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A Passion For Racing-Some Things Money Can't Buy

\$\$\$\$\$ Season Tickets Nebraska Raceway Park
\$\$\$\$\$ 10 Road Trips(8-WDRL, 1-WoO SLM, 1-Extreme)
\$\$\$\$\$ Gas
\$\$\$\$\$ Subscriptions to 4 racing papers and magazines
\$\$\$\$\$ Concessions/Road Trip Munchies

\$\$\$\$\$ + countless internet hours and phone calls replaying races and exchanging rumors.

Priceless-Sharing my passion for racing with my son Matt.

Yes, the 'Priceless' credit card commercials are syrupy sweet, and without question cliches. They work though because they do remind us of special times shared with family and friends. Of course big city ad agencies would never consider using racing as a setting for a commercial-well, maybe Nextel Cup, but certainly nothing as middle class America as dirt track racing. Or, maybe they would. There is a beer commercial that begins with hobby stock racing on a short track. On TV or not, I, and thousands of others like you and me have lived their own version of the commercial, and have racing memories that will last a lifetime. For me, racing is the source of a very special bond with my only son Matt.

When he was five years old, I took Matt to his first race at gone but not forgotten Sunset Speedway. His barely contained excitement brought back memories of my first race, twenty five years before. Every sight, sound, smell brought a question. That night I watched the racing through his eyes, seeing what he saw, feeling the sense of awe he so obviously felt. It was a joy for me to see his smiles, and to listen to all the "Mom, Mom, Mom's" when we got home that night.

For several years we drove the 40 miles from home to Sunset Speedway about once a month. Then, other things seemed to take a priority. For ten years we did not make a race at all. Games-baseball, football, and most especially basketball were important to my growing up too fast son. Miles and miles of training for cross country and track were the norm. Races-800 meters, 1600 meters, 3200 meters, 5K, 10K, all took precedence over 25 lappers. Then driving to work one summer morning I heard a radio spot announcing a UMP Summer Series race to be held at Sunset Speedway. "See the Kosiski's and other local drivers challenge the national stars," it said. Matt and I decided that would be something different to do, and decided to attend. The race was rained out, but we went to the weekly show at Sunset the following Sunday, and have been going to the eastern Nebraska Sunday races ever since.

Joe Kosiski was the driver to beat in those days-heck, even today most area drivers would rather beat Joe to the finish line than anyone else. I was not a fan of the Kosiski's, so naturally my son became a die hard 53 fan. Matt's 18th birthday present was to go into the pits as a member of Kosiski crew during the 1994 Cornhusker Classic at Sunset Speedway. Even though Matt is as technically challenged as me, they hit if off-I'm sure Matt's willingness to crawl under the car to scrape mud had something to do with crew members enjoying him-and the following winter Matt started going to Omaha,

often. Painting and moving parts and equipment into Kosiski's new shop sounded like drudge work to me, but Matt couldn't get enough of it. This was during Matt's first year of college, and I think his priorities were work, girls, racing-in no particular order, and about 93rd on the list was school. Fortunately he did get his priorities straightened out. It was definitely interesting getting the "inside scoop" on what was going on in area racing, though I missed sitting with Matt at the races, AND I was downright angered when I knew he was sitting in a cozy hauler as I froze during early season races, got rained on more times than I can count, and sweltered in the mid-summer heat.

During Matt's tenure with the 53 crew he told me of exotic places they went to, like Farley, Webster City, West Liberty, Moberly, and Park Jefferson. I had never been much for road tripping. Somewhat smug, I felt no need to road trip, that I was seeing the best weekly show in the country. Still, I very much enjoyed watching the likes of Gary Webb and Ray Guss Jr. from eastern Iowa and Illinois when they visited Sunset for four races. Park Jefferson, South Dakota sounded like just the place to expand my horizons-only 90 miles away, plus for many years the race there was almost like a Joe Kosiski benefit.

I am big on details, so this trip was well planned. Sort of like NASA's first trip to the moon was well planned. My trusty Rand-McNally was consulted, and course and trip time were plotted. Of course we needed lots of strength to handle the 90 miles each way trip, so I grilled hamburgers to eat along the way. And a tradition was born-I grill hamburgers to eat on the way to PJ every year, though I don't for any other track we visit. We loaded up on munchies-including licorice and cinnamon bears, don't ask why. And a cooler stocked with Coca-Cola. Racing road trips are NOT low calorie adventures. We do not miss the PJ summer special-now a WDRL event.

Denison, Harlan, and Corning in western Iowa became regular stops on our summer tours. The Adams County Speedway in Corning happens to be among my favorite tracks. Corning is the county seat of Iowa's smallest county, but the track is big time, right down to its Musco lighting. It is truly what every small track ought to aspire to be.

Des Moines, Oskaloosa, and Lakeside were added to our ever growing number of racing road trip stops. And this year we got to experience West Liberty, a track eastern Iowans claim a better venue than Sunset Speedway. Not so, but it was a great trip, and the old fairgrounds atmosphere is hard to beat.

Fast forward about five years, and there is my son in a cap and gown at the Civic Auditorium in Omaha, graduating from the University of Nebraska Omaha. A very proud day in our lives, and it marked a drastic change in priorities. No time to go to Omaha, a career and the lovely Miss Stephanie Howard were THE priorities for Matt. However, he was spending time on the internet, visiting racing sites like 4M and whowon.com. One day he told me "you HAVE to get on whowon.com. There is someone there who says he is the promoter of Sunset Speedway, and he is telling people to go to other tracks, since he doesn't do a good enough job for them."

Matt's racing idol is Humpy Wheeler. Mainly because Humpy Wheeler may be the only person who has crazier race promo ideas than Matt. Anyway, Matt's user name on whowon.com was NebrHumpy, or Humpy for short. As an inside joke-Bruton Smith being Humpy Wheeler's boss, I signed on to the site as bruton. And boy have things

been interesting since. The internet seems to fill the void left from Matt's departure from the 53 crew. Lots and lots and lots of information and rumors floating around. And interesting people to enjoy or do battle with. As a result of the internet, Matt and I became good friends with Sunset Speedway owner and later NRP GM Craig Kelley, good enough friend's that Craig was a groomsman at Matt's wedding last October. Bruton is an internet instigator, normally in fun, sometimes in anger. Humpy is a mediator, seeing the Humpy/Bruton relationship as much similar to Joe Gibbs calming Tony Stewart. Matt aka Humpy has taken to claiming he wears a hard hat to the races and sits several seats away, but that isn't so.

Sunday night's at Sunset Speedway for years, and now at Nebraska Raceway Park. Eight-ten racing road trips each year. Newspapers, magazines, Speed Channel. The internet dirt late model forums. A passion for racing. We argue about many things, but 365 days a year Matt and I can and do talk racing. Racing is an escape from the daily grind for us. It is the opposite of stress. It is excitement, it is fun, it is experiences we will always be able to share. So it costs a few dollars. We could spend our money on far worse than racing, and racing is part of an unbreakable bond. And that is priceless.

Sidebar-The Torch Is Passed by Matt Meyer

I used to be the driver and trip planner for every race adventure Matt and I experienced. Somewhere along the line I must have let him drive to the races a time or two, and now he is definitely the chauffeur. Once, I must have let him plan a road trip, and now he handles all of the race road trip planning-well, he still does not understand that the only confection entitled to the name licorice is made with molasses, but he does a good job picking out music(The Allman Brothers, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and Stevie Ray Vaughan provide perfect going to racing music). Matt thinks it must be easy writing articles for Dirt Late Model, so I asked him to add his thoughts to this article.

Matt-My father asked me to contribute to this article, giving me perspective on several recent road trips. Racing road trips are a great escape from the everyday grind, experiencing the camaraderie of fellow road trippers, all who share a passion for dirt track racing.

The trips my father and I embark on are an extension of our Sunday night excursions to NRP, most often to a WDRL sanctioned event. Over the last 3-4 years, I guess it has naturally become my responsibility to plan these min-vacations from A-Z. I have to admit I did learn some things about details and organizations from my father, but over time, cream rises to the top anyway. You see, as far as actually planning anything regarding racing trips, my father had his "Farewell Tour" about the same time as 'ol DW.' And some people say that getting my dad near a keyboard is about like giving Darrell Waltrip a microphone.

After countless miles crossing the Midwest with the 53 crew, I usually know the best routes to take, though when we visit a new track, I do rely on Mapquest to get me there. I determine when we will leave, and inform my father of the decision. The night before I make a grocery run to get all the racing munchies we have become accustomed to, and before we leave I stock a cooler with assorted beverages, the assortment depending on the characters who will be tagging along.

I also make sure I have just the right mix of music, though sometimes I can't resist irritating my father, so I'll pop in a Kenney Chesney CD.

The real fun starts happening as we bench race about what we think will happen that night at the race. Lots of talking, and even more one-upping. For those of you who know my father, it will come as no surprise that he dishes out more back seat driving advice than an instructor to a rookie driver at the Richard Petty Driving Experience. Occasionally we have one of those "racing deals," that are followed by several quiet miles. It is times like this that I feel like Paul Jr. on American Choppers. Even on a perfect day my father will say or do something to upset me, and without justification for doing so.

I think all the little things my father does to bug me are his response to being overtaken as the supreme road trip planner in the family. Still, I wouldn't trade my experiences in racing for anything. Many of my best times at a race track have been shared with my father, and I have formed some wonderful memories from these trips. As long as he is willing to see things my way, we'll have many more racing trip memories.

Ron-I like to call it navigating, not back seat driving, and as far as no justification, well, I am not Job, my patience does have limits. Again, the priceless commercials come to mind when thinking of going racing with my son and friends. Hours spent on the road talking racing with people who really know the sport, followed by watching incredible racing at all the best Midwest tracks. What more could a race fan want?