

My First Car

by [Peter Glassman](#) (September 2020)



Freeway No. 7, Ryan Reynolds, 2017

“I need you to sign for the car, dad.” I had waited a whole year and saved up money for car insurance and a used car.

“Did you test drive the car and check it out, Peter?” My father stared at me. “A used car can be someone else’s troubles you know.”

I was in my high school senior year and at first I didn’t care what kind of car I could get. I just needed wheels. Borrowing dad’s car was always according to its availability, and what I was going to do with it. I was always quizzed about this.

“You going out with those AZA boys? You better not get

in trouble with those Jewish girls.” Dad was suspicious of my high school AZA Jewish fraternity friends. He was the only Jew I ever knew who was wary of other Jews.

“You can’t go to the drive-in movie on a date with girls,” My mother warned. “The drive-in movie is a ‘flesh pit for transmitting venereal diseases’”. She would never tell me how she knew this.

“I’m double dating with my best friend Gary.” We had lined up two BBG girls from last week’s BBG house party. “They’re B’nai Brith Girls, Ma. BBGs are well behaved.”

My father chimed in, “Those BBGs are sluts of the worse kind—Jewish sluts.”

It was obvious to me that in my world I needed my own car. Once I had the money, I looked for one for two months before I found it—a 1952 light gray Chevrolet convertible. I first saw it with the top down. It looked fantastic. This was 1957 and the Chevy was only five years old. The radio worked, the power top went up-and-down flawlessly, and it had an automatic transmission.

My dad was too critical. “The tires are practically bald and the front end doesn’t feel right.”

It was a great looking car. I loved it. My friends loved it. My best friend Gary, who worked in his father’s automobile repair garage thought it was a “piece-of feces”.

There were a few defects. Most notable was the two-speed Powerglide® transmission. It was slow and getting slower with time and mileage. I brought it back to the shop and the seller tuned up the six-cylinder engine. It did go better until my five-thousand mile warranty was up. The car began to deteriorate badly. Rainy days were a disaster. There were

several leaks in the canvas top—one right over my head. Driving over a puddle splashed water from the street, through the floorboard, and up my pant legs or my date's clothes. The tires were now completely smooth and made a loud whining noise at 30 mph. Above 30 mph the front wheels began bouncing like I was driving over tree trunks.

“Bad king-pins,” my friend Gary said.

It was too costly to fix. I still don't know what a king-pin is.

The car now had such a slow pick-up that I had to floor the gas pedal when I was first at a red light, and often barely made the green light before it turned red again. I had to get rid of the car.

“This time listen to me when you get the next one.” My father asserted.

I found a '53 Ford 2-door sedan at a used car dealership that looked good. I test drove it with my dad who agreed. It was a V-8, standard shift, and drove great. The tires were new and it didn't have leaks when it rained. The dealer wanted \$150 plus my Chevy, sight unseen.

“But I want to look at your car before we close the deal.” He told my dad.

I asked my parents. “What are we going to do? He'll see my Chevy isn't worth much.”

My dad had a plan. “We're going to close the deal at night and fix up your Chevy. We'll have it done by Thursday night—the night before the 4th of July.”

What happened next was an example of true American family togetherness. My mother and sister were amazing. They sewed up the holes in the convertible top. My mother dyed the canvas top a dark black and it could pass for new at night. *I was sure of it.*

“What about the tires dad?” I didn’t have money for even good used tires.

“Don’t worry. I talked to your brother. Here he comes now.”

My brother Joe was three years younger and was very artistic. Art was his best school subject. He came into the garage with a heavy shopping bag.

“What are you going to do Joe?” I watched him empty the bag.

“Be quiet. Let an artist work.” Joe laid out his can of paint thinner, rags, artist brushes and opened a can of black paint. “Get out of my way. I have to look at the tires on dad’s car to do this.”

I was awestruck. Joe proceeded to paint in “tire tread” lines exactly like those on my dad’s 1957 Oldsmobile. I had to move my car back a few inches so he could complete the tread lines on each tire. After he was done, the tires looked barely worn—and they were in fact completely bald.

I pointed to the dashboard. “What about the ignition? We can’t have the wires dangling down.” My car started by crossing two bare wires. It wasn’t always like that. My car did look nice and one evening it was stolen and returned in the same night. Whoever stole it probably didn’t get very far before its lack of speed and the bouncing tires at 30 mph signaled that abandonment was in order. The carjackers brought my Chevy back with the ignition switch disassembled and its bare wires hanging free. The crooks then apparently stole my

neighbor's new Buick.

My father smiled. "You owe me eighty-five cents." He took out a brass cylinder with a key in it. "This is a desk lock. I'll rig it so when you turn the tumbler, the metal tab for the desk lock touches the hot wire. The upper part of the key is rubber-covered so it won't shock you. It'll start the car and shut it off as needed."

The finishing touch was the car floor. We spanned the holes to the open road with plywood and covered it with gray carpeting left over from when my mom had replaced our living room rugs a few years ago. "Never throw anything out," she advised. "You never know when God will find a use for the stuff."

The night of July 3rd, my dad and I drove my Chevy, with the top down, to the Somerville used car dealer. It looked really good. It took us a while to get there even though it was only eight miles away. My pulse was racing. *How could we pull off this sale?*

The dealer walked around the Chevy. He kicked the tires and then pointed a finger at me. "Put the top up please."

I pulled the switch out and the beautiful black-dyed top closed perfectly.

"Okay, start it up."

I put the desk key in dad's jerry-rigged desk lock. I had mounted it in the original key space and prayed. The engine started immediately.

The dealer looked at my dad. "Okay, let's do the paperwork. I need a check for \$150 and the title. All we have to do is switch the plates to the '53 Ford." He extended his hand for me to shake and added. "Give the Chevy keys to my

mechanic while your dad and I sign the titles.”

The mechanic had a strange look on his face as he glared at the “dollar store” desk lock ignition keys.

I drove the Ford home. Dad and I were all smiles. “It drives great, Dad.”

The next day was the 4th of July. Many auto dealerships were open for business. Just before noon the phone rang. My dad answered. It was the dealer. Dad stared at me with a grin. “I don’t care if it is the world’s worst piece of iron. It’s your worst piece of iron now.” He hung up.

I continued staring. Dad put his hand on my shoulder. “Remember what I told you about used cars? They can be someone else’s troubles. Someone dumped the Chevy on you, and you dumped it on someone else. Happy Fourth of July.”

Author’s Note

I felt some guilt about falsifying my ’52 Chevy’s health. My guilt was for the car not the dealer who got stuck with it. As atonement I put a ’52 Chevy in my high school mystery novel WHO WILL WEEP FOR ME. The car was a fantastic restomod with dual exhausts, glass pack mufflers, four speed manual transmission, a new ’55 Buick Century V-8 engine from a wreck, a great stereo system, and pink fuzzy dice. It did 0-60 in 5.0 seconds and was a high school “chick magnet”.

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