

## Pringles

by Nicole K. Sather

As a teenager, I remember watching from the passenger window of my dad’s truck as we drove past a beautiful, cherry-red, 1973 Mustang convertible. It was parked in someone’s front yard with a for sale sign.

“That’s a nice car, isn’t it?” my dad asked, with his trademark wily grin. “You should probably buy it.” He knew that it was exactly the kind of car I dreamed of having, and pointed out that it even had the creamy white interior that I wanted. I tried to hide my excitement when he quickly pulled over so that we could take a closer look.

Since I only had the savings from my summer job to offer, I was shaking in anticipation of negotiating a price with the owner. I begged my dad to do all of the negotiating for me, but instead he pushed me to be brave and to ask for what I wanted. To my surprise, the seller agreed to my offer. That magnificent convertible was mine.

Like all older cars, it needed a lot of TLC. On the weekends, Dad and I would go out to the garage and tinker around with the engine while listening to old eight-track tapes on the car’s stereo. While we may not have seen eye-to-eye on what time curfew should be or what university I should attend—and Lord knows we could fight like cats and dogs at times—we could always agree that five-spoke wheels look way cooler than the factory standard. After giving the Mustang a tune-up, we would drive it to the nearby gas station to make sure it was running perfectly and refill the gas tank. My dad almost never ate junk food, but every time we drove it to that gas station, he would buy a small can of Pringles for himself and a strawberry-kiwi Snapple for me. This was our reward for a job well done.

When I eventually went away for medical school, I left the Mustang in his garage. He continued to take care of it in my absence, so that the engine would be ready to rev whenever I visited home. My dad was a man who loved fast cars, loud music, smoky scotch, tough love, big parties, and hard work. My family and I would often joke that we could never imagine him growing old, because we couldn’t picture that a man who “lives

his life at 100 miles per hour” could ever slow down. It felt like cruel irony when he quickly and unexpectedly passed away while I was still away at school.

It took a long time for me to muster up the strength to drive the Mustang again, after all of the memories we shared in it; from singing along to the 1970s hits playing on the stereo, to all of the pep-talks he gave me when I didn’t think I was good enough to become a doctor. By that time, after going so long without all of his tinkering and tune-ups, the car wasn’t running anymore. I looked in the glove box for the owner’s manual in the hope that I would be able to figure out what the problem was without my dad’s help. I couldn’t find the owner’s manual, but I did find a small can of Pringles, half-eaten. He must have bought them the last time that he worked on my car. I closed the glove box with the Pringles still inside, as a silly sort of reminder that somehow he was still there in the passenger seat.

For my thirtieth birthday, my partner surprised me by revealing my Mustang out in the driveway, running like a dream and as shiny as if it were ready to be driven for the very first time. Unknown to me, he had been sneaking out to the garage for weeks, replacing rusted parts and polishing every inch of it until it was as magnificent as ever. As we took it for a spin around the block, he joked around about how he had found a *very* old half-eaten can of Pringles in the glove box.

“You didn’t throw it away, did you?” I asked in a panic. He nodded and then looked completely deflated when I explained why I was so distraught. I didn’t want to minimize how hard he worked or how loving of a gesture it all was, so I tried to reassure him (and myself) that it was *really not a big deal*. I know that the memories of my dad will never go away. I can imagine him riding in the passenger seat every time I drive. As silly as it is, though—I would still do anything to have that little can of Pringles.



**Dr. Nicole K. Sather** is a physician in southern Florida, specializing in the treatment of critically ill or injured children. She recently began writing as a way to honor her upbringing in northern Wisconsin and to reflect on the more poignant moments that shaped her as a physician and as a person.