

Dad's Henry J

Dad and we three boys
rode to the farm and back
in our 1950 Henry J
created by Kaiser-Frazer
during their waning years.

It had three speeds
more or less forward.
Reverse required expertise
lest the gearshift lever
do a free-fall all the way
over to the left.

Dad's black Henry J
had tail fins for sport,
two doors, and a sloping
but hatchless back.
Holes gradually rusted
through the floorboard.
It was a piece of junk
that somehow got loved
and joked about
and used every day.

Its oil pressure light
was never not on unless
the ignition was turned off,
but the engine forgave us
since we gave it oil every
two or three days.

Back seat sitting was
decidedly disergonomic,
but two of us sat there.
We might be snuggling
against a chain saw
or some fertilizer sacks
or old combine parts.

We three boys devised
subterfuges to achieve
riding in the front seat.
We'd hang back so as
to be the last one in.
But Dad was onto us--
if we dallied, he'd tell us
to come on and get in.

We'd spend hot hours
cutting weeds, Dad with
tractor (lucky cuss got
to sit down all day) and
we with reluctant hoes
ritually file-sharpened

each humid morning.
After a too-long day
we'd "knock off"
(Dad's phrase) and
maneuver for our seat
in the Henry J
by ever so politely
letting others go first.

Four cylinders,
sometimes only three,
pulled four weedkillers
back into town
where we lived.
A rain might splot
the windshield's dust
and be smeared around
by the one wiper
that had a blade.

Dad would never stop
at that last stop sign
before our house--
said it wasn't worth
the extra wear and tear
on the Henry J.

Out we would pile,
wary of hidden saw blades,
and the Henry J's doors
would close with a clunk
plus extra little sounds.

Dad bought our Henry J
for \$200 from a local man
aptly nicknamed Bargain Art,
and after about fifteen years
of his nursing the car with oil,
makeshift parts, and patience,
it completely quit.

Then for another ten years
it stood in our farmyard,
tombstone to itself,
until Dad finally sold it
to a collector while
preparing himself
to die.