

Young Paden Becomes a Man

I've been spending a good deal of time with my older brother Holden lately. His wife recently passed and I've been trying to be a good kid brother and cheer him up when I can. Invariably, our conversations always cycle back to our glory days... "*Workin' on mysteries without any clues....*" That's how Bob Seger put it.

My brother Holden was the looker. He had the girls and a two-door 1951 Chevy Deluxe, complete with wheel skirts. I could tell you I was never jealous of him, but I don't like to lie. On the other hand, I was just Cole and Holden's little brother. If you bought gas at Bill's 66 Station you knew me as the kid that squeegeed your windshield. I just never put much stock in socializing. By the time I had my driver's license I had fallen well short of my two older brothers expectations when it came to the girls. Kids nowadays are surely more knowledgeable about the opposite sex than we were in the sixties. Most of us didn't have clue. As for me, the term "copping a feel" was considered a "score". My brothers were always trying to bring me up to speed. I usually resisted.

One chilly Friday night Holden asked me to go on a double-date with him. His steady, Cheryl Parker, was spending the night with a friend and he needed a wing-man. Cheryl wouldn't go out unless he could come up with somebody to hang out with her friend. Holden was in this for himself. I knew it. He wanted somebody to drive so he and Cheryl could sit in the back seat, suck face and squeeze each other's protuberances. I needed some coaxing. Then Holden explained that her friend was Carol Ann Watson. **THE Carol Ann Watson...**



Carol Ann was the Sergeant-At-Arms of the Pep Club and the epitome of womanhood. There's a TV personality nowadays that reminds me of Carol Ann, Jenny McCarthy, if you know who that is; a wonderfully built young lady with the ever-necessary long straight blonde hair. She was also a pretty salty personality. Loud and funny but very lady-like. Upper classmen would crawl bare-bellied over broken glass the length of the football field to stand next to Carol Ann. I didn't know what to say. I

was sophomore, she was junior. An older woman.... *Sure.*

There was a football game that night and the girls had to do their thing with the Pep Club. Holden and I sat behind the Pep section in the bleachers and endured the game. I was increasingly nervous. Watching Carol Ann in her little pleated skirt made my palms sweat. My pulse was elevated and I was a nervous wreck. I soaked my shirt and it was a winter evening..

After the game we all hopped in the car and tried to decide what to do. Cheryl and Holden could care less. They had retired to the back seat and hung up the "Do Not Disturb" sign. Carol Ann piped up and wanted to go the "power plant". scooted over next to me as I drove. I would have driven to Hong Kong if she asked...

The power plant was an old abandoned generating station that was next to a cemetery. While there were plenty of hoaky horror stories about albinos with hooks for hands surrounding the place, we knew it well. It was located close to the house and I had grown up crawling all over that place. The worst thing that could happen there was to get cut on a broken beer bottle. Carol was excited that I knew the place well. She *really* wanted somebody to show her the inside, especially the top catwalk. It was probably three stories straight down. I knew exactly how to get there...away we went. As we left the paved road the only light was from the old Chevy headlights. Carol scooted closer. When I pulled up to the old gate and killed the car, she scooted closer yet. *I could get used to this dating stuff....*

We left my brother and his girlfriend in the car to steam up the windows. I was becoming increasingly at ease with Carol. She was a lot of fun and had me laughing and chatting as we pulled open the doors that supposedly kept kids out of the place. I showed her the way up the stairs to the cat-walk. There was one steel grate that was missing. It required jumping 4' or so over a chasm. I jumped first and egged Carol on to jump. She made it like a champ. Landed right in my arms...I was ready to propose.

The cat-walk was everything she had hoped for. While there were no lights inside, the building had these huge two-story windows that let in what little light the nearby highway luminaires shed. It was hypnotic. I had been there a hundred times, but never with a beautiful woman. Carol was elated. She was inside the old power plant! She didn't know anybody that had ever really been in there. She hung on my arm tight. I was truly in uncharted waters. Steady at the helm, Paden, steady....

We decide to get back to the car. Carol wondered if there was a different way down. She didn't like having to jump the abyss. I told her there was another way down, but it involved negotiating a ladder. She was in for the ladder. Great, follow me.

This cat-walk ladder was similar to a fire escape. It was counter-weighted and descended with body weight, to within about six feet of the floor. I explained to Carol that I would get on it first, it would drop, and then she could climb on and down. I would be on the floor to help her at that last drop.

It worked great. I was on the floor and she was dangling her saddle oxfords for me to grab. As I

grabbed her legs, she let go. Her feet were on my shoulders for a second, but they slipped. It went dark. My hands slipped up her skirt and I had a death grip on her butt cheeks. With one leg on one side of my head and one leg on the other, she settled down gracefully straddling my face. I remember she had her hands flat against the top of my head, underneath her Pep Club skirt...It was pitch black and I didn't care. My face was pressed hard against some of the finest real estate in the world. My horizons were expanding, quickly. Just like the lady she was, she leaned over and whispered in my ear, "Paden, are you through?"

I somehow gulped enough oxygen to get her wrestled down in front of me. As we stood face to face she hiked her skirt up and straightened her lollipop shorts, "Sorry, not very ladylike..." I was still mute. I might have thought there was no blood in my skull, but my face was beet red. I couldn't look her in the eyes.

"Oh my God, you're embarrassed! I'm so sorry, Paden!" She hugged me and kept apologizing. I finally convinced her I was ok and we headed back to the car.

We got back to car. Carol winked at me and announced "*she had made Holden's kid brother a man..*" Holden and his girl friend looked shocked. As she scooted over toward me in the car seat she winked again and held her 'shoosh' finger against her pursed lips. My brother punched my shoulder from the back seat. I never would tell Holden what had transpired. A gentleman *never* tells..

We had to make a round to the drive-in. After a game night everybody was hanging out. Several times Carol kept asking me if I was ok. She hung on my arm. She even told a bunch of varsity jocks they should take lessons from Paden. He knows how to show a girl a good time! What an evening to remember. Sometimes your brightest day might come in the middle of the night.

After that there were guys from school pulling in the gas station. Instead of "check the oil, weinie!" it was "hey Paden, what's up?" There were girls at school that wouldn't give me the time of day. After that they were presenting their smiling selves in front of me with a giggly "hi, Paden" in the halls.

Carol would always pinch my butt in the halls, or bump me with her hip. She was really a funny, good-hearted kid. Somehow, she had shattered a proverbial bottle of Champaign across the bow of the USS Paden. I sailed after launch into the seas of life.

Blushing and innocently showing a cute girl around an old power plant had somehow elevated my social game. My brothers were proud of 'the kid'. People at school knew my name. I had girl friends.

It just goes to show you that *behind every successful man is a woman*. Thanks Carol, wherever you are. God bless you.