

## 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.