

A VENT WINDOW VIEW, (***STEP HER UP A LITTLE***)

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My mother, born and raised in Northwestern Arkansas, was a teen when her father died. For a few years *her mother* had to support the family. With no real skills or education, the mother began “taking in washing” for women who had more money than time, energy, or inclination.

This happened when *my future mother* was already sharing chores, food and living quarters with a half-dozen siblings. As the eldest girl, she ended up “operating” a washboard alongside her mother. Keep in mind that laundering clothes requires quite a lot of water. That, in the early Thirties, meant someone had to pump it from a well or cistern, then carry it to the site where the washtubs were situated. In some cases, the washtubs were located beneath a shade where, if the laundresses were lucky, a cooling bit of breeze might cool the humid air. Most of the time, however, washtubs were located on a back porch next to the homeowner’s kitchen where a double-boiler full of clean water bubbled and steamed atop a wood-fired cook-stove.

For the uninformed, when the summer sun is overhead, mid-day temperatures in Arkansas compare to those found in African jungles or near the Amazon River during summers in Brazil. In the 1930’s when electricity was often not available in rural Arkansas, “fans” were hand-powered bits of cardboard fastened to a stick. It was a kind of slave labor situation, one that influenced my mother’s decision to say yes to the marriage proposal offered by my father, a widower with seven kids at home.

Obviously, this was hardly an ideal circumstance for a young bride to weather, but as time passed and my father switched from driving a truck to selling real estate her life improved. Then, in the late Thirties, Dad acquired a farm and economic circumstances improved for the family. This was a good thing for my mother as she had two children of her own by 1940.

As his new business prospered Dad soon recognized the need for a decent vehicle to transport his clients as well as his expanding family. This led to his acquisition of a brand new 1941 Ford 2-door sedan just a few months prior to the beginning of WW II. Shortly after the Ford was “broken in,” he and Mom made plans to visit her relatives in Arkansas. To keep costs at a minimum Dad decided to teach her how to drive so that they could avoid any motel or hotel stops.

He had always taught the older kids how to drive by taking them to a section of US 275 where the concrete highway had more curves than a shady lady. Curbs designed to shunt rainwater off the pavement lined both edges of the road; sadly, the curbs also tended to “shunt” automobiles off the highway if an unwary driver failed to use care.

My mother steered the Ford over hill and dale with increasing confidence, following my father’s urgings to “***Step her up a little, step her up a little.***” Then she encountered a section of Rte. 275 that contained several “S” curves as well as curbed edges on both sides of the highway. That was her “Waterloo” for on the second of the series of curves the Ford’s right front wheel touched the highway’s concrete curbing. The car promptly took flight across a shallow grader-ditch at approximately 45 mph where it then proceeded to rip out a block-long stretch of barbed wire fencing.

Damage to the car was limited to a few scratches and a broken headlight, (probably the front end needed an alignment, too.) but my father managed to drive the car home after assisting the farmer who owned the fence with some immediate repairs.

Years later Mom admitted to having a serious case of “The Shakes” for several weeks afterward, but she had learned a valuable lesson. She knew now that it might be wise for her to question her co-pilot’s urgings to “***Step her up a little!***”