

## CHAPTER 13

### *The Drive-in*

By 1962 the dress fads made popular by the movies of the '50s were gone. A new fad from colleges on the east coast was the rage. It was called the Ivy League style. There were many different options of clothing available, but the most popular for guys at our school was the madras shirt with button-down collar, dress slacks, and Weejuns or penny loafers with no socks. We wore our hair short; a clean-cut look that pleased my mom. If you looked Ivy League, you were cool. Most of our parents would fork out a few bucks for replacement clothing each new school year, but none of them were inclined to replace a whole wardrobe even if they could afford to do so. My mom bought a few basic things for me, but I bought the rest with my own money. Girls had many more cool dress options available, but the coolest look to me was a fitted dress or skirt with a belt, blouse (madras) with button-down collar, and of course, nylons with Weejuns or penny loafers. The most popular girls' hairstyle was long and straight, like Mary Travis of Peter, Paul and Mary fame. In our new style clothes and hairdos, we were cool to look at, but guys needed their own transportation to be really cool.

Teenagers were allowed to get a beginner driver's permit at age fifteen. My dad taught me to drive, and I took driver's education in school, so I got my permit on the day I turned fifteen. A year later when I turned sixteen, he took me to get the real thing, and the next day we went to buy my first car. For years I'd been saving my allowance and the money I'd earned from cutting grass, selling vegetables from the garden, and working at the supermarket. I was the only kid in my neighborhood to have his own car at sixteen. I loved that idea, but with it, I had become the chauffeur for the tribe. I didn't mind since they pitched in to buy gas. Four dollars would just about fill up the gas tank in the early '60s. My first car was a 1955 Ford coup, V-6, three speed stick shift. It had a lot of pep, and I really enjoyed showing it off. Most of my friends got a license before they graduated from high school, and most were allowed to use the family car on special occasions, like a prom. In the spring of 1962, Twitch's dad bought a second car for the family and let Twitch drive his 1949 Willis Jeep station wagon. It was old and worn, but his dad had maintained it well, and it could seat five passengers with room for two more in the back cargo area. There were thirteen of us, and we had room for fourteen. Now we were all set to travel as a group to fun destinations in and around the city.

We didn't car pool going to and from school. All of us had girlfriends or wanna-be girlfriends attending our high school, except for Suntan. His girl attended an all-colored school on the other side of town. I told the guys that I'd give them a ride if they were at my car when I came out to leave on school mornings. I had to drive past the high school on the way to Annie's house where I'd pick her up each day. My passengers would have to get home on their own, since I sometimes stayed at school for one of my activities or one of Annie's, and I worked at the

supermarket after school several days each week. Twitch had a similar arrangement with the guys. By 1962, we were all busy with our love lives, school studies, school activities, sports, and most of us had jobs, so we didn't see each other that often around the neighborhood. We did get together occasionally to do guy stuff, and that generally included driving to the beach or other venues in the surrounding area.

Drive-in theaters were big business in the 1950s and '60s. When new movies came out, our parents often took the whole family there. But as we got older, no one wanted to go to the movies with their parents. The drive-in became one of the favorite activities for the tribe and me. I went there with Annie, sometimes double dating. Occasionally, just the guys went without dates, often to see a movie the girls wouldn't particularly like.

It was in the spring of 1962 that we first decided to buy beer and sneak it into the drive-in with us. Some had never tasted beer, and we all looked forward to this adventure. We loaded up in the two cars and drove to a small grocery store near Bayview. We'd be crazy to buy beer near our neighborhood. Too many people knew us, and we didn't want our parents to find out. Smarty, a senior, knew boys at school who bought beer at a particular Bayview grocery. He said that the owner usually asked to see an ID, but he didn't check any of the details. Since Smarty and Speedy looked older than the rest of us, they went in to make the purchase. We each gave Smarty a dollar, and he bought two quarts of cold Ballantine for each of us. Twitch had brought plastic cups. Good thinking. I said, "The cups will draw less attention than a quart beer bottle."

They weren't long in the store, and when they came out, Shortstop inquired, "Did you have trouble buying it?"

"No problem at all. Smarty and I put the beer on the counter, and the man rang it up. He didn't even ask for an ID," replied Speedy.

“Wow!” Bouncy said as he examined one of the quart bottles of beer. “I don’t know if I can drink two of these. If I don’t drown, I’ll get drunk for sure with all this beer.”

“Sip it. Besides, we have about three hours or more to drink it, but if you have trouble finishing yours, I’ll help you.” Tank sounded experienced.

“Have you had beer before?” I asked Tank.

“Sure, my mom sometimes has it in the refrigerator. She has given me sips, and once I stole one and drank it in my room,” he replied.

“Groovy!” Gabby exclaimed.

We left the grocery and headed to the drive-in, which wasn’t very far away. Just before we got there, we pulled off the road into an empty parking lot. Several of the guys were short on cash and wanted to sneak in by hiding in the trunk of my car. Speedy, Bouncy, Marbles, and Suntan climbed into my trunk and squeezed together enough to allow the trunk to close with some room to spare. Back then car trunks were deep and spacious. Once they were in, Gabby climbed in and filled up the little remaining space. This made for a really tight fit but I eased the trunk lid down slowly, and it closed with ease. Off we went with four visible passengers in each car. The price to enter the movie was one dollar per person, so we got in for eight dollars that night.

Sometimes the ticket window people at the drive-in would even check the trunks of passenger cars, especially when the drivers and passengers were teenagers and the lines of cars weren’t long. Knowing this, we always waited to enter a line when it was loaded with other vehicles. We had no difficulty on this evening. When I was sneaking guys in, I’d think of something to talk to the attendant about, trying to distract his attention. “Did the last big storm do any damage to your

theater,” or some other subject that might interest them. Eventually the drive-ins caught on to the trunk passengers cheating them out of income. To remedy that, they began charging a per-vehicle price, which was more than we ever paid using the individual person fee.

After paying admission, we parked near the rear of the lot since we'd be drinking beer and most likely making more noise than usual. We parked side-by-side on the last row. Cars continued to enter, driving down the back row and then heading forward to find their favorite viewing location. With the traffic and the sun's glow still visible in the western sky, I left the guys in the trunk until they started banging, and I could hear muffled yells.

I walked to the trunk and said, “When I raise the trunk, one of you roll out to the ground and crawl to the passenger side of the car. Twitch's car is parked on that side. When the first one's clear, I'll repeat the process until everyone is out. Do you understand? Cars are still driving by, so I'll open the trunk when there's a gap in the traffic.”

I heard some okays and some complaining, but I opened the trunk and out came Gabby. He rolled out of the trunk like a WWII military commando and then crab-walked to the passenger side of the car. Next was Suntan. When he got out of the trunk, no vehicles were in sight, so he stood up next to me like he'd been there all along. Next out was Speedy. A car came flying down the drive; Speedy hit the ground and rolled under my car. After the car passed, he crawled out and got in the car. More vehicles came by, and one pulled to a stop behind my car.

The driver, a middle-aged man with his family, rolled down his window and asked, “Is everything alright? Is that colored boy bothering you?”

I'm sure I had a puzzled look on my face initially, but I composed myself and answered, “No sir, he's my cousin, and we're together.”

Suntan smiled and put his arm around my shoulder and said, "Don't you see the resemblance?" The man mumbled something to his wife and drove off.

"I just realized that this wasn't a smart thing, me standing out here with you," Suntan said with alarm. "I hope they don't report me. If they do, we'll be kicked out. For sure Coloreds aren't allowed in this theater, you know," so he quickly got into Twitch's car and scrunched down in the seat.

"If you see a cop or guard coming this way, crawl to that car over there and hide until he's gone," I said pointing to a car four spaces on the other side of Twitch's Jeep.

"I can do that. Good idea. I'll hide there until they leave," Suntan replied after thinking about the possibility. By now the traffic had stopped, and the advertisements for the concession stand started to play on the screen. I opened the trunk, and Marbles and Bouncy got out complaining about being cramped and being in there too long. Smarty and Twitch got out of the Jeep and distributed the beer and cups. Twitch also had brought a few folding chairs. Smarty had brought a bottle of wine in case anyone wanted to have a taste. We all took up seats on the hood and top of the vehicles with several sitting in the chairs and on the ground in front.

Twitch instructed us to pour our booze into the cup and then put the bottle some place out of sight.

"Man, this tastes like medicine," Shortstop said as he took his first taste.

"It gives me a bit of a buzz," Gabby said after taking his second taste.

"This is stronger beer than my dad's. I think I like red wine better than beer," announced Speedy as if he was an authority on wine.

"I have red wine if anyone wants to have a taste," Smarty responded.

"I'll have some later," Speedy replied.

"I might try some later, too," Newguy said, "but this beer is real tasty."

The movie was *The Longest Day*, and we were looking forward to seeing it. As the previews to future movies were being shown, Bouncy and Tank went to the speakers on the row immediately in front of us to turn them on and adjust the volume. We had full volume of sound all around us and could hear the movie really well but with some echo.

As the previews started, Gabby asked, "How did baby Hitler tie his shoes?"

"This is not about Hitler when he was a baby," replied Seeds. "It's about World War II, you dufus."

"No seriously, how did baby Hitler tie his shoes?"

"Okay, I'll bite. How?" responded Twitch.

"In little knotsies." We roared with laughter. With or without the beer that was really funny.

After the laughter died down, Tank said, "I don't see what's so funny?"

"Really," I said. "The Germans were Nazis, and little Hitler tied his shoes in knotsies." I spelled both words after saying them.

"Oh! I get it." We all kind of rolled our eyes at that comment.

Changing the subject Tank said, "I'm going to the snack bar. Anybody want anything or want to go with me?" Gabby and Speedy said they'd go but no one else wanted anything. The three boys departed for the concession stand. The rest of us sipped our suds.

As the movie was starting, Speedy and Gabby returned, running to take their seats as the credits rolled on the screen.

"I thought you went to the concession stand for snacks," Limpy asked.

"Changed my mind," answered Speedy.

“Me, too,” Gabby said with a grin on his face.

“What are you up to,” Limpy asked looking at Gabby.

“What? Nothing!” replied Gabby, as Speedy nudged him to shut up.

“Where’s Tank?” asked Seeds. “He went with you.”

“Oh, he was in line buying junk when we left,” Speedy answered.

Quite some time went by before Tank came back from the concession stand with two soft drinks, one hotdog with one bite out of it, two popcorn boxes opened and mostly eaten, one open candy bar with a bite out of it, and one unopened candy bar.

“Tank, you can’t be that hungry and thirsty. I thought you were excited about the beer,” stated Smarty. Gabby and Speedy could be heard giggling.

“You bastards!” Tank shouted looking in the direction of Speedy and Gabby who were on top of the Jeep.

“What’s the matter? You look like you’re about to go ape on us” commented Seeds.

“Those bastards got all this food and started eating and drinking while we stood in line waiting to pay. I had this one candy bar, pointing to the unopened one. Speedy hollered to someone and handed me his partially eaten stuff and dashed out the door of the concession stand. He said, ‘I’ll be right back.’ Then Gabby put his partially eaten stuff in this carrier, handed it to me, and said, ‘Me, too. I’ll be right back.’ The bastards left me standing in line with all this junk.”

“Why didn’t you just return them?” asked Newguy. “They’re not yours.”

“Pay attention. They’re all partially eaten. I stood in line waiting for those two Clarabells to return. People passed me by to pay for their stuff, and finally I was the only one in line. The manager came and told me that I would have to pay for everything, or he’d call the cops. So I bought



all this crap. Now you two get down here and pay me and take your junk,” Tank demanded.

Speedy and Gabby continued to sip beer and paid him no attention. Tank put the food carrier on the ground, picked up the two drinks taking off the lids, and walked to the Jeep. He tossed the contents of the two cups onto Gabby and Speedy. Speedy jumped from the car and onto Tank who was ready for him. He threw Speedy to ground and turned to look for Gabby who had not moved. Speedy tackled Tank to the ground but before a fight started in earnest, we intervened telling them to cut out the noise or we’d all get kicked out. Speedy and Tank had cuts and scrapes from the graveled lot of the drive-in, and Speedy and Gabby were wet and sticky from the drinks. Tank went to the far side of my car, took a seat on the ground, and sulked. Speedy climbed back to the roof of the Jeep to resume drinking and watching the movie, and Gabby went to the restroom to wash up before joining him on the roof.

As the evening progressed, we all got a bit tipsy, and the beer was mostly finished. Seeds and Limpy seemed to be drunk, but they might have been pretending. Tank asked Smarty if he could have some wine, and Smarty opened the bottle and poured some into his cup. Newguy, Speedy, Gabby, and Marbles decided to try a taste, as well. The beer was definitely making me a bit dizzy, which gave me the feeling that I wasn’t in total control of myself, so I passed on the wine and so did the others. By the time the movie was over, the five guys who had sampled the wine were absolutely drunk. Seeds and Limpy had been kidding with their slurred speech, but these guys weren’t.

“Heey, Sppeeedy! You knooow, you’re alllll right,” Gabby announced. “You’re my bestest friend in the whoooole world.”

Speedy mumbled, “Me, too.”

“I’ve capped the wine and put it in Cowboy’s trunk,” Smarty proclaimed. “I think we’ve had enough booze for the night.”

“Oh, goooody,” said Gabby. “That’s where I’m riiiiding.” Tank, Newguy, and Marbles were already in the back seat of my car and seemed to be asleep.

“Gabby, get in my car. You don’t need to ride in the trunk when we leave the drive-in,” Twitch said as he guided him to the back seat of his jeep. “Let’s load up and go get some food. I could use something on my stomach.”

“Gooood idea. That way we can staaay in the car and have it, *hiccup*, brought tooo us,” Gabby said with difficulty.

Off we went to The Corner, as we all called it. It was a drive-in restaurant that served hamburgers, fries, and stuff like that curbside to your vehicle. It was a mile north of the high school, and a lot of kids from our school stopped there late on Friday and Saturday nights. Some came for food, and others came to socialize. It was the place to be seen on the weekends, especially if you had a date. After we placed our food orders, Speedy, Gabby, Tank, Marbles and several others had to go to the bathroom.

Smarty said, “Twitch, let’s go with them to make sure they don’t get into mischief. Since they’ve been drinking, they could end up in jail, knowing those two,” pointing to Speedy and Gabby.

“Yeah, since Tank is going too, that could mean even more trouble” Twitch replied.

After a while, they all walked back to the car trying to look as cool as they could while staggering, especially Tank, Marbles, Gabby, and Speedy.

“Any trouble?” I asked as they got to the cars.

“A little. Tank told the urinal to stop moving as he pissed on Speedy’s shoes,” Smarty said as he laughed.

“What did Speedy do?” I asked.

“Nothing, he thought it had started raining. He told Gabby to hurry up before he got wet again, so they both zipped up. Twitch escorted them back to the Jeep.”

Everyone was back in the cars, and the laughter finally died down. We had all the windows rolled down so we could talk with guys in the other car. We had ordered hamburgers and fries, thinking the food would help soak up some of the alcohol, and it did. By the time we’d finished the food, most of those who had the wine along with the beer were acting more sober.

Speedy announced, “I smell piss! Who pissed in their pants?”

Both carloads of boys cracked up again, except for Speedy and Gabby. They didn’t understand. Even Tank laughed, either because we were laughing or because he had known what he was doing when he peed on Speedy’s feet.

We had other such outings at the drive-in theaters and with beer or other kinds of booze, but we didn’t get that drunk ever again. We learned not to drink as much beer and to never mix beer with wine.

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“You tell a good drunk story,” Sam exclaimed. “For a minute I thought I was going to have to ration your wine tonight.” Clay laughed. “Speedy and Gabby could really be mean kids. I’m surprised you hung out with them.”

“They were handful, but I guess we were used to their tricks. They

didn't pull much on me, so I guess I was tolerant. Did you go to drive-in movies here in Texas?"

"I went a few times with my parents when we were visiting the city, and a few times when I spent weekends with my cousin and her parents in Austin. I never went there on a date or with other girls."

"You didn't grow up in a city like me, but you had many other cool things to do living on a ranch."

"Yeah, we had a lot of dances, barbeques, church socials, and of course my favorite, horseback riding. My first experience with booze came in my senior year when some of the guys spiked the punch at a party at Wade Cartwright's parent's ranch. His parents weren't aware, and they would have been furious if they had known. They had gone to the neighbors to play cards and to allow Wade some freedom at the party. After all, we were fixing to graduate from high school. Almost adults. Anyway, I guess they used vodka to spike the punch because you couldn't taste the alcohol, but after my first glass, I could tell something was going on with that punch. I didn't drink anymore, but some of the girls got tipsy that night. Fortunately, nothing bad happen, and his parents never found out."

"Sounds like you have some cool stories to tell, too."

"Not really. My childhood was never exiting like yours. Let's hear some more."

"This next story is a favorite of mine. We basically lied to our parents about where we were spending the night. We spent the entire weekend in a house near the ocean during a major hurricane."

"I better make some popcorn. This is getting better and better," she said excitedly.