



Award-Winning College Student

After high school Fay attended a local college and studied business. "I wasn't really happy with the degree," he said. "I understood how business works and I did not like it, I did not like the use of the language to sway people's opinions that was taught in a salesmanship course. I didn't like the format of establishing a brand and an identity and then promoting that brand. I thought that the pursuit of truth and actually doing good work should speak for itself."

Always in pursuit of truth, Fay never had a problem telling people what he really thought of a product, a concept that might scare the average businessman at the risk of losing a sale. "One of my governing ideas early on in business was that I did not want to fear to dictate what I was doing," he said. "I wanted love to dictate what I was doing."

If he saw any practicality in following the herd, it was his moral compass that steered him away, and twisting verbiage was never his thing anyway. "Language is a very confrontational tool," he said. "I choose not to use it to sway people's opinion to my benefit. I think the highest and best use of the language is communicating ideas, so that's what I try to do."

Language has always played a major role in opening Fay's eyes to the ways of the world, having had a front row seat to the impact of words. "I think it's because my name is Fay, and you know how kids can be very abusive," he said. "I think at an early age I thought, well, what difference does it make what my name is? It made me think about the struggles that people go through, which has nothing to do with them or who they are. Sometimes people confuse what I do with who I am, and I like to think that they're different things, who I am is not what I do. What I do is only what I do. Who I am is a humanist."

Before his business degree could gather dust he was back in school. "I decided I wanted to become an industrial arts teacher, but mainly I was interested in learning all the different skills," said Fay, who went on to Fitchburg State College and earned the prestigious Arthur E. Purrington Award for outstanding all-around craftsman. The faculty votes the award, and in Fay's case the vote was unanimous. "I did pretty good in college," he said, modestly. I think Fay

was a little taken aback when I asked him if he'd been a hippie back in the day, a question I am prone to asking anyone over the age of 50 on the off chance they will tell me something shocking and insane, and Fay being such a deep thinker I was sure he'd confess to having been a total freak or, possibly, a disciple of Timothy Leary. But he quickly set me straight that although he had no problem with hippies, he was definitely *not one of them*. "When I went to college I never went to a party," he said. "I never smoked dope. It wasn't something I disapproved of, it's just that it didn't have any purpose for me. I never even drank until about five years ago when I discovered red wine."

Without the benefit of a trust fund or parents with deep pockets, Fay par himself through school. "I was working for some antique car dealers, sharks who were buyers and sellers," he said. "It gave me a great opening to the history of the automobile."

From Vintage Restorations To General Motor

While on a trip to a car swap meet in Hershey, Pennsylvania, with his employers, Fay met a talented restoration expert named Larry Amesley, of Amesley Antique Body Co. in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. "Larry's team was building classic and antique cars from a pile of sheetmetal and a pile of wood," Fay remembered, "and that was my first awakening that you didn't have to go to Detroit to big stamping factories to get sheetmetal parts made. I put my sights on that, I knew that when I graduated from college that's where I was going."

After graduation his employers flew him back to Pennsylvania to drive a 1929 Packard touring car home to Massachusetts, and Fay took the opportunity to approach Larry Amesley for a job. "I cornered Larry and I wouldn't leave until he promised me I could work for him on a trial basis for two weeks," said Fay. "At the end of the first week Larry called me into the office and said I could stay as long as I wanted and he'd pay me the same salary he was paying his best worker. I probably would have stayed even if he'd paid me nothing."

Fay admired Larry's understanding of shapes and his work ethic. "He was really the

fellow that got me on my feet for shaping metal. We could build anything, although it was hard work," he said. "We built recreations of original bodies: Auburn Speedsters, Packard Phaetons, LaSalle Phaetons, Duesenberg bodies, all 1929 to 1932 vintage cars. There was one car I built the body on, a '32 Packard touring car that a few years later I saw at a meet and it was being sold as a documented original car."

In less than two years Fay learned all he could from Larry and was anxious to return to his hometown and set up a shop of his own. "I stayed in Pennsylvania as long as the learning curve kept going," Fay said. "I came back here and bought really good equipment and just chained myself to it. Now I have a wood-working shop, a machine shop, an upholstery shop, and a sheetmetal shop, all in the same building." Harkening back to his aversion to sales and advertising, he's never minced words for the sake of luring customers. "I was in business and didn't have a letterhead, a business card, or even a telephone," he said. "I was just interested in doing the work. I taught myself upholstery because I realized while building the bodies that there may be holes, so I decided that in order to build the best body I needed to know how to upholster it. I've done some pretty heavy cars. A diamond-tufted leather with horsehair, which was common in the teens, to old classics. I upholstered a V16 Cadillac 1931 convertible sedan that was a pretty high-profile car."

But upholstery is of course not the only factor in making Fay such a legendary name with car and motorcycle craftsmen, and even the art world. His understanding and gift for taking flat metal and making it three-dimensional is considered by many to be unrivaled. He's worked on many high profile cars from Ralph Lauren, including a hood for the Count Trossi Mercedes; two Brough Superior gas tanks for Jay Leno (a nickel-plated tank and a chrome-plated tank); 4-cylinder Indian motorcycle tanks from the 1930s; and too many to list here, really. In 1995 General Motors heard about Fay and wanted him to conduct some seminars. "I'm pretty independent, I like being here in my shop, but they wanted me out at the GM proving grounds and enticed me to go out there." Fay reluctantly agreed, but only after told them

his essential requirement. "Phyllis comes with me," he said. "We're a package deal." And Phyllis did go with Fay, and when all was said and done he put on 24 programs for General Motors: one-week seminars for six people at a time. "I've trained about 150 people in the GM proving grounds. It wasn't so much the compound curve work, it was the overall package of understanding what metals were and what they do from a scientific point of view."

The Science Of Fay

It's his exalted understanding of metal that has made Fay such an anomaly and has taken him (and Phyllis) all over the U.S. and Canada. His talents have even taken them across the globe to Oslo, Norway's National Museum of Science and Technology where Fay put on a seminar for the Norwegian Veterans Motor Car Club, and he hopes to travel further "to promote good science and metal shaping." A classic car enthusiast, Fay is partial to the pre-1920 Pierce-Arrows, and owns a Pierce-Arrow of his own, for which he worked the fenders and body in aluminum, crafted the copper engine hood, and machined new parts for the engine. He's also an expert woodworker, and undertook the task of replicating a half-dozen Auburn Speedster bodies, keeping true to the exact methods used by the Auburn factory in the 1930s.

It's Fay's willingness to share his knowledge and open his shop to hundreds of students over the years, some famous, some not so famous, that has assuredly inspired automotive and motorcycle craftsmen, and even metal sculptors, to follow suit and pay it forward. Back in 1989 he began his famous metal shaping seminars, he said, "Because people were asking me how I was getting to the shapes, but needed no picking and filing. So I started the seminars, because part of my philosophy is if someone asks you for help and you can help them, then you should."

To read the 2009 schedule of Fay's seminars, or check out some of the books he's written or tools he's developed (and don't forget to look up some of Phyllis's recipes), you can find him online at <http://www.faybutler.com>.

- Wendy Manning
Photos courtesy of Fay Butler

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