

Flashback – Breakdown At Ingleside Fifty-seven Years Ago

By Bob Lynch

Fellow Chesapeake Region member Ed Hainke and I have been lifelong friends. We met in the first grade at St. Cecilia's School in 1938 in Walbrook (West Baltimore).

My flashback story begins on a chilly night in late 1951. Ed picked me up in his 1940 Ford convertible. We headed for the Varsity Drive-in on Baltimore National Pike (Route 40), near the intersection of Ingleside Ave, as we had done many times before. I guess we were out looking to meet girls and to talk to some other motor-heads that were sure to be at the drive-in. We had our usual good time at the drive-in and then it became time to head home.

We should have gone directly back to Walbrook, but instead we headed out Route 40 to see how fast we could make the Ford go down the hill and across the Patapsco River Bridge. At the time, Route 40, west of Rolling Road was just open country. There were few buildings, no stoplights and usually no traffic or police. As a matter of fact, the newer divided highway ended a few miles west of the bridge. We enjoyed the high-speed ride, then we turned around and headed for home.

We got back to the intersection of Route 40 and Ingleside Ave. across from the Varsity. There was a traffic light at the intersection even in 1951. We stopped at the red light. While waiting for the green light another hot rod Ford pulled up along side. A few hand signals were exchanged, and the race was on. Hard to believe that the son of a Baltimore City Police Sergeant would do something like this. Ed gunned the old flat head V-8 and then the light turned green. He mashed the accelerator to the floor and popped the clutch. We heard a noise and the car jerked forward about five feet and stopped. We got out to see what had happened as the other Ford was racing past the Varsity, leaving us in the dust.

We pushed the '40 Ford to the side of the road knowing that something serious had happened to the drive line. We found out later that the clutch disk

hub had sheared away from the disk leaving no connection between the engine and the rear wheels. We hitched a ride back to Walbrook and then we tried to figure out how to get the car running again.

A year before this incident happened, my father and I opened an International Harvester dealership in Glyndon. We



A similar 1947 I-H KB-5 truck

renovated an old fertilizer mixing plant at the end of Chatsworth Ave. at the Western Maryland RR tracks. We had a shop and the tools to fix Ed's car. The problem was getting the Ford from Catonsville to Glyndon. We decided to tow the car using a heavy chain and the company truck. The truck was a 1947 I-H KB-5 with a 14-foot stake body. Needless to say, this vehicle was less than ideal for towing a passenger car. I brought the truck home from Glyndon the next evening. I picked up Ed and we headed back to Catonsville. Darkness had settled in by the time we got to the disabled Ford, adding another negative element to the towing job. After hooking up the car, we started out on the twenty-mile trip back to Glyndon. Everything seemed OK.

Ed was steering the Ford and managed to keep tension on the chain and we used hand signals and the horn to communicate when to brake and turn. My big problem driving the truck was I couldn't see Ed's car because of darkness and the large stake body, which blocked my view, except for what I could see in the mirrors. One good thing in those days – there were

no traffic signals on that part of Reisterstown Road. Times have really changed! Last time I counted the traffic lights on Reisterstown Road from Chatsworth Ave. to the Beltway, there were more than twenty-five. Of course, there was no Beltway in 1951.

Now this is the part of the story that made it an indelible memory. We made the right turn onto Chatsworth Ave. and I breathed a sigh of relief. Ed and I were less than a mile from the shop. Chatsworth Ave. is slightly downhill all the way to the railroad tracks and our destination. Everything was fine until we got within one hundred yards of the shop. Due to the darkness, I did not know a serious problem was about to happen. The first time I became aware of the situation was when I looked in the left mirror, and to my horror, Ed was passing me. His car got almost to the front of the truck and then the chain tightened up and pulled his car toward the left front of the truck. I was sure that a major disaster was about to happen, and the only thing I could do was to increase the truck's speed. Our guardian angels were working overtime that night, because only God knows why we did not destroy both the Ford and the truck.

We managed to get control of the situation, and got to the shop without any serious damage to either vehicle. I found out why this accident almost happened when we were finally able to get out of our stopped vehicles. Seems that when I slowed down somewhere on Chatsworth Ave. Ed ran over the loose chain, which wrapped around the right front wheel and broke the Ford's rubber brake hose. Ed had nothing to slow or stop the car and that is why he either had to run into the back of the truck or try to pass me. One thing I'll never forget is the look on Ed's face as he went by the truck the first time.

I'm pretty sure that if something like this happened to us now, we would have heart attacks. The memory of replacing the clutch in Ed's car is long gone, but the memory of how we got the car home will be with me forever.