

Lucky

Allen Forrest

It was May, 1975. They were heading down the coast road in Oregon, both tall with blond hair down to their shoulders, they could have been brothers, but weren't. Rocko watched them from the back seat bickering like an old married couple. The one driving, Ron, was a grunge dresser long before it became fashion. He's a sly fun-loving smile girls really went for. They'd gush, "Oh, he's so cute!" The other, Tim, wore much the same attire, but his demeanor was more sincere, less self-assured, a loving quality that came from knowing what it was like to be unloved. Rocko, visiting from Canada, had previously lived in Seattle and grown up with them. His hair was also long, tousled dark brown. Wearing wire rim aviators, a faded jean jacket, with a red rucksack nearby he looked the part of a young vagabond. For these young men hitch-hiking and spur of the moment tripping were a part of their world. Like Kerouac's Dharma Bums seeking spiritual enlightenment on the road, these travelers searched for their own existential adventures—and they were about to have one.

"Jesus, why do we have to always have to push?" Ron was bitching about the Corvair they were in, which Tim had purchased for a wrinkled five-dollar bill and a six pack of Oly. With a dead battery and no ignition, the car's wires had to be crossed to start it and Tim was always the one who did the starting while the other two provided the muscle. Ron waited for him to answer, but Tim just smiled.

"Hey Rock you want a beer?" said Tim. Rocko nodded. Tim passed one over then started rolling a joint. All of a sudden, they heard a loud thudding noise coming from the rear driver's side. The car wobbled a bit. "Fuck, we got a flat!" said Ron pulling over, "Keep the engine running and you drive for a change, besides you can't roll for shit." He got out and went back to look at the tire. Tim and Rocko joined him. They saw it was tilted at a slight angle. "It's not flat, must be loose lug nuts. Gotta tire wrench in this thing?" asked Rocko. Tim opened the front trunk, dug around, found one. Ron went and sat in the passenger seat to roll some joints for the trip south, eventually Mexico. Tim stood behind Rocko watching him tighten the wheel and then it happened.

A Highway State Patrol car pulled in behind them. Tim yelled out, "It's State!", tossing his bottle of beer into the back seat while Ron scrambled to hide the bag of weed. Rocko stood up, his jaw dropped. They were caught, time seemed to freeze. This is what the State Trooper had to have seen: three young men with long hair, an out of state license plate, one of them yell out a warning and throw a full bottle of beer in the car, another in the front seat trying to conceal something, and the third member with a shocked expression. Back then young men with long hair were frequently classified as hippie troublemakers and could easily get hassled by the police.

Rocko's brain cells began to thaw. He decided there was only one thing to do, act as though nothing was wrong, outside of the tire that is. He crouched back down and started torquing the nuts. The Trooper got out of his car, walked to the front bumper. "What seems to be the trouble?" he inquired. Rocko took the initiative and replied in the most casual good-natured voice he could muster, "Thought it was flat, but it's just loose lug nuts. We sure are lucky." The Trooper stood there scrutinizing them. His neatly pressed uniform, big shiny badge, gun and holster gave off an ominous presence. They held their breath and all thought the same thing: this

could be bad, real bad. Besides being busted for drugs, there was the alcohol, since they were under 21, and to top it off—shoplifting, they'd just pilfered three top sirloin steaks from a small grocery store a few miles north. The owner could have spotted this by now and phoned the cops reporting the meat-eating outlaws.

The Trooper gave no indication of what he was thinking or going to do. He didn't move, just kept looking them over. Then he nodded and said, "Okay, just checking." Turning around he headed back got in his patrol car pulled a U-turn and left. The boys exchanged a glance with one another. Rocko finished securing the tire, put the wrench away and climbed in the backseat. Ron resumed his spot at the wheel. "Thought you wanted me to drive?" said Tim. No reply. Ron hit the gas pedal. Gravel and dirt kicked up from the tires. The little Corvair screeched away from the shoulder and sped up the highway as fast as it would go.

After driving for a while, and double checking in the rear-view mirror, Ron said, "God damn! DAMN, that was close!" He smiled his sly one, but this time it contained an enormous amount of relief. Rocko was amazed and couldn't help wonder why the Trooper didn't walk up to their car, why he kept his distance, he had to have known something was up? If it was concern about being outnumbered, he could have called for backup. Damn was right and way too close. Tim, watching his companions' reactions, pulled an ironic grin. He opened another beer, lit up a joint and said, "Boys, this calls for a celebration."

Author Bio:

Allen Forrest is a writer, graphic artist, and filmmaker, the winner of the 2015 Leslie Jacoby Honor for Art at San Jose State University's Reed Magazine. His Bel Red landscape paintings are part of the Bellevue College Foundation's permanent art collection in Bellevue, WA.