

Race Cars – Football – Cigarettes – and – Celebrates
by Bob Kocher

This all started back in the late 80's or early 90's during a SCCA Driving School being held at Mid-Ohio Race Course. I was taking the school so I could hopefully get my racing license to start driving in auto racing. It was Friday night at the track and I had been doing a classroom session, which was a requirement before I could do the on track sessions. All I remember was how hard it was.

The classroom part lasted several hours and covered all the rules needed to drive on the track including what all the flags meant.

Having worked long hours for sever days to prepare my racecar for the drivers school and hopeful some SCCA club racing.

A crew to help with my car was in order so I had my wife Connie and my nephew and his wife, Bill and Jackie Brooks. They had been great help with much patience while I was in the classroom.

Now is when the fun started. Racing School Classroom had ended and my crew greeted me as I exited. After asking me about the school and how hard it was they popped the question that started many years of fun. My wife said to me, " did you see Walter Payton in the classroom"?

I answered back fast, "Who is Walter Payton?" Well having never been a sports fan, just a car nut, I had no idea who they were talking about. Then out of the blue my wife was pointing and yellowing at me, "There he is, there he is, Walter Payton".

I said, " o him, he sat next to me in the school and we talked to each other a lot".

Over the next sever years Walter and I talked to each other briefly at several racetracks as he did his racing gigs. A real nice guy!

But wait the story is not over yet. As most know got very sick and was out the publics eye at differ times. Sometime I think in 1999 I attended a GM party in Chicago and Walter was guest at the party. He signed footballs and talked to all and gave out a ton of autographs. Most of the evening he was busy. It was getting late and I walked by and we spoke and then he invited me sit next to him and talk.

Yes I had wanted to tell the racing school story to him for years and knew it now was the time. Of course when I told him I had no idea who he was or what he did he Laughed and laughed hard. He though it was a very funny story.

While I was sitting there he looked at my white shirt, which in the breast pocket he could see there was one cigarette. Walter Payton reached in my shirt pocket and

removed that cigarette and spent the next 15 minutes giving me all the reasons not to smoke. He chewed me out like no one else had ever done about smoking. I did stop after that several times until I quit all together a few years ago. Yes Walter Payton, Mr. Sweetness, was truly a great man who I will never forget. I was told at a later date that this was Walter's last public appearance, he passed several months soon after.

Several years later I was staying at the W Hotel, Times Square, and was going to the lobby to meet some friends to go to party for the New York Auto Show. As I got on the elevator to go down to the first floor there was a attractive young lady already in the elevator. She knotted to me and said hello and I though nothing about it.

After we got off the elevator my friends were caring on. Wow Bob how did you arrange that elevator partner, what did you do, you are the man. They went on and on about the lady from my elevator.

O Kay I said, Just who was she. Well it seems I had enter a New York elevator with Sara Jessica Parker, wow. And Yes I had no idea then who she even was, just a little sexy.

Moral of these stories, even if you have oil for blood as a Car Nut, spend sometime paying attention to other things in life than just cars!