

A VENT WINDOW VIEW – **PRIVACY**

2011 B. K. Showalter – November

Privacy for a pre-school boy in 1941 was not a big deal, largely because there was little to be had. At our house, the one exception was bath night when Mom placed the galvanized, round bathtub behind our wood-fired kitchen range. In my five-year-old innocence I presumed that she selected that location for warmth. That was true, but some years later I finally understood the real reason was that my mother and older sisters wanted a measure of privacy when bathing.

However, since we kids never had privacy we didn't miss it. Not only was the aforementioned bathtub shared when two would fit, most beds slept at least two and sometimes three kids at once. Things changed over time as my older siblings grew up and moved away. And yet, when I began high school in the early Fifties privacy, other than for bathing, was still difficult to come by. At the same time, I began to exhibit the genetic qualities that make humans the social animals we are. Admittedly, it is difficult for teens to make that jump as they live in a swamp of resentment where the least bit of parental input on behavior, dress, or grades results in crocodile sneers.

Naturally, as a sophomore, I began to seek out feminine approval from teenaged girls who were perfecting their posing and primping in an ongoing effort to snag male attention. Of course, to those of us lacking cars it appeared that girls aimed their Kleenex-stuffed charms toward guys who owned a set of wheels.

I was a sophomore at that point, and that meant increased participation in all kinds of school activities when I could arrange transport. I wanted a car so much my brain was operating much like those of the frog-like fish that climbed out of the ooze several millenniums ago. The first said, "Ah-ha! I'm gonna grow some hair so that I won't chill when the sun goes down. The second said, I'm gonna use my nose to get oxygen from the air instead of from water flowing through my gills. The last one said, "I'm gonna stand up, walk downtown and buy me a car." In case you haven't already figured it out, fish number one was a girl, number two was a nerd, and number three was an early version of the "Fonz."

Good fortune came my way when a longtime pal, Robby, obtained a 1938 Oldsmobile from his aging grandparents. That hefty old sedan lacked the sleek styling of the yellow '47 Chevy convertible owned by another classmate or the new car smell of the 1950 Plymouth driven by one of the other guys. Still, the Olds was our magic carpet for it gave us access to school occasions as well as the weekend nightlife downtown.

More important, the old sedan offered relative privacy for two boys with romantic notions even on the double-dates that became standard practice for Robby and me. With one couple in front, the other in back, the big sedan on a dark night meant a level of privacy unavailable to us elsewhere. And yet, with that privacy and comfort, not one of us risked anything that wouldn't pass muster at a church picnic. By the time I gained the use of Dad's '53 Chevy and began to share the driving with Robby the four of us, I suspect, were beginning to realize that the primary factors in our dating choices were more a matter of convenience and transport than romance.

Robby and I were satisfied. Through observation, we'd decided that romance can be a strain. Too often, it's like sitting on a fused keg of black powder while toasting marshmallows in a campfire. The potential for trouble can make life miserable.

The girls—well, they dumped us soon after this; turns out that they wanted relationships that went a step or two beyond convenience and transportation.