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Feature Writing

The Yellow Beast

August 6, 1976: It all ended with a missing finger and an undying passion for Volkswagen Beetles. The smell of oil and gasoline penetrated the air, engines running, various cars suspended lifts, and a few men walking around in blue jumpsuits. The typical blue uniform of a car mechanic with the last name of “Ford” stitched in it was worn by Mr. Thomas Ford. One couldn’t have had a more appropriate name for a car mechanic, but Mr. Ford was not a Ford mechanic; rather, Mr. Ford, a thirty year old man, worked on Volkswagens. “They are easy to work on and parts are always available”. To this day over thirty years later, Mr. Ford still remembers all the essentials of working on Volkswagens and vividly recalls that one day on August 6th, 1976.

It was a beautiful day, a special one. It was his sister’s birthday of whom he was planning on visiting after work. One would think after his many years of experience as a mechanic in the Air Force working on the F 106 Delta Dart, the situation on August 6th would never happen. But that day the little yellow beetle looking car was out to get him. Being the problem child that it was, this little bugger was in the shop getting some work done. The alternator belt along with a few other parts needed to be repaired by only an experienced mechanic.

After the owner dropped it off, Tom Ford drove the 1975 sunshine yellow Volkswagen Beetle into the shop to begin the repairs. He turned on the engine and began working. Moments later, with a quick strike the alternator belt sucked in his hand. A sharp pain shot through Tom’s finger. But being the calm and composed man that he is, Mr. Ford turns off the engine, takes out the pink rag from his back pocket, and begins putting pressure on the wound. To his surprise, it was more than a mere flesh wound. This “mechanical beast” had bitten and snapped off part of his middle finger. If you ask me, it was a smart move on the beast’s part: to rip off this exact finger, for now, Mr. Ford would not be able to use his middle finger to curse this 1975 yellow Volkswagen Bug.

While the beast was busy digesting this finger, Tom was already on the way to the hospital in La Jolla, San Diego. While at the hospital Tom found out he had lost the first joint of his third (middle) finger, and that the first joint was not recoverable. After hearing the news, the one thought running through his head at the time was “Boy am I stupid”. It was a silly mistake, but as I said before: the beast was out to get this unsuspecting mechanic. Although Tom Ford had to take over a month off of work, his finger was finally healed. He “forgave and forgot that mechanical beast” and he began working on Volkswagens once again.

Of all the things that could have taken off a finger from working in the Air Force for four years to working for a fencing company, it had to be his favorite hobby: fixing up Volkswagens. In his life Mr. Ford has owned a total of seven Bugs from the years of 1962 to 1968. His favorite was his 1967 Dune Buggy. Although he most recently works on Honda, Acura, and Volvos, and owns a 1995 Acura NSX, he hopes to own one more of these beautiful cars: a 1967 Kelly Green Volkswagen Bug.

Tom Ford may not be able to tell you what he had for lunch yesterday, but on August 6th, 1976, such an ironic sequence of events is unforgettable. The nub of his middle finger is forever a battle scar and memory of the day his hobby attempted to consume him.