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Neal Rubin

What a way for guys to celebrate the gift of friendship

French class, seventh grade. The new kid walked in, sat behind Glenn Therrien and put his feet on the wire rack that was supposed to hold Therrien's books.

"Get your bleeping feet off my desk," Therrien said.

Thus began the deepest and most enduring friendship of Therrien and Curt Wallace's lives. There may have also been some shoulder-punching involved before the bonding was complete, but suffice to say they've been together through thick, thin and male-pattern baldness.

Therrien says Wallace is a great guy, unassuming, with a still-untamed metaphorical wild hair. "And he's ugly," Wallace says Therrien is beautiful and like a brother. "And he's good at telling stories."

Thirty-eight years ago, they lived in Bell Gardens, Calif. It was a shabby suburb of L.A., and if Wallace's family was average for the area, Therrien's was dragging down the curve. Too unsettled, too much to drink, nothing to keep a smart but rowdy kid from dropping out of high school and hitting the road.

Eventually, Therrien wound up in Clawson. In a vivid and frequently hardscrabble life, he's been a taco maker, a dishwasher, a seaman and Bill Bonds' television producer. These days, his title is senior sports producer at WJBK-TV (Channel 2).

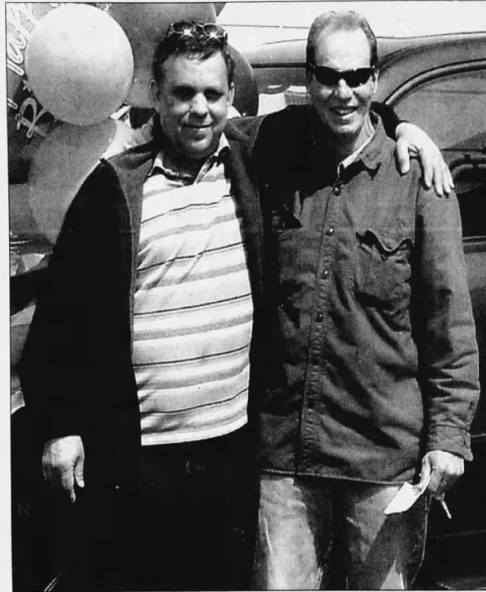
Wallace stayed in California and went into his dad's business, trucking potatoes up and down the coast. He and his dad built Sweet Jimmy Foods into a french fry powerhouse and expanded into vegetables and meats.

You wouldn't know it from his jeans and T-shirts, or the fact that he'll still drive a route, but Wallace has become well-to-do. He lives in a nice segment of Orange County and owns more cars than one person probably needs, and he's still the first guy Therrien called two months ago when his brother died of cancer.

"I have two best friends," Therrien told him. "I just lost one of them, and I wanted to talk to the other."

Kevin Roseborough, the executive producer for Fox 2's Problem Solvers team, describes Therrien as crusty. Not mean, mind you, but after a few decades in newsrooms, "he's a pretty tough individual."

Couple the brother's death with the passing of his mother-in-law a few weeks later, though, and he was hurting. Wallace invited him west, but that was impossible; he'd been



Curt Wallace, left, of Orange County, Calif., and Glenn Therrien of Clawson have been best friends since seventh grade.

away from work too much already.

Then Therrien remembered he was already scheduled to take last Monday and Tuesday off. Two Fridays ago, on five days' notice, Wallace hopped a plane to Detroit.

They hugged and called each other names. Wallace fixed the Therriens' toilet so you didn't have to jiggle the handle anymore, and while Therrien wasn't looking, he even cleaned out the drain. On Monday, Therrien's 50th birthday, they went fishing at his favorite spot, west of Cadillac.

The next morning, they went to find Wallace a new pickup truck.

Early in the weekend, he had decided to buy himself a vehicle and drive home. That's the kind of spontaneous sort he is. He surfed the Web, decided on a double-cab Toyota Tundra and started e-mailing car dealers.

Therrien isn't much of a gearhead, but Wallace tried to involve him in the process. "Oz," he said — it's short for Ostrich, after the time Therrien's head wound up buried in the wood chips in a high-jump pit — "what's a good color for this thing?"

They decided on salsa red, with leather seats and all the options. Since Wallace doesn't live here, he explained, there was one problem: Therrien would have to co-sign for the car and put his autograph on a bunch of paperwork. But Wallace would pay him back when he got home, and he was good for it, right?

Finally, all the T's were crossed, and they walked out of the showroom at Suburban Toyota in Troy. Around a corner sat the truck — with a big red ribbon and half a dozen balloons on the hood.

"Happy birthday, idiot," Wallace said. "You didn't think I was really driving back, did you?"

Therrien burst into tears. So did Wallace. Dealership staffers went next.

"You can't do this," said Therrien, who had been driving a 1998 Saturn. "This is crazy."

It's done, Wallace explained — so shut up and drive.

Everyone at Fox 2 who finds out about the truck wants to hear the story from Therrien, and every time he tells it, he breaks down. "This is a life-changing experience," he said. "Not in the way of material

things, but I need to pay this forward."

As for Wallace, he says he didn't really cry. "It was windy." But he's sticking to what he said as they drove to the airport in a salsa red pickup.

"This is the best day of my life," Therrien said.

"Your reaction," said his friend, "made this the best day of my life."

Neal Rubin appears Sunday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday. Reach him at (313) 222-1874, nrubin@detnews.com or 615 W. Lafayette, Detroit, MI 48226.

