

MINING CAMP FOLLIES

This is a hilarious TRUE story written by my uncle, and takes place in the copper town of Magna, Utah back in the 1940's. It has been lightly edited to include some details remembered by my mother, and lightly edited for grammar. Most of the story has been left as it was originally written so as to preserve its flavor.

SONABITCHEN CHEVROLET ©

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We had a 1936 Chevrolet two-door sedan that Dad was trying to nurse through the war years. I swear that that car had its own personality, including some traits such as a stubborn cantankerousness. At other times it had a sneaky playfulness.

One day after a cleaning session around the yard in the early springtime, my father recruited a couple of my friends, my sister, and myself to help carry off the trash. We loaded boxes of trash into the old Chevy's trunk and back seats. We all clambered into the car and pointed her prow towards the dumps.

The dumps were located north of Magna on a flat, sagebrush covered plain next to the tailings pond. The garbage trucks dumped their weekly pickup here, and everyone hauled in their unwanted trash. As we began our journey down the dump road, which was usually a dusty dirt trail—we quickly noticed that things were, however, not the same. There were some pretty good ponds and mud puddles in the middle of the road. Not to worry though, my old man deftly swung the wheel and skirted the treacherous quagmires. He drove on to the sagebrush covered flatland and avoided a sure bogging down.

After unloading our trash on the dump, dad began the homeward journey. After he had avoided a very mucky road hazard, one of my friends made the mistake of praising my father's evasive action.

“Hell, son, this car is half mule and half jeep.”

“Really?”

“Yep. If I put her in low gear, she would climb that tailings pond dike.”

“Wow!”

“Watch this—“

Dad veered on to the sagebrush-covered clay flatland and sure enough the old Chevy plowed through like a jeep, mowing down the sagebrush. All went well until about a quarter mile from the road, the Chevy slued sideways and spun to a stop in a big slippery mud puddle.

Dad mumbled something about this not being a problem and put the car in reverse. The Chevy made a gallant effort but went only about a foot and a half before it bogged down again. Dad was wise enough to know that you don't just spin your wheels or you will just sink deeper.

“Everybody out,” he ordered. “Grab sagebrush and shove it under the wheels.”

Dad was at his best—delegating his way out of a problem. He was getting us to help him provide traction for those slipping tires. “OK, now you boys get in back and push,” he ordered.

Dad opened the drivers' door, reached inside and pulled the hand-throttle open a bit.

Hell! It worked good. A bit too good, however. The Chevy lurched forward on to the sagebrush—dumping we three pushers onto our faces, luckily on fairly dry soil. Luckily, I say because Dad did not fair so well. He found himself face down in the center of the mud puddle. He sat up and uttered a few words that we had never heard before, and I'm sure we weren't supposed to remember either. The sight of him covered with mud sent the three of us into peals of laughter. Dad was just beginning to say something about our disrespect when he realized that the Chevy was bouncing across the sagebrush plain on its own volition, and heading for a power station about a half-a-mile away. Dad was up like a shot and was soon in full pursuit of the old Chevy. It looked like the car was mocking him the way it flapped its sprung door open and nearly closed.

Dad was amazing. We kids were dually impressed as he sprinted after the wayward automobile. Then with a graceful leap worthy of a male ballet dancer, he mounted the running board of the vehicle. He reached inside and grasped the steering wheel. Then in a far less graceful manner, he dismounted. The combination of slippery clay-mud on his feet and running board and the bouncing vehicle left him rolling head over heels through the sagebrush. He had accomplished one thing however, as he fell he pulled the steering wheel so that now the car was going around in a big circle. To add to his chagrin, all three of us were rolling on the ground in mirth. Loud guffaws were the reward Dad got for his efforts to corral the maverick Chevy.

Dad got up, brushed himself off as best he could, what with clods of mud covering his frontal area. He surveyed our wild mirthful abandon and muttered something about our parentage. But it wasn't complimentary at all. Then he yelled at the smirking Chevrolet—most of which is unprintable except for “Sonabitchin Chevrolet.”

Dad ran after the circling car like an Indian chasing a circling wagon. Again Dad leapt onto the slippery running board just in time to be bashed by the swinging door and sent tumbling through the sagebrush again. Hells Bells! This was more fund than a Three Stooges comedy, and tears were running down our cheeks. My stomach hurt from laughter. Dad questioned our parentage again. We really couldn't see why he saw no humor in his predicament. Off he went again in pursuit of the playful Chevrolet. I swear, each time it circled towards us, there was a grin on that battered grill. Dad, after a couple more sidesplitting tumbles finally was able to insinuate himself between the doorpost and the wildly flaying door. He fell into the seat and pushed in the throttle lever. Then mustering all the dignity that he could, the old man drove over to where the three of us were still rolling around in unbridled laughter. He pulled himself upright in the seat and said, “Would you kids get in the damn car?!”

One look at his mud caked face however, sent us into peals of unrestrained laughter again. After a short stern lecture about how he could have been crushed under the marauding wheels of this two-ton monster of a car, Dad finally had us fairly sober and into the car.

The ride home was rather quiet and chilly. It was punctuated however, by a snicker that slipped out now and then by one or the other of us kids. These relapses were met by an icy stare from the old man.

We finally pulled into our yard. Mom was hanging out clothes. When she saw the muddy apparition that was my father climb out of the car she shrieked—“What in the world happened to you?”

The first words to come out of the old man's mouth were “Sonabitchin Chevrolet!”

I swear that that car was grinning at him.