

A DIARY OF A DE SOTO

By Fred Hobbs

First, an apology. I can't write and I can't speak. So years ago, I asked my human to keep track of some of the highlights of my time on earth. If I could speak, I would offer these reflections of a life well lived.

My adventure started in Detroit, Michigan in late 1928, but I didn't encounter this particular group of humans until 1946 in Colorado.

My name was chosen to honor the great 16th century Spanish explorer, Hernando DeSoto, who discovered the Mississippi River. My family included cousins Chrysler, Plymouth and Dodge. We all started as only children, but were adopted by a man named Walter P. Chrysler. I was sort of the middle child, sturdy, dependable but somewhat sporty with my wooden spoke wheels and handsome design. My popularity was legend in those early days. Folks liked my 55-horsepower six-cylinder engine and marveled at a brand new feature in the day...hydraulic brakes. And, I had an attraction loved especially by young human couples...a rumble seat. A comfy ride to cuddle up close and enjoy the wind in the human girl's hair.

Which brings me to the time just after the end of World War II. I was sitting in a lot in Denver full of newer but less deserving options like Fords and Chevys. And, an ex-GI named Bob chose me!

He was the oldest brother in the family. He had three other brothers, two of whom I eventually served. Bob had a girlfriend named Betty. I think my charm and dependability had something to do with the fact that the couple soon became engaged and actually gave me the honor of transporting them to Estes Park, Colorado on their honeymoon. A few months later, it became evident that despite my admirable attributes, the couple was going to need more riding room. They were expecting a baby.

Enter brother number two...Sam. He, too, was about to get married to his girlfriend. Sam became my new human after a spirited economic transaction with Bob. He and new bride, Shirley, used my services for about two years while Sam was studying at the University of Colorado in Boulder.

By then, I was regrettably in the twilight of my years. But..wait! One more brother was in line for me to serve. Fred, a senior in high school, was six years younger than Sam. Being generous brothers, Bob and Sam negotiated an arrangement to give me to Fred.

I had a very good time hauling high schoolers to football games (three in front, three in the rumble seat and sometimes two on the running boards.) When he entered CU, Fred took me back to Boulder. That's when I became an important part of Colorado history. Two nights before the official opening of the Denver-Boulder Turnpike, January 19, 1952, when no one was looking, I carried Fred and two college buddies about a half-mile down the highway. Undoubtedly, it was the first non-construction related trip on the new highway.

Because of my age and Fred's meager budget for operating me, I rested a lot. Unfortunately, rest eventually turned to rust.

When Fred was drafted into the Army, he gave me to a friend. Two months later, I collided with a tree, which ended my long career on the road, winding up in a junkyard with some pretty disreputable company.

I've never been the same since.