

**Once upon a time there was a kid...**

**a can of paint...and an Oldsmobile**

*As told by Frank Robert "Bob" Price*

***Is there life after you use your hands and house paint on the '56 Olds?***

**This is a true story**



*Illustration 1: Frank and sister Barbara and the car*

*(This story is true and first appeared in part in the Off the Editor's Desk column in the Medina Valley Times as a Mother's Day salute).*

Like all little boys I gave my Mother some good-days and bad ones too. And as a surprise to me most of all; I have lived to tell about it! For Mothers everywhere; take heart. Your day could get much worse. Little boys; take a warning; there is 'a bridge too far' that you might not want to cross.

It was 1956 and we lived in the neighborhood above, as you can see for yourself.

There in this photo is evidence of the hulking shapes which filled the driveways and lined the streets; Coupes and Sedans and Pickups; some were light colored, but most were dark. And as the new 'two toned' cars began to invade the streets; why, even a five year old could see that something just wasn't right. One thing for certain about those cars on our street was the fact that they were all one color... just the way cars were supposed to be.

So being a budding artist and an observer of the way things ought to be; I set my sights on the shiny new Olds '88 my dad brought home and left sitting in the driveway; it was an embarrassment I assure you. Something was wrong in Rivercity. Right away I knew someone ought to finish painting that car.

Well, leave a small boy alone with a car and a bucket or two of white oil based house paint long-enough and he will come up with a plan to get himself in trouble. One thing about it; I did not like those new two toned cruisers!

In 1956-57 two-toned cars littered the landscape helping push aside the fat-fendered auto.

Being just four at the time; it was probably near impossible to change everyone's car. No one seemed much interested in what I had to say; but it was plain as day; Action must be taken. Timing would mean everything. Secrecy the most important factor. The end result could change automobile history!

I can remember the plan as clear as a bell today. There was no malice intended. I saw myself as the avenger of fat fendered cars everywhere. I was simply correcting a growing plague of the two toned menace! Besides; every time that car came home it sat out front; just imagine...

Here was this single car, all-mixed-up and everyone else's car was one color. It looked to me like someone had started to paint it twice and had stopped about midway. It was so bad that people even came to look it over. It got mixed reviews I am sure of that.

The fact that this car drew so much attention was probably the final straw; and then my parents moved it into the garage...this was my territory; and besides there were those cans of paint just waiting. I didn't have any turquoise...so, white would have to do. My first big paint job sat there waiting...

Before I ever heard of Huck Finn I knew that plans as big as this take more than one person to carry out. Besides, this was a big car and there probably wouldn't be a second chance. My four year old neighbor Stevie Strong seemed willing to help; though he seemed less clear than I on the goal. I on the other-hand had a mission. All I needed now was a screw-driver.

I found the screw driver and pried the lids off the paints and put Stevie on the left-side and I took to the right. We had no brushes. And we didn't know much about the art of stirring paint. But, at four, if you stick your arm in the can clear to the elbow; you can get enough paint on you to last about a quarter of a fender give or take a dab or two. Though it gets messy; once you get started on one area, another slides into view before you know it.

Why, with a little creative effort a small boy can master the fine art of painting chrome bumpers, grilles, headlights and yes, even windshields front doors (handles included), side windows and even the center posts before his mother even gets to missing him. There is only one steadfast rule...Don't paint the tires. Everyone knows that tires are supposed to be black.

But, before Stevie and I could really step back and take a critical view of our work. I heard that voice in the distance...and had the first thought that I might be in trouble.

Then the garage door opened...it was one of those old wooden kind that pulled out and the whole thing slid up and stopped. It was surely to be a moment of enlightenment...

Now I don't know where you were raised.

But, in 1957 Texas, the rod was seldom spared in the education of heathen children. My parents were no exception. And force was applied vigorously and you didn't wiggle and fight and squirm; because that just brought more areas of the body into contact with whatever hand or weapon of choice was available.

Now I've been whipped with belts, sticks, paddles, house shoes, fly-swatters and probably other readily available utensils of convenience; but my mom; (bless her soul) just lost it and the hand became the tool of the moment. When she came charging at me like a big time wrestler; all doubts of being in trouble were soon gone. I knew then and there my days were numbered. The sight must have been too much to witness. My partner vanished between the grabbing, hitting, screaming, focused in my direction.

Stevie ran home crying; telling his mom that my mom was killing me...which was slightly exaggerated but an accurate description of wrath and frustration. Steve's feet put him beyond reach quickly.

His parents thought this was punishment enough. I think my mother always looked at him after that and it was all she could do to put aside the desire to 'grab him up'. For me things got a little fuzzy right about then. In Texas they have a saying for a moment like this;

" When the cat hit the fan...the fur was flying..."

I don't remember the exact order of things there for a little while after that, but; I know that I lost count of whippings that began immediately after some impressive jerking about and being lifted off my feet by one arm.

Somehow I wound up in the bath tub; and between dousings of turpentine I would receive another round or two or twenty. It was a stunning jolt into reality; and a feeling which tornado victims must have when they suddenly are aware that they have landed afar from where they started and in a split second time.

I found out first hand why cats run so fast when they get 'turpented'...it is not a pleasant experience! But, educational...

And another lesson I learned was; scare a woman and make her mad and you have got a handful; a lesson never to forget or underestimate.

By now my mother was in a state of shock and panic and was a crying-wobbling-mad kinda Mother!

A rather large woman at the time; her image could be intimidating. I still have visions of polka-dots coming at me and hands working in an opening and closing manner that would put the best Maine Lobster to shame. But here she came just the same; all Polka-dots and



*Illustration 2: Lois Winnell Cunningham Price and son Frank*

Pinchers! And after the initial contact; there was I floundering in the bath tub.

While I suffered through the turpentine; she went to the phone.

She called my dad in Oklahoma (he was an engineer on the railroad). And if I thought he was going to help me; I was barking up the wrong tree. I figured I was pretty well doomed but he was a last hope anyway. He and I were both 'boys' and there was a remote chance of salvation.

But, I was soon to learn otherwise. I got into this situation all by myself and was beginning to see by now that nature was sure to run its natural course...mostly on my butt!

"Morris," she said, "That boy...(meaning me) has painted the car..."

And, I could hear him laugh. Not the kind of chuckle from a little joke; but one of those full, "Haw! Haw! Haw! kind-of laughs that's sure to make things worse if you don't see the humor in the situation.

My dad tried to calm my mom with the normal things, 'boys will be boys', and the like; reminding her he'd done much worse as a kid. But, all to no avail. She was out of control. He recommended that she just use a little turpentine on the car. That made it even worse. It was obvious he didn't understand the situation...

"No," I heard her say, "you don't understand..."

" He didn't paint 'on' the car" she said, "...he painted the WHOLE car..."

And there was a pregnant pause and that booming laugh that I could hear even where I sat.

Haw! Haw! Haw!"

Well, let me tell you; when that woman hung up that phone (after talking pretty bad about my dad's ancestry); I swear her eyes were red just like a bears eyes caught in a flashlight. And she come at me again...polka-dots and pinchers. It's hard to get a running start when you are sitting in the bathtub, too.

Well that Olds and I both got a half dozen turpentine baths that day. I know I got at least 10 whippings

in rather rapid sequence. I suppose that the fact the car only had 250 miles on it kind of sweetened the deal. The paint job wasn't ruined on the Olds and my skin didn't come off. We both survived.

I saw that Olds in 1972 and it still had paint inside the big 'O' s on both sides; and it was being driven by the same little old lady my dad sold it to. My Mother always said that every time she thought about that car she still wanted to give me a whipping to this day. Haw! Haw! Haw!

Now, to all politically correct folks; some of this may sound 'abusive.' But, in-truth this was kind of like reverse discrimination. It was abuse alright; but not abuse of little people like you might think.

I'll swear right now; that wasn't child abuse; that was 'parent abuse' in that instance; however, my family situation was relatively abusive in many ways...some of it I obviously brought on myself...

All in all; I feel pretty damn lucky to just be here to tell you about it...and this was a lesson my mother made 'stick'. You won't find my name on the rolls of any police agencies, or listed with any felony action. If a mom would do that to you for doing wrong; why, think what total strangers might do. And this is what is missing in today's youth...punitive action...like an air-strike...a lesson that will stick. It is the only thing rouge heathen children understand. Haw! Haw! Haw!

Did all this have some deeper affect on me...you bet; I still see Pinchers and Polka-dots in my sleep at night on occasion...and when I go to the paint department to buy supplies; Pinchers and Polka-dots...is a constant reminder that good ideas can go wrong. It is called a conscience.

I became a whole-lot wiser for the experience. And my mother? Well, she had white hair all her adult life; and this experience probably helped keep it that way.

So mothers everywhere; take heart. There is life after the rug rat gets himself or herself into trouble.

But, If you don't hear those little rascals anywhere and you know that they are up to something...you better go check on 'em right now or you both might come to regret it later!