



November 2011

Bernard Whalen's 1964 Thunderbird.

I bought my Thunderbird in 1984. I had previously owned a 1962 Chevy Impala SS which I loved. Unfortunately it was rear ended while parked & totaled. I used the insurance money to buy my 64 Tbird because I remembered as a kid my father's friend took us for a ride in his new 66 Tbird convertible. I was considering a convertible Flairbird but the nice ones were out of my price range. Then I saw an add in Newsday for the Tbird I eventually bought. It originally belonged to an old lady on the north shore, who sold it to a man in Glen Cove .



When I looked at the car, the things that struck me most were the color combination, blue on blue, the mint interior, and the low mileage, about 60,000 on a twenty year old car. I paid two grand for the car back then, fixed the front end damage, got the car painted, made some other minor repairs myself and started showing it. I got a lot of compliments and a few trophies over the next few years. When any of my friends got married and couldn't afford a limo, I ferried them to the church in the Thunderbird.

When my daughter was born in 1991, I started having had less and less time for the car so it just sat in the garage. In 2009, I decided it was time to bring her back to life. I budgeted \$10,000 the restoration job, five grand for paint and bodywork at a friend's shop, Aberle Auto Body & Restoration, and five grand for everything else. To be honest, it came to a little over twelve grand by the time I was done. Still a reasonable figure considering the amount of work that was done, but it is probably more than the car is worth.

In addition to the paint and body repair, the entire interior was removed so new floorboards could be welded in place. Then new cables and gaskets were installed for the dashboard and heating systems. The non-working gauges were replaced. I put in new rubber seals and new carpet. I replaced the gas tank, the trunk liner, the fuel sender unit, got a new rear end, shocks all around, an Eldebrock carburetor, and radial tires. There was more, too much to list because it seems once you start taking things apart the more things you discover need to be repaired.

It took over a year to do everything. I was lucky, my neighbor Kenny Metz and his son Ryan helped me along the way. They were restoring a 1969 Nova SS at the same time. Ryan is a throwback to the days when young boys didn't mind getting a little grease under the nails.

The day I got the car back from the body shop last year, I was detailing it in the driveway when a sudden gust of wind broke a huge branch off from a tree at the curb. It crashed onto my Thunderbird and dented the fender and hood. If it hit had me, it would have killed me. That cost another thousand to repair. Thankfully, JC Taylor took care of everything, but I upped my coverage immediately.

Since then I have been enjoying the car, taking it out nearly every weekend for a ride or a show. It has appeared in HotRodHotLine, the online car magazine and in other website magazines. It turns out that there that many Thunderbirds around this area, but the name is so identifiable that strangers and photographers like to take pictures of it. Recently, it was awarded third place at the Point Lookout car show. It's tough to beat those 55's, 56's and 57's. It was there that I met Elliot Weiner and got to talking about Thunderbirds and the Long Island branch of the national Thunderbird Club which I was already a member. I look forward to meeting my fellow T-Bird enthusiasts on Long Island and to going to more shows.

My regular job is that of a New York City police lieutenant. When I'm not busy with my car, I spend my spare time writing crime novels with my father and have had some success. Our book, Justifiable Homicide was published by Ballantine books and is

available at Amazon. I have done book signings, appeared at colleges and on writer's panels. I'm a member of the Mystery Writer's of America which is the organization that presents the Edgar Awards. In discussions with my male colleagues, I've discovered that many of them are car enthusiasts too and they all know what a Thunderbird is.

