

It took a Pandemic

My name is Abbie (Humbert)Goldbach and my dad's name is Tony Humbert. My dad is a man of many passions or more like obsessions. One of them near and dear to his heart being his Porsche 356C. Ever since I was a kid, I remember the Porsche always being there under cover. It has been in and out of the garages and barn. It has always been a part of our lives even if it was that thing that just took up space in the corner. Over the years I've heard bits and pieces of stories surrounding the cars history from dad and others. However I didn't know the whole story. When ever any of us kids would ask dad, why he didn't finish his car? We would get that "because of all of you kids" look and then a smile. I recently sat dad down and made him tell me the whole story, and here's how that went...

The story starts in 1987 with my dad ready to finish college at The University of Cincinnati. He and his sister shared the second floor of a house while both were working and going to school. The neighborhood they lived in at the time was anything but nice to put it kindly. A bit rough but affordable for students. While driving home from school one afternoon, dad stopped his car in front of a house in his neighborhood. There in a front yard sat a Porsche 356. The first one he had ever seen. It was a little rough around the edges but seemed to be all there. Sitting in front of the car was a large sign that read "NOT FOR SALE. DON'T ASK. GET OFF MY PROPERTY". From that day on, that car was in his head. He had been bitten by the bug.

It's now December 1987 and time for that one event that every good man encounters, marriage! He met my mom in college and shortly there after they were married and moving to Fairfax Virginia. Dad transferred to the Westinghouse Engineering Service Office in Columbia Maryland and my mom worked in the DC area. While getting to know the new group of Westinghouse people, Dad met a man named Bob Wroble in his office. Bob had just bought an early 911. He intended to chop it up, install flares, paint it with a wild gold paint job, and have fun with it. He did just that!

Dad told Bob about the 356 in the front yard of an old broken down house in Cincinnati. Dad said to Bob that he wanted to find someone that had one so that he could just go see one up close. Dad wanted to know more about that car. Bob just by chance and for no apparent reason had a list of owners names, numbers and their cars published by the 356 Registry club in 1988. Bob suggested that Dad find someone on the list in the area and ask. Dad started making phone calls to people in the Washington / Baltimore area. After about 5 calls to people that had no interest in dad coming to see their cars. "Who's this nut calling me" Right, I can only imagine. The sixth name on the list was an older gentleman named John Kummell. John surprisingly said "Sure, come on up!". John invited dad into his home with open arms. They seemed to click immediately. Both having engineering backgrounds. Neither one them mentioned cars for several hours. They sat in his living room just talking about stuff. Finally after several hours John told

dad to follow him. John said, you came here to see something. When dad walked into the garage, his eyes lit up like a kid at Christmas. He was looking at four old Porsche's. Mr. Kummell had an older 911 that he drove daily, a 1959 convertible D, a 1964 C Coupe European and a pile of parts that use to be a 1964 C coupe sitting in the back of the garage. John told dad that he dismantled the green C in 1976 intending to restore it. However health issues seemed to bring the project to a stop. That's how the car sat for many years while being used by his grandson as a toy box. They spent several more hours crawling all over and under the cars. The more dad looked at the cars, the more he wanted one. Dad got himself through college with two VW bugs. One of them he turned into a rail buggy. He said that may have set his mood for the next air cooled project. As they continued talking, dad noticed that John said, "if you wanted the C coupe I have all of the pieces". A day later, the car was on a trailer and headed to the Westinghouse shop with my dad smiling ear to ear. I've seen those pictures of dad and his smile.

Keep in mind, mom and dad are in a strange city, with no family or friends. My mom was working nights and dad is working days. Dad had lots of time to dedicate to his new obsession. When he gets his mind set on something like this, he's at it night and day. For the next year dad scraped, degreased, sandblasted, replatted and painted every part that came with the car. Boxes and boxes of unfamiliar parts.

Dad started smiling and shaking his head before telling me about the next event. At about this stage of his project dad said he joined the 356 Registry. He signed up to go to the east coast holiday event. Dad was young and broke when he headed off to Michigan for the multi day event in moms brand new Ford Festiva. So excited to go, but broke. So who would notice if he slept in the car instead of getting a room at the hotel. He found a corner of a huge parking lot away from the hotel and crashed for the night. As he opened his eyes the next morning he found himself in the center of a crowd assembling for the 356 parade that morning. He had to climb out of the car just feet from dozens of fellow Porsche owners that had been staring into the car at him for a while. He said that he had slept in his new black 356 Registry event jacket and event pin on the front of his shirt. It was really embarrassing climbing out of the car in front of all of his peers. He assumed that someone was going to start a petition to have him removed from the ranks. Funny now.

Next order of business was the body of the car. Dad said that he built a rack to hold the shell of the car while he worked on the body. Many weeks were spent on the body top and bottom. Finally it was time to decide on the color of paint. He said that he was leaning towards pale yellow but hadn't decided.

Let me quickly give you some details of the weeks leading up to this point. My mom went outside to go to work late one evening. Someone had hooked his bumper onto moms new Ford Festiva and was dragging her car through the parking lot right past her. He was trying to leave the scene but couldn't. After much trouble with the man's insurance, (his third accident in two weeks) the car was taken to a body shop for repairs. On the day that the car was to be picked back up, they were told that a trim part was back ordered. They were told when it came in they could bring the car back to have

it installed. So they picked up mom's car and went to dinner. Upon return to the apartment complex parking lot after dinner, someone had hit the front of my dad's Nissan truck. They pushed two cars sideways with dad's truck. There was quite a bit of damage. And then they just took off. Dad decided to fix the truck himself and give it a new paint job. How about shiny black paint he thought. That would look good! Meanwhile, the part came in for my mom's Ford Festiva and they returned the car to the shop to complete the repairs. A few hours later the car was completed and sitting in the parking lot of the body shop. Someone went flying through the intersection and hit my mom's Festiva again doing extensive damage. And they also just took off! What a string of bad luck right? Who would have known that this was just the beginning of a year from hell.

Okay, jumping back to the day the Porsche was painted. Mom and dad abruptly decided to move back to Cincinnati. Enough of the craziness they thought. They packed and headed home about six days after the Porsche was painted. Yes, dad had black paint left over from his truck repair so presto the Porsche was now black. The Porsche had just been painted and no seals or weather stripping was in place. Dad was afraid to put the hood on the car, having it rattle and scratch the new paint while being trailered back to Cincinnati. What he did instead was place a piece of foam on the roof of his little truck, and placed the hood on the top of the truck roof. He tied the hood down with wire while he towed the car behind. He made it all the way to Columbus Ohio on I-70. In a heavy construction area, a delivery truck next to him swerved and hit the barriers and a bunch of construction debris on the road. A piece of pipe flew up, hit and broke dad's truck windshield and cut the cable holding the hood onto the top of his truck. The hood flew off, hit the front of the Porsche, and ended up in the next lane. That's when an 18 wheeler ran over it smashing it flat. How much more bad luck can he have.

That night at home in Cincinnati, He stared at his two year long project smashed. The hood wasn't the only thing that got crushed that day. Dad started making phone calls to body shops that could repair the damage. The Porsche dealership in Cincinnati was somehow associated with a nearby Volkswagen dealership in Norwood. This was where all of the body work was done for both dealerships. The guy that ran their body shop was a good body man. To their shop it went. Dad said that he couldn't do all of the work again himself.

While waiting on the repairs and checking in on the progress, mom and dad bought their first house. Dad went to work on fixing up a few things before they moved in. Apparently everyone thought he was nuts because he insisted on fixing up the garage before anything else in the house. He even installed a "Porsche Parking Only" sign. Mom and dad moved in on a Friday night. They woke up the next morning to find that someone had driven down the road at a very high speed, heaved a bowling ball out of their car, hitting the Ford Festiva (again) on the rear hatch. It bent every part on the car from front to back. (and of course, they just took off) Dad was fit to be tied by now. This time the Festiva was done. So dad and grandpa found a 67 mustang with only 21,000 miles. A white coupe with an inline 6 cylinder, three on the floor and a teal interior. Beautiful. The inside looked like it had never been sat in. Still owned by the original owner, An 84 yr old lady in grandpa's church that had lost her sight due to

diabetes. The car had sat for about ten years in a garage. I know, sounds like one of those stories but he Really did. So that was mom's new ride. How cool!

Within days the Porsche repairs were supposed to be finished and it would be ready for pickup. Dad was out of town on a job the Friday it was to be repainted. The moment he got back in town, he made a bee line to the Volkswagen dealership to see his finished car. Dad parked in front of the dealership and walking around the side towards the body shop. Low and behold somebody had broken into the body shop, stolen all of their tools and set the building on fire. The entire building burnt to the ground with dad's beloved porsche inside. How can this keep happening to him. The only reason his porsche was saved is because it didn't go to paint that Friday. The fire was set in the paint department and nothing was left on that end of the building. The car got scorched and damaged from the burning roof coming down all around it, but it was going to be saved once again. The dealership moved their operations to a temporary location to complete all the repairs and finish the work. Finally dad's porsche was repaired and repainted for the third time and it made its journey to the finished garage that had been patiently waiting for it.

Next, I happened! Yes me.

A brand new bundle of joy for mom and dad to spend their money and every waken moment on. There were four of us little monsters within five years. You could say they had their hands full to say the least. By the way, while I sat in my car seat, mom pregnant with my brother (number two) it happened again. Someone not paying attention to stopped traffic smashed into the rear of the mustang. It was a total loss and a trip for all in an ambulance to the hospital.

Dad always talked about wanting to finish the porsche. I think that he was afraid to go near it and awaken the bad luck demons. The car sat for about 28 years while we four grew and stepped out into the world. Then he seemed to get the bug again.

In 2018 dad took the car to a interior restoration guy named Rick Devin in Cincinnati. He was well know for his work on concourse level cars and other 356's. Finally he had the interior and glass installed after sitting in boxes for more than 30 years. His hope was that seeing the cars interior completed would inspire him to finish the car. However, it sat for another two years while he enjoyed his new obsessions, grand babies.

It took a pandemic.

It's now 2020 and we're knee deep into the coronavirus pandemic. Everyone seemed to have time on their hands including dad. That just never happens. He dove back in! Dad has been working on the car night and day. I have heard him mumbling several time, " I've owned the car for 32 year. I want to hear it run" He keeps talking about all of the items that were new or have zero miles on them yet needed to be replace again after sitting to long.

Dad may sound more like an old man now. Complaining under his breath about how expensive everything is today. You know the old "when I was a kid a coke cost a nickel" thing. However when he finally turned the engine over for the first time in 44 years, he had the same look and smile on his face that I saw in the photos of him the day he loaded it on a trailer at John's house 32 years ago.

