

BESSIE BEE AND OL' SNORT

By John S. Halbert

"Such was their luster, they did so excel."

---George Herbert (1593-1633)

In 1940, several years before he met my future mother, "Johnny", the man who would someday become my father, began looking for a replacement for his 1936 Ford coupé. At first, the Ford had seemed to be a bargain---it had originally belonged to a proverbial "little old lady who only drove it to the grocery store and to church." When he brought home the coupé it had only a relatively few miles on the odometer, which, coupled with the reasonable sales price, seemed, at the time, to be a good value. Johnny bought the car with the intention of driving it to work which meant about a forty-mile round trip each day. But the car, having only been driven infrequently around town in stop-and-go traffic, was not used to long-distance or highway driving. The poor little coupé just couldn't handle it and before long the engine gave out.

Johnny suddenly and unexpectedly needed another vehicle in a hurry. He drove the smoking, jerking Ford around to several dealers, all of whom looked askance at the coupé as a trade-in item. The scenario was always the same: Johnny eased the shiny Ford onto the dealer's lot and the salesmen eyed it eagerly. But their enthusiasm evaporated as soon as they took an evaluation test-drive---the car looked like a thousand dollars and drove like fifty cents! Seemingly stuck with a car that could barely move under its own power, Johnny had about given up hope of finding a suitable replacement at an affordable cost. Then he saw a shiny, dark-green 1939 Dodge Luxury Liner four-door sedan parked on a dealer's lot.

He determined to buy that car, no matter what it took. As it turned out, the dealership's Sales Manager was looking for a vehicle to customize (an early street-rod, it would appear) and the Ford coupé was just what he was looking for! In no time, daddy and the dealership had a deal and he drove the Dodge home. He always said it was the best-looking car he ever owned, and it did, indeed, have good lines for its day. As were all pre-war vehicles, the car was robustly-constructed---an advantage that would carry it through the long World War II years soon to come when new cars were unobtainable in the United States and replacement parts, tires, and gasoline were in short supply due to government regulations.

When Johnny and my future mother married in the late Summer of 1944, she gave the car a nickname: "Bessie Bee". She said the name seemed to embody the vehicle's honest, down-home qualities.

My earliest recollection of the '39 Dodge was when I was not quite two-years old. It was Easter Sunday and I remember that my mother took a photo of me in my Easter outfit standing on Bessie Bee's front fender. By that time, Daddy had repainted her black. Somewhere along the way he also removed the radio. Uncle Millard put the Dodge's receiver in his International pickup truck, and Daddy bolted a blanking plate into the hole on the dashboard.

Bessie Bee hauled our family around for years. We made all of our early trips to Grassy in

the old Dodge and it was our transportation for the many jaunts we took to the airport to watch the planes on many memorable Sunday afternoons. Daddy always drove the car fifty miles an hour on the highway. No more---no less. Probably it was a throwback to the war years when the national speed limit had been thirty-five miles an hour. Old habits died hard.

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My education in things mechanical began as a toddler. Daddy allowed me to ride in the car standing on the Dodge's front seat, an arrangement that afforded me a wonderful view out the windshield as to where we were going. (And, incidently, not legal today because of child automotive safety laws.) One day while we were stopped at a traffic light, I asked Daddy about the steering wheel. I was fascinated with the large spoked wheel and was curious as to how they made it. My father said its parts were put into a machine and with a big "*Grrriinnding*" noise the steering wheel popped out---just like that. For years afterward I thought that all cars and all things came from a machine somewhere that made the loud noise and out dropped the finished product.

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We neighborhood kids had a lot of fun playing in and around the old Dodge. A favorite pastime was jumping up and down on the wide, seamless roof. We discovered we could bounce on the car's top and it would spring us back upwards like a trampoline. But one day, not long before we moved from 24th Street, while my parents were indoors (and unaware of what we were doing), and my friend Jimmy and I were jumping together, at some point, we happened to come down onto the Dodge's roof at the same time---and it *DID NOT* rebound! *YIKES!* Jimmy and I gaped at the big crater in the car's top and at each other, in wide-eyed, horrified dismay!

My friend and I climbed inside the car. Sweating, together we desperately pushed upward on the buckled top but it didn't budge! *What if Daddy were to show up right now and see what we had done?* Just as the two of us were about to have to give up and go face Daddy (and most assuredly, the music), our cohorts, the two Lewter brothers, came along just then and we explained our predicament. The exertions of all four of us were rewarded with a loud and satisfying *POP!* and Bessie Bee's roof snapped back upward into place. Daddy never found out about it and that was the last time we ever jumped up and down on the top of the car.

We did have one final close call: moments after the roof recovered its shape, Mother stuck her head out an upstairs window and called down to us. "What was that funny noise?"

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Several interesting and notable vehicles made their domain in the old neighborhood on 24th Street. There was a huge and impressive sedan, probably a 1933 Buick, complete with foglights and front-fender-mounted spare tires, that was usually parked in front of the house on the opposite corner from our's. In photos over a period of several years, up until we left 24th Street, it always appeared in the background, parked in the same spot. (Today, the Buick would be a collector's item worth tens of thousands of dollars.)

When I was very young, there was a white-haired old man who drove a well-used 1928 Ford Model A roadster pickup truck around the neighborhood. He seemed to have little regard for

brakes, as he slithered and slid the machine around corners at breakneck speed. One day as I was standing on the sidewalk corner by the purple lilac bush, the old guy skidded the truck around the turn in its customary cloud of dust. He caught my eye and grinned---the only time he ever took notice of me. Shortly afterward Mother told me he had died suddenly. No one seemed to know what happened to his Model A roadster pickup---we never saw it again. (Today that rare, plucky little truck, like the Buick, would command a high price as a restored collectible.)

In a nearby house up 13th Avenue lived an outside salesman who owned a 1934 Dodge business coupé---a single-seat vehicle with a truly enormous trunk in which he carried his samples. The Dodge seemed to always have problems because when he started out each morning the engine usually lasted only long enough to carry him around the corner to a spot right in front of our house. Then it would sputter, gasp, cough, and quit running, rolling to a stop. I saw the man countless times raise the hood and fiddle with the balky engine. He must have had important clients because he always wore a white shirt and a tie. While he tackled the balky Dodge he rolled-up his sleeves that invariably became smeared with grease and oil. One time I heard him loudly cussing the car while he tried to make it run. On another occasion I saw him kick the tire and run red-faced back to his house. These highly-visible episodes made me wonder why he didn't just either get the engine fixed or get a newer car!

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After the war there were a lot of surplus military vehicles for sale by the government, and Mr. Pipkin, our neighbor across the street, bought a "Half-Track" flat-bed truck. A "Half-Track" was something on the order of a combination truck and Army tank. The front half of the vehicle resembled a regular truck with rubber tires and the cab was equipped with a usual steering wheel. But underneath the truck's rear-mounted flat-bed, instead of wheels and tires, there was a set of tracks like an Army tank---hence the term, "Half-Track." As it whirred around town, the track treads made a kind of buzzing noise. Mr. Pipkin said its biggest advantage over standard trucks was its ability to get around on muddy roads, a feature it put to good use as 24th street was unpaved until just before we moved away to High Point in the spring of 1952. A big water truck paid daily visits and thoroughly soaked the streets which not only settled the dust but gave the huge Half-Track an opportunity to exercise its mud-conquering tank treads.

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In my earlier years, several mornings a week I would be rudely awakened by another neighbor's "Cab-Over-Engine" GMC dump truck. I recall that truck mainly because it was responsible for much lost sleep until I was almost seven years old. The fact that my bedroom faced 13th Avenue, where the truck was parked, only served to make matters worse. When the guy left his house about dawn, he always began his routine with a big *SLAM!* of the truck's door, that woke me up---followed by a rumble as the engine started. He revved it to frightful levels, then took off with a roar and a clash of gears, with the engine loudly howling in protest. By then, I was wide-awake, silently wishing all sorts of bad things on that man. His daily dawn-driving episodes were standard happenings the whole time we lived on 24th Street.

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Our next-door neighbors on 24th Street were Mr. and Mrs. Pyron. The adults had a funny way of pronouncing Mr. Pyron's name, something that sounded like, "Pie-r-r-r-n". Everyone called him by just his last name---in fact, I never learned what his first name actually was. Even his wife called him "Pie-r-r-r-n". Mr Pyron and his wife lived in a small house trailer that was parked right behind the Shell station and across the vacant lot right next to our house. He was an angular old gentleman with jerky mannerisms and a rapid-fire way of speaking---as if he were shooting machine-gun bullets out of his mouth as he talked.

His wife was a pleasant, slightly-plump blonde. woman, who was also getting on in years. During all the time they lived there, she ran a frozen custard stand next to the curb market where 24th Street ran into Second Street, directly across from their trailer. Often, she gave my sister and me a free cone of frozen custard---an endearing gesture if there ever was one. I never saw any children around their place; evidently their offspring---if they had any---were grown-up and moved away.

Mr. Pyron made his living manufacturing house trailers in his own small factory in our town. About once a month he finished a trailer home and pulled it behind a long, black, 1948 Chrysler New Yorker four-door sedan to his market, which was in Miami, Florida. He hooked-up each new trailer with a peculiar-looking wheeled dolly that resembled a tow-bar combined with an airplane's landing gear, that in turn was connected to the Chrysler's bumper hitch. I never saw another one like it and I always thought it was a heckuva a good idea. Mr. Pyron told me it took all the weight off his car's bumper. It occurred to me much later that maybe he had invented it and made it himself at his factory---in which case he should have patented it. Perhaps he could have made a lot of money with the device, especially when travel campers became popular a few years later. But I don't think he ever did.

Mr. Pyron had a reputation for driving that Chrysler very fast. I saw him drive away many times pulling one of those trailer homes with that odd-looking but very functional dolly-hitch. What was so remarkable about this was that in just about twenty-four hours he was back! This meant a round-trip to Miami and back of two-thousand miles---an astounding feat considering that there were no Interstate Highways in those days. My mother once asked him , "Pie-r-r-r-n--- just *HOW FAST* do you drive, pulling that trailer?"

I overheard his reply: "Oh, about a hundred miles an hour!" I resolved right then and there that I would someday have a car just like Mr. Pyron's Chrysler---I figured that any car that could tow a thirty-foot-long mobile home a thousand miles and make a return trip by the next day was *MY* kind of car!

Later, the Pyrons moved to St. Petersburg, Florida. The last time I ever saw them was when we paid them a visit on a vacation trip to Florida in 1958. While we were there, Mr. Pyron took me to his workshop where he was putting together a vehicle that was combination bus and trailer. In a few years, motor homes became popular, but Mr. Pyron had beaten them to the idea by several years.

My parents continued to stay in touch with Mr. Pyron even after his wife died some time later. He later re-married and did a lot of traveling around the United States in his motor home. He was still doing that well into his 'nineties, but I guess the years must have finally caught up with him---sometime around the mid-1960s, Mother and Daddy stopped talking about him, which must have meant he had made his last trip to Miami.

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Eventually the sands of time began running out for Bessie Bee and by the early 'fifties, the old vehicle was becoming an acute embarrassment to me I quietly endured the ever-increasing ailments that were beginning to afflict our beloved Bessie Bee. A large hole developed in the floorboard of the back seat. In time, it was possible to ride back there and watch the ground rush by underneath our feet! I was mortified each time my friend Bill laughed at the hole, which was often. Daddy dismissed it as "just another form of ventilation," which didn't help the problem. Another friend had a more pointed observation: he considered the "holey Dodge" to be a convertible in reverse!

Late one afternoon in the spring of 1954, daddy drove-up in a different car: a cream-colored 1949 Plymouth two-door fastback sedan. He motioned to my sister and me. "Let's go for a ride!" Mother joined us and we headed toward downtown. Daddy explained he was ready to buy a newer car and how did we like this one? I was impressed with the tan mohair upholstery and the woodgrained dashboard. It even had a crisp, leatherette smell. He drove to "Southern Sash", a big appliance store, and parked the car at the curb directly in front of a large display window. Inside the glass was a black-and-white television (the only kind in those days) that was showing a program. The sound was piped outside where we could hear it. In the setting sun we watched a TV show while sitting in the Plymouth. I tried to convince Daddy to buy the car, but he insisted it was only the first of several vehicles he intended to evaluate before making a final decision.

A few days later daddy appeared with another Plymouth---a two-tone blue 1948 club coupé, crammed with gadgets the likes of which I had never seen. The first thing I noticed right away was the throaty rumble of the engine. "'Hollywood' muffler!" Daddy said. Along with its impressive voice, the Plymouth was outfitted with wide white sidewall tires, wheel trim-rings, a sunvisor, foglights, reflective headlights, spotlights, back-up lights, fender skirts---and . . . *A DELUXE RADIO!* In a word, it was loaded. Daddy said he felt a bit sheepish even to be *seen* in such a car, as he had always driven much more conservative vehicles, and this one was only a step or two away from "street-rod" status. Mother immediately dubbed the Plymouth "Ol' Snort", for its resonant sound. Naturally, I was all for buying it right then and there. The four of us piled into it and roared off around the neighborhood. Waving neighbors and smiles of approval clinched it: daddy bought the car the next day. I went with him when we drove down to the dealer to finalize the buy. As we rode away in shiny Ol' Snort, I looked back and glimpsed for the last time Bessie Bee parked forlornly on the trade-in lot. (I later learned she was sent immediately to the scrappers.)

Life took a new turn for us with the new set of wheels. For the first time in my life we had a car that could carry us long distances. That summer we took our first of many trips to visit Uncle Aubrey, Aunt Irene and my cousin Judy in Kentucky. We began taking Sunday drives. Daddy even managed to get monumentally lost a couple of times. One time we arrived in a town that turned out to be halfway across Northern Mississippi---dozens of miles off-course. But it was enjoyable to be able to explore new territory and the Plymouth opened up new vistas for us. Mother even learned to drive---she had never before had a driver's license. Driving the Plymouth was a complicated process as it had a manual-shift transmission and learning to operate the tricky clutch involved much clashing of gears (and gnashing of teeth). Before long, though, she had mastered the procedure and shared the wheel with daddy on many vacation trips.

Ol' Snort had an interesting personality. He tended to be headstrong and I always thought of him as being a Bull or perhaps a male Lion. (We always referred to the car as masculine.) One time we were roaring down a highway when the hood suddenly flipped-up, completely blocking

the view! Daddy slammed on the brakes and managed to pull the errant vehicle onto the shoulder of the road. An inspection revealed absolutely nothing wrong---the latches and releases were in perfect working condition, and there was no reason for the hood to shoot upward like it had done. Another time, the outside sunvisor suddenly drooped downward, again blocking the driver's view. The car seemed to have a thing for doing things like that. But on the whole, we were happy with Ol' Snort. We took many trips to a lot of new places (for us) and our world grew larger in the blue Plymouth.

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My cousin Judy lived in Campbellsville, Kentucky, in the south-central part of the state, not far from the famous "Mammoth Cave". In those days there were no Interstates, and we made the journeys on the existing "U.S. Highways" that, in addition to being routes that covered many states, took motorists through the middle of each little town. Daddy voiced his opinion that the local Chambers of Commerce designed the route through the towns and villages purely in order to take unwitting travelers past each and every monument, school, showcase cemetery and award-winning waterworks plant. Nashville, Tennessee, the capital of the state and a fairly good-sized city, was notorious for its zig-zagging route through the center of downtown. It was useless to try to defeat the system---they changed the routes every time we went through there (but they *always* managed to take us past the State Capitol Building). In Nashville, we also had to endure endless traffic jams---and, of course, the stops always seemed to be timed to happen right beside an historical marker or some notable building or other they wanted us to see.

Driving through Middle Tennessee and Southern Kentucky we saw spectacular horse farms and tobacco plantations, always with white picket fences, white barns and immaculate fields and meadows. Once we spotted a statue of the race-horse "Man O' War", a "Triple-Crown" winner. When we stopped to read the inscription, we learned it was where he was bred and had lived the last years of his life. Such scenes were (and still are) typical in that part of the country.

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Not only was the club coupé a right comfortable car, it was also thrifty on gasoline. Daddy claimed it got about twenty miles to a gallon of gas---and gasoline in those days cost less than thirty-cents a gallon. His calculations were approximate---pretty soon after bringing home the Plymouth, we discovered that Ol' Snort's gas gauge was not very accurate. Thereafter, daddy carried a pad and pencil in the glove compartment to figure how much fuel actually remained in the tank. Another shortcoming was that when it rained, the engine would sometimes "drown-out" and stop running. In wet weather he had to periodically stop and wipe off the spark plugs and the wires. (Much later I found a kit that would have stopped that aggravating problem, but it was a scarce item at the time and daddy probably never knew of it.)

The gasoline in those days tended to have tiny particles floating around in it that would some-times catch in the carburetor, stopping the engine. One time, on the very day we were set to leave for Kentucky, the engine was barely running. Daddy took the car by his favorite mechanic's shop, "*BROWN AND VIALL TUNE-UP*", expecting a lengthy and expensive repair job that would have scuttled our trip. But Mr. Brown, a real "Master Mechanic", had a simple and effective solution: he rapped and tapped on the carburetor with a small hammer and freed-up whatever was causing the problem and we were on our way in a few minutes.

That was a particularly satisfying trip as later that same night as we neared our Kentucky destination, my sister and I looked out the back window of the car and saw the Milky Way Galaxy strung out across the sky like a glowing strand of cotton candy.

We also remembered that trip for all the "Sunday drivers" we had had to endure north of Nashville. Getting through Tennessee's capital city was the usual difficult enterprise, but we were further delayed by an aggravating, mile-long parade of vehicles poking along in front of us. We lost at least an hour's time trying to get around them one-by-one on a winding two-lane road. Finally, we managed to scoot around the leading vehicle, which was occupied by a pair of elderly lovebirds driving slowly and smooching on a Sunday afternoon! Daddy had some choice words as to *WHERE* he wished the two septugenarians could go to do their courting!

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In Kentucky, Uncle Aubrey lived with my mother's sister, Irene. Aubrey was a tall, smiling, raw-boned man, a former U.S. Army Sergeant in World War II. He, my aunt, and my cousin Judy lived on a farm just outside of Campbellsville, Kentucky, in the south-central part of the state, about a six-hour drive from Sheffield. My uncle had been in the Army Motor-Pool during the war, and afterward became a mechanic at "McCubbin Motors", the Ford dealership in Campbellsville.

Right after the war he owned a two-door 1937 Chevrolet, which for some reason, devoured mufflers and tailpipes. One time, Judy and I stood at the rear of the car while the engine was idling and watched the tailpipe flake-off tiny particles that fell to the ground. Even as we watched, the rusty pipe lost about an-eighth-of-an-inch of its length! There must have been something in the exhaust that caused the pipes to wear out prematurely, although the engine always ran fine. All Chevrolets, Uncle Aubrey's included, in those days had a distinctive whine in the transmission. Shifting through the gears caused a sound like "*Walla-Walla!*" as each gear changed, which was loud enough to drown out the sound of the engine. You always knew when a Chevy was coming---the talking gearbox gave plenty of advance notice.

On our trips to Campbellsville we usually arrived on Friday evening. This allowed us to rest on Saturday and go shopping downtown and to visit Uncle Aubrey's relatives who lived in and around the area. His father was a lanky, bespectacled, congenial old guy who obviously had passed on to my uncle his physical appearance, as they both looked much the same, except that the older man had white hair and looked . . . older. Uncle Aubrey's father was a gardner of local note who lived in an ancient white frame house surrounded by his cultivated and manicured flower beds and shrubs. A spry octogenarian, he loved and fondly nurtured his plants and was very proud of them. We spent many an afternoon in his back yard, surrounded by his plants in full bloom, talking over the events of the day with the interesting and lively old gentleman.

Downtown Campbellsville consisted of mostly turn-of-the-century, dark-red brick-and-stone two-and three story buildings with period retractable canvas awnings over the store-fronts. Ranks of old trees lined the edges of most residential lanes; leafy branches overhung many of the streets like cool tunnels, accenting ranks of white picket fences and quaint bungalows. The town and its inhabitants oozed '*Americana*' and could have been used for a whole series of "Norman Rockwell" paintings.

Judy and her parents lived just outside the city limits in a white farmhouse, on an asphalt farm-to-market road. Across the lane from their house was a field of corn along with patches of beans on poles and other growing produce. As we usually visited Kentucky soon after school was out each year, the farmer who owned the acreage was always out in in his field cultivating his crops with a big John Deere tractor. Judy, my sister, and I spent untold hours sitting on a

fence down in front of the yard watching the man across the way breaking-ground with his "John Dairy" tractor, as Uncle Aubrey pronounced it. (For a long time, I thought there was something different and mysterious about the green-and-yellow "John Dairy" tractor in that Kentucky field compared to the familiar red "Farmalls" on my uncles' farms back at Grassy. (I learned later that the popular John Deeres were, of course, rugged, highly-regarded farm machines; very much competitive to the Farmalls. It all seemed to come down as to which dealer sold tractors in a particular locale that determined as to whether most farmers owned Farmalls or John Deeres.)

The day-to-day routines on a small Kentucky farm in those days were done without many of the amenities enjoyed by people who lived in town. For example, water for the farm came from a well underneath the back porch that was topped by a big (to me), black, cast-iron, hand-operated pump. To get water up from the well, you placed a bucket underneath the pump spout and grabbed the long pump handle. After several furious strokes, a sloshy stream of water gushed out into the bucket. They washed dishes by first heating water on the wood-burning kitchen stove and pouring it into the sink. Then, they attacked the dishes with a slimy, vile-looking ball of collected bits and pieces of cast-off bath-soap. The designated dishwasher (they rotated the chore) rubbed the goeey mass into a frothy lather in the sink, then washed the dishes with a dish-cloth fashioned from an old flannel shirt. Hard to believe, but the dishes always came out clean.

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Food preparation also was a basic enterprise, in keeping with the farm's self-sufficiency. Aunt Irene kept a flock of chickens, both for their eggs and as a convenient source for fried chicken. On several occasions I watched my mother nab a chicken to prepare for supper. Her technique, developed years earlier on the farm at Grassy (where I also saw her do this), was to sneak up behind an unsuspecting hen and grab the neck of the surprised creature, which promptly let out a loud squawk. But the pullet's protest came to an immediate halt when mother gripped its head with both hands and began vigorously wringing the hapless hen around and around by the neck in mid-air, which brought forth a shower of feathers. In a few seconds, its head popped off whereupon the headless hen ran senselessly around the farmyard, bumping into things, backing up and running anew, and spinning around and around---an activity that lasted for a minute or more---until it finally flopped over onto the ground. Cleaning the chicken was something I was glad Mother and Aunt Irene always did---after witnessing the hen's barnyard ballet, I couldn't possibly have done it myself. I saw this scene enacted several times, and gained a far different perspective of the origin of fried chicken than I would have otherwise had.

Meals on the farm were absolutely delicious---those were halcyon days before there was any scientific connection linking fat, cholesterol, sodium, and heart disease. Main-course foods were invariably deep-fat fried in either bacon drippings or lard. Creamery butter was slathered on everything; we drank gallons of cold whole milk recently from the cow, and the salt shaker on the table was in constant use. Vegetable fare consisted of garden-grown corn, beans, squash, and potatoes, all cooked with the usual lard, and served with home-made bread and finished off with an apple or peach cobbler that was topped by a browned, doughy, buttery bread crust..

Breakfast always began with thick strips of bacon; followed by a plateful of eggs deep-fried in bacon drippings, along with yeast biscuits baked with lard, covered with mounds of butter and homemade jelly. And there was the mandatory Southern staple: *Grits*.. The grown-ups gulped cup after cup of coffee (with plenty of cream and sugar), and we youngsters drank glasses and glasses of farm-fresh, buttery milk. It was a menu that would have given a modern dietitian fits,

but suited us just fine For me, the rural lifestyle---the food, the exercise, and all that fresh air---proved beneficial and I always came away from my cousin's old Kentucky home a little heavier and stronger than when I had arrived.

Another tradition on the farm was the Saturday Night Bath. Again, we swung the pump handle until we drew enough water. The bather then lowered the lights (the bath took place on the back porch), and tiptoed gingerly into the tub. Without exception, the water was either too hot or too cold. The remedy for this was provided by pre-arranged kettles of hot water from the stove and cold water from the pump stationed nearby. After a few tries with the kettles, and with the temperature just right, the bather commenced the bath. The process was repeated until every member of the household had taken a turn. It was tedious---but indoor plumbing was still a convenience of the future at the Crabb's country house in the mid-1950's, and I suppose at countless other rural residences. The front and back porches of the farmhouse were covered on the outside with a mottled translucent cellophane-sheet material, that served to prevent bugs from flying or crawling into the house (and from nosy across-the-field-neighbors observing us when bath-time came around). When anything other than a light breeze blew, the membranous panes reacted with a loud snapping, popping sound that took some getting used to, especially at night. It did serve to diffuse the view from the outside, and gave a measure of privacy to anyone taking a nocturnal bath on the back porch.

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About the time I started to high school, Judy and her parents moved into town---to a much more up-to-date dwelling on Birdwood Street in Campbellsville. (It even had indoor plumbing!). It was while she was living at this house that she met her future husband, a divinity student at the local college. My sister and I "chaperoned" their first date. Their courting consisted of riding for fifty miles around the curving highways among the hills of central Kentucky engaging in small talk. The date apparently went well---they announced their upcoming nuptials a few months later!

Our last trip to Campbellsville in Ol' Snort ended with the usual cholesterol breakfast, then we headed south on a different road that took us through a portion of lower Appalachia that we had never seen. A couple of hours later, we found ourselves in mountainous terrain with square curves and sudden, looping speed changes. Staying on the road required Daddy to constantly twist the steering wheel and alternately apply the brakes and the accelerator. I was sitting in my usual spot in the back seat behind Daddy where the lurching Plymouth rocked my sister and me about with each twist and turn of the roadway. Pretty soon I began to feel queasy. In a word, I was carsick! Finally, we came to a small town that identified itself as "Celina, Tennessee". Daddy pulled off the road and mother sighted a small general store with a patent-medicine counter. Fortunately, they had the pink stomach relief medicine and my problem soon went away. It was the only time I was ever carsick, and once was enough!

On alternate years Judy and her family made the trip to Sheffield, with stop-offs along the way at Grassy to see the relatives..We always looked forward to those visits as they were a major part of our summer vacation. On the day of their arrival my sister and I would spend the entire day camped by the curb, patiently waiting, gazing down the street in anticipation. Ofcourse, they never arrived until mid-afternoon, at the earliest (remember the six-hour drive). What must the

neighbors have thought, observing Frances and me pacing back and forth curbside, staring down 30th street all day long!

McCubbin Motors, the Ford dealership in Campbellsville, always let Uncle Aubrey use a company car when they traveled to Alabama. Usually he drove a Ford, but there were exceptions, such as a couple of Buicks and a memorable, fully-loaded 1958 Edsel Citation four-door hardtop, which was the top-of-the-line for that short-lived car. Uncle Aubrey raved about that Edsel's performance and all its gadgets. In particular, he liked the push-button transmission controls in the hub of the steering wheel and the powerful engine, plus its stylish interior and plush ride. Although I thought it was a terrific automobile, as it turned out, the Edsel did not last long in production and it was the only Edsel he ever drove to see us.

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On Sundays, my sister and I attended the first of two services at the First Baptist Church in Sheffield, and our parents went to the second service. This meant that we had to wait an extra hour for the second one to finish. Here was the big opportunity to use the Plymouth's Deluxe Radio: the church program was broadcast on a local station. Many Sundays we listened to the entire service in the car while our parents were in there. It was a wonder we didn't run down the battery, as the big radio had about a dozen electricity-eating vacuum-tubes and used a lot of battery power. Even so, I always thought it was pretty neat to hear the service on the radio while parked up the street from the very building where the broadcast originated.

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But even the best of vehicles had their limitations, and Ol' Snort was no exception. Its problems began when Mother crashed her head into the windshield during *The Great Tornado of February, '57*. The glass cracked and water started leaking into the car around the dashboard. Faced with a hefty repair bill, Daddy was in the process of deciding what to do with the car when there was a sudden development: my grandfather passed away. As a result, mother inherited his white 1949 DeSoto Custom four-door sedan---a truly fine and elegant vehicle. The car had a superb gray broadcloth-and-leather interior and a magnificent wood-grained dashboard.

But what really made it special was its unique transmission: the famous (for its day) "Fluid Drive," which meant mother and daddy didn't have to shift gears, anymore. In regular driving, the column shift lever was set in what would normally be the "high-gear" position of a standard three-speed transmission. Letting-out the clutch merely resulted in slightly lower engine revolutions---the driver could then forget the clutch for a while. Then he gave it gas and the car accelerated up to about thirty miles an hour. At that point, the motorist let off the pedal for a second, and an audible "clunk" announced that the car was in high gear. If you wanted to pass another vehicle, the driver floorboarded the accelerator pedal that kicked the car into a lower (Passing) gear. After getting around the other vehicle, the driver let off the gas for a second and the car "clunked" back into high gear.. Even my mother thought it was a nifty way to go, and years later, when I had my own "antique" Chryslers with Fluid Drive, I discovered what my parents had known a long time before about the DeSoto: it was a fun way to drive a car!

However, the DeSoto didn't last very long. Only a few months after it became part of the household (daddy had in the meantime sold Ol' Snort to a friend), a drunk driver careened over "High Point Hill", lost control of his vehicle and slammed into the rear of the DeSoto parked in

front of the house. Fortunately no one was hurt, but the back-end of the car was badly damaged and daddy decided to trade it in for something else.

That set the stage for the appearance of the most important vehicle of my life, so far---the machine that would carry our family to much of the United States; would become the first car I ever drove; and in which I had my first real date---the 1953 Buick Roadmaster.