

1996 Chevrolet

Edition: LT-4

Commemorating the
Corvettes

by Jeff Rios



Corvette Collector's

C4 and My Love of

Ever since I can remember, I have always been a fanatic about cars - American cars! However, there is one automobile, an icon, which in my mind is the most significant car that has, is, or will ever be made: the Chevrolet Corvette!

Growing-up in the 1970s, I guess some would be surprised about my enthusiasm for automobiles, given the gas shortages and increased government regulations. However, I grew-up in a family that appreciated fine cars -- General Motors cars. In particular, I grew up liking fast cars, such as the Pontiac Firebird Trans Am and Chevrolet Camaro; I also liked big luxurious Cadillacs. Yet there is one car that caught my eye more than any other.

It was the autumn of 1976 and my father was looking at new cars. A Corvette fanatic himself, he and my mother both had Pontiac GTOs at one time and had nearly purchased a 1968 Corvette with a big block 427. Unfortunately, the order was delayed from the dealer, and my parents needed the money to purchase land and build a home. They had to cancel the order. Now nearly eight years later, my parents had a family to tend to (myself and an older brother). We had a station wagon -- a big Pontiac Grand Safari that weighed nearly 5200 pounds with a 400 cubic engine. The car was fast and comfortable, but my father longed for a sports car. So here we are at a Chevrolet dealer, and the first car I noticed was a beautiful 1977 Dark Red Corvette. I fell in love instantly! The big bulging curves on the car made the car look like I was going over 100 MPH standing still. I was not quite six years-old, but I knew that this was the car that I would like to have. At that moment, I promised myself that I would own a Corvette some day. Unfortunately, my family could not afford the Corvette and purchased a base aqua-blue Camaro with an in-line six. No, it wasn't a Corvette, but this trip marked the beginning of my love for the Corvette.

As I grew older, I could not stop thinking about the Corvette. Many times I would lie on the bed in my room imagining myself driving a Corvette. Many nights I would dream of driving the car, on the open highway, with the roof panels off, wind blowing through my hair, and of course I had a big smile on my face. Heck, I was driving the pinnacle of all automobiles: the Chevy Corvette. Unfortunately it was only a dream, and not even being a teenager, I would have to dream for many more years before I could actually drive one. The years passed but my dreams never faded. I began drawing (doodling is probably more appropriate) cars on scrap paper. Generally the cars were sporty and often I would try to emulate the lines of a Corvette. I would even try to construct a Corvette out of Legos as my passion for the 'Vette continued to grow. During my freshman year in high school, all students were required to research a topic and make formal presentations to peers and faculty in order to advance to the tenth grade. I chose to make a presentation

on the Corvette entitled: The Past, Present, and Future of America's Sports Car: Corvette. I received an A+! I knew then (though I had thought about it many years earlier) that I would love to work at General Motors, and particularly would like to work on the Corvette. Of course, growing-up in Northwest New Jersey, I did not know anyone who worked directly with or for GM. Therefore my dream of being a part of the Corvette team had to wait, but my lust to drive the car would soon be met. After the Camaro my father purchased a 1983 Trans Am, then a 1986 Trans Am. Yeah, they have V8 power, were good-looking but they were not Corvettes. Finally in late 1986, my father purchased a 1987 Corvette with a rare two-tone color of Silver Beige Metallic/ Medium Brown Metallic and the Doug Nash 4+3 transmission. Now this car exceeded my expectations. Fortunately I soon obtained my license and my father would let me drive the car. What a dream!!! Yeah, Ford might have begun reviving the Mustang, and Porsche thought they had an affordable well performing sports car with 924/944; but they are/were not in the same league! The Japanese cars (Supra, 300ZX, RX-7); yeah right, they did not have class, speed, performance, or mystique of the Corvette. Driving my father's 'Vette reaffirmed a promise I made to myself as little boy; I will own a Corvette! Unfortunately being a teenager in the late 1980s, I could not afford Corvette. Even if I could, the insurance for young male driver would be over \$4500 per year. Right now, I would have to satisfy my passion by driving my father's Corvette.

My father continued his passion and upgraded to a beautiful 1990 Dark Red Metallic Corvette Coupe with a ZF 6 speed, FX3 Selective Ride Control, and low-tire pressure warning system. Again, this car exceeded my expectations. Furthermore, this car was an improvement over the '87, the car just became better which made my love toward Corvettes grow stronger! My father's love grew too, and when my folks moved to California, he upgraded to a 1993 Ruby Red Anniversary Convertible Edition to better enjoy the friendly warm weather of that state. Meanwhile, my passion for the Corvette remained. I was soon going to be graduating with a Master's Degree in Engineering from Cornell University. I wanted to work for General Motors, hopefully with Corvette, so my passion could be further satisfied. Most of my peers shunned the auto industry thinking it was not glamorous and was lacking in opportunity. I saw it differently. I loved cars, particularly the Corvette, and I wanted a job that I would enjoy. Also, fortunately, GM, after a lackluster start to this decade, was beginning to improve. I saw opportunity and sent my resume to numerous GM locations. As destiny would have it I landed an interview with Midsize Car Division (of which Corvette was apart of). I was offered a job and would be stationed in Bowling Green, Kentucky, to work with the Corvette team -- a dream come true! I saw this as an opportunity to not only have a job that I love, but also an opportunity for me to work and contribute to improve both Corvette and GM. Now I could give something back to GM and Corvette since they instilled in me a passion and pride for not only the best car in the world, but also for American ingenuity.

Working with Corvette is great. Not only do I work with the car I adore, I am paid for it! However, being around Corvettes all of the time was a constant reminder to another promise I made to myself; I needed to own one ! For the first time in my life, I was making enough money that I could potentially afford a Corvette. However, insurance for a young single male under 25 owning a Corvette can be astronomical. Also, should I make

the "wise" decision and buy a house? After contemplating my situation, my love for Corvette grew fonder. As the 1996 model year approached, I knew this would be the last and best year for the C4 Corvette. I have a lot of memories with the C4. It was the first Corvette I drove and wasn't the car that I had my first true job with. Furthermore, there was a new one-year only motor, the LT-4, and I really loved the five spoke wheels on the Collector's Edition. September 19th, 1995 was a momentous day for me. I decided that I was not going to let "rationality" reign and a house foil my dreams or postpone an aspiration of mine for twenty years as it had my father -- I ordered an absolutely luscious 1996 Sebring Silver Corvette Collector Edition Coupe with the LT-4 six speed. I could not contain my excitement! Here I was, 24 years-old, and already achieving a lifelong dream: owning a Corvette! Furthermore, now I would have the opportunity to watch my Corvette be built. Watching my Corvette being built was like nothing I could have every thought I would have the opportunity to do. In addition, my car would be one of the few with the new waterborne paint -- which further enhanced the looks of the car by reducing orange peel and by improving the exterior luster that Corvettes are known for. Everyone at the plant was really great with my order and helped me track the build of my 'Vette. Many employees signed the car, and I had the opportunity to sign the driver's side interior door skin! To top that off, someone wrote in the inner rear quarter panel on the right side: "Good Luck, Jeff!" Furthermore, Bowling Green's plant newspaper, The Vette Gazette, did a feature on me and my car, and took pictures of it being built so I could treasure the assembly of my car along with my ownership of it.

Not only was I obtaining my dreams, my colleagues at GM Corvette did everything possible to enhance my dream to ensure that I would receive the finest, best built car in the world! I did receive the best car in the world and continually like to thank everyone who contributed to my dream. The next momentous day for me was on January 3rd, 1996. I took delivery of my Corvette from Gordon "Shorty" Brandon of Cave City Chevrolet-Buick in south-central Kentucky. Gordon and the dealership further enhanced my dream with their professionalism, courtesy, and down-to-earth goodness. I want to thank them for improving my dream and only hope all can experience the salesmanship and service that I have experienced with Cave City Chevrolet-Buick. I now have had the car for a year, and I still feel like a little boy in a candy store. The car is excellent!!! Every time I drive it I receive thumbs-up and positive comments from others, as well as the traditional "Corvette wave" from fellow 'Vette owners. Today, others may buy cars because of prestige and a badge on the hood. However, with my Corvette, I not only own the best car in the world, I own something that has more class, mystique, speed, and styling than anything else in the world! My Corvette like all 'Vettes is an icon -- not only for all automobiles, but also for America! It is and will continue to be a piece of not only American pride and history, but also my personal pride and history. I love my Corvette!!!