I BOUGHT THE CAR – IT CAME WITH A FAMILY

I retired with a plan and a vehicle that made sense. What I didn't realize was that the impractical choice – the fun one – would lead to the most meaningful chapter yet.

When I retired after turning 64, a friend asked what I planned to do with all my spare time. I told him Jayne and I were going to travel – hit every contiguous state and take in the sights, history, and flavors of our country. He agreed. That sounded like fun. Then he added. "Get a Corvette."

"What? Why?" In my mind, our little 25-foot RV was perfect – a home away from home. No hotels. No suitcases. No eating out every day. It was comfortable, safe, and convenient. A Corvette? That was a toy. Sure, we would love a Corvette. I had worked on sports cars back in college. When I met Jayne, my wife-to-be, back in 1972, she was tooling around in an MG Midget, so we were both car people, but ownership was merely a dream, not reality.

Then my son got married.



His wedding venue was the Gilmore Car Museum outside of Kalamazoo, MI. As part of the wedding package, he was offered five cars for the wedding party to drive for the afternoon. Choices included a 1955 Chevrolet convertible, a Jaguar coupe, or a 1958 Corvette convertible.

I chose the Corvette.

For that afternoon, behind the wheel of a pristine 1958 Corvette, I was transported back to my teenage years – when these cars were kings of the road and freedom came wrapped in chrome and fiberglass.

Somewhere during that drive, I remembered a promise I had made to myself years earlier. Before the day was over, I was looking for an affordable convertible – one that didn't need restoring.



A year later, I bought a 2002 C5 Corvette convertible.

It wasn't practical. It was driven only when the sun was shining, parked below forty degrees, and garaged at the first hint of rain.

And it was fun – especially third gear! If you know, you know.

I sent my friend a photo. He replied, "Welcome to Corvette ownership. Now find a club."

"What? Why?" Jayne and I were never club people. There never seemed to be enough hours in the day. But somehow – almost despite ourselves – we joined one.

The Corvette Cruisers of Illinois turned out to be an eclectic bunch. They loved to eat, loved to travel, and loved sharing their cars. At our first car show with the group, we met Don, Liz, Judie, Randy, Lawrence, and Theresa – all Corvette owners who were passionately in love with their cars and the club family. By the time we left, we had an invitation to the next club meeting and a quick drive for ice cream.

Before we realized it, Jayne and I were part of their family.

When chest pains sent me to the emergency room six months later, I learned what that really meant. The cardiologist said my heart had been sending warnings I'd ignored – too much physical work, too much stress, not enough attention to what mattered. The surgery went well, but recovery was slow. Some days I wondered if I'd ever feel like myself again.

The club called daily. They checked on Jayne, brought meals, and offered to help in any way they could. Tom came by just to visit, and Curt came by to pray with us.

I recovered, but my focus shifted. Rehab slowed me down, and my work moved from physical labor to quieter pursuits. I returned to something I'd done most of my life; writing.

The heart 'event' had clarified something: I'd spent too many years planning the sensible thing and not enough time doing what made me feel alive. The RV made sense. The Corvette made me happy.

RV trips faded into family visits. Road trips became Corvette adventures – convoys and back roads to places RV's didn't do well. Quiet RV parks were replaced by group dinners and comfortable hotels.

Seasons filled quickly with family, parades, car shows, and club trips. Everyone contributed in their own way, and the club became a second family.

Over time, Jane and I went from owning one Corvette to two. My trusted 2002 C5, now with 160,000 miles, shares the garage with a newer 2013 C6. We needed something we could trust for long trips.

But we can't part with the car that started it all.



One of my children suggested keeping it at his place in Michigan for the summer. I'm weighing that idea carefully – given his driving history – but I also feel obliged. Without his wedding, I might never have rediscovered the joy of top-down driving, and I'd probably still be dreaming about that impractical convertible from the comfort of my RV.

So where is this journey taking me?

In 2026 alone, we visited Bowling Green and watched Corvettes get assembled, traveled sections of Route 66, visited the Flight 93 National Memorial, and spent three wonderful days at Corvettes at Carlisle. We traveled together by land and sea, supported veterans, and filled our calendar with more miles than I ever imagined in retirement. Somewhere in all of it, I still need to finish the book I've been writing – the one about second chances and unexpected friendships.

I still don't know where this is all heading. But I know I'll be in a convertible with the top down. Jayne beside me, and friends somewhere in the rearview mirror or just ahead on the road.

And honestly, that's exactly where I want to be.

Ronald Egolf – Corvette Cruisers of Illinois



Our Corvette Family