

JERRY'S GOLFCART

It was 1972, the summer that I turned 12 and left home for the first time to be on my own.

My best friend, David, got me a job at a summer camp in the Catskills, which was originally an old Jewish hotel. My room had a creaky metal framed single bed, a stained enameled sink and a medicine cabinet with a broken mirror. It was paradise!

I was finally a free man but really at 12 I was just a "free boy," certainly not even a "man-child." I hadn't gotten laid, high or even driven a car yet but I knew one of those rites of passage would happen that summer.

Camp Lymelight was a very unique camp. It was a camp for rich mentally challenged children and adults from the city.

These campers had the most severe handicaps. My initiation into this world was quick when I watched in shock at a kid thrashing on the floor during a grand mal seizure. An experienced camp counselor shoved his wallet into the kid's mouth so he wouldn't bite his tongue off. A puddle of urine formed around him. But when it was all over, he was treated with love and kindness. It was a common occurrence.

Jerry Rosenberg was the camp director and my job was to be his personal assistant while also manning the sports equipment room. He was a big man, with a booming voice and a lively personality, who loved to joke around. One of my jobs was to hand wash his enormous 1972 yellow convertible Eldorado Caddilac. He taught me what a chamois was and how to polish chrome. I think Jerry was thrilled to have a monkey like me around, so he took me under his wing and treated me like his son that summer.

One morning, a flatbed truck made a delivery at the camp. Jerry rushed out of his office, very excited. His golf cart, with a fresh paint job of red and yellow flames on the cowling that made it look like a toy hot rod had arrived. He loved that golf cart even more than his Cadillac. Sometimes he even let me drive it and that made me feel important spinning around the camp.

One day I was with Jerry in the front seat of his Caddilac as we followed a convoy of school buses filled with our campers on a field trip. It was a hot day, so the convertible top was down. Jerry wore dark sunglasses, and smoked a cigar. As we slowly drove through Rosendale, Jerry waved and yelled at an elderly woman who was sitting on her porch. "Hey Edith! You look wonderful today!" Then we passed another one. "Ethel - I love your hat!" They waved back at him and smiled. Then a third one - "Estelle! It's too hot to work in the garden today!" I looked at him, amazed that he knew all their names until he smiled back at me and winked and I realized he was just kidding around. I sunk into my seat and started to laugh hysterically at what was the funniest thing

anyone had every done. What chutzpah Jerry had!

One quiet Sunday, feeling full of myself, I decided to take Jerry's golf cart for a ride. I jumped in the front seat, turned the key and stepped on the gas. Bam! I forgot to put it into reverse. The golf cart smashed into the building and cracked the fiberglass cowling, ruining the hotrod paint job. My heart was shattered like those cracks and that night I went to bed with a big lump in my stomach.

The following Monday, when Jerry saw my handy work, he was so beyond anger that he refused to talk to me that day. I was heartbroken. Jerry eventually forgave me and we went on, pretty much as if nothing had happened. But everything had changed. The bond we had was gone; Jerry never looked at me the same way. I left at the end of the summer never to see Jerry again. Those rites of passage I had expected to experience never happened, but I had changed because I met Jerry Rosenberg, who let me drive his golf cart and who I would never forget.