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# Car Bombs and Camouflage

BY KEITH LONG

When I was a kid, my mother always said cleanliness was next to Godliness. I always said cleanliness was next to impossible.

The world is a dirty place. Especially in southwestern Oklahoma. Especially for a kid. But even here, dirt is a seasonal thing. Winter dirt is hard to come by, while summer dirt is a

little too hot and keeps getting washed off by the water hose. But springtime dirt, the right-now kind of dirt, makes for perfect messes. Just ask any mom-on-the-street.

There were all kinds of dirt in our neighborhood, but Mother was a stickler about certain kinds. She didn't like dirt under my fingernails. I kept my fingernails bit back as far as possible to lessen the tons of dirt that could get under them. Mother's method of unloosing the dirt from my fingernails—hot water, Lux liquid, and a steel brush—could've pulled war secrets from the most hardened Nazi.

Mother also worried about grass stains on the knees of my jeans. As a kid, I was young and short and clumsy, and I had very little protection against grass stains on my knees. Sometimes I would hobble into the house, nursing the results of an Evel Knievel bike wreck, such as a sprained ankle and a dislocated shoulder, and Mother would declare, "Just look at your knees! How am I going to get those grass stains out!"

I figured Mother didn't watch TV and hadn't

heard about "Tide" and "Era" and all those other laundry wonders. On the other hand, I didn't understand why Mother didn't go ahead and patch my stained jeans just like she did all the others. It was inevitable that a patch would wind up on my knee, so I saw no reason to wait until I actually tore a hole in it.

**"Just look at your knees! How am I going to get those grass stains out!"**

On the whole, fingernail dirt and grass stains were pretty run-of-the-mill stuff. I could get either all by myself. I could get fingernail dirt by excavating a red-ant bed, and the grass stains came easily enough when I practiced parachuting off the picnic table with a bath towel wrapped

around my neck. To get inventively dirty, however, a kid needs a catalyst of some kind. Luckily for me, I knew Harv. He was my partner in grime.

One afternoon, after a particularly gruesome John Wayne movie the night before, Harv and I decided we couldn't tame the entire Old West without a little camouflage on our faces. I swiped a couple of magic markers from Mother's art drawer, and we managed to pretty much cover our faces with black and red ink. But when we were finished, Harv said we just looked like two kids with magic marker on their faces. I agreed. We needed more. Besides, Old West lawmen didn't even have magic markers to help them sneak up on villainous outlaws. We remembered

the mounds of clover in Johnson's back yard, so we crumbled that up and rubbed it on our cheeks and brows.

"We look pretty dirty now," I said.

"Yeah, but not a great dirty," Harv countered.

We searched the neighborhood for more weeds, but unfortunately they were all of the green variety. We did find

**"We look pretty  
dirty now," I said.**

some old charcoal in the barbecue grill. It had been cooked over and was all oily so it didn't scrape onto our faces too easily, but it did alter our clothing wonderfully. We charcoaled each other, front and back. Even Clint Eastwood would have been proud of our ugliness.

Harv mused a minute. "Mud would work," he said.

"Can't, I said. "Mother won't let me get muddy."

Harv mused some more, and I could tell he was about to come up with a great musement. He began eyeing the lawn mower, which was sitting beside our red barn. It was great. The sludge on the mower was of perfect texture for camouflage. We sludged our hair, our ears, our faces. One could hardly see the charcoal on our clothes once we were properly sludged.

The mower didn't hold enough sludge for our purposes, but we were able to rake some off the rototiller, and then we scoured the neighborhood for more motor sludge. The mother lode was waiting for us behind the old DX station. Sludge was just lying about on the ground, camouflage in waiting.

When Mr. Worthley finally ran us off, we slinked around the neighborhood, looking for Pat Garrett, Billy the Kid, Butch and Sundance, and

**"Can't, I said.**

**"Mother won't let  
me get muddy."**

any other bank-robbing, bomb-toting low-life that we could find, confident that our sludge camouflage would prevent our detection. Since Mother wouldn't let me go uptown to the bank, we decided the black hats must be planning a big car-bombing raid that day and took it upon

“Look,” Harv said, pointing out one of the squad cars.

“They must be looking for car bombs, too!”

ourselves to check every car in the neighborhood. I started to mention to Harv that there were no cars in the Old West, but decided not to ruin all the fun. We skulked through alleys and side yards, approaching each car with care and suspicion.

Neighbors came out and shooed us off, uttering nonsense about sludgy stuff on their windshield. But I knew they didn't recognize us, since no one

threatened to call my mother. Police cars began prowling through the neighborhood.

“Look,” Harv said, pointing out one of the squad cars. “They must be looking for car bombs, too!”

We doubled our efforts, but found only a few dozen car bombs. We were convinced there were hundreds more, but since the paper didn't carry any news about bombings for the next couple of weeks, we gave ourselves new deputy badges for a job well done.

When Father finally gave the dinner whistle, I scurried to the back door, leaving sludge marks every step of the way. When I rounded the corner into the kitchen, camouflage dripping from every limb, Mother stepped back, aghast at my appearance.

“Just look at your knees,” she cried. “How am I ever going to get those grass stains out?” ■