

*A whimsical autobiography about growing up in the 50's and 60's in the Cold War era of America.*

## **Green Underwear**

By Terence McSweeney

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# Green Underwear

TERENCE McSWEENEY



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### *The Race*

It was the year of the Soap Box Derby. Our best friend Timmy (not to be confused with my brother Tim) and his brother were building a car and what a car it was. Timmy's brother spared no expense on lumber. It was all two by fours and sheet wood. It was designed to be aerodynamic and had shopping cart wheels. All Timmy could do was talk about that car. How fast it was. How the rope steering was state of the art, state of the art meaning clothesline tacked to the front wooden axle. It had a cool wooden seat with a back. Timmy had a helmet and everything. Each day it was this soapbox car was sure to be a winner because it had this feature or that feature complete with brakes.

Tim and I wanted to race a soapbox car, but we could never build anything like this. So of course, we made it our mission to build one and we challenged Timmy to a race upon its completion. We had a broken sled/cart that we received a few Christmases before. This was the Space Rocket XS-17. Ours converted from a sled with individual skis to wheels for the warm months. It had two handless at the very front that looked like they came off a wheel- barrow set so close to the front that they invited young kids to flip the sled/cart upon completing the maximum three degree turning radius. A real deathtrap. We had broken the front wheels off in a previous horrific accident. The back wheels like the front were ball bearing packed so they would spin with a cool breeze. Perfect.

But, what to do about the front. Our solution was a pair of ten inch narrow buggy wheels whose axle we nailed to a two by four we found and using the original bolt called the “Orbit Control” on the original sled/wagon we put a hole in the two by four and attached the buggy wheels. We attached rope to each side of the board to steer although now because of the size of the wheels we had reduced our steering ratio to two degrees. She was a real flipper. As a way to stop we nailed on a stick to the side of the death board and we were ready.

The big day had arrived. Timmy wheeled out his magnificent specimen of a car and moved it up to the starting line at the top of Grandview Terrace aptly named for its height and steep decline ending in two side streets that intersected and were lined by parked cars of those who lived on the street. What could go wrong? As Timmy came up to the starting line, Tim and I waited in the Rocket. If beauty was any measure Timmy’s car was a classic and we were a junker.

We looked over at each other and made the mandatory taunts about seeing the other at the bottom, eating each other’s dust and the like. We counted down from ten and we were off. Tim and I took off at breakneck speed. The optimal word was “breakneck”. Within twenty yards we realized that we really had no steering and the brake upon pulling flew off never to be seen again. Our hair was pushed straight back as were our lips from the increased velocity, increasing with each second. We were sure that there were flames coming out of our tail end of the board, which was our seat, closing in on the bottom of the street and of course the intersection. Some of the kids watching covered their eyes while others watched because they had never seen a wreck like this before.

Timmy’s speed was glacial. Birds began to land on his magnificent car. He passed his first car and there was a

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collective yawn. The car was too heavy. It was the dump truck of soapbox cars. It never accelerated but just lumbered like a wounded elephant stuck in a tar pit. Glugg!

Meanwhile back at the death race from Hell the McSweeney boys had a decision to make when to jump off what now was more a meteor than a soapbox car. Pieces were flying off and the buggy wheels were beginning to bend on the axle. At the final point of no return I swear to this day she screamed. We jumped at the same time and onward the rocket barreled through the intersection in the air missing by inches an approaching car and landing on top of a bush. Tim looking over at me after brushing off the gravel that had accumulated on his arms and legs said,

“Need to do a little work on the brakes, but I think she’s ready.”

*Terence McSweeney*



The Space Rocket XS-17

Unsafe at Any Speed



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### *These Boots Were Made For Walking*

Winter was coming. To anyone in their sixties there is the memory of very cold and snowy winters in the Northeast. Clearly if you lived there you needed boots. Around November parents would go through the closet to find the winter boots and proceed to pray that their children's feet had not grown. Of course, they were often disappointed and finally after much tugging, pulling and yes swearing they would surrender to the idea that a purchase needed to be made.

Now in those days the preferable boot for kids was the old black buckle galoshes model. Usually these monstrosities would have five or six metal snaps and the boot itself was designed to fit over a shoe. We were never allowed to wear sneakers to school. Now my parents were living paycheck to paycheck and many times no paycheck to paycheck so money for boots had to be budgeted for during the summer. The year 1963 was especially a tight year as my father was more out of work than in so there was truly little budgeting for boots that year. Regardless the leaves had already fallen, it was cold, and snow was predicted to be heavy that year. All the parents of the kids in the neighborhood had already spent their budgeted money and bought out all the boots. While this was a dilemma for my father as his wife was not happy about the bootless situation of her children, he was not deterred and vowed he would solve the great boot dilemma.

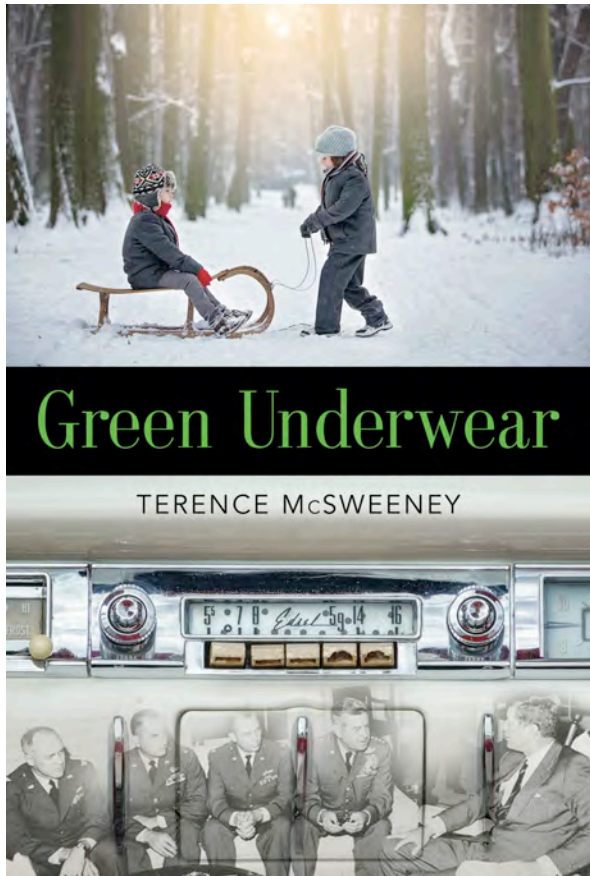
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It was a cold and snowy night when our dad came home from the pub with a bundle under his arm and a smile on his face as he exclaimed the boot problem was solved. He placed his hand into the bag and pulled out two pairs of boots. There was joy in Mudville. We waited in eager anticipation for our black snap galoshes. A big snow was forecasted for the end of the week, the kind of storm that would surely close our school which needed an Armageddon to occur for classes to be called off. New boots and the snow to traipse them in. It was perfect. With the snap of the first buckle we would be on our way to winter fun.

That snap never came for what dear old dad pulled out of that bag looked nothing like our coveted galoshes. In his hands were two pairs of rubber slip on boots, the larger one brown and the smaller one orange. ORANGE. Our hearts sank. Tim was apoplectic. He knew who was getting the orange ones. There was no way he was wearing those little kid's boots. He had a reputation to uphold. As Dad handed them to us the first thing, I noticed was the plastic, rubber smell. It was all wrong. There were no clips, just a horrible rubber mess. We were ordered off to bed with our boots to be worn the next day. As we went to our room, I remember Tim saying under his breath "There is no way I am wearing those things. No way!"

The next morning, I thought Tim may have had a change of heart because as we left for school, he was wearing the orange boots. We said goodbye to our parents, my father being home that day for some reason, and walked down the stairs. I went right and before I knew it Tim was gone. He had circled behind the house and slipped into the garage that was unattached to the house and off to one side of the backyard. The rebellion was on! He stayed in that garage with his orange boots until 3:00 PM.

As I was returning home Tim came up beside me and we proceeded to enter the house when who was waiting for us but good old Dad. He had not gone to work and not only that he knew Tim had also played hooky as he saw him go into the garage. "How was school, boys?" I heard my father bellow as he came from the kitchen. "Good" was the standard reply. That was usually enough, and we could get onto changing to go out and play. That is except for this day. This day my father who was never usually home at this time wanted to know what pearls of wisdom we had acquired. He wanted to know, and he wanted Tim to start off. Tim was pale, but he was good on his feet when he had to be, He went into a litany of the magical learning experience starting with Math as an appetizer, English as the main course and History as the dessert. It was masterful. He had details and even inserted different schoolmates into the story. Afterall, he had hours to work on it. My father listened to it all. He never interrupted Tim until the end when he uttered the fateful words," That's odd that you were able to accomplish all of that from the garage." BAGGED! I proceeded to leave the room. Tim got the mandatory sentence of a spanking and early bedtime without the hour of TV allotted from 7:00-8:00 p.m. if our homework was done. He took his punishment like a man, but he never wore those boots. Somehow, they disappeared. I have always suspected that mom knew where they were but was not telling. My father had moved on and forgot all about the boots. A few weeks later there were two pairs of black galoshes with buckles sitting by each of our beds. Thanx mom. We did notice that we ate a great deal of spaghetti for the next month and suspected that the food money had been reallocated. There were also a number of mustard sandwiches in our immediate future, but those boots were sweet!



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