MOTORING MEMORIES

ONE MOTORIST’S EXPERIENCES
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MOTORING MEMORIES

Motoring is an experience with an automobile, something that makes one's interaction with an automobile memorable. It can be good or bad, a life changing experience, or just a memorable event or occasion. It can fix in your memory a series of sights, smells, and associations that linger there forever. Driving is just the function of taking a car from one place to another. Most of the time all of us merely drive, but there are times when we motor memorably. These are some of those stories.

I cannot remember a time when cars were not important to me. After "Mama" and "Daddy," I am told that some of the first words I learned to say were “Buick” and “DeSoto,” cars then driven by two of the members of my family who drove me around a lot. My father had the only children in his family and circle of friends, so we were doted upon and taken around in Buicks and DeSotos to be shown to other friends and family. I collected all types and kinds of toy cars and trucks, even having a pedal car with working electric lights and horn. As I moved into those in between years when you are not a child anymore, but you cannot drive, I made myself content with building models of the cars I admired, eventually acquiring some one hundred and sixty, as well as articles and advertisements from various magazines of cars for the various scrapbooks I began then and still have. One uncle owned a car dealership. He sold Studebaker, Datsun and Mercedes-Benz. As a teenager, he would get me tickets to the local car shows where I could add to my store of free car literature. Then there were trips to the main public library after school on the bus to check out books about cars. I would then go to my father's office, and ride home with him. All of this fascination with reading about cars was but a poor substitute for the time when I could obtain a driver's license and actually control a car. In my day, and among my circle of friends and
acquaintances, it was not the norm for sixteen year olds to have their own cars. To accomplish this feat of dexterity would require skillful planning and patience. I went to work on my research well in advance of my fifteenth birthday, because at that time one could obtain a learner’s permit ninety days before one's sixteenth birthday, and it was not my intention to allow any of that ninety days to go to waste.

1954 PACKARD CLIPPER DELUXE SEDAN

I had determined that I wanted some sort of luxury car. I had reasoned through to this decision, I thought, by a brilliant series of deductions. People who owned this type of car generally had money. Therefore, they would have taken care of the car in better than the average fashion, and I could expect such a car to provide more than normal value for dollar spent since such cars depreciated rather rapidly, and they should be expected to operate relatively trouble free, not to mention that they had a better ride and usually more features to make ownership enjoyable. In the 1960's, when one was looking for a ten to a twelve-year-old car, generally only the more expensive makes had automatic transmissions, and this was an essential feature for keeping one arm around all of the girls I was going to be able to date once I had my own car.

We always owned a Chrysler product, and I was singularly unimpressed with the durability of their body work, and my family possessed a decided bias against owning a Ford product for reasons never articulated to me. Therefore, with Chrysler and Ford out of the picture, I was left with Buick, Oldsmobile and Cadillac, the latter being my car of choice. My uncle's Studebakers were to be avoided at all cost, and Datsuns were then thought to be cheap and tinny, and Mercedes,
even then, was priced out of the realm of consideration. Of course, I had better plans for the future. I was going to own a succession of Mercedes-Benz, Rolls-Royces, and perhaps even a Dusenburg, but one had to start more modestly, particularly when one had to persuade one's parents to spring for the purchase price.

As I diligently searched the newspaper advertisements for a suitable car, I kept coming across advertisements for a car named “Packard.” I asked my father about this marque. He explained to me that people with real money used to drive a Packard. In his view, most professionals - doctors, lawyers, engineers, and accountants - drove Buicks, Oldsmobiles, and Chryslers. They had enough money to take care of their cars, and they generally did. In my father's opinion, there were two types of people who drove Cadillacs, Lincolns, and Imperials - those with money and those without. The former took exceptional care of their cars, but if one were unlucky enough to get a used car owned by one of this latter type of folk, my father opined, it would be a perpetual headache of expensive repair bills. The reason for this was that each of the manufacturers of these vehicles had a finance company to handle the arrangements for buying the car on an installment plan. Packard, on the other hand, did not have such a captive finance company, and therefore their cars had to be bought with cash. Also, I learned at that time that Packard was esteemed every bit as fine a car as Cadillac, if not better. In the 1920s and 1930s, the golden age of the classic automobiles, Packard had been considered by many to be second only to Dusenburg in its ranking as the world's best car. Certainly, at that time, it was of a higher status than even Rolls-Royce, and generally built to much the same exacting standard with the same quality materials. It was not until 1949, after many years of effort and expense, that Cadillac managed, with the combination of the new overhead valve V-8 engine, two-door hardtop Coupe de
Ville, and their tailfin styling to dethrone Packard from the number one luxury car sales position it had occupied for half a century. It was a combination that Packard would never again best. The Packard advertising slogan, from the beginning to the end, “Ask the Man Who Owns One,” had exemplified the company's complete confidence in their products. Since these cars were no longer being made by 1965, their re-sale value had plummeted, and they were available for approximately half the price of the corresponding year's Cadillac. The search was on in earnest.

My father shared many stories about making spending money as a youth polishing Packards for those who lived along Nashville's West End Avenue, and its parallel streets of Whitland Avenue, Richland Avenue, Central Avenue, as well as the other intersecting neighborhood streets. I felt that I would have an ally in the effort to persuade my mother of the wisdom of allowing me to purchase a Packard. Additionally, my father had a part-time job working in a West End Avenue service station where he had been employed since he was a teenager, so he had some familiarity with the maintenance history of the cars in that neighborhood.

In July of 1965, I located a very promising advertisement in the local newspaper. A 1954 Packard Clipper Deluxe four door sedan\(^1\) was offered for sale for three hundred dollars. I persuaded my father that we should go and look at it, particularly after I had called the gentleman who owned it and found that he lived on Whitland Avenue, one of Nashville's magic Packard addresses. I felt reasonably certain that if my father would consent to go and see the car, that this indicated a willingness on his part to accept the proposition that I might be able to have a car of my own. I was equally certain that such an idea would be perceived by my mother with less enthusiasm than one would embrace death. With my father's permission, I made an appointment

\(^1\)This car had a wheelbase of 122", over-all length of 215.5", height of 62.4", and weighed 4030 lbs., it had an L-Head in-line 8 engine of 327 cu. in. developing 165 HP; MSRP base was $2,695.
for us to see the car. The elderly gentleman explained that he had never driven anything but Packards, having owned seventeen of them, and this one was his last. He had retired, and he and his wife were moving to Florida. He had purchased a Chrysler Imperial from the former Nashville Packard dealer, E. Gray Smith, as his retirement car. Mr. Smith had been in the automobile business since the first decade of the twentieth century, and was still, at that time, one of Nashville’s premier auto dealers.

The car had been repainted refrigerator white, and had an original forest green interior. It had power brakes, a signal seeking radio, an automatic transmission, remote control exterior rear view mirror, and a heater, all optional equipment for that year and model. Originally, the car had been a rich cream color, with a forest green top and matching interior of a vinyl and wool cloth. I would be the third owner, the original owner, I would learn, having employed a chauffeur. The car had been sold new at E. Gray Smith. The car had fold down footrests in the rear, a rear seat heater, and rear seat radio and interior light controls. After a brief drive through the neighborhood, my father told me he knew the owner from the service station where he worked, and that the car was very well maintained. I could tell that my father was impressed. When we returned the car after the test drive, my father offered the owner $275.00 for the car. I was amazed and astonished. We were going to buy a car without consulting my mother! The owner said he would have to consider the offer, and we left. On the way home, my father went on at great length about never believing he would ever be so fortunate as to own a Packard. I reminded him that we did not own it yet. “Oh, but we will,” he said, “he will accept the offer.” It was the evening of the next day before the call came

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2 This was not a standard Packard body color.

3 Approximately $1,825.00 in today’s dollars, adjusted for inflation.
through confirming my father's prediction. We were now the owners of a Packard automobile. I only had to wait seven months, during which time I would learn to drive, and obtain my driver's license.

Within a day or two, we returned to the couple on Whitland Avenue to pay for the car and pick it up. My mother stayed in the car in front of the house. She was not at all happy with these proceedings, and was only along to drive my father's car home. The little couple, whose names I cannot now recall, stood in their driveway, with their arms around each other's waists and tears running down their cheeks as we drove away. The gentleman who sold the car had told us that he had never driven anything but Packards, and neither had his father. This was his seventeenth Packard, and was to be his last. My father drove the Packard, with me perched on the seat beside him, barely able to contain my total joy. My plan to obtain a car had succeeded beyond all my wildest dreams. I can still vividly recall that feeling of accomplishment and pride of ownership of that old car. I was the first of my friends to have my own car. To this day, I can remember every detail of the ride home in that car - the feel of the elegant but faded material on the seat, the high gloss of the forest green paint on the unpadded metal dashboard, the smell of the car, the highly efficient and satisfactory ventilation system on that hot July afternoon. Everything on the car worked flawlessly, with the exception of the electric clock, just as a proper Packard should. We stopped at the service station where my father worked to fill the tank. The car tank, though not empty, held eighteen gallons of gas, which then cost thirty-one cents per gallon. My recollection was that the car would get about seventeen miles per gallon on the road, and between fourteen and fifteen miles per gallon around town, about average for so large and heavy a car of that day, and really not too bad, when one considers that this car was comparable in size and weight to today's
SUVs.

My euphoria was short lived. When we got home, my father opened the hood of the Packard, removed the distributor cap, and placed it in the trunk of his car. He explained that I could not drive the car until I had a learner's permit (which, of course, I knew), that the removal of the distributor cap would prevent me from being tempted to do something I should not do, and that having the car behind the house would stimulate my ambition to locate a job and save the necessary money for my car insurance. In October of that year, I obtained my learner's permit, and lessons commenced on the old Veteran's Administration Hospital property, where there was no traffic, to teach me to handle this behemoth we had bought. My mother grudgingly conducted most of these lessons. She was never as impressed with the Packard as my father was.

I then learned to my chagrin that state law prohibited the hiring of anyone not already sixteen. I spent the balance of that summer cleaning cars for neighbors, mowing lawns, and doing anything else I could to earn money with only a bicycle for transportation. It was profitable, but not profitable enough. I needed a regular salaried job. Once I had attained the age of sixteen, I would ride the approximate mile and a half from my home to the nearest shopping center each afternoon after school, and pester Wayne Mealer, the manager of the local Kroger grocery store, for a job as a clerk. Each afternoon I was told that there was no job available for me. Finally, one afternoon, Mr. Mealer asked me how long I planned to continue to come each day. I told him until he told me he would not hire me, since each day I had been told that there was no job available, rather than that he would not hire me. He asked if I had not had some success with the other two grocery stores in the immediate area. I explained that I had friends who worked at those stores and Kroger paid three cents an hour more and I wanted to work for Kroger. Besides, those stores also had told me
there were no jobs available. He smiled. “How about you are here tomorrow at three o'clock, in a fresh white shirt, and available to work?” he asked. I must have made thirty miles per hour on my bicycle to get home then (in those days before the cell phone) and call my father with this news. My mother was of the opinion that I should save up all of the necessary money for my insurance before I could drive the Packard, but my father allowed me to pay so much a week, which would pay them back for fronting the insurance money, as well as put some aside for the following year. It was May 1966, I was gainfully employed, at the princely sum of $1.27 per hour, and my Packard and I were off on a series of adventures. There was no car in that day and time to equal in memory a boy's first car, no matter what kind or type it was.

My father had purchased a 1963 Plymouth Valiant sedan for my mother. Leroy Daubs, who ran the general automotive repair shop my father patronized, had been teasing him since that purchase about the perceived need for my father to buy a real car, one large enough to be comfortably worked upon without being cramped and scuffing one's knuckles. Shortly after the Packard was insured, upon the pretext of making a minor repair, but really just to show off the car, my father took it to Mr. Daubs' shop. This was a garage typical of the type in that day where one drove in through a large garage door and stopped. The office was just inside the door, to the right, with a large plate glass window in the office so as to see the customers when they arrived. And arrive we did! Dad practically lay upon the horn button as soon as we entered the shop area. Packard, like Cadillac formerly, had a horn that sounded something akin to an ocean liner blowing to clear its berth. Mr. Daubs emerged from his office and advised my father that he had certainly heeded his advice this time and purchased a real car. On another occasion, when I came to the shop

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4 This trip was probably to replace the broken speedometer/odometer cable.
to pick up the Packard after some minor adjustment, I found Mr. Daubs, a short, slender man, sitting on the radiator, with his one foot on the suspension frame and his legs crossed eating his lunch. When I asked why he chose such an unusual place for taking his lunch, he told me he was just admiring the old straight eight, in his opinion, one of the finest and best looking engines ever designed for a car. I was understandably proud!

Almost immediately upon beginning to drive it, I was apprised of the singularly unique status afforded one that drove a car no longer being made. Cherishing old things no longer made would set a pattern I would repeat for the remainder of my life. Within two weeks of going to work at Kroger, the older boys initiated me and my car. One evening, as I would later figure this out, someone put one of those explosive devices on one of the Packard's spark plugs. They are designed to make a loud boom and emit clouds of smoke when the car is started, but are otherwise harmless. This one malfunctioned, and only produced the intended result when I arrived home and shut off the engine in the driveway. My father came running out of the house, raised the hood, and began laughing uncontrollably. He found the remains of the device, and explained to me that he had some familiarity with them, which I surmised came from having used them himself when he was younger, and that I had been the victim of an initiation prank. He advised me against retaliation, as the device was harmless, and as such, showed that the boys had not intended to cause any damage, and was probably someone I liked just playing a harmless prank, and trying to get a rise out me. Since the device did not go off in the parking lot, the culprit was probably disappointed, and would be seeking my reaction. I was advised to not mention the incident, and my father helped me to remove the remains of the device from the engine. The next day at work, I caught my best friend from among the members of the clerk staff under the hood of the Packard.
Curiosity had gotten the better of him, and he was checking to see why the device had not worked as intended.

In May of 1966, I attended the Nashville Steeplechase, the premier sporting event of the spring social season in Nashville then, as it remains today. Always on the second Saturday in May, so as not to conflict with the Kentucky Derby in Louisville, it has always brought out the finest in clothing and cars for the event, though in 1966, unlike today, it was free. It is as much about seeing and being seen as it is about the horses and the jumps. The observers run the gamut from the haute couture to the hoi polloi. My girlfriend of that time decided that we should go, as she had a new sun dress and bonnet to exhibit. As I recall, I had a gold colored double breasted silk sport jacket with silver plated buttons set off with a matching yellow silk ascot. We went in the Packard. We arrived and parked next to a Rolls Royce Silver Cloud, though whether a I or a II series I cannot now say. I thought this a suitable stable mate for my equipage, and selected my parking space accordingly. It was black, and the doorman from the Belle Meade Country Club was the liveried chauffeur. We arrived just as he was switching his chauffeur's coat for the white jacket of a waiter. The car had a wooden table of exquisite coloration attached, on one side, to a sort of stowage compartment in the trunk, from which it slid out like a large drawer. There were stowage trays for the matching folding chairs, which looked not unlike the deck chairs of the luxury ocean liners of another era. The table was set with china, silver, crisp white linens, fresh flowers, and a champagne bucket of silver that had all been taken from a large expensive looking wicker basket. The occupants of the car were none other than Mr. and Mrs. John Jay Hooker, Jr., two of Nashville's most elegant and significant socialites. It was the season of Mr. Hooker's first run for the office of Governor of Tennessee. Just as they emerged from the rear compartment of their car, I removed from the trunk of the Packard.
the cardboard box that held our home made lunch of sandwiches, potato chips and store-bought cupcakes, and a six pack cooler of Cokes, which I placed on our Samsonite folding card table. We had two folding webbed seat patio chairs. We had a table cloth, which was probably the large red oilcloth that has become one of those campy family heirlooms, decorated with gauche roosters, and left over from our family vacation to Virginia in 1960. At that time, I thought that our preparations and our transportation were every bit the equal of the Hookers’. After all, we were not eating off of a blanket spread on the ground, as were so many others, and we were dressed well, if not so formally as our neighbors. The look of complete disdain on Mr. Hooker’s face was priceless. I only wish I had photographed the contrast in our two set-ups for posterity. I was not the least bit embarrassed, and I am certain that my Packard enjoyed the afternoon as much as I did. At least she was among equals. That one afternoon remains my only foray into the world of the Steeplechase.

On another occasion, I had left the store after closing time to discover that someone had backed into my car. The only damage was to the large plastic taillight atop the left rear fender. My father saw the damaged taillight, and inquired what I planned to do about it. I answered that my intention was to go to E. Gray Smith, the former Packard dealer, who now handled the Rolls-Royce and Bentley brands, and see about obtaining another lens. My father opined that, even if they were still available, they would no doubt be prohibitively expensive. The very next day, I went to the dealership, obtained the lens, installed it on the car, and left the empty Studebaker-Packard Corporation packaging on the kitchen table. When my father arrived home, he told me he had seen the taillight replacement on the Packard. “How much did that set you back?” He inquired. “Four dollars, ninety-five cents, and tax” was my reply. It turned out to be the least expensive among several taillights I had to buy in my first years of driving.
Everyone of a certain age has heard the story of the ubiquitous hook man. It seems that he is a homicidal maniac who preys on young couples in lovers' lanes all over the country. I made the mistake of telling this story one moonless evening to my then girlfriend in Percy Warner Park, a wilderness park of about five hundred acres in Nashville. As we were leaving the park, a tire blew out on the Packard, necessitating a change in the pitch black darkness of this un-illuminated park. You have not lived until you have jacked up a two-ton Packard in the dark, on a hot summer night, while holding the full sized flashlight, your only source of light, in your mouth, because your girlfriend is locked in the hot car with all of the windows rolled up hysterically screaming to get through before the hook man comes, and continues to jump around in the car checking all of the door locks. This was she of the Steeplechase. We broke up shortly after this episode.

The summer of 1966, I got to take my first solo trip. When I got my several days' vacation at Kroger that year, I arranged to visit my grandmother in Waverly, a town about sixty miles west of Nashville. I was admonished not to speed, as anything could happen in such an old car. Sufficiently warned, and terrified by every sound I thought I heard that some major component system was about to separate itself from the car and leave me stranded alongside the road, or worse, I arrived, after numerous stops along the way, at my destination, having taken only about twice as much time as usual to make the trip. Several of the stops were to check out strange noises which I thought I heard. The Packard seemed fine each time I stopped, and seemed to be actually smiling at me as though to say it would not leave me stranded. Did I lack faith in the noble Packard? Finally, I was just stopping to wipe off bugs and walk around and admire my pride and joy and congratulate myself that I was very lucky to have such a machine, and to return the waves and smiles of those unfortunates who were condemned to make their way in less worthy
conveyances. The trip was entirely uneventful and comfortable, just as it should have been.

I do not now recall any mechanical problems of great concern with the Packard, other than some small adjustment to the carburetor or the choke that my father had made by our mechanic shortly after we bought the car. I really think the main purpose of that visit was to have the mechanic admire the car. On another occasion, I was proceeding down one of the roads near my school when suddenly the car fell to idle speed and would not accelerate. Pulling to the side of the road, I found the accelerator linkage had come undone. There was no plausible explanation for this other than another episode of sabotage by some of my co-workers, but that problem was soon repaired by the side of the road, and I was underway again. Then there was the day we were proceeding to school when for some inexplicable reason the rear end of the car's drive shaft fell to the ground at a stop sign. This turned out to be a broken universal joint, which was rather easily and inexpensively repaired. I sat in the back seat of the car during this particular repair, while the car was on the lift, reading Robert Turnquist's 1965 edition of *The Packard Story* which I had just procured at the then exorbitant price of eighteen dollars. I still have the book, and I wish I still had the car. One other curiosity of this car was that at night, with the headlights on, if the car was driven above fifty-five miles per hour, the lights would go out. I was sure there was some sort of short in the electrical wiring, probably insulation worn through somewhere, which created an electrical short due to vibration at that speed. I asked my father about it. He explained in great detail that it was a Packard safety device designed to keep old people from driving too fast after dark.

That Christmas, a return trip was made to Waverly to again visit my grandmother, but this time with all the family and all of our Christmas presents in the Packard. This was because we
were traveling in a snowstorm, and the Packard had snow tires and a posi-traction drive. We again traveled uneventfully, except that periodically I had to stop and rub Coca-Cola on the windshield because the vacuum powered wipers could not move fast enough at interstate highway speeds to keep the glass clear of ice. Another milestone was that during that winter, late one evening, my father and I were in the Packard, again in the snow, when we came upon a man standing in the road beside his new 1966 Cadillac Fleetwood. He was trying to hail help for his predicament. The Cadillac had slid out of the ruts in the snow and ice and was resting on the shoulder of the road. All of his efforts to extricate the car had come to naught, and he wanted to know if we thought we could push him out. My father opined that he was sure we could if the two cars’ bumpers would mesh. My job was to direct this junction. The bumpers meshed successfully, and it was the work of a brief few minutes to push the flashy new Cadillac back upon the road. The man offered to pay us, which offer my father declined, and then he said, “Say, I could use a car like that for driving in these conditions. It wouldn’t be for sale, would it?” “Certainly not,” was my reply, while my father stood there in the road and smiled. How could someone in a Cadillac imagine himself worthy to own such a vehicle?

The finest moment in the ownership of the Packard came in January of 1967. While at school, one of the winter storms that formerly afflicted Nashville struck without warning, and rain turned to ice, then sleet and snow while the temperature plunged, all in the space of a couple of hours. When the authorities finally agreed to let us leave for the day, I was in a study hall, overlooking the student parking lot, and watching everyone try and un-stick their frozen doors and door locks, and then try and start their cars, most of which were temperamentally refusing to co-operate. Not wanting to be embarrassed by my car, which my classmates had already
nicknamed “The White Elephant” (I was White, it was white, we were both big, and it was not made anymore; cute, huh?), I waited until almost everyone was gone to approach the parking lot. The Packard door locks were not frozen. As I climbed behind the steering wheel, I spoke to my car, reminding it that if it retained any self-respect for the very fine motor car it once was, it would start and not embarrass us both. As I turned the key, the big, smooth straight eight turned over and fired on the first spin. I lodged my piece of a yardstick between the seat and the accelerator pedal, my version of fast idle, and got out to scrape the ice off of the windows. Several friends and acquaintances drifted over to ask for a ride. After warming up both heaters, about ten people squeezed into the car, and I spent about an hour and a half chauffeuring my friends home. My big, warm car with its posi-traction grip earned a new respect that day. Ask the man who owns one - indeed!

All great love stories come to an end. This one did in April 1967. As is the case so many times, one love is replaced by a newer, faster, sexier model. So it was with the Packard. My Uncle Joe had died in January 1967. He owned a 1956 Buick Century two door hardtop. Those GM coupes were a tall order to top in the mid-1950's. My Aunt Ruth had, as Don Corleone would have said, made me an offer I couldn't refuse. My uncle in the car business tried for a while to sell The White Elephant, but those who loved a lost cause were fewer in those days, and she was not then old enough to attract the attention of car collectors. She was showing about 55,000 miles on the odometer\(^5\) when she left. And there is no doubt of her gender; all of the cars I have kept for a long time have been females. I never had enough money to purchase a fire belching male car. I finally sold her to a co-worker for $ 150.00, one hundred twenty-five dollars in cash, and a check for the

\(^5\) The speedometer cable had been broken when we purchased the car, so there was no way to ascertain its true mileage.
rest, which was never honored. It must have been the final indignity which her grand old heart could not withstand. He drove her far too hard and with no respect for all that she had once been. In what I perceived as one final act of loyalty to me, another co-worker told me her Ultramatic transmission died later that year. The new owner did not have the money to have it repaired. I never knew what happened to her after that, as I never saw her again. She probably went to the crusher. Whenever the subject of cars is brought to mind, I have mourned her passing ceaselessly from that day to this.

1956 BUICK CENTURY RIVIERA COUPE

While settling my Uncle Joe's estate, my Aunt Ruth bought a brand new 1967 Buick Electra 225 Custom four door hardtop. It would be the final Buick she would own in what seemed like an endless succession going back to 1948. She then owned a 1962 Buick Electra 225 Custom four door hardtop with approximately 45,000 miles on it which I coveted, but for which my father had spoken. She sold it to him for $950.00, about half of its then value. There was also a 1956
Buick Century Riviera two door hardtop\(^6\) with about 82,000 miles on the odometer. It was then worth about $600.00. I was told it could be mine for $75.00. I bought it in March 1967. The hood had been slightly damaged by a window in her apartment garage falling on it during a storm. The landlord agreed to have the dent repaired and painted, so I had to wait until April to obtain the car. Bought new by my aunt and uncle in 1956 for $3,600.00, it had always been garaged and had never been wrecked. It still smelled new inside. It was white with black and white leather seats, sea foam green tinted glass, Dynaflow automatic transmission, and heater. That was it. Uncle Joe did not want a radio to distract him while he drove, so the dashboard had a metal cover where the radio should have been. It was long, low, svelte, fast, and sporty, all of the things that the Packard could never have been.

The first order of business was to obtain the correct Sonomatic radio for the car. I was not successful in locating a signal seeking model such as the Packard had possessed, but the correct factory supplied type was found, tubes tested and replaced, and the aid of a friend enlisted to install it in the cramped quarters behind the dashboard. My recollection of this car is that the most frustrating aspect of its ownership was the seemingly frequent need to change those radio tubes and the contortions necessary to do so under the dashboard.

Uncle Joe had been afraid for Aunt Ruth to drive this car alone to Ashland City, a distance of twenty miles from Nashville, to attend her bridge club meetings. I would drive this car for three of the four years I attended the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, and it would have 142,000 miles on it and be sixteen years old before it was traded.

\(^6\)This car had a wheelbase of 122", over-all length of 205.1", height of 60.4", and weighed 4350 lbs., it had a V-8 engine of 322 cu. in. developing 265 HP; MSRP base was $2,958, although this car had an original selling price of $3,600.
I did not know it at the time I owned this car, but it was one of the world’s truly great
performance vehicles of 1956. I knew it was a screamer, but I just did not know how much of one
it was. It had a nailhead V-8 of 322 cubic inches, developing 265 horsepower, and what was
known as a switch the pitch Dynaflow transmission. Operated skillfully, and driven hard, it would
shift like a four speed. It once outran a 1966 SS 396 from a standing start, but the rear end died the
following week. On another occasion, while squiring my girlfriend and her best friend around the
local Shoney's drive-in, we were accosted by a carload of greasers (the girls' term) in a rather ratty
1958 Chevrolet Impala two door hardtop. They advised me to get my mama's car home before she
knew it was gone, and asked if the girls would like to go out with someone really exciting – real
men, I believe they called themselves. Thankfully, the girls were not interested, and their car,
while newer, was not in the same class or condition as my own. The greasers followed us to the
interstate, where they beat upon the doors of their car and challenged us to a drag. They wanted to
see if the old Buick could keep up with them. At that time, the speed limit was seventy-five miles
per hour on the interstate. My girlfriend asked did I think we could take them. “Easily,” was my
response. I nodded my head in their direction, she pressed my knee to jam the accelerator down,
and the race was underway. We traveled nose to nose for about a half mile, when my nerve was
sufficiently built up to push the Buick beyond 100 mph. For a good quarter of a mile, we stayed
side by side. I had more accelerator left, just not the nerve to use it. Suddenly, we all heard a loud
“bang,” and the Chevy rapidly fell behind. Looking in my rear view mirror, I saw it engulfed in
smoke, with pieces of its engine flying all over the road. It had evidently thrown a rod. I exited the
interstate at the next exit, and did not frequent that same Shoney's drive-in for about another
month. I never saw the greasers again, thankfully, and my girlfriend was much impressed with my
It is way cooler than your last car" was her comment, words that fell like music upon my ears.

I became the chauffeur to and from school for several guys who lived on my street. In those days it was not necessary to lock one's car in one's own driveway, so they would get in the car every morning and wait for me. One cold winter morning, they were horsing around in the backseat, and one of them drew back to punch the other in the shoulder. The intended recipient moved out of the way at the last instant, and the full force of the punch impacted the cold leather seat panel. The leather shattered just like an eggshell. I was not amused. It was necessary to have the entire interior redone to make that repair, as the front seat was showing a lot of wear. My mother offered to help cut and bind new carpet to replace the fitted carpet panels, so the entire interior was renewed. I removed the front door garnish rails and took them to a body shop to be repainted while the car was in the upholstery shop. It was my first restoration project, and it was relatively inexpensive and successful.

The car had a second bumper piece above the tailpipe which distinguished it from the less expensive Special model. Those pieces, called “J-bars,” had become corroded from the exhaust. I procured replacement pieces from the local Buick dealer for $9.95 each. My cousin, John Ayres Greenlee, was coming for a visit and he had assured me that it was very easy to remove the bumper and obtain access to the bolts to replace these secondary bumper rolls. On the appointed day, he got under the car and loosened the bolts retaining the bumper to the brackets. He was stretched out with his legs under the bumper. My job was to hold the bumper while he hit it with a rubber mallet to loosen the seal it had acquired to the brackets due to years of accumulated road grease and mud. I was the larger and stronger of the two of us, so my job was to lift the bumper from the brackets.
when he had knocked it loose. When that occurred, being young and inexperienced in such matters, I took the full weight of the bumper to keep it from falling on his legs. Now I have never again removed a bumper from a car other than this Buick, but I am reasonably certain that today's plastic bumper covers cannot compare with that 1956 Buick. It must have weighed all of two hundred fifty pounds. To prevent him from having two broken legs, I staggered back about four feet before dropping the bumper on the ground. When it fell it made a depression in the yard visible for the remainder of that summer, and it took four teenage boys to lift it and guide it back upon its brackets when my cousin and I had repaired the two “J-bar” pieces.

In the spring of 1968, I had one other occasion to remove a bumper for this car. One day while sitting stopped at a red light, a cement truck poised in the left turn lane to make what I supposed would be a left turn, suddenly, and without warning, turned right, taking with him as he did so the left front bumper of my car, and flattening the fender. After settling the $321.00 insurance claim with the cement company, I felt that I was about as rich as a Rockefeller. It was then that I was told by the dealer making the repairs that the fender could be pounded out and repainted, but the bumper would need to be replaced, and they could not find the correct one. I knew of a 1956 Buick in the back yard of an acquaintance. When I contacted him, I was advised that they were going to restore the car, but the $35.00 I offered for the bumper I needed was sufficient to persuade him to postpone further the restoration plans. My radio installation buddy owned a convertible, so we went over to the location of the donor car, removed the bumper (no one laid down under the car this time), put it in the backseat of his convertible, and took it to the dealership. It was not to be the last time I was to procure parts from an abandoned 1956 model to satisfy a need. There would be one more accident which would necessitate finding the “Century”
script for the fender when a motorcycle sped around a corner too quickly and ran into the right rear quarter panel as I was executing a left turn. All of these problems were repaired without structural or permanent damage to the car, now named “Big Bertha” by my classmates in honor of the connection they saw between it and a certain railroad car-mounted cannon the Germans had used in France in World War II. I was never consulted on these names, and did not find them as amusing as my classmates did. But I was somewhat gratified that they were affectionately being bestowed upon my cars.

Bertha required numerous repairs during the four and one-half years of my ownership. Most were routine for a car of her age and mileage. One stands out in my memory. Driving to and from Knoxville, and over all of the hills there, it was inevitable that the Dynaflow transmission would go out. It began slipping noticeably. My father borrowed a tow bar and told me he would head toward Knoxville. I was to head toward Nashville and to meet him at a certain designated interstate exit. My college roommate, Ron Anderson, had been a neighbor and friend all the years of my education from first grade until college graduation. He was with me on this jaunt for another brief trip home. We arrived at the designated meeting place ahead of schedule, and over the Cumberland Mountains, without any noticeable change in the car's performance, the transmission still slipping, but not seeming to be worse. When my father arrived, he told me to drive on toward Nashville. If the car failed to proceed, as is said in reference to a Rolls-Royce (they do not break down, they simply fail to proceed), get off of the road and we would hook up the tow. The car got within less than one hundred and fifty feet of the garage door to our regular repair facility when the transmission began to make all manner of grinding noises. Shifting it into neutral, I watched as Mr. Leroy Daub, our mechanic, opened the door, and Bertha coasted into the repair bay. Mr. Daub
opined that it sounded to him like several of the 10,000 moving parts for which the Dynaflow was noted had at last failed. Dad lent me his 1967 Buick to take back to Knoxville while mine was being repaired. He still owned the 1962 model but did not think it reliable enough for use in Knoxville, though it had been the intended tow car during this adventure. While I was at school, Aunt Ruth had sold him the 1967 model, and graduated to Cadillacs. For some reason, having to do with my father’s preference and the time necessary to obtain all of the parts for my car, I had the use of the “new” Buick for about a month. I had more dates during that month than at any other time during my entire college career. I had a lot of fun that one month, but the lesson was not lost on me that the girls were not dating me, but rather my car, or should I say my father's car?

It seems that April is a dangerous month for me. Most of my car trades occur during that month. In April 1971, I began to experience what I thought was the onset of a fatal condition for Bertha. When one would stop in traffic, the oil pressure gauge would dip precipitously toward low. I was sure the engine, the only major component still operating without a rebuild, was about to fail, and so advised my mother. I have experienced this problem since that time with other cars, and it is usually the oil pressure sending unit on the engine block which has or is failing. Also at that time I was becoming disgruntled with not having air conditioning, and persuaded my mother and stepfather that I needed a newer car. This conversation proved to be disastrous for several reasons. First, I had been promised by my Aunt Ruth that I would receive a car for graduation, now only about a year away. We had been discussing a new Buick. She was most displeased with me for selling Uncle Joe's last car. Secondly, I traded the Buick for a used 1968 Chevrolet Bel Air sedan, one of the worst cars I have ever owned. Both of these problems became mine alone. I received $600.00 trade-in allowance on the Buick against a purchase price of $1,795.00 for the Chevrolet.
Sometime in 1973, while on business in Clarksville, Tennessee, I turned down a street, and there set Bertha in the driveway of a house in an economically depressed neighborhood. I stopped to look at her and to determine that it was, in fact, her. The finish was not unlike what I remembered, except that the left four hole front fender had been replaced with a three hole fender from a Special, the telltale sign of another motoring mishap, and she still sported a tachometer I had purchased and had installed on her steering column. I inquired if perhaps they would sell the car. I was told that they most certainly would, but since I knew nothing of her history over the past two years, we could not agree on a satisfactory price, though we negotiated for the better part of two weeks. I never got to drive her then, we were so far apart on price, and I never saw her again. Sometime in early 2002, I found her mate on E-Bay. The car was in California and was exactly the same model, body style, and color combination. Before I could complete my research, the sale was over, and the car sold for $16,000.00. I do not think Bertha's like will pass my way again.

**ALSO RANS**

It is telling when one owns a car, but never gives it a name. Such was the situation in my life for the next three decades. The 1968 Chevrolet Bel Air sedan with which I replaced Big Bertha was an almost total disappointment. It had air conditioning, and that was about all it had that did not need attention. Truly, it was the car's only salient feature. It was a nondescript everyman's car. The engine was too small for the weight of the car, I decided, since it required two ring and valve jobs in 84,000 miles of driving. The ball joints collapsed twice, and the engine mounts all broke, which, in both instances, caused the accelerator pedal to jam in the full throttle mode. Fortunately,
this latter condition was repaired by General Motors under warranty, but not before I had my neck snapped on Kingston Pike in Knoxville by the car accelerating from a standing start with the accelerator pedal jammed all the way to the floorboard. That required turning the engine off and stopping the car with no power brake boost. I soon realized that trading my Buick for this machine had not been a wise choice. There was no sadness when this car got traded in June 1973.

The next car was almost as large a disappointment. I traded the Chevrolet for a 1971 Triumph Stag. It was such a beautiful car - burgundy (called “damson” by the manufacturer) with black leather interior. It had walnut trim on the dashboard and console, a 182.9 cubic inch, dual carbureted V-8, removable fiberglass hardtop over the regular convertible top, power windows, brakes and steering, four wheel independent suspension, and real chrome wire wheels. It was also a complete joy to drive on those two days of the month when it would run. The funniest event with this car (this is looking back; it was decidedly not funny at the time) was my first date with my future wife, Barbara, in August 1973. I lived on West End Avenue at the time. One of the intersecting streets was Cherokee Road. The Metro Police had the habit then of sitting on Cherokee Road and catching speeders and those who ran the light at Cherokee Road. I was approaching the light as I was imparting this information. I went through a yellow light – it was not red – and was pulled over and given a ticket. This was a great first impression on a first date. I kept the Triumph nine long months, and got lucky as a friend had a real love affair with it and bailed me out. I had paid $9,000.00 when I bought it. He paid me $7,500.00 cash and a 1970 Ford

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7 This car had a wheelbase of 100”, over-all length of 173.75”, height of 49.5”, and weighed 2640 lbs., it had a V-8 engine of 182.9 cu. in. developing 127 HP; MSRP base was $10,500, although I bought this car used for $9,000 when it was eighteen months old.
Maverick, for which I allowed him $450.00. The Triumph was the sexiest yard ornament I ever owned that was allegedly motorized. It did, however, provide me with one memorable summer!

The Maverick was a workhorse car with 39,000 miles on the clock when I acquired it. It was a basic, no-frills ride, to which I added air conditioning, one of those then ubiquitous tack-under-the-dash models. The car got an honest thirty-five miles per gallon on the road. I had to give it a valve job at some point, as the first owner (I was the third) had used it to tow some sort of really large boat, but I drove it for four years, put 50,000 miles on it, and sold it for $750.00, thereby recouping some of the cost of the valve job. From Packard to Buick, Buick to Chevrolet, Chevrolet to Triumph, and Triumph to Maverick; I was fearfully afraid that my motoring dreams were moving in the wrong direction.

On March 1, 1978, in a blinding snowstorm, I took delivery of a 1978 Ford Fairmont, my first new car. It was noteworthy for the negotiations attendant to its purchase and sale. The car listed for $6,300.00 and was the top of the line model. All it lacked in equipment was cruise control. The dealer was trying to impress the bank where I worked, and agreed to sell cars at cost to any of the bank officers who might be interested in purchasing one. I bought it for $5,600.00 cash, after availing myself of the dealer's offer. The salesman told me we had gotten a virtually impossible deal, as these cars were selling as fast as they could be delivered, and we had just bought the most expensive one they had at a substantial discount. Apparently, for once we had been told the truth; we drove this car for 16,000 miles and sold it in August 1979, eighteen months later, for $5,800.00. Its most memorable feature was its propensity for the transmission to lodge in "Park" and remain there even when the car was being rocked to release it. It was during ownership

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8 This car had a wheelbase of 103", over-all length of 179.4", height of 52.3", and weighed 2535 lbs., it had an in-line 6 cylinder engine of 199.8 cu. in. developing 120 HP; MSRP base was $1,995.
of this car that our oldest son was born. My wife's mother was visiting from Alabama for this event, and on the morning that my wife and son were to come home from the hospital, it was a cool and foggy morning. I inadvertently left the headlights on in the car. By the time all of the paperwork was processed, the lights had run the battery down, and Richard made his first car trip in a taxi. I had to have a family member take me and my battery cables to the hospital parking lot to retrieve my relatively new car.

1973 BUICK RIVIERA

I first met my future wife in August 1973. She had a six month old burgundy and white 1973 Buick Riviera\(^9\) with about 8,000 miles on it at the time. She was a graduate of the University of Alabama, and has always preferred burgundy cars. This was the famed boat-tail or fastback Riviera, the third in the series, the prettiest of the three, and the last. It was also the last year for GM's two-door hardtops. This car was really a fast and smooth highway cruiser. My wife was

\(^9\)This car had a wheelbase of 121.9", over-all length of 218.3", height of 54", and weighed 4497 lbs., it had a V-8 engine of 455 cu. in. developing 270 HP; MSRP base was $5,221, although this car had an original selling price of $7,200.
stopped several times for speeding in it before we were married, and was always successful in getting off with only a warning. Once, after we married, she was ticketed by a highway patrolman. He told her he did not know how fast she was going, as his speedometer only went to 85, and it was buried, but he knew she was going faster than that. I was in the passenger seat and had been reading. When he walked back to his car to write her the ticket, I asked her how fast she had been going. “About 110,” was the answer. When we married, we took this car on our honeymoon. We were married in Barbara's church in Robertsdale, Alabama, and decided to honeymoon in New Orleans. We asked the mailman, Arville Moseley, a member of Barbara's church, to hide the car at his house so it would not receive the usual complement of tin cans, soaped windows and other such decorations. The best man drove us to our car, and we were off to New Orleans that evening after the wedding. Those were the days when the service station attendant still pumped the gas. We were astounded that at every station where we stopped (and the stops in that car were frequent as it averaged about 9 miles per gallon city and 13 highway), we were congratulated on being newlyweds on our honeymoon. We began to wonder if somehow we looked different, until finally we asked one attendant how he knew we were newlyweds. He beckoned me to the back of the car, where the mailman had placed a placard inside the fold-down license plate where the gas tank filler cap was located. We enjoyed the joke, as did the mailman when he was confronted about it later. We still have the placard among our wedding photos. When this car was traded in 1982, I knew we were leaving a future classic on the sales lot, and told my wife so. Time has borne out that prediction. In 2007, we pursued, for a brief period, the purchase of a Massachusetts car found on E-Bay which matched hers perfectly. We could not agree to the $12,000.00 asking price, and so lost the opportunity to travel down a memory lane once more in a car exactly like the one in which
we had dated.

1979 OLDSMOBILE 98 REGENCY SEDAN

The next car was another spectacular purchase. Several people in the office where my wife worked had bought 1979 Oldsmobile 98's. She had ridden in several of them, and really liked the car. I wanted a Cadillac by this time. We went looking at Buicks, Oldsmobiles and Cadillacs. It was rumored to be the last year for the de-tuned, big block, V-8 engines from GM, which rumor turned out to be true. We did not find a suitable Buick, and the dealer representative insulted our car. We narrowed our search to the Oldsmobile 98 and the Cadillac. The then current gas crisis had encouraged GM to offer dealer rebates for the sale of the large engine cars. These rebates were not available to the public, only to the selling dealer. The Oldsmobile 98 Regency four door sedan\(^\text{10}\) we selected was white, with a white vinyl roof and red cloth interior. It had a full range of optional accessories. We wanted one last big engine car for our frequent runs to south Alabama to visit Barbara's mother. This car listed for $12,500.00, and since we had made arrangements to sell the

\(^{10}\) This car had a wheelbase of 119", over-all length of 220.4", height of 55.5", and weighed 4021 lbs., it had a V-8 engine of 403 cu. in. developing 175 HP; MSRP base was $10,500.
Fairmont to my secretary, and had no trade-in, we were able to negotiate a cash price of $8,600.00. Before finalizing the deal, I wanted one last opportunity to purchase the Cadillac which interested us. It listed for $14,500.00. Since I knew the mark up on the two to be the same, from my position with the bank, and that GM was also offering the same dealer rebate on the Cadillac as on the Oldsmobile, I offered $10,600.00 for the Cadillac. The salesman, Joe Townes, a former sales representative for Packard at E. Gray Smith, very haughtily asked me where I had arrived at such a figure for an offer. I explained my reasoning to him, and also the price at which the dealer across the street from him had offered to sell us the Oldsmobile. He replied, “Well, son, I am not saying that you have not been made such an offer, but if that is the case, you had better snap it up, as that is the best deal you are going to find in Davidson County today.” He had lost my attention and business at “son.” Barbara snapped her purse shut, and replied, “Well, I believe we are all through here,” to which comment I agreed, and we left the dealership on foot, having delivered the Fairmont that afternoon, and taken my secretary’s money for the purchase. Walking across Nashville's widest street to the Oldsmobile dealer, we were shocked to see the car we had selected cleaned up and displaying a “sold” sign on the windshield. Inquiring of our salesman why the car had such a sign, he smiled and answered that he had sold it to us. We reopened negotiations on the price and finally bought the car for $8,400.00. We took delivery that night and drove it home from the dealership. I told Barbara we had best plan to enjoy this car for a long time, as we would never again buy so much automobile for so little money. This turned out to be the finest car either of us had owned up to that time. We drove it 142,000 miles and sold it to my aunt for $2,000.00 when it was twelve years old. When she could no longer drive, it had 155,000 miles on it, and the only serious repair it had ever required was a new timing chain. It was sold out of the family for $
1,200.00, or 14.28% of its original price. It had cost $342.85 per year in depreciation. When it departed from my hands it was a bit worn looking, but still running well. On the Monday following the Friday on which we bought the car, the Cadillac salesman called and offered another and lower price on the Cadillac. It was with great relish that I told him I had taken his very fine advice on Friday, and bought the Oldsmobile, and for even less money than I had told him. I believe it was Oscar Wilde who said that living well is the best revenge. It was a sweet trip in that car.

**1978 CADILLAC DEVILLE SEDAN**

In August 1978, my Aunt Ruth had bought a new 1978 Cadillac Sedan DeVille. The first time I saw this car, I fell in love with it. It was a love affair that continues to this day. It was white, with a white vinyl top, and white leather seats with red piping, red carpet and red dashboard. I told her that very day that when she was ready for another new car, I wanted it. In May 1987 she bought another Cadillac, her fourth and last. I bought the 1978. It had 21,000 miles and had always been

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11 This car has a wheelbase of 121.5", over-all length of 221.2", height of 55.3", and weighs 4236 lbs., it has a V-8 engine of 425 cu. in. developing 180 HP; MSRP base was $10,668, and as equipped it listed for $12,785. I bought it for $5,000 in May 1987.
garaged and never wrecked. I own it still, with 112,000 miles, mostly all original condition, still always garaged and never wrecked. In 2002, I joined the Cadillac-LaSalle Club. In 2004, I attended my first Grand National, where my car won a 2\textsuperscript{nd} Place trophy in its first national competition in South Bend, Indiana. In 2007, it won a 1\textsuperscript{st} Place Trophy in Savannah, but had to be towed home because of a tank full of bad gasoline. My mechanic thought that diesel fuel had been put into the gasoline tank at the last service station where we had stopped. I have declined several offers to sell this car, feeling as I do that I would soon regret it. It is approximately the same size as the Packard and the 1956 Buick; it is white like both of them, has an eight-cylinder engine like both of them, and was owned from new by Aunt Ruth, just as was the 1956 Buick. It takes a long time and a lot of effort to get a car from new to thirty-one years old and keep it looking and running new. Somehow, I just have the notion I no longer have that much time. Aunt Ruth's friends from Florida, the Campbells, came up with the perfect name for the old girl: we named her “Ruthie” in 2003, which was their nickname for my aunt. My older son, Richard, took his first solo trip with some high school buddies to Gettysburg in Ruthie in 1997 when they were all too young to rent a car, and no one either owned a car reliable enough to go that far, or their parents would not let them borrow their cars. Remembering the shattered leather in the 1956 Buick, I had several rules for the trip: no rough housing in the car, respect her age, and when you return, see that she goes back in the garage as clean as when you took her out, and with a full tank of gasoline. He and his buddies cleaned her immaculately. Both he and Barbara told me much later that they could neither one believe I let him take my prized pet car. I was glad to be able to afford him the experience, both because he got to go, and because he got to appreciate a quality old car. He has told me he hopes that I never sell her, as he wants her someday. He said she has always had a special place in his
OTHER CADILLACS

In 1991 began approximately a decade of ownership of various Cadillacs. We purchased a 1990 Fleetwood in October of 1991. It was stunning, painted a color called Black Sapphire, with diamond tufted dark blue leather interior, and was one of the loveliest cars we ever owned. Then in April 1994 we bought an Academy Gray 1993 Sedan DeVille with red leather interior. I encountered a member of my church, Joan Elizabeth Taylor, in the parking lot of a local shopping center. Her husband had recently purchased for her a new Jaguar, and she asked if I had seen it. Upon telling her that I had not, she offered to show it to me. It was truly lovely. It was the top of the line Jaguar Vanden Plas in a beautiful paint color that corresponded to what Cadillac called White Diamond, with cream-colored leather seats, brown carpets and dashboard, and brown piping on the leather seats. She asked me if we had pursued a new car purchase she knew we were considering. I told her we had, and she asked what we had bought. When I told her a Cadillac Sedan DeVille, she curled her lip and remarked, “Oh, the very ordinary Cadillac.” When I returned home, I told my wife that I had just heard two words strung together in a sentence that I never thought I would hear coupled, and that was “ordinary” and “Cadillac.” The 1990 and the 1993 cars were noteworthy because within the first two weeks of ownership both were struck in the rear end seriously damaging the 1990 model, and certainly taking from the 1993 the luster of what Cadillac refers to as a “new to you” car. In August 1996, we bought a new Sedan DeVille in White Diamond. It, too, was struck within two weeks of purchase, this time in the front. In May 1998, we bought a black Concours sedan. This was the realization of a dream, the first car we bought entirely equipped as we wanted it. Beginning at about 20,000 miles, it started experiencing
In the late summer of 1989, we were negotiating with some friends to purchase their home. We did not feel that the negotiations were progressing as they should, and had about decided that the deal would not materialize at all. During this period, I discovered a 1983 Ford Mustang GLX convertible on a local car lot. This was the first of another long line of convertible Mustangs after a hiatus from the market. It was red with a red interior, black top, and chrome after-market wheels. At that time, we had some stock in a savings and loan that was not performing up to expectation, so we cashed it out and bought the Mustang for $3,200.00. It had about 79,000 miles. It was quite a fun car. It always had a problem running warmer than it should have, though it never overheated.

1983 FORD MUSTANG GLX CONVERTIBLE

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12 This car had a wheelbase of 100.5", over-all length of 179.3", height of 55.3", and weighed 3269 lbs., it had a V-6 engine of 231.8 cu. in. (3.8 liters) developing 112 HP; MSRP base was about $10,000.
Much money was spent on it in the attempt to have it run and look flawless. It was painted a beautiful Cadillac color called Autumn Red Firemist, and the top was replaced. The car provided seemingly endless days of windswept enjoyment until becoming my older son's first car. It was wrecked twice (not his fault), repaired, and remained road worthy. We were fearful of him taking it on the interstate to college in Knoxville, so it was traded Memorial Day weekend of 1998 for a new GMC Jimmy. The remainder of its story will have to be written by my son.

**1961ROLLS-ROYCE SILVER CLOUD II SEDAN**

Frederick Edmund Smith, the first Lord Birkenhead, associate of Winston Churchill, Lord Chancellor of Great Britain, and libertine of some infamy, once remarked “Ford and the world
Fords with you, Rolls and you Rolls alone.” Though cognoscenti of the marque are universal in their insistence that one call it a Royce in deference to the greater contribution of Sir Frederick Henry Royce to the character of the creation than that of the Hon. Charles Stewart Rolls, much has been written about the vaunted Rolls-Royce, and by authors more knowledgeable than I. Still, my name came at long last, to be added to that list of those who, like Lord Birkenhead, possess a set of keys that signify entrance into the society of those who “waft” their way upon the world’s motor ways. Rolls-Royce has managed to survive war, bankruptcy, reorganization and sale, as well as most all of its competition in what the British call the bespoke automobile business. Gone are the custom crafted Dusenburgs, Pierce Arrows, Hispano-Suizas, Isotta-Fraschinis, Marmons, Franklins, Minervas, and even the long-lived and noble Packard. Left almost alone in the field of the hand assembled, custom-crafted motorcar, Rolls-Royce, under German BMW management soldiers on, its reputation for near-perfection still unsullied after one hundred and six years.

When I owned my Packard, Nashville's Packard dealer, E. Gray Smith, was still in business. He had handled the Packard franchise from 1923 until the end in 1958. In 1960, he had been awarded a Rolls-Royce and Bentley franchise which he continued to hold until he closed the dealership and retired in 1980. Offered an opportunity to sell his dealership, he reportedly declined, and decided instead to close it, as he said he had worked too hard for too long to establish his reputation to have someone else tarnish it. He was regarded as one of the two or three most highly ethical and principled auto dealers in Nashville when he closed. When I took my Packard in for those few adjustments it needed from time to time, or to purchase the occasional needed part, I got to examine his inventory of Rolls-Royce and Bentley models. Once Claude W. Shaffer, the General Manager, even let me go with him on a test drive and complete the checklist for the
pre-delivery of a new Silver Shadow. On three separate occasions during my tenure at the Third National Bank in Nashville I got to drive Rolls-Royces to the consignor for resale after they were repossessed. I was told they intimidated others at the bank who were afraid to drive them. I have never been intimidated by driving any car I have ever been allowed to drive. Of all the Rolls-Royces I ever looked upon with longing, by far the most favored was the Silver Cloud, that of Grey Poupon mustard advertising fame from the 1980’s. I surmised that by the time I could ever afford one, they would all be too old and worn out, or too expensive for me to ever afford. Among Silver Clouds, my favorite always was the Silver Cloud II. It still had the high radiator grille and was a single headlight model, but it had the fabled aluminum block V-8. It turns out that among aficionados of the marque, it is considered the least desirable Silver Cloud. Many devotees prefer the last big bore six Silver Cloud I, the engine that had made Rolls-Royce famous from the early Silver Ghosts of 1907. The Cloud III has all of the refinements of the Cloud II, and the lowered hood line and radiator, and the quad headlights, which its advocates say cleans up and streamlines John Blatchley’s front design. I happen to take exception to that assessment. The Silver Cloud II had some serious teething problems with the early series of the V-8 engine, leading to its “less favored status" among gatherings of Clouds, but those were corrected by the time the "D" series engines, which my car has, were placed in production. For these reasons, the Cloud II has even been referred to, and not with kindly intent, as the “orphan Rolls." Its engine still powers the Bentley sedans,\textsuperscript{13} and lately that manufacturer, now owned by Volkswagen, has publicly credited

\textsuperscript{13}Robert Cumberford, “Bentley Brooklands - Exquisite Excess”, \textit{Automobile Magazine}, May 2008, p. 54. It has been bored out to 6.75 liters with 530 HP and 774 lb.-ft. of torque, but still has only one spark plug per cylinder and only one intake and one exhaust valve per cylinder. It is the world’s longest production V-8, slated for retirement in 2009. Author’s note: Production, however, has carried over into 2010.
the Packard V-8 as the principal model upon which the Rolls-Royce V-8 was patterned.\textsuperscript{14} If that is true, with the Packard debuting in the fall of 1954, and the Rolls-Royce iteration five years later, that fact might account for the teething problems experienced by the latter, as the initial Packard V-8 had some problems, particularly with the oil pump. It is known that Rolls-Royce was experimenting with a V-8 configuration in the early 1950's.

In the late spring of 1999, a Silver Cloud II\textsuperscript{15} single headlight model appeared at the church we then attended. It was black with beige leather upholstery. Inquiry revealed that it belonged to a fellow church member and lawyer. I told him if the day ever came when he no longer wanted the car, I would appreciate having the right of first refusal before he sold it. In July 2002, that call came. I had been talking about buying a Packard of some sort, an idea my wife most consistently and emphatically opposed. The postwar models, being the only ones within our budget, were all ugly, she opined, and but few were ever air conditioned, a necessity for the South in the summer. The owner called while Barbara was out of town on a business trip to Denver, quoted a price, and said that he would give me a while to decide, as he wanted to advertise it by the first of August. When I called to inquire of her possible interest, Barbara's first question was whether or not the car was air conditioned; it was I told her. Realizing that we could indeed afford it if we chose to do so, and being otherwise clueless about its condition or the cost of maintenance, I arranged for the opportunity to drive it. The simplest thing to say is that it had issues. It was not smooth, as I thought it should be. The transmission shifted harshly, the brakes juddered at slow speeds, the arm rests were stuck to the seat leather in the raised position, the sun visors would not

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15}This car has a wheelbase of 123", over-all length of 212.75", height of 64", and weighs 4570 lbs., MSRP base was $15,565 POE.
stay stowed upright, and other little details needed attention here and there. Having no basis for comparison, it was much like buying a pig in a poke. Nevertheless, the temptation was too great, and the deed was done. The price was firm, but basically wholesale for that time, and the car had a full set of shop manuals, a remote territories' parts kit in the trunk worth about $2,500.00, and all of its large and small tools, jack, trunk mounted trouble light, and leather bound owner's manual. These last two are about $500.00 each to replace, if they can be found, and seldom accompany these used models nowadays. The car was complete, having even a chauffeur's cap. It developed that the deal turned out to be a very good one. The car required some minor adjustments and, after thorough cleaning, smoothed out with driving and became a very good example of a forty-one-year-old un-restored Rolls-Royce. The armrests were worked loose with ample applications of leather conditioner and baby oil. The transmission was adjusted and the fluid changed. The brake juddering turned out to be caused by transmission fluid on the servo mechanism pad, which was an easy and relatively inexpensive fix. The car had 69,000 miles on it when we purchased it; it now has more than 86,000. Many minor problems with an old car can be overcome by the simple expedient of driving it, and that has never been a problem for me. In 2004, Rolls-Royce celebrated its centennial in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. We drove there in ours where it experienced the pleasure of seeing some 220 of its cousins of all ages, and acquiring a centennial celebration badge for its badge bar to commemorate this accomplishment. It also sprung a minor leak in its radiator which required a trip to the mechanic when it returned.

Friends helped name this car as well. I specified that the name must alliterate with "Rolls-Royce." The name "Rosalind" was selected from Shakespeare's As You Like It, Act 3, Scene 2, Line 86 ["From the east to western Ind, No jewel is like Rosalind. Her worth being mounted on
the wind, Through all the world bears Rosalind . . .”). This seemed imminently appropriate, due to the aforesaid alliteration, and the “mounted on the wind” phrase being evocative of the Spirit of Ecstasy hood ornament. It has settled into a life of car shows, impromptu tours, and backdrop for various weddings. It performs, for the most part, as one would expect that a Rolls-Royce should. It is not a perfect car by any stretch of the imagination, such a thing does not after all exist, but it is one very satisfying car to drive, and seems to spread happiness everywhere it goes and among all classes of people. There was one occasion where I was accosted in a shopping center parking lot by a rather attractive 40-ish woman who inquired if this were my car, or was I just someone's driver. Upon assuring her that I was the car's owner, she stated, “I would do anything, and I do mean anything, for the opportunity to ride in this car." I told her my wife might take offense at such a proposition, but if sitting in it for a few minutes would help in any way, to knock herself out, as I opened the door to the rear seat for her. On another occasion in downtown Nashville, while stopped at a traffic light in front of the Sommet Entertainment Center, a gentleman crossing the street stopped, removed his hat and bowed to the Spirit of Ecstasy hood ornament. Everyone remembers the Grey Poupon advertisements, and many will ask, "Pardon me, but do you have any Grey Poupon?" Of course we do, and it travels in the front door cubby, where it is easily accessible for display in answer to the question at stop lights.

In addition to the usual equipment, it also sports silver and crystal bud vases, compliments of the original London dealer, Frank Dale and Stepsons. These were apparently that dealership’s trademark. Manufactured in Crewe, England, 4 May 1961, the anniversary of the date on which Mr. Royce and Mr. Rolls met at the Midland Hotel in Manchester to cement their partnership deal, she is a right-hand drive model. She has a V-8 engine of 6,230 cubic centimeters capacity, 6.23
liters, 380 cubic inches, developing an estimated 225 to 300 horsepower [Rolls-Royce never
published horsepower ratings until after the 1998 sale to the Germans, but this was estimated in the
motoring press when the engine was first released]. She has an advertised top speed of 118 miles
per hour [I have taken their word for it], and the factory said she could cruise indefinitely at 100
miles per hour, indefinitely being truly limited to the vast amounts of gasoline she consumes. I
have chosen to take their word for that fact as well. She has three fully independent brake systems
manufactured by Girling, which though they are drums, were accounted the best drum brake
systems ever fitted to any car, and are engineered to function as a primitive anti-lock system. The
seats are of Connolly vaumol leather, and all of the woodwork is French walnut veneer with
Wilton wool carpeting and west of England wool broadcloth head liner. We are her fourth curators
since new. Originally in service in Sussex County, England, she has been in Nashville since 1975,
when she was brought here by the late Ira Heckman, an insurance executive. The car generates
much attention wherever it goes. There are many urban legends about Roll-Royces, such as the
drive compartment being sealed at the factory and only being able to be opened by a certified
Rolls-Royce mechanic (it is not), the car is warranted for life (total car, three years only, without
regard to mileage), and that it is all handmade (only the radiator grille shell and the hood ornament
are truly hand-made; the body panels are stamped out like any other car, but it is all hand
assembled, fitted, and trimmed out), or that one has to pass some factory mandated test or
background check to be qualified for ownership (not true, since I have one).16 These make for
interesting questions at car shows, and provide amusement when some supposed authority is

16 And then there is the story of the Yorkshire pig farmer who carried pigs in the passenger compartment. A
factory representative was dispatched to advise the farmer that the factory took a dim view of such practices. To his
great consternation, the farmer informed him that pigs paid for it, and pigs would ride in it.
overheard imparting his knowledge (usually all wrong) to his family, friends and colleagues. I never correct such statements, unless called upon for corroboration, and then I try to be as gentle as possible in setting the record straight.

Once, we took the car to an Alabama home football game in Tuscaloosa. My wife and son had tickets, I just went along to drive and have fun with the car. Arriving very close to kick-off time, we were sent to parking within two blocks of the stadium, because the policemen handling traffic passed the car to the front, such is the affection shown to the marque, even when the particular example is aged. During the game the policemen came over to examine the car and ask if it were mine, or did I just drive for the owner, a frequently asked question. They were very happy to be afforded the opportunity to sit in it and peer under the hood. Like most people, including myself before 2002, there is little opportunity for the average person to have a hands-on experience with any Rolls-Royce, old or new.

This is probably the only Rolls-Royce I will ever own. It took forty years for one to find its way to me. I doubt I would be so lucky on either car or price again. No car I have ever owned has been so satisfying in so many ways. It is a very rewarding experience to have your hands on an automobile generally conceded to have been the best made when it was created. And there is still the experience which Ken Purdy once described as the “inimitable cachet, the tapestried legend of the Rolls-Royce, the timeless nobility of that hand-soldered, square sided radiator, . . . . Chastely adorned with its black enameled R-R badge, object of admiration in every country in the world where wheel turns on axle.”17 When you sit behind the wheel, serene in your progress down the road, and gaze out over that expanse of black polished hood to the Spirit of Ecstasy mascot,

heralding your progress or arrival, you sense, as in no other automobile of my experience, a timelessness that makes you know that the machine will most likely outlast you, that you are but a temporary curator, and that you hold in your hands what was advertised by its makers as quite simply “The Best Car in the World.” When this model was introduced, someone in the motoring press summarized the total experience of the Silver Cloud II when new with the intended uncomplimentary assessment that it was “only a superb example of what modern manufacturing technology and a spare-no-expense philosophy can do for a 1939 Packard.”\(^{18}\) If that is true, then perhaps I have another Packard, after all. It still satisfies in so many ways, so many years after its manufacture with the simple understanding that in our hurry up world of disposable goods and relationships, there are still some things that are timeless, and were designed and executed with care and pride by persons who believed and wanted them to be timeless, and built them with precision, care, and pride of craftsmanship for that reason. I am very humbled and pleased to be able to add my small contribution to the preservation of such a machine, while being able to enjoy it at the same time.

**OTHER PEOPLE'S CARS**

When I worked at the bank, we were often engaged in transactions involving funding from other sources. We came to refer to this as “other people's money, or O. P. M., the acronym (say it to yourself for a further funny effect). For that reason, I have chosen the name of this section.

**Grandfather White** - My grandfather, Carson Bailey White, was a notoriously bad driver. It got so bad that the family would not consent to ride with him, and eventually, Aunt Ruth became the designated driver for the family. The first car he bought was a Dodge seven passenger sedan

\(^{18}\)“Six Luxury Cars - A Subjective, Seat of the Pants Evaluation by the Editors,” *Car and Driver Magazine*, July 1965, p. 64.
from the 1920's, purchased at Cumberland Motors, the Cheek family enterprise in Nashville, and the “World's First Dodge Dealer,” as their sign so proudly proclaimed. Their other commercial enterprise was ownership of the Maxwell House Coffee Company. My father’s cousin, Carley D. White, once related a story in which he was personally involved. My grandfather was the City Market Manager for the Farmers’ Market in Nashville until his death in 1939. In those days, the market did not close for holidays. It was the Fourth of July, and the family had gathered at my grandparents’ home for a celebration of the holiday. Grandfather White decided that fresh watermelons were needed, so he loaded the boys, Carley, my father and my uncle, and some others, into the big Dodge for the drive to the market. When the watermelons were procured, they and the boys were loaded into the rear passenger compartment (the car had jump seats and seated seven) with the admonition to leave them alone until all arrived home. My grandfather had learned to drive with a horse with which it was necessary to converse and, according to Carley, never ceased to talk to the car. The big Dodge had only two wheel mechanical brakes, and it was necessary to take firm hold upon the steering wheel and rare back when engaging the brakes, causing one to virtually stand up on the brake pedal. Grandfather always drove recklessly fast. Coming home, every stop was attended with the standing up on the brake and shouting “Whoa, G-dammit, whoa!” When the car arrived home, the boys and the watermelons had been thrown around the rear compartment several times, with the result that all of the watermelons had been cracked open. When my grandfather opened the rear door to let the boys out, he exclaimed, “you little devils! I told you boys to leave those watermelons alone. It does no good to mix boys and watermelons and expect the watermelons to not get broken open!” Grandfather also had an eye for the pretty girls, and regrettably, one February afternoon in 1939, while driving home from work,
one in a short skirt caught his attention. When he turned around to look, he drove his Oldsmobile into the Tennessee Central Railroad trestle that then spanned West End Avenue about where I-440 now crosses it. The engine was driven into the passenger compartment. Fortunately, he was alone, but his injuries were severe, and he died the next day.

**The Pierce-Arrow** - My father related that in 1931 or 1932, Aunt Ruth was dating a dapper man, several years her senior who drove a Pierce-Arrow sports roadster. It was their custom, when they returned from a date, for the man to park the car under the streetlight out in front of the house, and Aunt Ruth would sit on the running board while they talked, and the man took a polishing cloth and rubbed the finish on the car to remove the road dust. My father would watch them from the gap under the window shade, and dream of the days to come, after Aunt Ruth married him, when Dad would have the opportunity to drive the Pierce-Arrow. It was never to be, and Aunt Ruth broke up with the man before they had dated for very long. Mentioning this to Aunt Ruth many years later, she said, “well, the relationship might have amounted to more, but the Pierce-Arrow was all he rubbed.” My great-grandmother, Jennie Suitter Whitaker, had a succession of Pierce-Arrows, none of which she ever drove. She had a driver for some time, and Aunt Ruth learned to drive in one of those cars, a large sedan, taking her mother and grandmother shopping at D. Loveman's in downtown Nashville. I once heard her reply to the protestations of her Buick salesman when she told him of her intention to buy a Cadillac, that she did not need so large a car, and that they were too difficult to drive and park. “I learned to drive downtown in a Pierce-Arrow nearly as big as a railroad car. I could drive a railroad car, too, if it had power steering and brakes.” Jennie's last Pierce-Arrow, which got about eight or nine miles to the gallon, was sold during World War II, when gas was rationed. It went to the yard man-handymen for eight
hundred dollars.

**Sylvia’s Hudson** - My mother worked in the late 1950's with a lady whose name was Sylvia. She had contracted breast cancer, a virtual death sentence in those days, and her husband had deserted her in the fall of the year. She did not have enough insurance for her treatments and no extra money for Christmas. She had several children, I do not now recall how many, but my parents decided it would be a good thing to try and help Sylvia with Christmas. My father helped us renovate a Tonka construction truck set, and some other toys for the boys, and some new toys and dolls were bought. Grown-up things were bought for Sylvia as well as a turkey, ham, and assorted other groceries. We filled the trunk of our car with all of the presents, toys, and groceries. She lived in Old Hickory, a distant suburb of Nashville, way on the other end of the county. In those pre-interstate days, it took a long time to get there. I remember hearing later that one of the older boys was upset with charity, but Sylvia was overjoyed when we arrived. I remember distinctly that we put all of the presents into her car in the dark, using my father's flashlight for such light as we had, and she was going to lock the car until Christmas morning. It was either the 23rd or 24th when we made the delivery. The floorboards of the car were so badly rusted that 2 x 4's had been placed over them between the frame rails. The car was either a 1952 or 1953 Hudson sedan.

**My Father’s Riders** - My father made a little extra money for gasoline when I was young by driving “riders” to town and back each day. One such rider was a Mr. Gilley, universally referred to behind his back by the other riders as “old man Gilley.” Dad drove an aqua 1955 Plymouth Savoy sedan with a white top at the time. It was Mr. Gilley’s practice to try and sit at a different door each day. Upon alighting from the car, he would slam the door, my father said, as
though he were trying to slam it through to the other side of the car. The result was that all of the
door glass and vent window panes in the car were cracked. Whether from Mr. Gilley’s tender
ministrations or not, I do not know, but we were reduced to only one window crank. To avoid
losing this last crank when it became dislodged from its home, my father tied it to a heavy string
attached to the radio knob. Whenever you wanted to lower a window, you had to ask for someone
to please pass the window crank.

**Clem’s Studebaker** - My father had a co-worker who was a rather quirky sort of fellow.
He went around always with a permanent pinched look on his features and with his mouth open
revealing all of his teeth, rather a goofy sort of expression. His name was Clem. I cannot recall his
surname. Clem drove a 1953 Studebaker sedan into the late 1960’s. One extremely hot summer
afternoon, my father pulled beside him on West End Avenue in rush hour traffic. Clem had all of
the windows of the Studebaker rolled up and was wiping profuse perspiration from his brow. My
father motioned for him to roll his window down and told him that he was not fooling anyone, that
everyone knew that his model of Studebaker did not have air conditioning, and that if he did not
roll down his windows he was going to have a heat stroke.

**My parents’ 1955 Chevrolet** - In 1958, Cohen Williams, the owner of Martha White
Mills, the famous advertiser on the Grand Ole Opry, traded a 1955 Chevrolet Bel Air two door
hardtop for a new four seat Thunderbird for his daughter. My father had been familiar with this
Chevrolet because of his part-time employment at Richard Smitha’s Pure Oil service station. The
car was solid black with red and white upholstery, and had every available factory option,
including the new for that year factory air conditioning. It was a very popular car from the time my
father first purchased it. In 1967, it was sold for conversion to a street rod with a salvaged Corvette
engine, transmission and rear end. The car was pretty well worn out by then, but rust free and had never been wrecked. One did not stand behind it, though, for it had a propensity to throw raw oil out of the dual exhausts. We took this car to Virginia and Washington, D. C. for our family vacation in the summer of 1960. The car kept blowing fuses on the air conditioner. In Richmond, Virginia, we took it to the Chevrolet dealership, but they were unable to help us, and suggested the Cadillac dealership just down the road. After what seemed like an eternity waiting for a diagnosis, my father went to the service area where he found every mechanic in the dealership under the hood of our car. I do not recall the problem, but it was properly repaired. But the best memory I have of that car is one of Christmas, probably either 1958 or 1959. School had already let out for the holidays, but Christmas was still a few days away. My mother and I had been to the Kroger store in Belle Meade, and were heading home. As we crossed the bridge on White Bridge Road, we saw an older woman wrestling two bags of groceries and two small children. To complete this picture, it was snowing steadily. My mother stopped the car at the foot of the bridge and waited for the lady to arrive at where we had pulled over to the side of the road. The lady explained that they lived several miles distant, on the other side of Charlotte Pike, and had gotten a ride to the store, the nearest to their home at that time, but could not get a ride back from anyone they knew, so she had decided they would walk. She did not own a car. The children were very young, and all three of them were obviously very cold. We loaded them all in the back seat with their groceries. On the ride to their home, the lady explained that the children were her grandchildren, her daughter and son-in-law had left town some weeks earlier allegedly in search of work, and had apparently just abandoned the children to her. When we arrived at their home, all of the lights were out, and my mother said we would wait in the driveway until she got to the house and turned on a light. It was
then that she told us that the power company had turned off the electricity the day before due to an unpaid bill. The fee to turn the lights back on and pay the delinquent bill all together came to something less than $40.00. My mother reached into her purse, took out her checkbook and wrote a check to the power company for the required amount. The lady protested that my mother should not do this for her, and then wanted to know where to send the money. My mother said it was her Christmas gift to the lady's family, and not to worry about it. If she wanted to repay the amount, do the same for some other deserving person she might know. I rode home in silence, an unusual circumstance for me, filled with the finest feeling of contentment I had ever experienced. When we arrived at our house, I thought the lights burning brightly had never seemed so welcoming or full of warmth, and I had never been more proud of my mother than I was that evening.

The Plymouth Valiant - Before I could drive and in the summer of 1964, we went on a family vacation to Florida. At that time we owned a 1963 Plymouth Valiant, a small car for its day. We took my mother, father, brother, grandmother, a friend of my mother’s from work, two dogs, and me, a total of six people and two dogs, in this car from Nashville to St. Petersburg, Florida. The car had one of the then fairly ubiquitous under the dash air conditioners. We assigned my brother and grandmother the duty of taking turns straddling the air conditioner in front, as they were the two shortest persons. At one of the infrequent gas stops, my grandmother remarked, “now I know exactly how a sardine feels, except they are not frozen!”

More Packard tales - As stated previously, my first car was a Packard, which I took for servicing to Nashville's former Packard dealer, who remained in business until 1980. I became fairly well acquainted with the service manager who related the story of a late model Packard which had an electric leveling device, which basically worked by pumping air into large air bags.
He once picked up several ladies to chauffeur to his wife's bridge club meeting. The last lady picked up weighed about 300 pounds. The entire time she was a passenger, the car's air pump could be heard whirring away in a futile effort to keep the car level. When they arrived at their destination, he went round the car to assist this lady out. As she exited the car, the air bag suddenly released its contents, which sounded like a prolonged sigh of relief. She turned to cast a disdainful look at the car, arranged another ride home, and never again rode in his Packard.

**Governor Browning’s Cadillac** - My late uncle and his wife were politically very well connected in the 1930' and 1940's. They were once invited by Governor Gordon Browning to accompany him and his wife to Knoxville for a UT football game. In those pre-interstate days, Cookeville was a noted speed trap, and then the governor had neither a driver nor a police escort. Governor Browning had a Cadillac, and was noted for driving it fast. As might be anticipated, when they arrived in the vicinity of Cookeville, he was pulled over by a state highway patrolman for speeding. When asked to present his driver's license, the governor said: “Don't you know who I am? I am Gordon Browning,” to which the patrolman replied, “Sure you are, and I'm Harry Truman. Just let me see your license.” Examining the license, the patrolman replied, “My God, you are Gordon Browning. Do you know who I am?” The Governor told him “No,” to which the officer replied: “Good, good-bye,” jumped on his motorcycle and sped away.

**The Cadillacs of Kroger** - My tenure with The Kroger Company from 1966-71 in both Nashville and Knoxville brought me into contact with some rather unusual automobiles for the period. At that time, grocery stores actually opened and closed, and none were known to stay open twenty four hours a day. There was one very pleasant older lady who arrived at the store every Saturday morning before the store opened. She would be standing by the door when we unlocked
it. She drove a beautiful but huge 1960 black Cadillac Fleetwood 60 Special with a white top and black cloth and white leather interior. I always took her groceries to her car so as to admire it. It had very low miles for its age, and she always parked in the last spot of the parking lot, as far from the store as possible. I always assumed it was to prevent parking nicks to her car, but one Saturday I finally got up sufficient nerve to inquire. She explained that the car was her husband's and he had done all of the driving, but he had died, which circumstance necessitated that she learn how to drive. She had never learned how to back up, however, and did not want to risk being blocked, hence her selection of parking spaces, as well as the time of her weekly shopping trip. I knew from having accepted her checks when she came through the check out line that she lived in Belle Meade, Nashville's premier suburb. I asked her how she managed to back out of her driveway, to which she replied that after her husband's death, she had the driveway extended around the house, so that she did not have to back up to get out, and she left the car under the portico on the side of the house, rather than in the garage. I believe it was F. Scott Fitzgerald who said that “the rich are not like you and me.” Another remarkable car was the black 1941 Cadillac Fleetwood 60 Special driven by a very meticulous black couple. He was always dressed in a gray flannel vest, black jacket and tie, and charcoal striped trousers. His wife usually wore a flower print dress, and always rode in the back seat. The car was as meticulously maintained and spotless always as were the passengers. I was always instructed to place the groceries on the passenger floorboard in front, which had rubber floor covering, as opposed to the rear, which had medium gray wool carpeting to match the striped gray wool broadcloth upholstery. There was little doubt the entire car was original. I had learned that he worked for a man in Belle Meade who had three Cadillacs, which it was his job to keep clean and maintained. His wife was the housekeeper and cook. When the
employer had died, the widow had given them this Cadillac, the oldest of the three, and traded the other two in on a new model. I have often wondered what became of these two cars, as both sets of owners were elderly in the 1960's. There was a beautiful 1966 Cadillac Fleetwood Brougham bought new by the Hobgoods from the Cadillac stand at the 1966 Chicago Automobile Show. It was a one-of-a-kind car with a special gold metal-flake paint, black vinyl top, and gold leather and brocade interior. Mrs. Hobgood used to tease me about selling it to me when they were through with it, but it was traded in 1970 for another new Fleetwood Brougham. Then there was the 1958 black Cadillac Fleetwood 60 Special with less than 50,000 miles that I could have bought for $500.00, but my mother would not let me have two cars until I could sell the 1956 Buick. *Sic transit gloria mundi!*

**The Packards of Kroger** - Belle Meade still afforded a look upon certain Packards at that time. There was a couple who owned three Caribbeans: a 1956 hardtop, 1956 convertible, and a 1955 convertible. All three cars were in rather rough shape, because the couple drank rather too much, and drove inebriated. I personally watched the lady run the red light in front of the store one afternoon just after I had loaded her groceries. The Cadillac that hit her 1956 convertible in the side did extensive damage, but did not disable the Packard. She had the damage repaired, but it was a shoddy job. I always wondered if someone rescued those now quite valuable cars before they were totally beyond restoration. The Caribbeans were top of the line for Packard, and but few were constructed in Packard's last days, making them an almost instant collector's item. Mr. Tommy Hopkinson lived in the same apartment building as my aunt. He owned Isley Thermometer Company. He was English, and should probably have driven a Bentley. He was a very careful dresser, always well turned out, in the proper, conservative English bespoke tailoring fashion. He
owned a tri-tone blue 1955 Packard Four Hundred hardtop, which he always promised to sell to me when he was finished with it. One day, he appeared in a new Buick. It seems that carbon deposits had clogged the valves in the Packard and it would not run. He traded it to E. Gray Smith for the Buick, and, after a valve job, they sold it to Bobby Goldsboro, the country music personality and Packard devotee, and another future classic slipped beyond my reach.

My favorite Packard from those years was owned by two little ladies who were sisters. One was tall and thin, the other short and dumpy. They generally wore old style clothing, always dresses, hats with veils, and sometimes white gloves. The dresses I most remember were the pastels that had white print contrasts, called whipped cream print, because they looked like someone had splattered whipped cream on the pastel dresses. They had a chauffeur who wore a charcoal grey chauffeur's uniform, complete with jodhpurs, and lace up black knee boots, and cap and gloves. He would spend the time they were in the store wiping the dust from their immaculate 1954 black Packard Patrician sedan. The car had gray wool broadcloth upholstery, and a black rubber floor mat in the trunk that was so shiny and clean one could almost see one's reflection in it. It was always specified that the groceries go in the trunk, never the interior. When they were finished shopping, the taller of the two ladies would take her handkerchief out of her cuff, gently and ceremoniously touch her mouth, and then wave the handkerchief for the chauffeur to come around to pick up the two ladies and their groceries. I fantasized that his job was one which might be worth pursuing someday. Often I have wondered what became of the little ladies and their very impressive Packard.

The Rolls-Royces of Kroger - Since Nashville had a Rolls-Royce dealer in those days, there were a few of those as well. There was a lady who owned a Silver Cloud II. It was black. She
told me two anecdotes about it. The first was that while driving out West End Avenue, a car raced to catch up with her at a stoplight. Beating on their doors to attract her attention, when she lowered her window, the man in the backseat said, "Say lady, settle a bet for us, what model Packard is that anyway?" On another occasion, a gas station attendant (remember those?) asked her was the car really a Rolls-Royce (for some unknown reason this is a frequently asked question, and one is tempted to say, “no, it is really a Volkswagen with an attitude on steroids), and followed up with, “I suppose you had to have it imported in then?” There was another gentleman who owned a Silver Wraith in two-toned gray, with a James Young Touring limousine body, a bespoke car. He would sit in the rear seat behind his sea green tinted windows reading *The Wall Street Journal* while the chauffeur went in to pick up a few items for the evening meal. There were also two or three Silver Shadows, but I thought them not much more impressive than their contemporary Mercedes-Benz competition, so they made no lasting impression on my mind. They truly were the everyman's Rolls-Royce. Time has borne out that impression. In addition to being the most numerous of any Rolls-Royce series, (being in production from 1966-1980) some of the early ones are prone to exasperating and quite expensive repairs to their problematical hydraulics. They have not held their value very well, and can be seen for sale frequently in the range of $ 10,000.00 to $ 18,000.00. In the world of Rolls-Royce cognoscenti, it is said that there is nothing quite as expensive as a cheap Silver Shadow.

**The 1962 Buick Electra** - In 1967, when my Uncle Joe died, my Aunt Ruth sold my father her 1962 Buick Electra Custom four door hardtop. The car did not have air conditioning, and my father took steps immediately to remedy that deficiency. The company making that addition neglected to add either an additional auxiliary cooling module or a larger radiator to the car, with
the result that initially, until properly configured, the car would overheat. One Saturday morning, my cousin John Greenlee was once more visiting and, for some reason, maybe the air conditioning, I was to take him downtown to the State Library. On my return trip, the car overheated and stalled out in the middle of the intersection of 21st Avenue North and Church Street. I could not get the car to start again immediately, and there was a lady behind me in a new Cadillac, extremely frustrated that I could not get the Buick to proceed out of her way. She was animatedly and incessantly blowing the horn of her car, with the effect that it sounded like a luxury liner blowing to clear its way. After some minutes of unsuccessfu lly trying to get the Buick to start, and not wanting to run down the battery, I finally walked back to her car. She rolled down the window of her cool sanctuary. I advised her of my plight, and suggested, quite courteously, that I would be happy to sit in her cool car and vigorously blow the horn if she would like to try her hand at starting the Buick. She rolled up her window without a word, slammed the big Cadillac in reverse, and screeched out around me. In another few minutes, the Buick fired up and I proceeded approximately a mile to my father’s service station where the necessary repairs were made to the Buick that afternoon. I had been permitted to take this car to my high school senior prom on two conditions: first, I had to detail it out before the prom and, secondly, it had to be home by midnight; not necessarily me, but the car. My group of buddies and their dates took the 1962 Buick home, everyone was shuttled to their respective houses to change clothes for the breakfast, and we took my 1956 Buick for the remainder of the evening. I thought how seemingly perfect it was to have a selection of Buicks to drive. My father kept this car until it had well over 140,000 miles on it. He was always insouciant about the maintenance of his cars, and this one was one of the few Buicks, of which I ever knew, to develop the tendency to burn oil. When he finally offered it for sale, I can still see him with his arm
draped over the shoulder of the young lad to whom he sold it, explaining to him that “this car has a very unusual feature; it changes its own oil.”

**Hodo’s Ford.** My grandfather, Willie Anthony Hooper, of Bakerville, Humphreys County, Tennessee, had a tenant or overseer, called Mr. Doc Anderson. Mr. Doc had a son, Linnie who, although not strictly speaking an employee, was what was then called a hanger-on. Linnie was nicknamed “Hodo,” which somehow seemed an apt moniker. Hodo was always coming around and was a good natured sort of fellow, always good for entertainment value, but not disposed to regular employment. Hodo drank a fair amount, always beer, and became more mellow and amusing the more he had to drink. I remember one interesting experience with him in about 1964. He had come be the house one Saturday when my parents were gone, and I was in the backyard enjoying the antics of our two dogs. Hodo had arrived with his usual complement of beer, and casually asked if I knew if the dogs liked beer. Hodo proceeded to drink from the bottle and share it with the dogs, who lapped it up. By the time my mother arrived home, Hodo was pretty well lit, and the dogs were very wobbly on their feet and would walk a few steps and fall down. Hodo found this quite amusing, and was laughing his unique and characteristic laugh. I thought it quite funny myself, but dared not betray my amusement to my mother. She was rather sharp with Hodo, and he asked, also characteristically, that someone just call him a cab and he would leave. After many years of never owning a car, sometime around 1966 he bought a black and white 1959 Ford two-door sedan, the cheapest series made that year, and it had no options except a radio and heater. This meant that it had rubber floor mats covering the floor, and a three speed column mounted shift. Sometime after he had bought this car, I asked him to teach me to drive a stick shift car. He agreed, and on the appointed day arrived already slightly inebriated. I was instructed to go
to Drew’s Market, then located on White Bridge Road, where Hodo procured another supply of beer. We then took to the hills and hollows of West Meade for the driving lesson. As I recollect, in about one half an hour, Hodo was sleeping in the passenger seat. After many stallings of the engine, I finally mastered the intricacies of coordinating the engagement of the clutch with the engine speed and learned to drive a stick shift, without much assistance from Hodo. When we returned to my house, I roused him from the arms of Morpheus and commented that he was certainly the least engaged instructor I had ever had. He replied: “It was all part of my master plan, Paul; you would not have learned so much so fast if I had not left you to your own devices.”

Another interesting experience occurred with this car a couple of years later. It was the summer once more, and I was visiting my grandmother. Someone she knew had told her that he had harvested his cornfield to his satisfaction, and there was a fair amount of corn left in the field. She was advised that she could have all of it she wanted. Knowing that I was coming, she arranged for Hodo to help upon the promise of some of the end product for his mother and sisters, and on the appointed day, Hodo arrives with the Ford. He volunteered the use of his car. We went to the cornfield, and loaded the substantial trunk of the car so deeply that we had to put a plastic sheet over the corn and tie the trunk down. Then Hodo opined that we should fill the back seat, which we proceeded to do, in spite of my grandmother’s objection that so large a load would most likely break the springs, and if not, the car would not clear the railroad crossing between the farm and town. The three of us climbed into the front seat and headed back to town. The railroad crossing was just before we entered town. My grandmother told Hodo the car would not clear the railroad crossing with such a large load, and she was not going to get trapped on the track. Hodo told me to get out of the car, and he did as well. My grandmother was assigned the task of driving the car over
the crossing, and we were to push if it became stuck. My grandmother replied that if we could not get the car off of the track easily, should it become stuck, then she would get out, and it would be Hodo’s problem, since he had not listened to reason. When we were ready, my grandmother revved up the engine, popped the clutch, and launched the car toward the railroad crossing at what seemed a very high rate of speed. I would swear the car became airborne at the summit, and there is no doubt that it struck the payment on the other side, bottoming out the suspension and scrapping the exhaust system along the pavement for several feet. Hodo examined the car and pronounced that the springs had endured the stress, the car had sustained no noticeable damage, and had cleared the track completely in accord with his “master plan.” My grandmother set her jaw, asked if he intended to stand around and yap all day, and reminded him we had much work to do. The task of shucking, silking, and removing the corn from the cobs, spread over about three afternoons, was made much easier, and seemingly passed more quickly, by Hodo’s incessant and good natured banter and story-telling. He was what was, in that time, referred to as a *bona fide* character.

**The English Rental.** In 1999, when I made my first trip to England, we took our two sons, and, after a coach trip around the south of England, we rented a car to tour the West Country and visit Somerset County, the place where Barbara’s ancestors originated five hundred years ago, as well as several other sites off of the beaten path. We arranged to take possession of the rental car at Heathrow airport, where we were to return it. It was a tiny Renault sedan, the only car in our price range to have both an automatic transmission and air conditioning. Air conditioning, usually optional for England, was essential for that summer as it was the hottest on record in England in quite some time. All was going well with driving on the other side of the car and the other side of the road until, on a very narrow country lane, a tanker truck careened around a curve on my side of
the road. Swerving to avoid a collision, I struck the curbing rather hard. Proceeding on, we very soon heard a noise from the left front of the car. As soon as the road conditions would allow, I pulled over to check the source of the noise. The blow when I struck the curb had dislodged the fog light from the plastic bumper surround which held it in place, and the light had been bouncing along the road. At the next available place I stopped at a convenience market and gas station. I went in and explained that in the states we had a black tape which we called electrical tape, and inquired if they had anything like it. I was informed that in fact they did, and curiously they also called it electrical tape. I bought a roll, taped up the offending light, and went upon my way without further mishap. When returning the car, I was attended to by a large, burly, redheaded Scotsman with a full bushy beard. As he walked around the car checking it for damage, he came to the left front fog light. “Well lad, would you care to explain what we have here?” he said. I allowed as how it was his fault for renting me a car too large for England's narrow roads. He placed his hands on his hips, threw back his head, and roared with laughter, and then told me “You Yanks are a priceless lot!” He did not charge me for the broken light bulb, as he said it would only cost about $ 15.00 US to replace, and he would have more fun than that amount sharing this story with his mates down at the local pub.

**FINALE, FOR THE MOMENT**

All I can say about all of the Cadillacs I owned was that the first one was the best, and I still have it. Each one was less reliable than the previous one, and all were, in some way, disappointments. There is a certain "standard" they should achieve which is sadly lacking. I believe Cadillac today to be the ultimate triumph of brand marketing and consumer identification with the perceived lifestyle of ownership over any concept of quality of assembly or engineering. Besides,
somehow, I always felt more socially content in a Buick; you can drive one without apology and without being self-conscious. People never ask you, as many did when I owned a Cadillac, “Why do you feel you need a car like this?” None of these cars ever acquired a name. When you name a car, you have made a commitment - it has become a part of you, an extension of your personality, if you will. Some become like members of one's family. To name an inanimate object reflects that one has bestowed upon it personality, permanence, affection, and some measure of contentment. Of all my cars, only four earned the distinction of a name - the first two, and two I own still.

In August 2000 we bought a new Buick Park Avenue\(^{19}\). We drove it ten years and two months. It turned more than 145,000 miles by the beginning of October 2010. I have always operated on one standard in the ownership of cars - buy the best you can afford at the time of purchase, take care of it as though it will be the last car you may own, fix what breaks, and you will never know a day when you have to buy a car. That philosophy became severely strained on 7 October 2010 when, on the way to work downtown, the Park Avenue’s oil pump failed causing one set of lifters to collapse and the car to be perilously close to throwing a rod. That afternoon, the saga of the 2000 Buick came to an end. My plan of proving that the quality American car, being the subject of proper maintenance, would last as long as a Japanese or German car, proved to be inaccurate. It was traded for another dream, a 2010 Hyundai Genesis\(^{20}\) The car is rear wheel drive and has a V-8, maybe the last of its iteration I will ever own. The color is a metal flake paint, called “White Satin Pearl.”

I have owned or extensively driven eight Cadillacs in my life, and six Buicks. I have never

\(^{19}\) This car has a wheelbase of 113.8”, length of 206.8”, height of 57.4”, and weighed 3779 lbs. It had a V-6 engine of 3.8 liters, 231 cubic inches developing 205 horsepower. The price new exceeded $ 33,000.00.

\(^{20}\) This car has a wheelbase of 115.6”, length of 195.9”, height of 58.3”, and weighs 4120 lbs. It has a V-8 engine of 4.6 liters, developing 375 horsepower. The price new exceeded $ 42,000.
had a bad Buick. The 2000 Park Avenue delivered flawless service for all but the last ten months of my ownership of it. All but three of my purchases have been vanity buys, not bought out of necessity. I have let many cars go when they still had many satisfying and rewarding miles left in them, simply because I wanted another car. There was the 1979 Oldsmobile 98 LS sedan, the 1997 Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme sedan, and most recently the 2005 Mercury Grand Marquis LES sedan, all very fine cars in their own right and still serviceable when they departed. Mostly I still miss the Packard and the 1956 Buick. As for the 1973 Buick Riviera, after a three year search, I found an exact duplicate of Barbara’s original car in Bourbon, Indiana. We bought it and brought it home 19 July 2009, making the third collector car in our stable. We are its fourth owners. It sold originally in Marion, Indiana and had 116,000 miles on it when we purchased it. It has been exceptionally well maintained, garaged, and was repainted in the 1990’s by the previous owner, who owned a body shop. It has three base coats, four color coats of a burgundy metallic paint (a 1994 Buick color called “Autumn Maple”), and two clear coats, all individually hand-rubbed. The finish is stunning. Maybe someday circumstances and opportunity will again converge, as they did with the Rolls-Royce, to allow of ownership of another Packard, or a 1956 Buick Century. Until then, it is my sincere hope that this monograph has reminded you of some of your own motoring memories, and that they all are as memorable and as enjoyable to recount as have been my own.
Paul R. White
Nashville, Tennessee
January 1, 2011