



My Three Cars— Or: A Car is not Just a Car

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I am deeply interested in the creative way in which archetypal energies incarnate in our everyday lives. We can notice them as they play themselves out in a drive to work, tooling around in the kitchen, or when we make love or war in the bedroom etc. Swiss analyst Adolf Guggenbühl Craig once told me that a Jungian analysis serves the purpose of living life more fully with occasional reflection! In this sense, while a cigar is not just a cigar, nor a car just a car, we should smoke the cigar or drive the car before we should analyze it as a psychological phenomenon. If we don't immerse ourselves deeply and fully into life, there would be nothing to analyze and, very sadly, we would have bypassed living!

And so: to my three cars.

My first car was a beetle—black—almost new. It was a no-nonsense, plain car, a hand-me-down, a loan, from my practical fiancé. It was 1959 and I was the only one in my class who drove a car. I happily chauffeured my three closest friends around. We relished the envy of our other classmates! My social status increased greatly as the only driver of a car—although it was a status on loan, so to speak.

We were in the last year of school in my home country Germany and preparing for the *Abitur*, the final state exam. All of us were headed for university—or so we thought. I was then quite unaware that my trusty little bug was also motoring me from being a schoolgirl into becoming a woman. Within a year I would be married, pregnant and separated from Europe by the vast Atlantic Ocean. The bug had a great deal to do with my initiation into being a grown-up. Like my persona, it was not quite mine. It, like I, depended on a man. My fiancé bought it's gas, paid for the insurance and maintenance—as I would come

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to depend on him, my then husband, for sustenance, safety and protection on a foreign continent.

In Germany a car is called *das Auto* short for automobile—or being automatically mobile, empowered by many horses. I can't recall what horsepower the car had—nor did that matter to me then. A VW is short for *Volkswagen*, a wagon or car for folk, the people. It has its roots in the Third Reich and was intended to be affordable transportation for the masses. It was a more personal and socially elevated alternative to getting about than the excellent public transportation system we had.

Many fairy tales deal with this time of life, with adolescence—the transition to adulthood. It is very often a dramatic and turbulent phase, especially in our culture, which no longer has meaningful rites and rituals to contain and transform the high emotionality of this important passage. To get out of the tower, *Rapunzel*, for example, had to have an outside agent of transportation. In her case, this agent was a prince on a white horse. Analogously, for me, a mid-20th century woman, a fiancé provided an automobile "... to get me out of there." Not understanding that we are searching for "masculine" energy to propel ourselves out of the entombing family and into life, far too many women to this day choose instead an actual man. We are not yet ready, nor are we conscious of this: the need to access our own inner masculine strength—which in any case is usually not very well developed at that stage of life. The tidy little black beetle bug *Auto* was not just a car—I now understand it as a symbol. It was, literally and figuratively, the means by which I left my childhood, my family and my home continent behind.

About twenty five years later the next important mode of getting about in the world, came into my life. It was a large brown Suburban, which functioned like a living room on wheels. It was huge, felt safe and was a gift from my second husband. It was intended to cart around our two children and their many friends. We belonged to a car pool, a unique American institution, capably organized and managed by a group of neighborhood mothers. That car pool was a big part of our lives for many years and most of the friendships I retain to this day have their origin there.

The suburban was roomy, reliable, with a powerful motor that could even pull a horse trailer. It was at ease in our urban neighborhood as well as on the muddy, slippery clay trails through the woods on the farm in the country where we spent most of our weekends. My two grown children from my first marriage often joined us there. At times we would spend a whole month in the house in the woods, which my husband and I and some of our friends had built over the years. Early in the morning I would pack the children, still rather sleepy and in their P.J.s, into our living room on wheels. They would have their breakfast in the car and get dressed on the way into town. (Those were the days when neither seatbelts nor environmental concerns about gasoline were operating in my consciousness.) We would load up the other car pool children on the way to school. The whole lively bundle would tumble out of the big car in front of their school. In the afternoon I'd pick them all back up. My children did much of their homework during the one-hour drive to the country. Once we got there, we'd catch and ride horses, play in the hay barn, fish at times. The Suburban, able to go anywhere, was an integral part of family life. Whenever I think about this big lummock of a car, I smile. It fit in anywhere: into the simple, almost innocent country life where steaming breakfast platters were handed through the kitchen window onto the large old table on the never-quite-

finished wrap-around deck; it would carry us, in cocktail dress and tux, to social functions, or to the Crisis Center for my midnight telephone counseling shifts etc. etc. It somehow represented what my husband and I wanted our children to be able to be and do: develop big and sturdy enough personalities to embrace diversity and fit into any situation in life—personalities as large, open, capable, and steady as our family car. The Suburban was a symbol for my full, content and busy life as a grown woman in America, a life as ample as the very car I drove. I thought of it as a symbol for our marriage as well.

But the living room on wheels also powered us through a painful divorce, another drastic awakening and transition. Births require labor. The car needed a great deal of gasoline, energy to keep going. Our marriage had become an energy guzzler as well and could not be sustained. After the wrenching process of the divorce, I sold the car. I could no longer afford the fuel nor did I need a vehicle to get around on a farm or a country club—neither was any longer part of my life. The carpool continued, though—we all just got crammed in a little closer.

The living room on wheels was not just a car, it represented a phase in our lives—full with both joy and the darker emotions.

Now when I reflect on it, it was like a womb—crammed full with children and the hopeful potential of life they represented. It also became a libido-guzzling tomb incapable of adjusting to lean times.

Propelled by post-divorce grief and rudderlessness, I did a turnabout and started training as a Jungian analyst. I drove several cars during this time, shifting from one to another, practical considerations foremost in my mind. Cheap, used cars—very sensible. Once I had my diploma as a Jungian analyst from the Zürich Institute, the pattern continued. It was a time of hard work—inner and outer. Focus on the joys and pleasures of life had to take a backseat ... for a while, as it turned out.

“If this were my mother’s car, I’d forbid her to ever set foot in it again,” the Toyota mechanic announced to my daughter after an eventful and scary two-hour drive to Montgomery.

I was devastated and terrified. Where would the money for another car come from?

“I need a martini—join me” I said.

My daughter observed calmly:

“There’s a BMW dealer next door. Let’s take a test drive instead. YOU SHOULD HAVE A FUN, DEPENDABLE CAR.”

A nice car, a source of pleasure in my life?

What a concept!

But the BMW immediately also became the vehicle chosen by all the inferiority complexes, shadow issues and demons that had plagued me from my earliest childhood and which I thought I had exhaustively dealt with during the many years of analysis. They riotously came to life again! “You shouldn’t!! You can’t!! Who do you think you are?” they screamed in chorus.

When I test drove this BMW I made another discovery. I realized that I very much like fine cars, their elegant style and exquisite engines. I love the sound of a V-8 engine, purring confidently or roaring demandingly under the hood—analogue to the powers within me—I was almost embarrassed at the thought—that might now, finally, be permitted to full life?

I did not buy a BMW—but the seed the child had planted in the mother was sprouting.

After a month of considerations, of juggling emotions and bank accounts, I took out an equity loan to finance a new car as well as the repairs, and improvements to the house I had lived in

and where I had raised my children for the last 30 years. I bought a brand-new car and several years later I sold the house. My new car was a two-seater hatchback—paprika/cayenne red! My Australian shepherd could easily jump into the back and off we’d go anywhere. The little red car fit my dog and me like a glove—like a second skin! It was glorious. There were many adventures with this car at a time in my life when I had thought that adventures belonged to the past. It had a certain spirit about it and evoked my fun-loving, adventurous, extroverted side. A Jungian would say that I was developing more of my inferior function, the shadow side of my personality.

My car and I made friends. Leaving a Christmas party of the New Orleans IRSJA Seminar with Peggy Schoen one year, we steered towards our cars—only to recognize a kindred spirit in each other that was expressed in both of our sexy, sporty cars! We have been fast friends since.

Then, one dark Christmas night three years ago my red car and I were caught in one of those sudden and devastating New Orleans flash floods. At this darkest night of the year, my car tried to drive on valiantly through the rising ominous waters until we came to an intersection where the water was just simply too deep ... it stalled ... and we drifted. It took all my strength to push the door open. I stepped out and was knee-deep in black moving floodwaters. The dark night and unexpected deep waters moved around us powerfully. We were alone and helpless as the destructive powers of nature whirled about us. There was still a low shimmer of light in the flood lights of my car, but the car itself seemed to have half-shut its eyes as I stood helplessly watching its demise in the dark rainy night. It seemed to me as if it was saying: “I worked hard, pulled us through a lot—we had fun ... now I submit.” I’ll never forget those half-shut eyes of my fading car. A car is not just a car—this car had been an embodiment of my late-in-life unexpectedly abundant energies. Would my body also gently give up when my time would come? Would my eyelids droop half shut, to better focus on my inner life during the last transition? In psychological jargon, this event would be termed a projection. I prefer to call it, with Marie-Louise von Franz, *Spiegelungen der Seele*, mirroring of my soul, soul talk.

The Mercedes dealer in New Orleans in concert with the insurance agent, tried in vain to resuscitate the little paprika/cayenne red car. It could not be done.

I’m driving another fine German car now—a bit of home in a foreign country and with a solid and strong engine tucked under the hood! There may be another car or two in my future, but the paprika/cayenne red hatchback, in conjunction with the sale of our family home, belong together as markers, symbolic of entering into the last phase of my life, a time, surprising me by being far richer in creative energy than I had been taught to expect.

My three cars are meaningful images, symbols of three phases of my life. All three were more than just cars—I am grateful for what they incarnated for me and for what I could understand about life because of their presence in it. They were representatives of archetypal energies that are always lurking in the background, in the unconscious, waiting to be known, to become embodied. Is it perhaps our job in life to look for and give these energies life by acknowledging their presence—whether they incarnate as cigars, cars, other “objects” or synchronistic events.