

Three Decades in a Corvette

By: Paul Ennor

CHAPTER #1

IN THE BEGINNING

In my early 20's I had a boyhood friend named Lynn. Lynn had a funny habit of having a pickup truck when he was married and a Corvette when he was single. A couple of years before when he and his first wife broke up he had purchased a '62 Vette. He sold that when he got married to his second wife, and staying in true form, when he split the sheets with wife number two, he once again got the Corvette bug. One afternoon I got a call at work. It was Lynn and he said, "Paul, would you meet me after work, I'm looking at a '63 Corvette roadster and I'd like you to be there so they don't take advantage of me. I know they will if you're not there because I just get crazy and I'll pay anything they want once I see it". So I agreed to meet him and help him not get taken. The car was a nice little '63 roadster with a hard top only, no soft top, a 327 engine and a 4 speed. It was a little tired, but by today's standards it was quite a find. They wanted \$1250 for it. No, there's no zero missing, that is twelve hundred and fifty dollars. We talked them down to \$1200 and he drove it home. Little did I know at the time that this would be one of the pivotal moments in my own personal history. Lynn immediately plucked the 327 out of the Vette and put a Hatch-built 350 in its place. He wanted power and lots of it. Going fast was what he was all about. Who am I to point fingers? I had a Z-28 Camaro that wouldn't idle under 1200 RPM, got 11 MPG and scared small children when you started it up. I think the fastest I ever drove was in that Camaro. I pegged the speedometer well past 120 one afternoon between Woodburn and Newburg. Then as the tack passed 8500 RPM I decided that enough was enough and I got off the gas. It was still accelerating hard when I chickened out.

About this same time I also owned a '59 El Camino and I was active in the El Camino club in Portland. This meant that I was already involved in car clubs when Lynn bought his Corvette. Upon buying his Vette, Lynn rejoined the Willamette Valley Corvette Association. He had belonged a couple of years earlier when he had his '62. Because we were rooming together at the time and because I was sort of active with a car club in Portland already, Lynn started to invite me to hang out with some of his WVCA friends. They were quite a bunch of characters, mostly baby boomers like us, but there were a few that were a bit older.

In the early 1970's a number of up-scale taverns sprung up in Salem. I suppose that they were the result of all of us boomers turning 21 and being of drinking age. There was the Tool Crib, the Blue Whale, and The House of Bacchus, The Oregon Museum, and one of the favorites of the WVCA group at the time, Dr. Jeckle's & Mr. Hyde's. Jeckle & Hydes had taken over the old Woolworth store in downtown Salem and it was a huge half block, 2-story tavern with shag carpet everywhere. It was just a great place to hang out and have some

beers. They used to serve what we used to call “dimers” every weeknight from 5:00 to 7:00. That meant that beer was a dime. They were not huge glasses of beer, just small paper cups, but we would buy them by the table full. So it was that I got well acquainted with several of the Corvette Club guys and they would let me hang around their non-Corvette activities.

CHAPTER #2

WHAT’S SO EASY ABOUT BUYING A CORVETTE?

In late 1972 I got the Corvette bug really bad. While many would argue that my ’68 Z-28 Camaro was quite a desirable car, it was by no means a Corvette, plus all of the guys I was hanging around had Vettes. I had been looking at used Vettes, but the prices on the used ones were going up fast at that time and the days of the \$1200 ’63 Vette were over. Used Vette prices were actually getting close to the cost of a new Corvette. In 1972 and ’73 the base price for a new Vette was only about \$5300. Well, I say only because that sounds so cheap today. In 1973 you could have bought a Cadillac for about the same bucks, or bought two Chevy Impala’s or three Chevy Novas for that much. But I wanted a Corvette! In late 1972 the 1973 model Corvette advertisements started to show up in magazines. The new clean look of the ’73 Vette had me lusting for one of them. I wanted a medium blue convertible with a black interior. I picked up the brochures and penciled out the options that I wanted and looked at the cost of each option and figured out what I had to have and what I could live without. I had serious Corvette lust, but I wasn’t quite ready to make that kind of monetary commitment, not just yet anyway. The final straw came when I burned up the engine wiring harness in my Camaro and had to fix that car yet again. In the 18 months that I had owned that car I went through 3 clutches, 2 push rods, and then an engine wiring harness. I was sick and tired of that Camaro lemon and I wanted something else, and what I wanted more than anything else in the world was a 1973 Corvette!

So on a cold wet night in January of 1973 I walked into Capitol Chevrolet to order a new Corvette. I had a good job and I figured I would be able to handle the payments on one, even though the cost was kind of high, over \$5500 for what I wanted! I was going to do this without consulting my father whom I knew would say something like, “What in the &%# do you want with one of those plastic cars, and with a V8 engine to boot! What the #*@% the matter with you boy”? So at 25 years old I walked into Capitol Chevrolet, asked for Dutch, a salesman that I knew my family had dealt with before, and I sat and waited for him to come to the floor. It was a dark, cold, wet January evening and I sat for quite a while waiting for him. The receptionist told me he was with another customer. After a while Dutch came walking out of the closing room followed closely behind by... *my mother!* What are the chances? It seems that Mom had decided to go down and order a car the same night that I chose to order my Vette. Neither of us knew what the other was up to and Dad didn’t have a clue that either of us was buying anything, let alone a car. So Mom ordered her new ’73 Vega and I ordered my new ’73 Vette. As I remember, she had her Vega in about two weeks. It was to take a lot longer for me to get my Corvette.

I had put down the whopping sum of \$100 and filled out an order form to order my new Vette just the way I wanted it from the factory. It was to be a medium blue metallic roadster with both a hard top and a soft top, an L-82 small block V8, 4-speed transmission, and not much else. No air conditioning, manual windows, just your basic performance Corvette without so many options that the payment book would break my bank. I was only a lowly State Employee and I had to keep the price down so I could afford the payments. I negotiated a price of \$5500 and change for what I ordered, put down my money and waited while the order was sent to the Corvette plant in St. Lewis where they would build my new Vette. So I waited and I waited and I waited. When I'd call Dutch he'd tell me that Chevrolet still had the order in their system and not to worry because St. Lewis was a low volume facility and it took time to get a Corvette built.

After 5 months I started to wonder if I'd ever get my new Vette. It was May and I still hadn't heard a word that my Vette was on its way. Then in late May Dutch called and said, "I have some news about your Corvette". "Great", I said, "Is it on it's way?" "No", said Dutch, "Here's what happened. There was a strike at the Corvette plant this winter. Chevrolet had to cancel 3000 Corvettes from the production and yours was one of them." My heart sank... They didn't make my Corvette... I was crushed... I said to Dutch, "Well, I guess I'll come down and get my \$100 back." I was about as down as a person can be when I made that statement. "Wait just a minute", said Dutch, "We have four new Corvettes on their way from the factory that are not spoken for. You can have your choice of any of those for the price we agreed on. They are all T-tops and all of them are automatics, do you want to see them?" My answer was quick and to-the-point, "NO, I don't want a T-top and don't want an automatic. I only have two requirement in a Vette, it has to be a roadster and is has to have a 4-speed. Other than that I'm willing to compromise everything else. I'll be down to pick up my deposit and I'll look for a used Vette somewhere." Dutch came back with another offer, "You can convert your order to a 1974 model and we'll guarantee that you have the first '74 in Salem." I responded, "No, I don't think so, there are rumors that the '74 will be a different body style and I don't even know what it will look like. I'm not willing to do that. I'll just come get my deposit." Again, salesman will be salesman. Dutch came back with, "Well, we do have one other '73 Corvette. It's our demo, it's a roadster and it has a 4-speed but it's red, only has a soft top and it has the big engine, the 454, in it." I said, without any hesitation, "I want to see it!" Dutch said that it was out at Capitol Toyota on Mission, that a salesman out there was driving it. To this day I still have no idea why a Toyota salesman was driving the companies Corvette demo unless he knew a good car when he saw one and what he was selling was not one of those. Capitol Chevrolet was downtown at the time while their Toyota lot was out on Mission Street, but arrangements were made to get the demo Vette downtown for me to look at an appointed time.

I drove up to the front of the dealership and there it was, parked in front, a red roadster with the dark red interior that Chevrolet called Oxblood. The sun was shining and the top was down. I met Dutch at the door. He said, "There it is!" I said, "Can I drive it?" Dutch said,

“Well, it’s a high performance car, you might have some trouble driving it.” I pointed to the Z-28 I drove in with and said, “I think I can handle it.” He handed me the keys and told me to take it for a spin, by myself no less. Thus I took my first drive in that Vette and it was love from the first time I turned the key. I’d never driven a big block before and I’d actually never driven a Vette of any kind before either. I’d ordered one without ever sitting behind the wheel. I liked everything about this Vette. The engine was smooth, had lots of power and was forgiving of even stupid mistakes like starting out from a stop sign in 3rd gear, something that my Camaro would have simply refused to do. I drove back to Capitol Chevrolet, parked in front and walked in with what must have been the biggest grin anyone had ever seen on my face. Dutch was standing there and without even waiting for him to ask I said, “If you’ll give me this one for the same price as the one I ordered, I’ll take it!” Salesmen will be salesmen, as I said before. “Well I don’t know”, said Dutch. “This one has more equipment than the one you ordered.” “Well yea...” I said, “but this one doesn’t have the hard top and it has 3000 miles on it and it’s your demo.” Dutch replied, “I’ll have to talk to Les Green and see if he’s willing to sell it that low”. I sat and waited. I suppose that I’d have paid more to get this red Vette, but I was already over-extending myself and besides it was really a used car and not exactly the car that I wanted, but I did love it, and I wanted it, and... God I hate buying cars! Dutch was in the boss’s office for all of 45 seconds when he came back and said; “Les says you can have it for your price. Let’s go fill out the paperwork.” I followed him to the closing room. The only unsettled piece of business is what Capitol would allow me for a trade-in value on my Camaro. They only wanted to give my \$1200 for a low mileage five year old ’68 Z-28 Camaro. I was sure that I could do better. I told them that I would keep the Camaro. We worked out the financing on the Vette, and I took it home, returning a little later to pick up the Camaro.

Let me digress here for just a moment with a little side story about that Camaro. I was so sure that I could sell it for \$1900 or so that I put a sign on it and parked it all over town. I didn’t spend a lot of time marketing it at first; I was too busy enjoying my new Corvette. By the time it dawned on me that I needed to get rid of the Camaro and get my money out of it, the oil embargo of 1973/74 had started. Nobody wanted a car that got 11 MPG on the best 100+ octane super premium gasoline you could find. I ended up selling it in early 1974 on a consignment lot for... you guessed it... \$1200. And I had to give the lot 10% commission on the sale to boot. I guess I should have just traded it in to Capitol Chevrolet in the first place.

CHAPTER #3

JOIN THE CLUB

I had no sooner ordered my Corvette in January before the guys from the Willamette Valley Corvette Association asked to if I wanted to join their club. I told them that I would not join until I owned a Corvette. They said it would be all right because I had a new one on order. I was uncomfortable with that and decided to wait until I could actually drive to my first meeting in my own Vette. One of the first things I did when I took delivery of my Vette was

to attend my first club meeting. It was summer, and in those days Capitol Chevrolet's old downtown building was the meeting place. They had an upstairs room that was not air-conditioned and I'm sure was not insulated much either. When it was hot outside it was awful in that room. So on those hot summer nights we'd meet across the street in Union Square Park. We'd kick a couple of bums off the park tables, push them together and have our meetings outside. My first meeting was out in that park. They welcomed me, told me I had to attend two meetings and two events to qualify for membership, they conducted election of officers that night too because the fiscal year ended June 30th in those days. Then they set a date and time on that coming Saturday for a tour to the coast. I was of course invited, if I came this would be my first event and I already had my first meeting under my belt. I would be half way to membership in the short space of three days. We adjourned to the Oregon Museum where the Club had a standing order for a pony keg of beer that would be consumed after each meeting. When that 7-½ gallon keg was gone some of us moved the party to a local bar where we would find some nightlife and perhaps some girls.

I was excited! This would be my first event with the Corvette Club. We met in the morning at Market Street and the freeway. We always met there for everything. It was our standard meeting place for all tours. I'll admit that I was a bit naïve about these club functions. When they told me that we would tour to the coast, images of a day on the beach and playing in the sand came to mind. I guess I should have known better when they told me to bring a little beer, but that didn't register with me, all I thought about was having a beer while sitting in the sand talking about car stuff. My imagination was a little off. We had a drivers meeting where they talked over the tour rules for the benefit of the new guy (me). The rules went something like this; we'd run with parking lights on, no passing other Corvettes, flash your head lights if you need to stop for anything and the whole tour would stop, and that was about it. We got through town and over the bridge when I noticed that Chuck, Al, BJ, and some others were drinking beer. Even though it was only about 10AM, I thought, well that looks like fun; I may as well have a beer too. I had a 6-pack cooler of Blitz stubbies in the back. I got one out and managed to uncap it using the church key that I had on my key ring dangling from the ignition. This was after all before twist-off caps were invented and you needed a tool to get into a bottle or can of beer. I took a swig. I was having a ball, drinking and driving and having an absolute ball. We passed the Rosemont exit on Hwy 22 West. Al was behind me in his '65 coupe. I was riding alone with the top down. We were traveling at 70-75 MPH at the time. I raised my beer in a salute or toast or perhaps just a stupid gesture, and when I raised it above the top of the window frame; the 70 MPH wind hit the bottle, swirled into the neck and sucked the bottle dry in about half a second. I was amazed that such a thing was possible. I looked in my rear view mirror to see Al running his windshield wipers and shaking his fist at me. I made a mental note not to do that again.

By the time we got to Grand Ronde, a distance of about thirty miles, we made a pit stop. Several guys had to use the rest room. At least one was out of beer already. We got back on the road and arrived in Lincoln City. We didn't go to the beach like I had envisioned; we

stopped downtown and went into a tavern, I think it was the Big "O". There we played pool, drank beer, and were basically loud and obnoxious until early afternoon when we all got back in our cars and headed back toward Salem. By this time there were none of us with less than 6-8 beers in us, and some had many more than that. We got as far as Rose Lodge on the Salmon River when our leader pulled us into the parking lot at the Blarney Castle, another tavern, where we had some more beer and played some more pool. We decided before we hit the road back to Salem that the President would stop at a tavern close to his house and buy a keg of beer and we'd all meet at his place for a keg party that evening. For some reason I don't remember the end of that party, and that was my first event with WVCA.

June of 1973 was the beginning of what is to date a 30-year relationship with the same car and the same Corvette club. While I remember in the greatest of detail my first meeting and my first event, I can't say that I remember my second meeting or second event, or for that matter much more that happened during that summer of 1973 except for the big accident, a story that I'll tell a little later. Most of the rest is a blur to me after all these years. I know that there were a lot of tours and keggers, some parades, meetings, and many nights in local bars and taverns. I was flying high and enjoying every minute of it. As I think back on it all, I wonder how it was that none of us ever got arrested or hit with huge DUI tickets. But when I think a little harder I sort of remember that I was lucky and some others were not. I can sort of remember BJ having some brushes with the law. I think it was in '74 when I had to try to bale Spook out of jail in McMinnville one night after he got arrested for drunk driving. However in those days drinking and driving was not as frowned on as it is today. Cops often winked, looked the other way, and told you to just go home and sleep it off and stay out of trouble if you got stopped. We were also very adept at being drunk and not showing it, and everyone always carried a Binaca Mouth Spray in their glove box just in case you got stopped. It was so powerful and minty that as soon as the cop's lights came on you would spritz it in your mouth and every word you said smelled like fresh double mint gum. I suspect that the cops knew this, but they were inclined to let you go without making you "walk the line" if you made an effort and looked like you could get home in one piece. It was easier for them to do that than to spend 4 hours processing the DUI paperwork down at the cop station. I was lucky; I never got stopped for anything I should have been caught doing. As a matter of fact (*knock on wood*), the only ticket I ever got in the Corvette came when I was stone sober and minding my own business. I crossed three lanes of traffic after leaving Capitol Chevrolet in the space of one block in order to get into the proper lane to cross over the bridge to West Salem and got nailed by a State Cop for an unsafe lane change. It was such a crock that when I took it to court to fight the ticket, the cop failed to show up to testify and the judge tossed it out of court.

CHAPTER #4

FRIENDS AND ODD FELLOWS

During the course of that first summer I became good friends with guy named Al. He owned a '65 coupe with a 365 HP 327 in it. It had fender flairs to accommodate the wider tires that would not fit under the stock fenders of those "mid-year" Vettes as we called them then. It was also a fairly rare car in that it was one of only a hand-full of '65 Vettes that had drum brakes. The original owner had ordered this Vette with the disk brake delete option and the biggest engine available in early '65 because he wanted to use it as a drag race car. By deleting the disk brakes you could cut a few pounds off the car, which is quite important to drag racers but not important to anyone else. 1965 was the first year that disk brakes came on Corvettes. They were standard equipment that year but for 1964 and 1965 only you could order your Vette with the disk brakes deleted in favor of the older drum brakes. I suspect that this was because Chevrolet had a bunch of drum brake assemblies left over from 1964 and some GM bean counter figured he could perhaps recover some that investment by letting people order the drums in place of the disks. Almost nobody took Chevy up on the option though. I doubt that there were more than a couple of dozen '65's ever to come with this rare option. At the time we didn't appreciate how rare that option was. I'm sure that today's NCRS guys would find it a real oddity. When I first met Al his Vette was tired. It ran like a bat out of hell, but the paint was 1/16th of an inch thick and comprised of up to 14 layers of different colors, including one purple metal-flake coat, that the previous owner had applied over the course of its then short 8-year life. The interior though was a cool custom black diamond tuck. Al knew how to drive that car and he drove it hard. During the course of that summer we stripped the paint off of his car using a couple of dull putty knives. It was so thick that it would just pop off in chunks. We'd strip at the paint for a while, then we'd go drive somewhere in the evening. When we finished paint stripping Al had that car painted '73 Corvette dark blue and it was an eye catcher. He still owns that Vette today. He's had it longer than I've had mine but it hasn't seen the light of day for a couple of decades and is still in the back of a chicken coup somewhere out in Turner.

I liked to ride in his '65; he liked to ride in my '73. Between 1973 and 1975 Al and I would end up being the best of friends and drinking buddies. We were an odd pair. He stood 6'4" with a full head of black hair. I had to stretch to reach 5'6" and was bald, even back then. He drove the old Vette; I had the brand new one. Together we would meet almost every night after work. We'd usually start with "dimers" (remember those dime beers) at whatever tavern was serving them that particular night of the week. Then at 9:00PM the bands would start to play at bars like The Bronze Balloon, The Blue Whale, and other nightspots in Salem. We would head for our favorite place, usually the Bronze Balloon for the early part of the night. Al and I were so well known that the bar maids knew us, knew where we liked to sit and knew what we liked to drink. As soon as they saw Al's big frame in the door one of them would rush over, usher us to our seats and our drinks would be in front of us. Al ran a bar tab

that he paid monthly and it far exceeded my car payment. I paid in cash so I didn't have to see how much of my income I was investing at this and other similar establishments.

Today I ask myself, why in the world did we party like that? The answer of course is that we were both very lonely, and not very well adjusted. Al had 3 kids from a prior marriage that ended in a bitter divorce. He had gained custody of them and they were really sweet kids, two boys and a girl. Al, his three kids and his Mom and Dad lived in an old house on the far south side of Keizer. As I look back, both his folks must have been saints to take care of those kids while we partied like we did. They raised those kids as we chased the girls, a good time, and our own identities. I was single, but not happily so. I never seemed to be able to find a girl friend that would stick with me for very long, and most of the time I went to club events alone. I didn't attract girls like some guys do and I was always a little shy. I think the Corvette was my way of trying to buy bait that would attract the opposite sex. I guess that's why Al and I hung out together so much. We were birds of a feather. We drowned our sorrows, looked nightly for female companionship, and in the end we both went home alone only to get up and go to work the next day and try it all over again the next night. It would be Al who was responsible for me meeting Pat, my wife of 28 years, but that story will come later.

There would be other Corvette club members that would influence my life, but none quite as much as Al. Lynn, the guy who got me into Corvettes in the first place was to follow suit and get married for a third time, he sold his Vette to buy yet another pickup. He did this soon after I joined the club.

It just dawned on me that I'm using a lot of odd names in this story. That's because back when I joined the Club almost everyone in the Club had a nickname. Let's see which ones I can remember. There was Little Joe, and Big Al. You can guess that those names had a lot to do with their stature. Then there were names like Spook, and Lucky. Those nicknames were, I suppose, based on some inside joke that pre-dated my joining the Club. There were simple nicknames like BJ, which were just the guy's initials. And who could ever forget Dude! He gave himself that nickname and forced everyone to use it on threat of pain if anyone ever used his real name, so I sure won't mention it here even though his is no longer with us. When someone new joined the Club the members always tried to come up with a nickname and stick it on that individual. They never managed to stick me with one though. I was just lucky I guess. NO... that can't be it... Lucky was another guy!

There was another odd thing about that early version of the Willamette Valley Corvette Association. They (we) didn't allow women to be members. Only the men were members. This made for at least one strange situation. There was a guy who drove a cool 57 Vette who was not legally entitled to be a member, but who was a member anyway. "How could that happen?" you ask. Well somewhere in his past there was a divorce that had him by the financial shorts so-to-speak. His Corvette was titled under his live-in girl friends name. The one firm condition of membership in the Club was that you had to own a Corvette and the bi-laws even stated that the Club had the right to make you prove ownership by requiring

that the member produce a valid title to a Corvette for examination as a condition of membership. Everyone knew that this guy didn't own the Vette that he drove, they just looked the other way and left well enough alone. His girl friend who should have been the member was not a member because she was a female. As for the wives and (as we'd call them today) "significant others", well, they were allowed to hang around and even do a lot of work, but they could not vote or hold office. Actually, even that holding office rule was usually overlooked, as everyone knew that you had to be a girl to be a secretary. So one of the officers was almost always someone who was not a legal member. This was something that was to change in only a few short years, but in 1973, male chauvinism was still alive and well.

CHAPTER #5

IT SEEMED LIKE A LIFETIME

I bought my 73 Vette in June of 1973, and by September of 1976 I would be married and settled down. That's only three short years! But a lot of stuff happened in those three years that I would remember for the rest of my life. Some of these things would even affect my life and bring me to the point where I am today.

Getting knocked down a peg or two

How could anyone be happier? I had a new Corvette, some new friends, and I was 25 years old? I was on top of the world. This next little story has a moral that only someone raised as a Baptist could fully understand. For those non-Protestants reading this I'll give you a hint; Baptists are to fun as dieters are to food. For a dieter the phrase "*If it tastes good spit it out*" will have lots of meaning. For someone raised as a Baptist, you can substitute words "*tastes good*" with "*fun*" and "*spit it out*" with "*knock it off or God will get you*". So it's only fitting I guess that a couple of months after I bought my prized 73 Vette and started to enjoy it too much, that it would seem like God reached and sort of knock me down a peg or two. This would happen late one Sunday afternoon on the road that runs along the Little North Fork of the Santiam River. The Club had once again bought a keg of beer and this time headed up the Little North Fork for day of swimming and playing at a place known as "the steel bridge". At that time this was the end of the paved road. There was a great swimming hole and some parking there. As I remember there were 5 or 6 Corvettes that went on this trip. Al and I drove up in my 73. He left his Vette at home. It was a warm afternoon and everyone had a great time. There was no tour back to Salem, members just left when they were ready, and in the end there were just two cars left. Al and I in my 73 and Little Joe in his 63 split-window Coupe. Little Joe had hauled the keg up the hill in his car and he would return the empty on his way home. About 5:00PM we headed back toward town.

The road from the steel bridge to the concrete bridge, the next landmark down the hill, was newly paved. It was nice fresh smooth blacktop with some nice Corvette curves that just

begged to be driven hard. Little Joe led the way and I was right on his tail. Little Joe was pushing the limits of traction on the narrow tires that would fit under a mid-year Vette. I had the brand new car with brand new wide radial tires. 1973 was the first year that Corvettes came with radial tires. They were Firestone 500 radial tires that were recalled a few months later for safety defects. I didn't know anything about that yet, all I knew was that the newest Corvette on radials should stay with a ten year old Corvette on bias tires and I was not letting him leave me in the dust! We came into a long sweeping right-hand turn at about 70 MPH. All of a sudden my Vette got real squirrely. The left rear swung out toward the bank, which pointed the nose toward the steep embankment on the riverside. It was about 50 feet down that bank to the river. I didn't want to spin out here and roll it into the river, so I corrected to the left a little and got the car pointed straight. Unfortunately I was in a curve and straight was pointing me directly at the up-sloping bank on the left side of the road at an oblique angle. Fortunately there was no ditch, or maybe it was just a little one, I don't remember exactly. I took the car up on the bank, which was mostly newly graded dirt. I was doing great. I was braking and slowing in the dirt and looking for a good way back onto the blacktop when I saw it, the only rock on the whole dirt bank, and I was headed right for it! It was only about the size of a basketball, but when you sit 4 inches off the ground that's not something you want to hit. So I gently pulled the steering wheel to the right to miss it, but I only partly missed it. I got the front of the Vette around it but that rock caught the left rear tire dead center and we hit it with such force that it broke the left rear trailing arm on the rear suspension which left the rear tire now, attached only by the axle and shock, dangling wildly and smashing fiberglass as it crashed around. This all took a lot longer to read than it did to happen. The whole thing probably took 3 to 4 seconds. By that time I had the car slowed down quite a bit and back down on the blacktop. For reasons that I still did not understand because I couldn't see the damage to the suspension, I was having difficulty controlling the car. I got it side-ways on the blacktop and slid for what felt like minutes, but was probably only another 1 or 2 seconds. We came to rest with the front license plate resting on a pile of gravel left from a construction job. On the other side of the gravel was that 50-foot drop-off into the river.

We had no beer in the car, Little Joe had that, but we were drunk. I'll even admit that today. I should not have been driving. Al for some reason had a Shasta Cola that he was drinking on the drive back. As this ordeal started he put his thumb over the hole in the can so as to not spill any cola on my new car. Through the whole ordeal Al held his finger over that cola can. All the way up the dirt bank and back down and as we slid down the road sideways. Then as we rolled to a gentle stop at all of 2 MPH into that pile of gravel he tossed it over his right shoulder and grabbed the dashboard. For some reason I thought that was funny and said, "What did you do that for?" He said, "I don't know, I thought we were going in the river I guess." We both sat there and laughed about it. Then we got out of the car. Only then did we see that the left rear fender was essentially gone and that tire was sitting at an odd angle. Little Joe had apparently not seen any of this happen. He must have been too busy looking at the road to check his mirror. There we sat, alone in a disabled car 40 miles from Salem, 10

miles from the nearest phone, and on a road with little traffic on that Sunday evening. Nothing sobers you up like a good wreck! We both walked back up the road to the place where the problem started. There we found where the tires had literally pulled loose from the wheel. We found where the wheel rim on both sides of the car had dug into the new blacktop. We walked back following the cars tracks and picking up pieces of my fiberglass fender. We started the car and tried to move it. Why I don't know. Both rear tires were gone and even the wheels were ground flat, but you do funny things at times like that... It wouldn't budge.

Today in a similar situation you'd grab your cell phone and call for help. In 1973 there was no such thing as a cell phone, so we did what we had to do. We both grabbed one of the remaining Shasta Cola's and sat on the gravel pile. After a short time a State Cop came down the road. I just knew that we were both going to jail. Fortunately for us the evidence at the scene didn't prove who was driving. The incident had been over for 15 minutes. We had no alcohol bottles or cans in the car, only Shasta Cola! On top of that when he drove up we were both sitting on the gravel pile so he had no idea who had been driving. The Cop stopped, got out and looked at the car, which was sitting perpendicular to the road. The back one-third of the car was in the road, the rest was on the shoulder and the nose was sitting in that gravel pile. Both rear tires were flat and both rear wheels had been ground down about 1 inch by sliding sideways on the road. The left wheel was at an odd angle to the rest of the car. It would not move under it's own power. The Cop got out of his car, looked at the situation, and said, "Did you fellows know that you're blocking this lane of traffic?" I didn't say a word. Of all the things I expected a Cop to say at that point, this question was not even on the list. I was trying to compose a sober response and ask for help when Al said, "Well no shit?" The cop said, "You need to move this vehicle off the road." I said, "We tried, it won't budge, the drive lines too badly damaged". Then I said, "Can you radio into Salem and have a wrecker come up and help us?" The Oregon State Police Officer said, "Nope, I can't do that. The radio is for official business only." At which point he got back in his patrol car and drove on down the road never to be seen again. Even today when I think of this I get mad. I guess I shouldn't however because he could have hauled us both in for DUI or something. I know that he knew we were drunk. He just couldn't prove who was driving so he left us there to sober up and think about it. Like going through what we had just been through hadn't sobered us up already.

Now it was getting close to sun down and there we were alongside the road with no way to get ourselves, let alone my new Vette, back home. There was very little traffic. We waited for someone to stop. A couple of cars passed us by. Finally an old VW Hippy Van stopped because our thumbs were out. I think Hippies have to do that don't they? Anyway, this one did. Al said he would stay with the car so nobody would steal it. I wonder how he thought that would be possible given its inability to even roll, but I thanked him and let him stay while I hitched a ride down to the main highway where I found a pay phone. Before dark a wrecker from Salem came up and hauled my mangled Vette back to my house.

I didn't have any idea what I was going to do. You see when, as a 25 year old, I bought a Vette, my insurance went sky high. I had financed the Vette along with my house and I held the title in my own name, so to save money I had opted to not carry collision insurance. I simply carried liability. This accident was my fault and I had no insurance to help me fix it. I was as low as low can get. I'd only had this Vette for a couple of months and I was driving the El Camino again because my Vette was a broken mess. Worse, I had to figure out how to fix it with whatever money I could find.

Club members came to my rescue. The President turned out to have some fiberglass repair experience. I bought a new trailing arm from the dealership. Another member helped me find a machinist that would setup the spindle. I had to have the frame straightened out of my own pocket. And of course I needed new tires and 2 new wheels. Yet another member owned a tire shop and got me a great deal on some mag wheels and TA Radials. By the time the weather was cold and wet my Vette was back on the road. It cost me a lot of nights at the bars to pay for it, and after that experience I've always carried full insurance coverage, no matter the cost.

So I got knocked down a few pegs and I would never have the same feeling for my Corvette that I had during those first couple of months of ownership. I now looked at her as damaged goods. I could see the place where the top of the door didn't line up with the top of the fender like it had before. I could see where the hood didn't meet flush with that fender like it had before. I could see flaws in that left rear fender where it had been "glued" back together. At that point I almost sold it a couple of times. But other people couldn't see what I saw and everyone seemed to accept the fact that things like this happen. Besides, the early winter of 1973/74 was starting, along with the oil embargo and gas lines of that winter. Nobody wanted a big block car of any sort then and I couldn't sell it if I tried. I owed more money on it that I could get for it at that point. Plus, I was still trying to sell my 68 Z-28 and it wasn't selling either. So I just kept the Vette. I guess it's a good thing that I did or this would be the end of the story.

The winter of our discontent

Like I said, the winter and spring of 1973/74 marked a low point for automobile enthusiasts. The Arabs embargoed oil to the United States, the President put price controls on things to keep inflation down, but it didn't work. Gasoline supplies dried up and Oregon had worse problems than most of the rest of the nation. We sat in long lines to buy 10 gallons of gas on odd or even numbered days depending on the last digit of your car license plate. People stayed home a lot. Those who didn't plan ahead often were forced to not travel for lack of fuel.

I had a friend who worked at an Exxon station at Hawthorn and Market. I managed to always have access to gas, even when they had a sign out that said they were out of gas. Thus it was that one night in mid-winter a small group of us, I don't even remember who was involved

anymore, were sitting around my house when one of the girls had an idea that we should all go to Silverton for some reason. Nobody had any gas in their cars, or at least not enough to get to Silverton and back at night. I was the only one with a full tank and that full tank was in the Vette. Thus it was that we proved that 6 people could actually get into a 73 Corvette with the top up. This was of course well before seat belt laws. We drove to Silverton like that, believe it or not.

As spring came closer I still had that Z-28 Camaro that I desperately needed the money out of. I found a consignment lot and put it on the lot. After about a month they were able to sell it for \$1200, the exact amount that I had not been willing to accept as a trade in the prior June when I bought the Vette. Out of that \$1200 gross I had to pay a 10% commission, so I actually got less for the Camaro than Capitol Chevrolet would have given me for it and it took me about 8 months to unload it. That's how it goes, that's the way I deal cars. I've always been able to make those kinds of deals. After thirty years I wish that I had kept that Camaro, not because I loved the car, but just so I could sell it at today's prices. It would have been a great investment.

Spring came and the gas lines eased, surprisingly as soon as the government allowed the price of gas to double. Gas that had cost \$.29/gal only 3 months before was now going for \$.59/gal and there was plenty of it. The summer of 1974 would be good for driving again but it would cost more to fill the tank. Where it took \$5.00 to fill the tank in 1973 it now took \$10.00 for the same amount of fuel. But we all puckered up and paid it. What choice did we have?

CHAPTER #6

INTO THE FRYING PAN

I was nominated and elected to the office of President of WVCA in 1975; I took office and became President in July 1, 1975. Soon after becoming President the club members voted to host a Northwest Association of Corvette Clubs (NWACC) event. This was to be an autocross and concourse event. Now I knew why they elected me President; because I would have a lot of work to do that nobody else wanted. As luck would have it, my friend Al was elected Treasurer that same year and because we hung around together a lot we were able to do some planning for the event outside of normal Club channels. My memory of all the details is fuzzy after almost 30 years. I kind of remember that the Club was able to secure the use of the State Fair Grounds for both a car show and an autocross.

Al was frantically trying to reconcile the books and the bank account because the previous few administrations had not made fiscal responsibility a priority. The check register showed that we had around \$800 in the bank. The State Fair wanted \$600 to rent the fairgrounds so the club voted to proceed with the contract. As president I signed the contract and called Al to get a check. That's when he informed me of the bad news. The checking account was way

out of balance. We were actually overdrawn at the bank by about \$15. There was no way that the club would be able to come up with the required \$600. So Al and I did what we always did; we went drinking, and while we had a few beers we planned a strategy. We decided between us we could afford \$300 each if we cut back on our drinking for a month. So it was that Al and I bankrolled the 1974 NWACC event out of our own pockets to the tune of \$600. We hoped that the event would make enough money to pay us back. We would pay ourselves the first \$600 in profits and the club could have the rest if there was any left. The event was a huge success. We charged \$1 for the public to come in and see the car show and between that and the entry fees the Corvetters paid to race, show and attend the banquet, there was a profit of \$1600! We got our beer money back and the club got \$1000. Al used that money to open a saving account for the club. Thus it was that WVCA went from being bankrupt to having one of the bigger financial cushions of any Northwest Corvette club.

Neither Al nor I ever rubbed it in nor did we ask for any recognition; ever. We were glad to do it and happy that we got our money back. For years after that event Al would jealously guard that \$1000 savings account, even after everyone except he and I had forgotten how it got there. At times that made for some hurtful words toward him from other members. I can remember comments directed toward him at club meetings like, "You act like that's *your* money", and in a way it was, but he'd never remind them of why he guarded it so jealously or how it got there in the first place. I always came to his defense, but I never did make a really big deal about how that money got there either or the sacrifices that he and I made to put WVCA on its solid financial footing.

The 1975 NWACC event that we put together got me interested for the first time in those kinds of organized events. The concourse, or car show, participants were in my opinion obsessed to the point of being anal with cleanliness and that just didn't do anything for me. I mean spending hundreds of hours making sure that the inside of your exhaust pipes were spotless was not my thing. This is not to say that I could not be a very picky concourse judge. I judged a lot of those shows over the years, and I was always able to find something to knock a few points off of even the cleanest car, but I'd rather drive mine than clean it. The Autocross events were fun. In an autocross one car at a time drives a course made up of traffic cones. The point was to see who could drive the course in the least amount of time. I was too busy at our own event to try it, but a few weeks later some members who liked to autocross talked me into attending another NWACC autocross in Olympia Washington. They badgered me into going and trying to autocross my new big block Corvette. Mine was 100% stock and as such, I would race in class A-1, which meant stock big block Corvettes of any year. I had probably the worst case of butterflies that anyone has ever had. I felt like a guy that was going to jump out of an airplane for the first time. I drove the course in a respectable time but did not win anything that day. When I got out of the car after my first run I was so shaky my legs felt like rubber. I just sat on the curb and recovered for about 10 minutes.

Autocrossing a big block Vette is a lot different than racing a small block. The engine is heavier and that means that there's a lot more weight in the front and that makes the car under steer, which pushes the front end in the direction you are going, not the direction you want to go. I spent the rest of the 1975 season learning to autocross my 73. Other members and NWACC, folks from other clubs gave me a lot of pointers. I learned to steer through tight corners more with my right foot than with the steering wheel. This is a trick that only those with big blocks need to learn and something that can get you in a lot of trouble in a small block car. I got over those butterflies and learned to look forward to each event and each run. I was hooked. For the next couple of years autocrossing would be my passion.

I began attending all of the NWACC events; some of them were as far away as Vancouver British Columbia Canada. On one occasion I even drove to Vancouver in the morning, a distance of about 350 miles from home, autocrosses all day, and drove back home that night so I could be at work the following morning. All I can say is that I must have been younger then. I don't think I could survive that today.

Back in those days the club president was expected to do more than just preside over meetings. It was the Presidents job to lead all tours as well. This might sound like an easy job, but it's harder than it looks. A tour of more than 8 to 10 cars will experience something called the sling shot effect, even if the leader holds a really steady speed. For example, if the leader drives at 55 MPH you can expect the trailing car in the group to increase and decrease speed from 45 to 65 trying to stay even. Don't ask me why, it's just a traffic dynamic that happens. So if the leader is not a real steady driver that sling shot effect gets even more pronounced and the more cars there are in the tour the worse it gets as well. Shoot, I've been at the end of tours where I ran at speeds between 35 and 95 MPH. It can be quite tiresome for those at the end, I can tell you that. Anyway, if you're the leader you want to keep a nice steady speed to make life bearable for those at the end.

So why did I bring this up? I do so because I want to tell you about the infamous "Apple tour". I had been president for only a short time when the Club decided to go on a tour to Mt. Hood. The tour went up through Molalla and Estacada to Government Camp where we had lunch. During lunch we decided that there was plenty of time and it might be nice to go home down the Hood River Valley. It was late summer and the apple harvest was starting. Some of the members wanted to buy some fresh apples, so they asked me to stop at an apple stand if I saw one open. I said that I would do that and we hit the road. I was driving down into the Hood River Valley when I spotted a very large fruit stand on the left side of the road and it had a huge parking lot. I made a snap decision to pull in and fulfill my obligation to find the members some apples. I hit the left turn signal and the brakes at the same time. I didn't have much time to think about it or I'd miss the entrance. I pulled to the end of the parking lot and stopped, fully expecting to see a line of Corvettes parking behind me but the lot was empty. I looked out toward the road and saw smoke, dust, and Corvettes everywhere except in the lot that I was in. I guess I didn't give them enough notice because none of them

made that turn into the lot. They all over-shot it and had to turn around and come back. It was years before the ribbing about the “apple tour” quit coming up in conversations.

CHAPTER #7

TIMES THEY WERE A CHANGIN’

When I joined the Corvette Club in 1973 Corvetting was for the most part a young single male dominated hobby. You’ll remember that earlier I mentioned how the men were the only ones allowed to be members and vote. That began to change around 1975 or ‘76. It started when the Club passed an amendment to its constitution to allow for family memberships and to also allow the wives to vote. Other car clubs and especially Corvette Clubs were doing the same thing around this same time. Things were definitely changing. The main focus of the Corvette hobby began to slowly move from drinking, driving fast, and racing, to more family oriented things like rally’s, parties, and social events. This change in focus of course caused some older members to drop by the wayside and some newer members came in to take their place. None of this happened without some disruption however.

I’ll digress here just a little, and tell a little story about a big change in the makeup of the club. As you may remember I had been elected President in 1975 with almost no leadership experience. During one of the events that year, a member accused another member smoking pot, something that might have gone unmentioned except that the offending member was having a little spat with some of the other members at the time. I don’t remember what that was all about, all I remember is that at the next meeting a small group of members presented me with a letter requesting that the board of directors kick this offender out of the club for “actions detrimental to the Club”. I consulted with the other board members, read the Constitution, talked to the accused individual, and the board decided that the evidence of the offence was insufficient for us to terminate a member in good standing, and we reported back to the club that we did not find grounds for the requested termination. Further we stated that we did not believe that we had been elected to the board to act as policemen, but rather to conduct the affairs of the Club and preside over meetings, and besides we had no police powers. Anyway, I thought that we done a good job of evaluating the charge and coming up with a very wise and fair ruling. This did not satisfy those who made the accusations and they immediately tendered their resignations and went to Corvallis and formed a new Corvette Club, one that would presumably have rules that suited them better. Thus Beaver State Corvette Club was born. WVCA was a small club at that time, and when those folks left we became a lot smaller. At one point we had to pad our roster with a couple of people who we thought might rejoin to have 10 names on the roster list so that we would qualify for continued membership in the Northwest Association of Corvette Clubs. So it was that I was indirectly responsible for the formation of another Corvette Club in the area. Little did I know that it would not be the last one I would help for form, but that story comes much later.

For now I'll get back to the changing demographics of Corvetting in the mid-70's. The price of a new Corvette was \$5500 or so in 1973 when I bought mine. In just a few short years that price quickly climbed to over \$8000. The price of used Vettes skyrocketed too. That meant that the kid who wanted to drive fast and beat up a car was quickly priced out of the Corvette market. The new buyers were more likely to be moderately successful young adults more interested in originality, driving and being seen in their Corvette than in tearing it up racing down "the gut". The Corvette was very much the car of the baby boom generation. Come to think of it, it still is today. So as we baby boomers aged and grew up it was only natural that the Corvette hobby would mature with us.

Some new and memorable people would join WVCA in 1975 and 1976. All of them were married and all of their wives were very involved in Corvetting. I was president at the time and the secretary was a divorced young lady named Karen. Somehow Karen had gotten the Corvette in her divorce and she may have been the first single female member of WVCA. Shortly before I met Pat, she failed to show up for meetings a couple of times in a row. Everyone was curious about what had happened to her but none of us were able to find her. Her Phone had been disconnected and we could not find her at her apartment either. She had just disappeared off the face of the earth. That was troubling enough in and of itself, because some of us were concerned for her safety. What was worse from the Club's perspective was that when she disappeared all of the Club's secretarial records disappeared with her. All of the historical information was gone. All of the old minutes were gone. Even the Club scrapbooks were in her possession and all that stuff was missing.

I managed to appoint replacement secretaries to take the minutes at meetings on a meeting-by-meeting basis, but there was 4 or 5 months left in her term and nobody wanted to take on the job until the term was up or our secretary could be found. I had asked Pat if she would mind taking the minutes at a meeting shortly after I met her. She said that she would do it and she did a good job of it too. After that meeting I asked her if she would mind filling out the missing secretaries term, and she agreed to. Legally I suppose that she had no right to do this, we were not married or even engaged at the time, but everyone liked Pat and we needed a secretary, so once again the membership looked the other way, as we were creative with the by-laws.

This all helped to cement my relationship with Pat. We started doing a lot of Corvette stuff together. Pat's son, Marty was only 2 years old and he came to most of the events too. The three of us would show up in my 73 for all the meetings and events together. Nobody cared about car seats and seat belts back then. Marty sat on a pillow on the console and looked right out the front window, he loved it.

Pat, Marty, and I actually made a cross-country trip from Salem to Chicago and back in my 73 Vette during the summer of 1976. Pat wanted to introduce me to her mother and sister that lived in the Chicago area. I had two cars, the 1973 Vette and my 59 El Camino. The Vette was almost new and I trusted it on a 5000-mile trip. The old El Camino... well I wasn't going to

trust that machine on that long of a trip. For some reason it never dawned on me that we might fly or take a train to Chicago. I bought a set of red luggage whose pieces when arranged just right would exactly fill the space behind the seats of my Vette. That meant that we had to leave the top up, but we had plenty of luggage space for the three of us, and we hit the road for Chicago. I drove the entire distance, Pat navigated, such as she was capable, and Marty sat on his pillow on the console and road like a trooper. He was such a good kid that I wondered why other people were always complaining about their kids in cars even on short trips. It would be another 4 years and one kid later before I'd find out that not all kids were the traveling saints that Marty was. Marty soon figured out that I would drive until I needed gas before I'd stop for any reason, then I'd pull into a gas station where I'd fill up while Pat and Marty hit the rest rooms and got something to eat or drink. During one long stretch in the mid-West I guess Marty had finally learned the system because he looked up at me and asked, "Do you need gas yet?" I got the message; he needed to go to the bathroom! At 2 ½ he had already figured out how to pull my strings and ask for what he wanted in a way that he knew I would respond to.

One night on our way home from Chicago, after being on the road for ten days or better, we pulled into a little motel in Winnemucca Nevada. We were almost home and I was glad, it had been a long trip. That day we had traveled from Salt Lake City across the salt flats in 100-degree heat with no air conditioning. The next morning, as I did every morning, I went out to the Corvette and opened up the back compartment, then I would make about three trips back into the room and bring out our bright red luggage. I had set the two largest suit cases next to the Vette when a man came out of his room in front of me, looked at the car and then at my suit cases and informed me that, "Those will never fit in there!" I said, "Really? That's funny because I took them out of there last night." Then I went back to our room to get the rest of the bags. When I returned I proceeded to pack them into the place where I put them each day, I shut the compartment door and latched the top. He just stood there for a second and said, "Well I'll be damned." Then he turned and walked off.

CHAPTER #8

CORVETTING – ALL IN THE FAMILY

There is nothing that changes a man's life like marriage. For most, like myself, it's a positive change. I was happy and not lonesome for the first time in my life. Many guys of the Baby Boomer generation who were into the Corvette hobby saw marriage not only as a life changing paradigm shift, but also as a reason to sell their beloved Corvette in favor of something more family practical. In the mid 70's that "something" was often a Dodge or Chevy van all tricked out with shag carpet, refrigerator, and wood paneling. Pat and I resisted that particular fad and we kept the Corvette. I sold my 59 El Camino, something that I still regret doing to this day, and we bought an old 4-wheel drive GMC pickup to drive because it met my need for a truck better than the El Camino, and that's what the three of us had for transportation for much of the rest of the 70's, a Vette and a beat up old 61 pickup truck.

Marriage didn't stop me from being active in Corvetting. On the contrary, Pat and I both held numerous offices in the Corvette Club during that time. I continued to hone my autocross skills as well. As a matter of fact I was able to win first place in all six Northwest all-Corvette autocross events in 1977. I still have those trophies today. It was the high point of my autocross career. My passion for autocrossing rubbed off on Pat and she too began to race the Corvette at some of the events. She was never as successful at it as I was because she was a little too careful and afraid of damaging the Vette. In spite of her carefulness she managed to have some nail-biting experiences in the Corvette, both on and off of the track.

Her first nail-biter happened in our own driveway. We had just bought a larger house and it sat up-hill a little from the street. The driveway was about a 5-degree up-slope to an almost flat spot in front of the garage doors. We didn't have an electric door opener then, so you had to stop the car, get out, and lift the door by hand. With the Vette being a 4-speed car, this meant that you either turned it off, put it in gear, and do that job, or you yanked up on the parking brake really hard, put it in neutral, and got out to open the door. That's exactly what I always did, and I guess Pat did that as well. One day while I was at work Pat took the Vette, put our young son Marty in with her, and went to the store. When she returned she pulled into the driveway, put on the parking brake, and got out to open the garage door. As she turned around she was horrified to see the Vette rolling backward down the driveway with little Marty still in the passenger seat. As any mother would, she ran after the car, unsure of what she would actually do if she caught it. The Vette increased in speed as it hit the steeper part of the driveway. As it rolled into the street it followed the street's slope toward the neighbors house on the corner. There was a curb at the corner and a stop sign, but no curb between the lawn and the gravel-parking strip. The slope of the descent was just right and the Vette turned just enough to miss the curb and sign post, rolled backward onto the gravel then onto the soft lawn in front of the neighbors house. There it was level and the Vette came to a stop right in front of their house. Pat was scared to death. The engine was still running and Marty was still in the seat when Pat got in the car and drove it back across the street and into our garage. Marty thought the whole thing was fun. Pat was shaking like a leaf in the wind. She called me at work with a trembling voice and tried to tell me the story. I tend to stay quite calm in situations like this, especially when it's a story about an event that's over already, and once I was sure that everyone was all right I laughed at her. As I remember she was none too happy that I was not as upset as she was, but what would be the point in that I thought. The event was over, her and Marty and my Vette were fine, and only two tire ruts on the neighbors front yard attested to the fact that anything had happened at all.

The second time that Pat scared herself half to death in the Vette was during an autocross at the Woodburn Drag Strip. Our courses at that facility were always a little hairy. There was not a lot of pavement, and there *was* a lot of grass and dirt. At the end of the course there were guardrails on either side because we finished with a flying 1/8th mile on the drag strip. Coming out of the pit area onto the drag strip the course had to cross through a couple of

cones and change lanes on the drag strip from the left side to the right side and back to the left side again. This was done to try to keep the speeds down and make the course safe enough that the drag strip owner would let us use the place for autocrossing. Nobody had ever had a problem navigating this simple lane switch, at least not until Pat tried it one day. And of course Pat had Marty riding as a passenger again on this episode as well. Pat did well on the course in the pits. As she came to the flying finish she made the first lane change, started into the second gate and saw an open drag strip in front of her. She was in second gear and forgot what a 454 can do when you nail it in a low gear. She smashed the gas to the floor, the engine revved, the rear tires broke traction and went up in smoke, and she did a 360 degree cookie right there in the middle of the drag strip between the two guard rails. I missed the whole thing, which only took something less than a second, as I was talking to someone and figured it was all over except for the finish run and that was always uneventful. Everyone that saw it was worried. Someone yelled at me to look, whereupon I turned around to see my Vette sitting dead in the middle of the drag strip with Pat screaming at the top of her lungs. She was so shook-up that she couldn't even restart the car and finish her run. Oh, and what about Marty? Once again he thought that it was great fun. His comment? "Mom, that was fun, can we do it again?"

CHAPTER #9

CAMPING THE CORVETTE WAY

Today most Corvetters that I know would never think of taking their prized fiberglass cars on a camping trip. Heck, some of them won't even take the Vette out of the garage on a cloudy day. But when I started attending Corvette Club functions things were a lot different. The Club had annual campouts, and those were not camping trips where they left the Vette at home and took the camper, trailer, or motor home. Oh no, they loaded up what they needed in their Vettes and headed for the woods, and I was right there with them.

On my first camping trip it was me and my dog Ernie, with a cooler, an old canvas umbrella tent, gasoline stove and lantern and a sleeping bag. There were ten or twelve Corvettes on that outing. We were a large enough group that the camp ranger could not find enough spots for all of us to camp together, so he directed us to the overflow area, which turned out to be about 1 mile down the road, right next to the boat launching ramp. For amenities there was water, a garbage can, and a couple of fire rings but not much else. We parked the Vettes in the parking lot and carried our belongings the short distance into the woods where we setup camp.

We had a great time all day drinking beer, playing in the water, and doing those things that people do on a campout. Along about dusk it was decided that we needed a fire. The only problem was that there was no firewood at the overflow area. The only firewood was a mile back up the road at the regular campground. Everyone, me included, thought that a mile was an awful long distance to carry firewood. I piped-in and volunteered, "I'll go up and get some

wood". "How to plan to do that?" one of the members asked. "No problem." I replied, "I'll just take all that stuff out of my car and I'll load some firewood in it. None of the others was willing to carry firewood in their Corvette. I had the newest Vette and I was more than willing to fill that back with firewood. I removed the ice chest and dog food, put down a plastic tarp, and went up and fetched a night's supply of firewood.

After Pat and I got married I tried just once to take her tent camping. We loaded up the same old tent and cooking gear that I had been using since my Mom and Dad gave it to me when they quit camping and off we headed into the wilderness. Well at least that's the way that Pat looked at the whole affair. You see this is where I learned that "You can take the girl out of the city but you can't take the city out of the girl". Pat came to me from the wilds of suburban Chicago and there was nothing about sleeping on the ground in a tent that excited here one little bit. I think that was our first and last tent camping trip. Pat stayed awake all night with a flashlight in hand, switching it on every time a leave fell off a tree and hit the tent. She was convinced that some wild animals were going to get her. She was a nervous wreck after only one night.



That's when I decided that if this Oregon boy was ever going to enjoy camping again then something had to be done to make my wife feel more at ease with being in the wilderness, as she would put it. Yes, well-populated State Parks did qualify as wilderness to her. One day an acquaintance offered to sell me a 1961 Shasta 12 foot travel trailer. It was a cute little trailer with two little wings on the back, a Shasta

trademark of the era. We bought the little Shasta and proceeded to take it camping. Now I suppose that most normal people would expect me to tow it behind my 61 GMC pickup. What would make a better combination, a 61-model travel trailer and a 61-model pickup? You guessed it, that's not the way we did things. I invested in a trailer hitch for the Corvette and that's what we used as a tow rig. Don't ask me what I was thinking, but it sure seemed like a great idea at the time. So we started camping again. The three of us in the Corvette with our little old Shasta trailer behind. Nobody had ever seen anything like it before, and I must admit that I've never seen anything like it in the 30 years since either.

We took our odd RV combination on a number of trips, one of them as far away as Los Angeles California. We went to Disneyland in that rig. On the way home from L.A. we took the scenic highway, California 1 it's entire length. At one stop in Northern California we pulled into a campground about suppertime with our little trailer. I found my assigned site and backed the trailer in. As I got out of the Vette the fellow in the trailer at the site next to ours came out, looked my rig and me over and blurted out, "Well I'll be damned! I heard all

this snortin' and growling and I thought there was a 1-ton pickup with a big ol' 454 out there, and what do I find? This little thing!" I responded, "Well, you were partly right, it's got a 454 in it." That seemed to satisfy him and we talked at some length about Chevy engines, camping, trailers, and how well my little Vette was doing on such a long trip from Oregon to L.A. and back.

That little Shasta trailer was the only one that I ever pulled behind the Corvette. It was not however the only trailer or RV that I would own. It turned out that Pat really did enjoy RV'ing as we call it today. She just didn't like tent camping. So as long as she could get into a real bed in a room with hard walls she didn't usually care where those walls were parked. So after the little Shasta, we moved up to a 15-foot trailer, then a 19-foot trailer, then onto a camper on a pickup and after I retired we bought a motor home. We're now on our second motor home and still enjoying RV camping. We also still have the Corvette and we enjoy that too. They don't go together anymore like they did way back with our first trailer, but they are still both a big part of our lives.

SAVE THE WAVE!