

# **I Guess That's Me (A Reflection)**

**Lee Frank**

## **No Longer Collegiate**

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## No Longer Collegiate

Compare this to the previous photos of me (page 51). How much different I could possibly appear? Not only is the crewcut gone, but it's even difficult to imagine it. Could the clothes in these two photos be any more different? The car is different too, in more than one way. It's mine. And it's black. The sports jacket is not, it's maroon corduroy. The turtleneck is gray—and it's a sweater. This was apparently my first try at this look and I still like it. My problem is I can no longer find turtleneck sweaters. No matter, I no longer own a sports jacket. But while I did, I liked this look, immensely practical for winters in Florida.

This is the maroon corduroy sports jacket I “borrowed” from my father for college. There's also something in the jacket's right side pocket. What? Seems like something I frequently carried there. What? No idea, and I've long I lost the habit of stuffing bulky items into jacket pockets.

The car was my first, a seven-year-old 1950 Ford coupe with a flathead six, manual three-speed transmission, and little to distinguish it inside or out. To its credit it could do a legitimate, if illegal, hundred miles

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per hour. Don't remember many problems with it, the worst being the time I blew a water hose—and all the water in the radiator. It was cold, the early hours of a winter morning, and I managed to drive home. Here's how. Let the car sit and cool off for about half an hour and then drive, perhaps as long as five minutes, until the water temperature gauge begins to soar. The twenty minute ride took over two hours. The best problem of this old Ford was the folding seatback—two-door, remember—which would randomly decide to recline. Two more points of interest for me about this car. It was my only black car and my only car without seat belts.

The most important fact of this car was its ownership. It was mine and I believe I paid \$300 cash. Out of college, I was working and thus able to buy the requisite working man's car. But I was still living at home, still accepting the generosity of my parents. My father got me this job (and the next). Out of college—we assumed temporarily—I was now a draftsman added to a two-man steel-detailing job shop. (Draftspersons were not yet invented.)

Buildings need more than floor plans and external views. There are plans for electrical, plumbing, structure, and more. Structural drawings show what piece of steel goes where. The steel fabricator needs drawings of each beam, hole, and rivet down to the sixteenth of an inch. Steel detailers not only produce these drawings, they're responsible for checking to make sure every piece connects properly with every other piece. They also check the loads and stresses. And they double and triple check. As the junior draftsman, I drew simple beams. I didn't have enough engineering to be responsible for checking.

Best part of this job was the deliveries. Since my car was old and not expected to be reliable, I was instructed to use the boss's cars. (OK, so only one was really boss, but from my position on the totem pole they both were.) One of these cars was a nearly new '56 Olds convertible.

A muscle-car long before the muscle-cars of the next decade. Occasionally, my deliveries took me into New York. It was summer, and I was driving a hot (or was it cool even then?) convertible on the streets of New York. I never even noticed the traffic.

I still thought I wanted to be an architect and only needed to find a school teaching advanced principles of design. I say I thought this, but at the time my thinking was mostly indefinite. Hell, my life was indefinite. Deep in the background were the beginnings of the medical problems that would dictate my future.

Somewhere around eighteen or nineteen, I acquired psoriasis. Seemed like a minor problem. Of greater concern were my hands, always cold and often stiff. In my junior year at Rensselaer, I was very much aware of wearing gloves from September to spring. Deep down I knew I would be having problems with my hands, especially if I planned to spend a lifetime at a drafting table. I didn't realize the problem was arthritis. Specifically, Psoriatic Arthritis (a particularly debilitating synergy).

None of this was in my conscious mind. Out of college and working, with wheels, my conscious mind was busy looking for women. Carol and I had had our last fight and who should fill the gap but her girlfriend Bea. Before long, Bea and I were good friends; a friendship lasting beyond her marriage some years later. We did things friends do like double-date and fix each other up. Once she wanted me to meet a new boyfriend. He turned out to be a former fellow Cub Scout from my earliest days in Newark. Surprising, even though Bea lived (where else?) in Newark.

Once Bea said she'd run into someone who'd met me and this person's description was so different from Bea's knowledge of me, she said she had to laugh. I was described as quiet, even introverted. This was not the Lee

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that Bea knew. I thought this was funny, too. I knew these contrasting descriptions were both true because I did not always behave with rigid consistency. It proved to me I had no need to always appear to be the same person. I'd never thought about it before, merely reacted to the situation and the people. Somehow I had passed beyond adolescence without concern about how I appeared to other people. Who I was, I knew, was within.

*About this "within." Today, I consider continuity of consciousness to be a necessary fiction. We believe in the continuity of our individuality for two reasons. One is that we are built this way, built to fill in the gaps. We think we have this movie in our heads of everything we see as we move about. In full, continuous detail. Nonsense. Ask any magician. Even in a single "snapshot" of our visual field, we fill in the details. Like our vision, our life too is full of holes. And like our vision, we can't live with these gaps. So we fill them in.*

*The other reason is more fundamental. We have to. If we didn't believe we were the same person from moment to moment, we couldn't function. But the truth is that we are not the same for our entire lives. We know we change. We each have our own memories of our individual past. But those memories are not fixed; they are reconstructed as we change. Who we are is not the surface person, the apparent continuity of the moment. The person each of us is, is the one who must believe, who must fill in the blanks, who must perceive him or herself as a contiguous human being. It is, if you will, the need to be whole, to be an individual.*

*We also believe this individual, our self, to be totally unique in the universe. But that, too, is another necessary fiction.*

Gil, Dick, and I still went to the Shore, but now only on the infrequent weekend. Most of our spare time went into Gil's next boat. His father astonished us when he brought home plans for a 25-foot cabin cruiser. In his garage we had put together the orange crate canoe and the 14-foot runabout. Now, we worked on what we perceived as ultimate luxury. It took all of that summer and the next winter. As this was a more practical family vehicle, the three of us rarely got to use it by ourselves. The summers of youth were fading fast and along with them my freedom.

I wasn't simply facing a lack of future, I was facing the Draft. Or would the next year, after my twenty-first birthday. The Draft has a history, in U.S. history, of emerging now and again. Back then, for me, there was only the present. I had formulated no plan to reenter college. (I had looked; no school of architecture seemed to offer what I needed.) Without a Draft-deferring job, I would be eligible. The good news was this was pre-Vietnam. The bad news was no one wanted to hire anyone who was Draft eligible. No one. This was not about facing possible death or disfigurement, it was looking at a two-year hole in your life. Waiting for the Draft was marking time, marching in place. And I had two full years in which to do nothing but wait.

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