

How Did That One Joke Go?

That is a question that I remember asking my stepfather a number of times throughout my childhood. I referred to it as “the one about the man from Boston”. It would take several tries before he would tell the joke, which was in a signing manner. The joke/song is as followed:

There was a man from Boston

Who had a little Austin

He had room for his ass

Five gallons of gas

And his balls hung out

So he lost them

I always felt as if this were just a dirty joke that was told by older men. There is no significant meaning to it other than to make an audience laugh. One must first know what an “Austin” is to comprehend the joke, however. An Austin is a type of small automobile, similar to the Volkswagen Bug in size. That was one of the first pieces of information I had to collect from my informant, because I had no relative idea the size of an “Austin”.

Joe, my father, would often times say this joke/song when I was younger to me to make me laugh. It was more commonly shared amongst the men at a family get together, some whom had not heard it before and received a good laugh. The joke was something that was passed down orally year by year. When starting this assignment I had to ask Joe how the joke went because I had forgotten. I hadn't heard it in a long time.

I asked Joe why he told me the joke/song. His reply was, “Boy, when I’d tell you that you would laugh your ass off because you knew it was something that your momma hated.”

Needless to say, he was right. Mom hated anything that was crude or had bad language in it when I was a child. Joe said he could recall me laughing for seemingly 20 minutes every time he told the joke.

I believe that the joke/song serves as a release valve for both the person telling it and the one hearing it. It allows the teller to say something with the anticipation that it is going to receive a good response. It gives the listener a chance to hear a funny tale and hopefully enjoy their day a little better after a good laugh. The middle ground between the teller and listener is usually where a smile is greeted from both people and they begin to laugh.