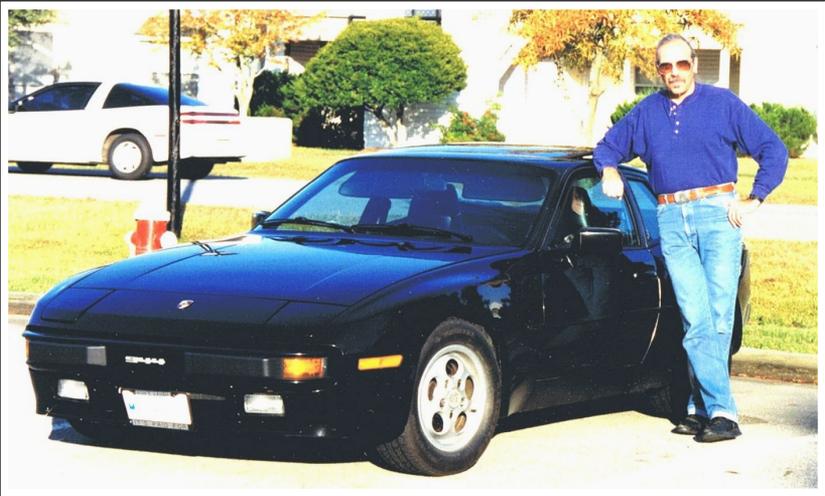


A Fairy Tale

by Gilbert Krebs

CHILDREN's fairy tales usually begin, "Once upon a time...", and end with "...and they all lived happily ever after." I have a personal fairy tale with a sad ending. It involves a wish that was fulfilled with a surprise ending.

When I retired from work in 1994, I treated myself to a present: Something that I had wanted for a number of years – a Porsche. Not a new one, but a used one, a 1987 944S model, black, leather interior, power everything. A wish granted. "...and they all lived happily ever after." Well... maybe.



While I owned it I bestowed upon it both normal and abnormal repairs and maintenance. When I recently checked back on the repair records that I dutifully saved, I realized I had further invested about 53% of my original cost. Not a pleasant discovery.

In April of 2000, a tragedy befell the Porsche. There was a clacking noise emanating from the engine that I erroneously deduced was a needed valve adjustment. So off to the local repair shop I started. After traveling about a mile, the car stopped running. Luckily, my sister was following me so she could bring me back home when I dropped off the car. I called the repair shop and told them where the car was and to pick it up. We returned home and I awaited a call from the repair shop about what the problem was. They called two days later with a

catastrophic diagnosis. An idler pulley for the timing belt had disintegrated and as such, the engine damage that resulted would be extensive and costly.

“O.K.” I said, “Open it up and let me know the sad news. But,” I added, “you guys replaced the timing belt a year ago. Shouldn’t you have sensed something then?” There was no reply.

To cut to the chase, when the pulley broke and the timing belt went all wacky, several valves had been broken, a piston rod had bent, and who knows what all other damage.

“This is going to run into quite a bit of money for repairs which we estimate will be in the neighborhood of four to five thousand dollars!” said the repairman.

“Gulp!” I gulped. “Is there a different neighborhood you can go to?”

“We’ll try to hold it down.” they said.

Fast forward to June 2000. I picked up the car and with a trembling hand wrote out a monstrous check. By a very strange coincidence, the cost was \$7.83 less than the neighborhood they had originally suggested. It must have been a depressed neighborhood. I now had 97% in repairs of what I had originally paid for the car. O.K., I told myself, lick your wounds and figure out what to do now. Well, the best thing I can do, I thought, is to sell it and try to recover what I had just reluctantly spent. So I placed an ad in the local paper and awaited the onrush of potential buyers.

The ad ran for 24 days. I received three calls. One came from a person who obviously didn’t know anything about the car and who understood that Volkswagen parts would fit on a Porsche. I politely ended the call. Another call was from someone who wanted to know if I wanted to trade the car for a 30-foot motor home. I declined.

One person did come to see the car but since he did not accept my offer to drive it around the block, I deduced he wasn’t that interested. ‘Here’s my card,’ he said, ‘I have another car to look at and I’ll make up my mind one way or another in a day or so. I’ll call you and let you know if I want the car because most people say, ‘I’ll call you’ and never do, but I will so you’re not hanging.’ I’m still awaiting his call after all these years.

The wife of a friend who knew I was thinking of selling the car even before the tragic engine blow-up said someone she knew was looking for a Porsche and would call me. Unfortunately, he called while the car’s engine was being resurrected. After I got the repaired car back the man and his son came out on a Sunday afternoon and looked over the car. After some polite “hard sell” I gave them the keys and off they went for a test drive.

When they came back about 20 minutes later, they looked the car over one more time. “We’ll take it.” Although softly spoken, the words resounded in the air. “It’s really for my son”, the man stated. The son smiled.

“With all the engine repair and other items recently replaced,” I assured them, “it’s practically like a new car.”

Papers were signed, money passed hands and all the extra keys were given. I sadly watched the car disappear around the corner. I thought I might have withdrawal symptoms, but I didn’t.

Now we come to the truly sad and unhappy ending. About two weeks later at a restaurant, I saw my friend’s wife who knew the man who bought the car. “How’s the Porsche doing?” I asked.

There was no immediate answer. I sensed that perhaps the engine blew up again or some other major malfunction had occurred. Maybe I did sell it at an opportune time.

“I hate to tell you what happened” she said.

“What! What!” I exclaimed.

“I don’t want to spoil your dinner” she said.

I grabbed the side of my chair. Maybe the car had completely blown up killing hundreds of people and there was an impending billion-dollar lawsuit heading my way for selling defective material.

“What happened,” she finally said, “the car was totaled. The Porsche hit a police car on the way to a call. On top of that, the 17-year old son had been drinking. Not only that, there were five people in the car.”

My initial reaction was wondering how they got five people in a car designed for two. The son had had the car for less than two weeks and it was now history. No one was injured, thanks to who knows what.

So with an empty feeling because I no longer have my “retirement-gift-to-myself” and thinking about all the wasted expense, I had mixed emotions. Shall I be happy that I recouped the expense for repairs or should I feel remorse for a car gone to the auto graveyard and Porsche heaven?

Perhaps, I thought at the time, I will begin a quest for a replacement. Another Porsche? A plain vanilla dependable compact? A Lamborghini? I think not a Lamborghini. Since we had a dependable and utilitarian Honda the urgency is not so great. It was the first time since 1964 when I didn’t have two cars.

I felt empty.

While I was cogitating, a friend drove up in his DeLorean.

A DeLorean?? Hmm...