her partner for well over an hour.



Bored, Ray's eyes followed Joe, Donna, and the other couples as they twirled and twisted their way around the dance floor. He especially like watching Herman, and his date, Elsie. Herman danced with jerky movements like a puppet on a string. That was kind of expected, though. Herman was a true nerd. He always used words that no one could pronounce, let alone understand.

He was all right, though. One day last winter, when Ray's rod wouldn't fire up, Herman offered his jumper cables. He knew how to hook 'em up, too, so the guy had a little street smarts.

Maybe he and Joe would ask him to hang out sometime.

It soon became apparent that Mel and his pals had come in with flasks hidden under their jackets so they could spike their punch when the chaperones weren't looking. Now, Ray watched as Dwight, half-snockered, stumbled around the dance floor, without a partner, of course.

Once, the big lummock slammed into Herman and Elsie, which Ray knew was intentional. Ray was tempted to get up and try pushing him off the dance floor, but thought better of it. Confronting Dwight, even a tipsy Dwight, was like tweaking the nose of a wounded bear. It was risky and just plain stupid!

After a couple of hours, Joe took pity on his buddy and suggested they all go get something to eat. Donna gave Ray a sympathetic look when Jeanette grumbled that it was too early to leave. When she saw Rod dancing with her best friend, though, Jeanette grabbed her purse, and, fuming, led them out of the gym.

As Ray was pulling away from the curb, he saw Mel and his gang being ushered, none too gently, out of the school. A moment later, Dwight was lumbering across the street – not a good sign!

"Hey! Hey," he bellowed, "Where'd ya get the fancy car? It's yer daddy's car, ain't it? Yer driving yer daddy's car."

Before he could get any closer, Joe flashed him an unwelcoming gesture, and Ray shot out into the street. Mel and his gang would be pulling away from the curb in a few seconds and he wasn't about to play chicken with his dad's Chevy.

Ray turned right on First Street as soon as it was cleared of traffic. "Where should we go, Joe? They're on our tail, aren't they?"

Fixing his gaze to the back, Joe nodded. "Let's go to my place. If we can keep a ways ahead of them, we can shoot through the alley and park in the garage out back."

Hoping to lose them, Ray zigzagged through town. Occasionally, Joe would spot Mel's Merc' trailing several blocks behind. Eventually, Ray reached Joe's street, careened around the corner, and shot into the back alley.

Ray's guardian angel must've been a Chevy man because the garage door stood wide open! Ray lurched in, cut the engine, and doused the lights. He scrambled from the Chevy and slammed down the garage door, practically, in one motion.

Since the garage was located near the end of the alley, Ray was able to view the side street from a small window situated at eye level. He crouched below the sill, rising every few seconds to check for their approach, his heart jackhammering his chest. They were four against two and one of them was a 240-pound gorilla.

It wasn't long before he spotted the Merc' speeding by on the side street. Ray held his breath as Mel circled the block three times, reducing his speed a little more each time. Finally, on the fourth round, he saw the headlights of the Merc' as it entered the alley, creeping along in the darkness. Then, the Merc' disappeared.

Ray waited a full ten minutes before standing, cautiously, then moved to the car. He slid behind the wheel, turning on the lights to the interior.

He looked around at the car's occupants. "I think they're gone. I doubt they knew we were even in here."

Ray's announcement brought a collective sigh of relief, followed by several moments of silence. His cockiness back, Joe blurted out, "What d' ya think, ladies? Now that we've had some thrills, are ya ready to cruise?"

Jeanette shot him a sour look that would have pickled a whole crock of his grandmother's sauerkraut.

"We've probably all had enough excitement for awhile. Maybe we should just call it a night," Ray suggested, noting Jeanette's cantankerous mood and Donna's silence.

Joe argued that the night was still young, but when he wasn't able to arouse any enthusiasm, he figured that maybe it was time to say good-night.

He levered himself from the Chevy and saluted his three companions. In his best Jimmy Durante voice, he parted with "Good-night, Ray, Good-night, girls, – Good night, Mrs. M'Gillicuddy, wherever you are."

He managed to coax smiles from two out of three. As it turned out, Donna's aunt lived closer than his own date, but Ray was anxious to part company with the charming Jeanette.

As soon as Ray rolled to a stop, she jumped out, storming up the walk before he could get out of the car. He waved at her back as she banged through the front door.

"G' night, Jeanette. I'm glad you enjoyed the evening. I had fun, too."

Donna giggled from the back seat.



Ray, turned, facing his last passenger. "I'm getting hungry, Donna. If it's not too late, would you like to go for a burger or something?"

"Sure," she agreed. "My aunt expects me to be a little later since it's prom night."

Ray hopped out of the car, opened the door, and Donna moved to the front.

They ended up at Denny's Diner only a couple of miles down the road. Since the place was nearly empty, they were seated in a booth quickly.

Ray put a quarter in the table jukebox and they put in their order.

When the Drifters launched into "Under the Boardwalk," he relaxed for the first time that evening.

As they talked, Ray noticed some things about Donna that weren't apparent before. She was an attentive listener whose ready smiles lit up her face like the candles on a birthday cake.

They lit him up, too!!

She looked good in her dress. It matched her eyes, a pretty blue that reminded Ray of the cornflowers in his grandmother's garden.

As they waited for their burgers, Ray asked Donna if she had ever heard about the time Joe siphoned gas from his uncle's gas tank.

“Joe really liked this chick named Linda who skated regularly at the Henderberg Skating Rink. One night he was hot to go there but had only enough money for admission, not for gas. He decided ‘just this one time’ to siphon gas from the tank on his uncle’s farm just outside of town. Little did he know that too many others had come up with the same idea so his uncle had filled the tank with contaminated gas. About half way to Henderberg, his pick-up sputtered to a stop. He spent most of the night walking home and six months earning the money for a new engine.

Donna giggled, commenting that he could have bought a lot of gas for the cost of that “freebie.”

After their meal, Ray and Donna talked for another hour. He learned that she attended a high school in a small town not far from his own.

By the time they were ready to leave, he realized that he was starting to like her but wasn’t sure if it was mutual. She had laughed at his jokes, though, so maybe that was a good sign.

Ray dropped Donna off, and then headed home. Minutes after he’d pulled into the garage, he was on his knees with a flashlight, examining nearly every inch of the “jewel.” He didn’t get underneath her but ran a beam over her hood, fenders, and everything else. Except for dirt around the wheel well, she seemed to be none the worse for wear. Still, he wasn’t out of the woods, yet.

As quietly as possible, he closed the garage door wondering what the day would bring. When it came to the “jewel,” his dad had the eyes of an eagle.

Passing Kevin’s room on the way to his own, Ray noticed a light still on. Entering, he saw Kev lying face-down with his leg dangling over the side of the bed. He was wearing his coonskin cap.

Ray looked down at his little brother who snored gently into his pillow. The little dweeb looked so innocent.

He thought about smearing cat poop on the tip of the coontail but then recalled how torqued Jeanette’s old man had been over the snake fiasco. Standing there with his red face and clenched fists, the guy had looked like a lobster on steroids.

Ray grinned. Maybe the kid’s idea of a prank hadn’t been so dumb after all. He reached down and placed the dangling limb firmly on the mattress. He drew the covers over Kevin’s shoulders, turned off the light, and tiptoed out of the room.

Hours later, Ray heard footsteps in the garage below and knew that his dad was inspecting the “jewel”. Still apprehensive that his father would find something he’d missed, Ray sat up, waiting for the dreaded roar, “Ray, get down here----NOW!!”

It never came. Apparently, the owner of the Chevy had come to the same conclusion as his son; the precious jewel was as perfect as ever.

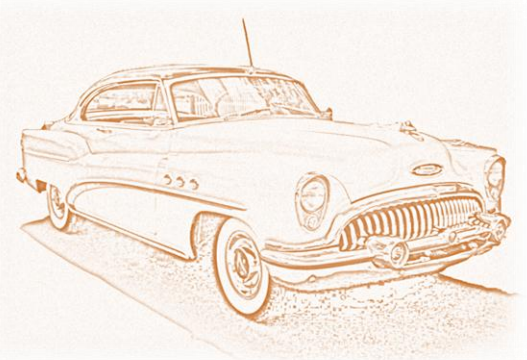
Greatly relieved, Ray let out an enormous sigh. He couldn’t help feeling as though he’d just been pardoned from a tingly seat in the electric chair.

The next morning, Ray threw his geometry book on the front seat of his ‘53 Buick then slid in behind the wheel. He turned the key, listening to the hum of the engine for a couple of minutes.

He had inherited the Buick from his grandfather over a year ago. She had been an elegant car back in her day, but, even then, wouldn’t have broken any speed records.

Remembering his grandfather’s fondness for it, he had decided to keep it all original. She wasn’t coddled like the “jewel”, but he tried to take good care of her. She had become his baby, too. “You’re all mine, now, Sweet Thing,” he’d assured her as he’d driven her off the farm for the last time.

Ray put the Buick into gear as he headed for Granite Falls High School. It was early, but he knew that the kids would already be huddled in groups, gossiping about the prom and what happened after the prom.



When he reached his locker, Joe was waiting, eager to bombard him with the news. “Did ya hear about Mel and his gang?”

Ray shook his head. “No, but I’m all ears.”

“Prom night, Dave Hanson and a bunch of guys were messing around out at Prairie Hills. They figured the cops would be sticking close to Granite Falls ‘cuz of the prom.”

“Mel and his pals were out there, too, looking for trouble, as usual. Mel kept tailing Dave who would crawl around the curves, then speed up on the straights. Finally, Mel zipped around him, ready to brake, when he saw the red lights of the highway patrol flashing in his mirror.”

“They were all hauled into jail for the night and had their licenses suspended for a couple of months. Mel and his gang got kicked out of school, too – for that, and their ‘monkey business’ at the prom.”

Joe finished his report with a smirk and a thumbs-up. “Gotta go, Buddy. I’ve got track tonight, but I’ll see ya tomorrow.”

Ray sauntered down the hall picturing Mel and his gang, not showin’ off in the red Merc’, but slumped in the back seat of a less sporty ride, one with a big, red cherry on the top!

A grin emerged as Ray continued to gloat inwardly. Yes, Sireee! If satisfaction had another definition, it would be – gearhead jerks with no ride and their butts in a sling.

By the time Ray reached his classroom, his grin had stretched to the size of a football field.

The rest of the day only got better. The cafeteria served footlongs for lunch, he got an “A” on his lab exam, and for once, Mrs. Gates didn’t catch him snoozing in study hall.

When he exited Granite Falls High School in mid-afternoon, Ray’s mood was soaring higher than a Bulldog football at their winning homecoming game.

Approaching the Buick after school, Ray spotted a note trapped behind the wiper on the driver’s side. It was from Joe.

Sorry, forgot to give you this earlier. It’s Donna’s telephone number. She’s giving it to you in case you’re interested in calling. Good luck, Buddy.

Ray gave out a victorious hoot. It was a perfect ending to a perfect day! He stuffed the note in his pocket, and hopped into the Buick. He started the engine, patting the steering wheel before putting her into gear.

“Get ready for some company, Sweet Thing, ‘cuz it won’t be just you and me anymore.”

The Buick’s engine rumbled heartily in response. She approves of the new arrangement, Ray thought. “Do you hear that, Grandpa? That’s gotta be a sign. That’s gotta be a good sign!”

