

1967 was an eventful year for me. I don't remember how it started off but it ended with one of the greatest blessings of my life, the birth of my first child, Tom, Jr on Christmas eve. At spring break, I swapped my 1965 Volvo with Mom for her Mercury Meteor and Bill Carr and I took off for Greensboro where we picked up my girlfriend, Janet Tweed, a sophomore at WC, for Womens College, as UNCG was called at the time, proceeded to Durham to pick up her brother, Doug, a freshman at Duke who I was meeting for the first time, and his buddy, Steve Cornelison, and proceeded to the Tweed home in Virginia Beach for a little R&R. We were graciously hosted by Janet's mother, Mary, who I was also meeting for the first time. Her father, Mac, was in Viet Nam. Janet and I drove Bill to Newport News where he was going to spend break with a buddy of his from Mars Hill. Driving thru the long tunnel to get to NN, an event, while not as dramatic as the other events described herein, occurred which I feel sure is indelibly etched in the three of our olfactory memories. But, I digress...

In April, Janet and I were married in York, SC by the same justice of the peace who had married Mac and Mary almost 25 years earlier, witnessed by our best man and only other member of the wedding party, Bill Carr. Shortly thereafter, Mac returned from Nam and he and Mary came to Greensboro to see Janet and meet her new husband, then introduced to them only as her boyfriend. When school was out and Janet got home, she told her folks we were married.

Mac Tweed was many things, but practicality was, if not at the top, very close to the top of the list. Dad loaned me his Ford station wagon to bring my new bride and her things to a small apartment I had found in Charlotte for the summer. Mac's mother, Dora Flowe Tweed lived with her son and Mac's younger brother, Dan, and his family in Mint Hill and Mac saw my trip as an opportunity for Dora to hitch a ride to visit them in Va Beach. I don't remember my reaction to being asked to transport an almost 80 year old woman whom I had never met on a trip of some 6-7 hours but who was I, the brand new son-in-law of a Marine colonel and father-to-be of his first grandchild, to raise even the feeblest objection.

So, on a Saturday morning in June, Grandma Dora and I light out for Va Beach, driving Dad's green Ford station wagon up Hiway 49 to Hiway 64 in Siler City, then on toward Raleigh and Va Beach. I guess she knew that I was her grandson-in-law but I'm not sure. I don't remember her then or thereafter as being very talkative; Mac didn't get his loquaciousness from her. I have no idea what we talked about.

Hiway 64 between Siler City and Cary has some long, straight, hilly stretches. We were barreling along, probably going 65, and as we come over a long hill, the next car was 4-500' in front of us. I remember tapping my brake when I crested the hill and saw the car's brake lights come on, but when it signaled that it was going to turn left and actually began its turn into a convenience at the bottom of the hill, I resumed my speed. But then, apparently its driver changed her/his mind and turned back in to the road. I immediately stood on the brakes but quickly realizing I was going to crash into the back of the car driven by the indecisive, foolhardy and reckless driver, I steered onto off to the side of the road.

The shoulder at that point was fairly wide and flat. It had apparently rained overnite and the station wagon started sinking into the muddy shoulder, which quickly narrowed and angled precipitously down into a ravine. I don't remember if cars had seat belts then but if this one did, I'm sure pretty sure that I, and probably Grandma Dora, would not have been enduring what I considered the discomfort which that Commie Lebanese, Ralph Nader (for readers who may not know my political views, I'm being facetious; Ralph Nader is one of my heroes; too bad he hadn't written Unsafe At Any Speed about the Chevy Corvair before brother Bill flipped his in '64 or '65 on the Blue Ridge Parkway) was trying to foist on us freedom loving, red blooded Americans in love with rides. I remember throwing out my right arm to try to stop Grandma Dora from slamming into the windshield, a move invented, according to him, by Frank Constanza on Seinfeld, known as "stopping short" and used to cop a feel of one's female front seat companion. I can assure you that the extension of my arm was for safety purposes only.

When we finally came to a stop, we were axle deep in mud, still parallel to the road, but resting on the down slope such that Grandma Dora was lying against the door. Given the angle of the vehicle, I thought we were going to slide or tumble down into the ravine. Had it not been for the mud, we probably would have. I don't remember Dora saying anything but I asked if and she said she was alright. Thank goodness the station wagon had a bench and not bucket seats. I was able to push open my door against gravity and slide my feet out into the mud. Then I pulled Dora, who was a large lady, up the seat, under the steering wheel and finally out into the mud with me. I walked her across the road to the store, sat her down, got her a coke and called the law. The offending car by then was probably half way to Raleigh.

The hiway patrol came and called a wrecker. I don't know whether they believed my story of how it happened. When the wrecker arrived, the patrolmen had to stop traffic in both directions as it pulled the

wagon out of the mud. Traffic coming from Charlotte was backed up 15-20 cars and at the back of the line was a tan Oldsmobile that looked familiar.

Cousin Mickey Head was getting married in Tarboro that weekend. Mom had already gone down, probably with her sister, Ruth, Mickey's mother, to make the wedding cake. Dad and cousin Pat Hughes (I don't know where Pat's mother, my Aunt Jeanette, Nig for short, another of Mom's sisters, and his brother, Mike were) had left Charlotte after I did, headed for Tarboro, driving Dad's tan Olds. As the traffic inched closer on the open lane, I could see Dad and Pat rubber necking as was everybody else to see what this young whippersnapper standing in the mud had gotten himself into. I think they were about up to the scene when I could see Dad do a double take at, what looked like his Ford station wagon, being pulled onto the road. Then he spotted me. Part of me wanted to disappear into the mud but I realized rather quickly that the probably not much more than \$20 in my pocket wasn't going to cover the wrecker, nor did I know if the wagon was driveable.

Generally, Dad wasn't one to lightly dismiss boneheaded stunts, but when I told him how it happened, he was like the Forgiving Father to me, the Prodigal Son. I guess he paid the wrecker bill. Grandma Dora didn't seem to be afraid to get in the car with me. The wagon seemed to be ok but Dad and Pat followed us to Raleigh to be sure and then they headed east to Tarboro and we to Va Beach.

I guess we arrived at Wakefield Dr a little later than expected and I'm sure I was a bit apprehensive in explaining the reason for the delay. Grandma Dora acted like there was nothing to it, thereby saving me much embarrassment. But still, though he never said anything that would make me think he felt this way, I expect the Colonel was thinking, who the Hell is this skinny kid who's wormed his way into my family by marrying my daughter and then almost killing my mother? Not only did he not embarrass me about what happened, he told me about him at 17 speeding down the River Rd in Marshall, NC in Dora's A-model with his buddy, chasing some girls and having a head on collision with a judge out for a Sunday drive, resulting in minor injuries to the judge's minor children and numerous stitches to his buddy's face, with Mac contemplating jumping in the French Broad River to end it all when the judge's wife yelled at him, "you've killed my family". As it so happened, McDonald Douglas Tweed became the 2nd most influential person in my life, next to Dad, but that's another story.