Obsession hits the road

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I am married to a man whose goal in life is to own every car he coveted—and couldn't afford—in high school. And because Ray was in high school during the 1950s, the same cars he coveted then currently cost a still unaffordable ten times their original prices. But that doesn't deter Ray. With him it's not the *having*, but the *getting*, so he doesn't buy these cars for keeps—only long enough to say he's owned them.

Our garage has housed an assortment of classic autos ranging from a 1932 Ford three-window coupe to a 1958 Jaguar drop-head coupe with cute little jump seats. The boys reaped the benefits of Ray's infatuation with cars. Ray, Jr. was the envy of his classmates when, during the mid-'70s, he drove a tomato-colored 1957 Chevy convertible to school. His younger brother later became the proud driver of a cherry red 1967 Camaro convertible.

You must be wondering what wonderful car I drove. The Jaguar? Nope, I never learned to shift for myself. I wound up driving vehicles which were the dregs of Detroit, like the old black-and-rust Mercury Comet which Ray bought, not because it was a classic but because he thought it was both cute and cheap. Every time I shut a door in that car, not-so-lovingly dubbed "The Vomit," the passenger side window fell down.

I remember sitting in a stalled 1951 dark green Nash Rambler convertible at the intersection of 15th and Iowa with impatient college kids behind me yelling, "Call a wrecker!" and "Get that piece of junk off the road!" And I well remember driving the low-slung white 1970 Chevy Camaro which acquired me my first (and so far only) speeding ticket. Ray, Jr., who set the Guinness Book record for speeding tickets during his late high school and early college years, sympathized with me: "It's the sporty car, Mom, I never got a speeding ticket when I was driving Grammy's old lady car."

An elderly couple once followed me all the way home, fearful that the back wheel was going to fall off the 1956 Chevrolet convertible I was driving. I allayed their concern by telling them that although the wheel was bent, making it appear to wobble, it was firmly attached to the axle.

Ray loved a turquoise-and-white 1959 El Camino he owned briefly, just long enough to buy a vanity plate that said "RAYS EL." It will upset classic auto purists to know that he changed its color to turquoise from the original hot pink. But the nastiest-colored car we ever owned was a 1955 Studebaker Speedster, precursor of the Hawk. Green and yellow were "in" colors then, but these particular hues were atrocious! It had mustard-yellow leather seats, fog lights and a tachometer that I kept confusing with the speedometer.

The only time I was successful in talking Ray out of purchasing a car was about 25 years ago when I convinced him that it was silly to buy a bargain-priced 1936 Cord with hide-away headlights and suicide doors. Sure, we would be rich if we had it to sell

now, but I'm not accepting the blame. It was really dumb of Ray to let me talk him out of it! That makes it his fault, don't you agree?

A car we owned and wish we'd kept was a yellow-and-white 1957 Ford retractable hard-top convertible with a Continental kit. It would be worth a fortune today. We traded that car off for a brand new black 1960 Falcon which we kept a mere six months. "I'm not going to own any car that a VW beetle can pass when I'm trying not to let it." Ray said in disgust.

The car Ray kept the longest was his beloved "Tarbaby," a shiny black 1967 Firebird. Driving home on K-10 one day, Tarbaby was passed (because Ray allowed it) by a VW Rabbit whose driver honked and waved wildly. Ray's vanity plate proclaimed TARBABY, the VW's said WABBIT! I am still shocked that Ray parted with Tarbaby. I thought he planned to be buried in it.