

## Dad, The Driver

After Dad's passing, there was a great deal of information about his off track involvement with his Race 4 Riley, Window World Cares, and #CheckIt4Andretti. That is a testament to the emphasis he placed on those events, especially in the last years of his life. However, I think the depth and versatility of his career is something that needs to be appreciated as well. I understand I view it through a slanted lens as he was my Father and everyone believes their Dad was the best at whatever he did for a living. I think to fully appreciate it we will need a couple different newsletters but let's start with his early career.

Dad raced go-karts and eventually got some opportunities in Formula Fords. Three races to be exact and for one of those races he built the car himself. Of those three races, he was able to win two of them, make a note of that as that will come up later!

As a 19 year old freshman in college, he picked up a Stadium Stock ride and won the only race that car ever had won. The next year he was able to get a USAC Midget ride and from there is really where his career started to gain traction. Of note, he did only a couple dirt go-kart races prior to jumping full time on the USAC trail. He won the Indianapolis Speedrome Championship as a Rookie, winning the last two races after being suspended for a race for "overly aggressive driving"! An Andretti driving aggressively, I never would have thunk it!

He also ran second at the Night Before the 500 which was one of the most prestigious races at Indianapolis Raceway Park. I think on the surface these accomplishments may not look ground shattering, but these were legends of the sport he was racing against. Mel Kenyon, Tom Bigelow, and Rich Vogler. If there was a Mt. Rushmore of Open Wheel Short Track Racing all of these guys would be candidates to be on it! And most of them had raced against Mario (Andretti) that's how much experience they had!

He was able to parlay that Midget ride into another Midget ride and then a Sprint Car ride and eventually a Silver Crown ride. This takes us to 1984-85 where he would get his first big road racing break, in a 1000+ HP BMW IMSA GTP Prototype at Sonoma Raceway. He got the test after meeting a guy at a USAC Midget Race and he threw his name in the hat for the ride. Before the test though, he had to convince BMW he was worth the test... "Well, I've won two-thirds of the professional road races I've competed in!" Little was it known he only had done three races overall! He went to the test and was the quickest and got the job.

Again, it can't be stressed enough how difficult that jump from an Open Wheel Car with no downforce to something as gnarly and mean as a Prototype at Sonoma nonetheless. One of the hardest places to get ahold of as a driver. That takes us to 1986. We will get into how he got his IndyCar opportunity next week!

The BMW IMSA GTP Program was very up and down with some issues as those prototypes were complicated and built very much on edge. It's no different than economics less supply equals more demand, well in racing typically more speed equals less reliability. This was especially true for those cars in that time period. At the final race of the season Dad and Davy Jones were able to win at Watkins Glen for their first win. The guys they beat are sportscar veterans in Porsches, Jaguars, and the Senior BMW with John Watson and David Hobbs driving. Unfortunately, at the end of the year they shut the program down and Dad was left without a ride. So at this point let's pause. Dad is 23-24, and he is fresh off the biggest win of his career and he is back to where he started in the Sprint Cars and Midgets. He re-grouped and called some old friends Rollie Helmling and The Gardner Family to see if they had anything available for him to drive. Fortunately, Rollie had a Midget and the Gardners had a Sprint Car so Dad was in business and back to his roots! He has some solid runs at Ascot in the Sprint Car, Winchester in the Midget (ran 2<sup>nd</sup> with broken Panhard Bar) and even won at Santa Maria in the Sprint Car. Dad was out west running the sprint car for the Gardner's and the sponsor on the car was Mike Curb and he also happened to own an IndyCar and NASCAR Cup Team. He came down one night and hired Dad to run the IndyCar at Road America the next weekend and Dad's Teammate Brad Noffsinger to run the Cup car at Bristol. Can you imagine, you get a promotion to run an IndyCar the next weekend and you still have to run the race that night! I would have been too excited to even focus! It was a one race deal and Dad was fitted in the car in the garage at Road America. Again, this can't be stressed how difficult Road America is to get ahold of. It is one of those classic American Road Courses with no run off area and lots of 3, 4 and 5<sup>th</sup> gear corners that are extremely difficult. Dad went and finished 6<sup>th</sup> and got to go to the next race and then the next one and eventually he was hired as their full time driver in 1987. The goal was to be at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway by the time he was 25 and his rookie test was on March 11, 1988, one day before his 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, goal accomplished! He passed and went to May as a rookie. Those were the days where you only had 3 attempts to get in, unfortunately on the first two runs he had mechanical issues, but was able to get in on his third and final attempt to get to start the Greatest Spectacle in Racing. He was running inside the top-10 but unfortunately another mechanical caused him to retire. He would run the remainder of the season until they got to Pocono Speedway...

It was the end of 1988, Dad's rookie season in IndyCar and they were headed to Pocono Speedway. Not only is Pocono one of the quickest tracks on the schedule, but back in those days there was no pit road speed limit. Which, to me, is still hard to wrap my head around. I think the crew members were even crazier than the drivers! During the race Dad was adamant something was wrong and after pitting to check it out they couldn't find anything so they sent him back out. Well on pit road at about 170 the rear suspension failed. It had a nut on the bottom of the bolt but they couldn't see that the nut was gone and finally on pit road it had worked itself loose enough to come out. It was a massive hit, with car pieces scattered everywhere. Dad said he was thinking if he looked down and his feet are still connected he would be over the moon excited. He looked down and not only were they still connected but his boots were still on! Aldo was the first person to the car somehow, and Dad was injured pretty badly. He was airlifted out and had significant foot/leg damage as well as the normal cuts and bruises. Dad always told the story that he was being wheeled around the hospital and a little old lady stopped him and asked if he got mauled by a lion! He thought that was hilarious even though she was serious! Dad was adamant (and stubborn) about getting back in the car as quickly as possible. He returned to action at Nazareth later in the season, they made the brake pedal very soft so he could use it with his casted foot. He was involved in an accident so he quickly made his way to the airport to catch a flight to Australia for the Bathurst 1000! He couldn't walk but he could still drive! If you aren't familiar with Bathurst do yourself a favor and look up the track. It's up and then down a literal mountain, it is one of the scariest/hair raising tracks as the walls are literal rock from the mountain. Of note, the shift was a left hand H pattern so Dad had to learn that as well. He ran and blew a tire at the top of the mountain, thus ending his race. This ended his rocky 1988 season, he was hurt and then crashed again at the fastest part at one of the scariest parts of the tracks. I'm sure an off season was a much needed time for some rest and recovery. 1989 would prove to be much better... With no IndyCar opportunities available, Dad went to drive a IMSA Prototype for Jim Busby. They ran 2 cars one for Mario and Michael and one for Bob Wollek and Derek Bell. Dad would be running for points so they were going to put him in whichever car would have a better chance of winning. Unfortunately, Mario and Michael's car had problems early so Dad was slotted into the sister car. Fortunately, they had better luck and were able to win the 24 Hours of Daytona overall on his first try! Winning always helps create opportunities and when he returned back to Indianapolis...he would have a message waiting for him.

If you want to hear more about Dad's 24 Hours of Daytona win he did an interview with Marshal Pruett about it below: [John Andretti Podcast](#)

Originally, I was going to switch back and forth between stories about Dad's career, being a car owner and other funny things that happened to us over the years. However, I've had a lot of people reach out about these latest newsletters so I thought I should finish these, at least until he moves to NASCAR!

Dad entered 1989 with only the prototype ride on his schedule, but winning Daytona opened up some doors and, when he returned back to Indianapolis, there was a message waiting for him from Vince Granatelli. Vince owned an IndyCar and wanted Dad to drive it at Indianapolis and, if that went well, they would do some other races in between his IMSA schedule. On the Prototype side, it was a pretty successful year for Dad. Besides winning Daytona, they also won the Grand Prix of Palm Beach and finished 5<sup>th</sup> in the championship. Considering the age on the Porsche 962 and speed deficit to the quick, but unreliable, Jaguar, it was a very good year. He was the highest finishing Porsche Driver in the standings and got the opportunity to run an ADAC Race in Germany. Dad was able to win that race and, thus, was named the winner of the Porsche Cup. This is a very prestigious award given out to the best non-factory Porsche driver that year. As we were cleaning out the storage units recently, we found his Porsche Cup; Mom polished it up and it looks great now! Dad never showed it to me, and I'm not even sure he knew exactly where it was kept! The IndyCar results weren't as he would have hoped as they were plagued with a variety of engine issues. At the end of 1989, Dad was left without a ride again and was looking to get back to IndyCar full time. At that time, Porsche was looking at building an IndyCar program with Teo Fabi as a driver and they decided to run another car for Dad. It made the most sense; he had just won Daytona, Porsche Cup, and had IndyCar experience. At the end of 1989, Dad went back over to Germany for a seat fitting and they had a car made completely out of wood. Even the steering wheel and gear shifter. They were behind on their car build and had to make sure their drivers fit! Dad did his seat fit before Teo and when Teo got there, he moved the bulkheads to fit him and that's how they built both cars. Unfortunately for Dad, Teo was smaller than him so he ended up only being able to run a small seat pad and his shins/knees would be cut up after every race. I've driven a couple single seaters and it is so painful when your legs are getting beat around every session. Despite the pain, 1990 would be a much better IndyCar season for Dad. I think 1990 was the first year that he only drove one kind of car. I always thought it was funny he didn't go back to Daytona to defend his win, but why mess up your 1000% batting percentage?! In all reality, he was taking time to heal up, which was probably suggested by my Mom...she always knew what was best!

1991 would prove to be the best year of Dad's IndyCar career. After a couple years of experience he was able to get the right opportunity to provide him with the car capable of matching his abilities. Back in those you had to remember that development was a constant factor, teams were constantly making their cars and motors better. In IndyCar now, the engines are sealed and they don't build new cars every year. The development aspect is still there, but the gains are much smaller. In 1991, it was Dad's best opportunity until that point, but he knew it was critical to get off to a quick start as their development program wasn't as advanced as some of the other teams. The first race of the season was the Gold Coast Grand Prix in Australia and Dad was able to win it! For his first IndyCar win! To that point, I would say it was the biggest win of his career on a street course nonetheless! Dad would continue that momentum the rest of the year with top 5 finishes at Indianapolis 500, Meadowlands, Milwaukee and Toronto. 1991 was a very special year for our family as there were 4 Andretti's competing full time in IndyCar. I would love to have a statistician do the probability on something like that happening again! Milwaukee was an especially important day as 3 Andretti's finished on the podium with Michael winning, Dad 2<sup>nd</sup> and Mario finishing 3<sup>rd</sup>. It was an historic day and something I doubt will be repeated. Like anything else, the results didn't come without a price. As Dad had a bad accident at Phoenix early in the year. He told me the story about 3 years ago where he tried to take turn 1 and 2 flat and he caught too much of Emmerson Fittipaldi's wake and ended up hitting the fence. It knocked him out, but he was able to recover and race that weekend. He would finish 8<sup>th</sup> overall in points and would return to Hall/VDS racing for the following season. Of note, one of the mechanics that worked on his IndyCar winner also worked on the GT4 car I drove last year. I thought that was funny how he had come full circle! 1992 wasn't as illustrious as 1991, Dad finished 8<sup>th</sup> in points again. As he contemplated his future he had other IndyCar opportunities available, but he realized he wouldn't ever be a top contender not driving for a top team. The best teams were Newman-Haas and Penske Racing. Both had stellar and set driver lineups so Dad decided it was time to make a career change and 1993 proved to be one of the most exciting and interesting year that (I would argue) any racecar driver has ever had. Lastly, Mom and Dad had their first child in December of 1992 (me) and I would very soon be at a race and it wasn't the 24 Hours of Daytona...

I don't think the year 1993 really received enough credit in Dad's career. I think it was one of (if not) the most interesting year of his whole career. Quite frankly, I think it may take me two of these to get through the whole year! As he was assessing his future Dad decided that 1993 would be a year where he wouldn't sign a full time contract with anyone. He would race what he wanted when he wanted in as many different series as he possibly could. He was using it as a test as to where he wanted to be next. My mom may have also influenced it as I was a newborn and she probably wanted him home to spend time with me! Dad kicked off the year at the Toronto Sky Dome in Canada for an indoor midget race. He reunited with an old friend Rollie Helmling to drive the USAC Midget that Rollie had built for a guy by the name of Jeff Gordon to drive the previous year. Dad qualified quick time and they inverted (which they never do indoors) and was able to make it to 2<sup>nd</sup> place finishing there with another familiar name, Kenny Irvin Jr. winning the race. Dad mentioned he was impressed with Kenny's ability to navigate lap traffic and years later they would race in NASCAR together. The cool thing about this race is that it was filmed so you can watch the whole race. I was about a month old, but in attendance with my mom holding me in the suite during the race! A couple weeks later, Dad was driving a factory Jaguar in the 24 Hours of Daytona. He hadn't been to Daytona since he won in 1989 and thought he would give it another try! He told me the story how they let everyone else get laps and threw him in at the end of the session. He went out and spun in turn 1 and flat spotted the tires so he came back around for another set. He went back out and spun again later in the lap! They came on the radio "Hey John, this is our last set of tires for this run" so he pitted again for a fresh set. He completed this lap and set fastest overall time on his first flying lap back at Daytona. All was forgiven for the spins and they were ready to race. They went out and ran, but a couple hours into the race one of his co-drivers came on and said "this thing is impossible to drive!" so they had Dad climb in to verify the problem as he had experience and success with the Porsche there. He climbed in a after a couple laps said "I don't know what's wrong but I can barely make it go straight", they retired at that point. Dad went back to Indianapolis and waited for the next call! It came in the form of a land speed record offer from Subaru. He put his helmet bag together and headed out to the Bonneville Salt Flats. Subaru was trying to set a speed record in a specific class with what looked like their station-wagon type model of car. We recently found the video from that trip as Mom started keeping pretty good tabs on his career at that point. We all watched it together and we laughing so hard because you see Dad in this station wagon going as fast as it would go across the Salt Flats, he was chuckling "I got it up to 167 (or whatever the number was) and we broke the record!" They left Utah and headed back to Indianapolis again and waited for the next opportunity, one that nobody in our family had to that point or has attempted ever since!

Dad returned home and went to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway in May without a ride for the first time since his rookie season in 1993. However, he went to the Speedway and helped get people up to speed in their own cars. Oftentimes, it was Europeans or others that had brought money to the team to drive but struggled to get up to speed at Indianapolis. Dad would get in the car, help the team with the car set up, and then help the driver get comfortable. He told me one time he could tell if the car was going to be too loose or too tight when he was exiting the pits on the warm-up lane. To me, this takes incredible trust and bravery in the teams you are driving for. He would climb in a car to go 220 without a second thought. These were teams that were struggling; maybe they didn't have the newest parts, but he strapped in and helped them. He told me a story once that he got out of the car and instructed a team on what to do to the car. The other driver chimed in and said "Yeah! That's exactly what I was telling you!" The team manager looked at him and said "If you both have a blank painting on an easel John painted a picture for us to clearly see. You threw the paint on it and hoped we could see it!" I always got a laugh out of that story! At this time, he had helped 5-7 different teams; as Dad was making his way through the garages, AJ Foyt decided to take his final lap in his racing career and retire. Not many people know this, but AJ is Dad's Godfather; with him being fresh from driving these other cars, it made perfect sense to slot him into the car. So, they signed a last-minute contract and Dad was in the #84 car! On his qualifying day, he would set the fastest time for that day and 6<sup>th</sup> overall at the time. Due to the format at the time, he qualified 24<sup>th</sup> overall and quicker than his teammate. He ran a clean race and ended up 10<sup>th</sup> overall, his 3<sup>rd</sup> top 10 in 6 races there (other 3 were DNFs). That would be the only IndyCar race he would run that year – I guess if you are only going to do one, Indianapolis is the place to do it at! The next move would be very interesting...there was an opportunity to go Top Fuel Drag Racing and Dad had some open time in his schedule, so why not?! The story goes that Dad was at the shop getting fitted and they fired the car up and he was thinking, "this doesn't sound too mean, I can handle this". Then the crew chief leaned in and said something he couldn't understand. Well, they were running without any nitro and the crew chief leaned in to tell them they were opening up the extra fuel pumps. That was when Dad started questioning if he had made the right move! After they turned it off, a kid rode up on a bicycle, looked at Dad and said "So how long have you been driving this?" "Well, this is my first time," Dad responded. The kid looked at him, raised his eyes, said "well...good luck" and rode off! Yeah, thanks for the confidence kid! The famous baseball player, Jack Clark owned the team and their first race was the Southern Nationals at Atlanta. Dad would reach the semi-finals, beating Joe Amato, the 1992 Top Fuel Champion, to get there. They would do a couple more races including the US Nationals; eventually the team folded, but what a rush and addition to a resume. We found tapes from the US Nationals that Mom had filmed and Dad was packing his own parachute, as the team was pretty small. After we jabbed Dad for his whitewash jeans and early 1990's hair flow, we all enjoyed watching the videos as a family.

It looks like I was wrong when I said it would take 2 Newsletters to get through 1993, I think it will take 3!

We have worked our way through most of 1993, but we haven't even gotten to the most critical part of it! After competing in the US Nationals on Labor Day weekend, Dad made the short 15 minute drive home to their house by Eagle Creek Reservoir in Indianapolis and thought about the next move. He had already decided he didn't want to go back to IndyCar and the Drag Racing was fun, but wasn't a long term solution for him. At the time NASCAR wasn't looked at as the powerhouse that it is now in the motorsports industry. It was largely a regional series with a third of the races within driving distance of Mooresville, NC (which is why we moved there). Upon looking at pictures of Dad's first ride it looked very much like a "stock car" with a lot of the stock parts being used and then raced. It was vastly different than the purpose built IndyCar and Prototype scene that he came from. Nowadays, the Cup Cars are very much on the forefront of safety technology and the fact they are going over 200 mph at lots of these tracks with a tube framed car is unbelievable. Dad tested at Watkins Glen for the first time and after day #1 he was pretty disappointed in his times. He used to tell me the story and he went to bed and came back fresh the next day with a new plan on how to drive the car. Instead of driving it like an IndyCar I decided to drive it like a Sprint Car! Fortunately, that's how those cars at the time liked to be driven and he ended up quicker than his teammate on the day. That test got Dad the opportunity to run a second car at the last five races of the 1993 season. Little did he know he found his (series) home for the next 16 years. However, over that time he sprinkled in some other interesting races, you know Dad always wanted to race as much as possible and if there was an open weekend he usually tried to fill it up. Even if it was just going to the go-kart track with me! In 1994, we ended up with a house in North Carolina and Indianapolis and kept those for the next two years. In 1996, they committed to making North Carolina our permanent home and I still remember leaving the house in Indianapolis to start our full time life back in North Carolina.

In 1994, Dad committed to the NASCAR Cup Series full time. The winter prior to this year was extremely critical as in the few races Dad had run the year before he got extremely sick and dehydrated. He wasn't running a cool suit or even a helmet blower, he didn't think he needed it and once he got dehydrated once it snowballed as there were no breaks in the schedule. Mom told me he would be driving home from the races and would pull over and throw up on the side of the road. He ended up running the helmet blower and worked on his seat to make sure it was more comfortable and that made a huge difference. In addition, he re-worked his entire workout program. These cars were much hotter and the races much longer than the IndyCar races he had previously competed in. However, the Cup cars had power steering unlike the IndyCars so you really needed a totally different set of muscle groups to work in each car. Dad along with his trainer, Steve Hoffacker, rebuild his entire training regime and Dad showed up ready to race in 1994. Steve is still good friends with our family and has been training me the past couple years, he started in his garage with one set of equipment and now runs a group of gyms in Indiana and California. I think it's important to realize how different it is driving different racecars, these guys had years of tricks that they used from seat fitting to training/diet regimes they used to be successful and Dad had a very short time to adjust to that. If you watched The Last Dance and Michael Jordan's trainer talking about switching from Basketball and Baseball it's the same with different forms of motorsports. Dad was driving for Billy Hagan and they were a small team but doing as much as they could with what they had. Dad was gaining valuable experience about being on the road and going to the different tracks. I think it is important to highlight that oftentimes guys at the back of the field are having to drive harder, more on the edge than those at the front of the field. Usually because their cars aren't handling as well so it's always interesting when guys that haven't been running great get into a better car and "haul ass". Dad was running in the 25-32nd position each race with Hagen Racing and eventually the team folded halfway through the year. Dad was left without a ride but Petty Enterprises at the moment was struggling to make races (back when you had to qualify for every race) and they were looking to make a change. Dad became available so he went to meet with Richard Petty at his house in North Carolina. Dad says they were on the porch and Richard turned to him and said "John, I believe in my guys and what they are doing" Dad goes: "I just want to drive your racecars not change your team" Richard responded "We are going to get along just fine." They decided to link up for the remainder of the season. Prior to Michigan they notified their mechanics that John would be driving the car for the rest of the season but it was only for these final races and they couldn't afford him for a full season. If you knew Dad well, you knew he was a pretty good negotiator! They go to Michigan and are having a pretty good practice session and they go out to qualify and Dad goes 2<sup>nd</sup> quick overall! When he pulled in all the mechanics had their wallets in their hands and opened them, to say "here take all our money, we want you in the car!" Dad laughed and said it made him feel really good, the guys threw all their wallets on the car and snapped a picture. The results difference was noticeably different and they ran in the top-20 at nearly every race and mainly in the top-15. After the season they parted ways amicably with Dad moving to another team, but as we all know the relationship would be re-kindled eventually. In 1994, Dad also completed something called "The Double" but I didn't want to cut that story short, so I will detail what that entailed in next week's!

In 1994, Dad was approached by a promotor/track owner about the possibility of doing something called "The Double". It was something that hadn't ever been attempted before and quite frankly I don't think anyone had ever thought about doing. It would mean two of the world's most grueling races in two different car in different states on the same day, The Indianapolis 500 and the Coca-Cola 600. I never really got to ask Dad about the decision making process behind it. To be honest, I don't think there was any hesitation. If there was any, I'm sure it wasn't from his side! Since nobody had attempted it before, nobody wrote it in the contracts so Dad was clear to race! With Indianapolis being the entire Month of May back then it made the logistics even more difficult. There was practice and qualifying on weekends he was committed to running the Cup car even before the 600 so he had to work through all of these logistical nightmares to ensure he was as fresh and as ready as possible for the entire Month of May. To make it all work they struck a deal with a company to provide the plane, pilot and assistance with the logistical planning of it all. An interesting tid-bit was the pilot Dad has assigned to him for the month was the former Pilot of Air Force One! As I was cleaning our the storage units during this down time I found Dad's hand written schedule for May of 1994. It is pictured above and it looks like he didn't get a chance to finish it up to the time of the race but his time even before the race week was scheduled to the brim! Bryant Heating and Air was the sponsor on both the IndyCar and Cup Car for the 500 and 600 so that made it easier. They were behind both programs and were excited about being a part of history. Dad was driving for AJ this year and they were struggling and Dad was leaving every weekend and flying back and forth to continue to keep up with his NASCAR commitments. The weekend before qualifying Dad was packing his stuff to leave and AJ said: "You can't leave, we need to keep running to work on this thing. If you leave you're fired!" Dad goes: "You can't fire me, cause I quit!". So AJ turned to Dad and said "well what do we need to do to make it better?" Dad responded: "I don't care, it's so bad you can do whatever you want and it wont make it worse." Dad had a great deal of respect for AJ's abilities to make a car better and AJ had a rookie named Bryan Herta who turned out to be pretty good. Bryan's feel partnered with AJ's experience turned out to be the perfect combination. When Dad returned from Sonoma (on the red-eye) it was raining and they didn't get a chance to practice. The first laps Dad would get with the new setup up would be in qualifying! Dad always said if they would have been able to run in the morning he would have been in the top 5 but the car was bottoming so badly that it upset the balance, but he would still slot into 10<sup>th</sup>, one position behind Mario! It was a big relief to get into the show as those days it was extremely stressful to make sure you got locked in. Dad hopped on a plane back to California to run Sonoma in the Cup Car! Finally it was time for the Double. Dad went to Charlotte and qualified the Cup car, but it didn't matter because per the rules he would miss the drivers meeting and thus would have to start at the back of the grid. The story goes at the time of the Driver's Meeting they had the Indianapolis 500 on in the background and Dad was leading the race. As they started roll call, "John Andretti" and Dale Earnhardt Sr. chimed in, "He's right there" and pointed to the TV behind them with Dad leading the race. Dad said Dale Sr. was always a big supporter of him doing the Double and as Dad was dropping to the back of the 600 (due to missing the Driver's Meeting) Dale Sr. was swerving at him and waving from his car. Dad always thought that was pretty cool, there will be more Dale Sr. stories to come soon! Dad blew a motor in the 600 so he wasn't able to complete "The Double" but history was made and only other drivers that have tried it are Robby Gordon, Tony

Steward, and Kurt Busch. Unfortunately, Dad never got a chance to do it again as it was written into all his NASCAR contracts from that point forward. However, Dad's love for Indianapolis would never wane and he would eventually return to the Indianapolis 500.

In 1995, Dad signed a new contract to drive the #37 Kranefuss-Hass Ford, this is widely known as the Little Caesars Car! Fun fact, there was a Little Caesars location about 10 minutes from our house and on every Wednesday would take me there to eat! I think they gave him a free pizza card, but he would never admit it! Unfortunately, in all of Dad's contracts after 1994 it was written in that he couldn't compete in "The Double" again. I think most of their concern was that if he won at Indianapolis he wouldn't show up for the 600! Which, knowing my Dad and his affinity for the 500, was a legitimate concern! It is interesting to see Dad's results from his career because he was always really good at certain tracks. The Road Courses, Short Tracks and Super Speedways were always his specialty. I think that was because for those it was more about the driver and less about how much downforce the team could build into the car. In 1995, Dad had Top 10s at Darlington, Richmond and Watkins Glen along with a top 5 finish at Michigan. He was always really good at Michigan as well, I think it had to do with the fact he ran an IndyCar there and driving the Cup car there was so much slower! Dad would drive for Kranefuss-Haas until midway through 1996, where he would then make a change to drive for Cale Yarborough. That story, however, is a long one and will tackle that in the next newsletter! To be honest, Dad didn't speak much about these early-mid 1990s years I think these were his experience getting years. He was on tour learning about the way the races needed to be run, the training he need to be sure he was on top of and what he needed to do to his car to make sure he could be as successful as possible with the cars he was driving. These were the foundational years that would allow him to be successful later in his career.

If you look at the results from 1996 you would think that there isn't much to write about. It looked like a pretty straight forward year with him starting out the year with Kranefuss-Haas and then making a late season change to Cale Yarborough. The story behind that is so much more complicated though! Midway through the 1996 season Dad met with Michael Kranefuss and told him to not pick up the option on his contract for 1997 that in not so many words he would retire before he drove another year for them. Of course, they picked up his option! Dad had a few choice words with Michael Kranefuss in his office that actually ended up with Michael running out of the office after Dad chased him around his desk! At the time it wasn't funny, but picturing Dad chasing his car owner around his desk has me cracking up now! This was mid-season so they had to continue to race on a weekly basis together. The remainder of the team eventually got word that Dad didn't want to return the following year. It had nothing to do with the guys working on the car and everything to do with management. He showed up to the shop one day and pulled around the back parking lot to find all of his suits, clothes, helmets thrown out of the back of the shop scattered around. And they couldn't understand why Dad didn't want to drive for them anymore! From that moment on Dad carried his helmet back with him to the track. The next week they were going to Darlington and Dad called my Nonno Aldo and asked him to come to the race. If they were willing to throw all of your belongings out of the back of the shop, leaving something loose on the race car isn't a far cry from that...In the meantime Dad was approached by Cale Yarborough about driving his car and Dad was excited about it and wanted to make the switch. Unfortunately, his contractual arrangement prevented that. They raced at Darlington for the Southern 500 and Dad ran 5<sup>th</sup> and was packing up his helmet back and Michael looked at him and said: "what are you doing?" "They threw all my stuff out of the back of the shop this week so I'm taking it with me! You talk to Cale and tell me where I'm driving next week!" It's a good thing Dad took his helmet bag as he was driving the 98 car for Cale Yarborough the next week! Dad always got along great with car owners that were also Drivers. Richard Petty, AJ Foyt, Cale Yarborough, Michael Andretti, Dale Jr., I think they appreciated Dad's approach to racing and the intensity he brought and Dad had the mutual respect for them that created a good relationship. They had some good runs to end the season, Dad got back to having fun while racing. The crew chief on that team was a guy by the name of Tony Furr and he is one of the funniest people you will have ever met. Kranefuss-Hass missed a race and Tony went down there and helped them back the trailer out! Dad was like "Tony! Don't do that, it's bad luck for us!" Tony had a cackle that is unmistakable so he laughed and told Dad not to worry about it! These last couple races together proved to be invaluable. They realized as a team they wouldn't be able to compete with the larger teams on the mile and half tracks. Instead, they decided to focus on Super-Speedways, Short Tracks and Road Courses and hoped they could pick up a win or a couple by focusing on the places that nobody else would!

When I heard Dad about 1997 he always had a lot of enjoyment in discussing the team and how they worked together. It was like they had a "us against the world" mentality and it was something Dad really enjoyed being a part of. They had Tony Furr as the crew chief and a couple guys in the engine shop that really knew what they were doing. As stated in the previous newsletter, Dad had a great deal of respect for Cale and I believe the respect was mutual. It always takes the proper leadership from the top to ensure the team works together smoothly. They used to go to lunch as a team every week and with this mentality of really focusing on a couple races they thought they could win it was the recipe for a solid year. They knew they were on the right path with a solid run at the Daytona 500. Dad always said they would have won that race had they not been collected in an accident! A couple weeks later they ran 4<sup>th</sup> at Talladega while having other solid runs on some short tracks and road courses before dropping out. When they came to Daytona for what was then called the Pepsi 400, Dad knew they had a good car and they practiced well and everyone was excited for the race. The night before the race Dad was in the motorhome and we were playing around and he said: "Do you know whose going to beat Dale Earnhardt tomorrow!?" "Who?" I responded. "Your Dad!" he'd say. "Do you know whose going to beat Jeff Gordon?" "Who?" "Your Dad!". Well, to me that meant the race was merely a formality, that they could already hand Dad the trophy and we could all leave a little early! During the races all of the kids would go to a place called Motor Racing Outreach (MRO) it was a Faith based organization that went to all the races and would watch the kids during the races. We would color, play with toys, watch movies. If your Dad was leading late in the race they would gather you up and take you to Victory Lane so you could be there before the end of the race. Mark Martin was leading with about 5 to go so they grabbed Matt and I went up to the Ms. Melanie and told her they were grabbing the wrong person. That my Dad was going to win. At the time Dad was running in the top 5, but didn't look like he would get to the lead. Well 2 laps later Dad was able to get the lead and they returned Matt Martin and grabbed me! However, the race wasn't over. There was a massive wreck with 1 to go and they did everything they could to get the race restarted! Dale Earnhardt would be restarting 2<sup>nd</sup> and leading on a restart at a superspeedway is usually the worst place to be. Under caution Dale kept pulling up next to Dad and Dad was just like "I'm not looking over!". There was a 1 lap dash to the checkered and Dad nailed the restart, didn't let Dale get a big run and there was a massive pile up with Dale ending up running 3<sup>rd</sup>! It was his first Cup win at Daytona no less! I don't remember going to Victory Lane or anything, but I do remember coming home to signs in our front yard from our neighbors. I didn't really grasp what that meant to Dad and his career. He was a winner in the highest level of stock car racing in the world to add to his 24 Hours of Daytona, IndyCar win and other short track wins and championships. The funniest part of the story was Ms. Melanie thought I was a prophet (or something like that) because I just knew Dad was going to win! He let this continue for a couple weeks until she wouldn't let it go so he had to tell her that he told me the night before he was going to win! I think she was pretty disappointed, but it was pretty funny while it lasted! Pretty soon after the win we received a whole new set of TVs and equipment from RCA. We had an 80" TV that was bigger than anything else on the market, it was great for movies! Dad would finish out the year with Cale Yarborough and he wanted to continue with them in 1998, but they didn't have the sponsorship to continue and Dad had to move on to another team that he would make his home for the next 5 years!

1998 would be the year Dad found a permanent home and the car he was most synonymous with for the majority of his career...the #43 Petty Enterprises car. Dad had originally planned to stay with Cale, however, the RCA sponsorship ended and they didn't have the funding to continue the team. It was tough, but Dad and Cale maintained great respect for each other. At Cale's Hall of Fame Induction Dad received a big bear hug and even a shoutout in his induction speech! To rewind, if you remember from an earlier segment, Dad drove for Petty briefly in 1994 and I believe that small time with the team left a strong impression. He showed up there in 1998 and had his best season to date. He ended up with 10 top 10 finishes and 3 top 5 finishes all a different variety of tracks. He ran well at both road course races, the short tracks and had some solid runs on the mile and a half tracks as well. When you look at the results from the 1998 season they were very strong, but had some real low points as well with 8 finishes worse than 30<sup>th</sup>, most of these had to have been DNFs and without those he would have had an even stronger points finish. Despite all of that, he finished 11<sup>th</sup> in the points his best points finish of his career and they had momentum to build on heading into the 1999 campaign. In addition to the racing results above, one of the most important things to happen in 1998 was the beginning of Adam Petty's career. Adam just turned 18 and he started racing in ARCA, actually winning in his first ever start. Dad and Adam really connected, they did appearances together and spent time at the shop together. Dad had countless stories of wrestling with Adam on the shop floor in North Carolina. Adam was always extremely kind to me and Olivia. He always carried huge amounts of bubblegum in his pocket and so I would always get a handful from him whenever I saw him! He would always stop and talk to us at the track and as a 5-6 year old I always thought that was the coolest thing. Dad tells a story about how he went into the shop a couple weeks before Christmas. He was asking the guys to build the exhaust a certain way for Daytona and he was receiving push back. He said "Alright, I guess you guys are fine running bad!" and stormed out of the shop. A week later he came back the exhaust was fixed on his car with a note on it from Adam saying: "Merry Christmas John!". Dad got a really kick out of that. Dad tells another story about him, Kyle and Adam giving rides at the Richard Petty Driving School in Charlotte. They had rev limiters in the cars to make sure they only went a certain speed, so of course the first run Adam pulls the limiter out when he gets in the car. He went down the front stretch, wide open, holding the limiter out the window so everyone could see it. Richard just shook his head, smiled, and walked away. The stories like that just made Dad like him even more, I could see Dad light up whenever he would talk about him. There is even a full chapter about Adam in Dad's book. Later in the series we let you know how and why Adam impacted Dad's career so greatly.

1999 was a really good year for Dad and the rest of Petty Enterprises. They continued to build off of the momentum established in 1998 and pushed forward to further improve their program. It all paid off in the 8<sup>th</sup> race of the season at Martinsville. However, the story starts in the races leading up to Martinsville. They had a solid top-10 run at Darlington in the 5<sup>th</sup> race of the season and carried that into a 4<sup>th</sup> place run at Bristol 2 races later. In addition to that they went and tested at a local short track in North Carolina. I actually raced at the track a couple years later and Dad said that he tested there before Martinsville win and that despite the track looking nothing like Martinsville Robbie Loomis convinced Dad that if the car was good there it would be good at Martinsville! Dad felt good about their short track program and following the solid run at Bristol they had every reason to be excited to head to Martinsville. I don't remember much about that weekend until the race time, I was 7 at the time and would always watch the start of the races. I remember Dad getting hit by Ward Burton and going a lap down and at that point I thought the race was over for Dad as there was no "lucky dog" or "free pass" at that time. You had to get your lap back the hard way! After a nap I remember waking up and Dad was on the lead lap! I was excited, but still didn't know how good his car was and he still had a great deal of time to make up to be back in the hunt. There was still quite a few laps left in the race so we decided to head to Chad Little's motorhome to visit with them. They had an older miniature schnauzer dog and for some reason that dog just didn't like me. I was sitting in the front seat in their motorhome and the dog bit me on my right leg right above my knee! It didn't break the skin but was a bit of a traumatic moment for me and to this day I'm still apprehensive around schnauzers! Obviously, that ended our visit to the Little motorhome quite abruptly! We headed back to our motorhome to pack the car up and head out from the track. Back in those days the traffic leaving those races was horrendous so we would get the car loaded and then we would head to the airport and Dad would either helicopter out of the track or hitch a ride with another driver. I believe this particular day Dad was helicoptering out of the track (he didn't do this often) so Renita (babysitter), Olivia and I loaded in the car and started to head to the airport. At this moment Dad was running well but he had to pass Jeff Gordon, Rusty Wallace and Jeff Burton to win the race and there were about 20 or so laps left to go. If you remember, those three guys were some of the best short track racers in the country and driving for three powerhouses at the time with Hendrick Motorsports, Team Penske and Roush Racing. We were listening on the radio and he passed Gordon and then Rusty and was chasing down Jeff. At that time we looked at each other and made a U-turn and headed back to the track! We wanted to make sure we didn't miss Victory Lane! At this moment, the team didn't think Dad could catch Jeff. They came on the radio and told him that 2<sup>nd</sup> was a great run and would be a great points finish. For those that knew Dad well, you can imagine how he responded to that, much of which I can't put in print! With a couple laps to go Dad passed Jeff and lead the remainder of the race to win his 2<sup>nd</sup> Cup Race and take Petty Enterprises back to Victory Lane! Dad picked up The King on the way to Victory Lane and he put it: "The 43 should never go to Victory Lane with The King". When Dad finally came to a stop he wouldn't get out of the car until we showed up. He was in the car asking: "Where's Nancy? Where's Nancy?" The celebrations lasted long after everyone else had left, the last thing I remember was being paid \$20 to hold a can of STP lubricant in the pictures! As a 7 year old I felt like \$20 was a million bucks. Dad said since he won the race he should get a cut, I refused and he was kind enough to let me keep it! Haha! It was a great day and the video can be found on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U52FWO5cBBM>

One last fun fact from the Martinsville win was Dad only lead the last 4 laps, the most important 4!

2000 was a year of some highs and some truly extreme lows. Dad had a memory like an elephant when it comes to races and racecars, but we never spoke much (or at all about 2000). Petty Enterprises went into the 2000 season with high hopes after their solid runs in 1999. However, the beginning of the season didn't pan out that way. They had decent speed, but never the race-winning or top 5 pace they had shown before. I read recently they were switching from Pontiacs to Dodges mid-year and that may have attributed to their struggles. Dad never mentioned this so I am unsure if it was true or not. I know that it is difficult to build cars while maintaining your racing program at a high level. It was always difficult when we built cars during the year with our sprint car program, especially in a panic! If you are undermanned it can lend itself to burn out and thus a lower quality workmanship. Another change was the switch from STP to General Mills mid-year, this could have also caused some minor hiccups with paint, decal, etc. All of those little things tend to make a big difference in the grand scheme of things especially if they build up all at once or if you are already a bit understaffed. However, all of the above was minor compared to a couple events that happened in early May of 2000. Dad had offers from a variety of other teams, front running teams, and he made a plan to stay with Petty Enterprises through the 2001 season. That would have been Adam's first year in Cup and then at that point he would move onto another team. He wanted to help get Adam going and then take another opportunity that would present a new challenge and potentially offer a better chance at consistent race wins. On May 10, 2000 Amelia Lois Andretti was brought into our family! I remember I wanted a little brother really badly, so when they brought her home I was all excited, what's his name!? Dad just smiled and held up a pink wristband! I was disappointed for about 20 minutes until I got to hold her and my heart was quickly warmed. I remember we were in our kitchen two days later and I came down stairs to the kitchen where my Dad had just hung up the phone. Him and my Mom were both crying in the kitchen, this was the first time I had ever seen my parents shed any tears. "What's wrong? What happened to Amelia?" were the first thoughts. They sat me down and told me that Adam had passed after an accident at New Hampshire the week before. It is believed his throttle got stuck and the injuries sustained in that accident ended up taking his life. To say it was a trying time for our family and the Petty organization as a whole. I couldn't imagine what it was like to lose a son, especially one that had as bright of future and that was so tight to the family like Adam was. I know it had a large impact on Dad, in fact, it changed his complete career path and choices he made afterward. To the Petty Family, the impact even greater the next generation and one of the brightest faces in the pit areas was lost. To me, my buddy that always had plenty of warm bubblegum would no longer be around. In May, Dad was practicing at Charlotte Motor Speedway and broke his rib in practice. He said he remembered leaving the track in the ambulance and seeing other drivers leave their garages and walk into the 43 garage to see if they could replace him. Dad said he never forgot who those guys were! On a (kind of) funny note Dad wanted to make sure he still received points for Charlotte so he would have to start the race. To ease the pain Dad went to the Doctor to get a painkiller shot before the race and like any good Father, Nonno Aldo went with him. Dad said they pulled out a needle that had to be close to a foot long and stuck him. When he pulled it out he said, "Sorry John, I missed it" with blood starting to run down his side Dad looked at Aldo and said: "You are going to see a grown man cry" and Aldo responded with: "Yeah, me!" Dad chuckled at that even with another shot coming soon! That afternoon he went out and they didn't get a caution until lap 100 or so.

He got out of the car running in the top 25 and only one lap down with a broken rib in May! His replacement driver got in and proceeded to go 3-4 more laps down! Dad was furious and went to Kyle to tell him his guys didn't deserve that and he was running the next week. Kyle explained to Dad that he wouldn't be racing until he was fully healthy. Dad said "Okay! But you have to drive the car Kyle because you care about how it runs and about the guys!" The next race was Dover and Dad got a caution within the first couple laps, got out and Kyle got in and ran in the top 10! It was a great day in an otherwise terrible year for the Petty Family.

I think at this moment I would like to pause and take a newsletter to reflect on what Adam meant to Dad and how it changed the trajectory of his career. From what I could see Adam really breathed a new sense of life into Petty Enterprises and to Dad. Over time, a company's mission may be lost or they may be discouraged on their path to the goal. My sense was that Adam was that person to bring Petty Enterprises back to prominence. With his name, talent and personality they were building long term partnerships with company's that would bring the team the ability to grow and built back to being a perennial front-running organization. I think for Dad, being around Adam brought a renewed sense of life in his racing world. I asked Dad how he could keep grinding out those years of 36-38 weekends on the road. "How do you stay motivated? How do you stay fresh?" I asked. He just looked at me and said "It's really hard" when you are 5, 6, 7 years into a series you know the routine the newness of it all has worn off. In the end, the job is really cool and different and he was so thankful to be able to race for as long as he did. But the time away from home and family does really wear on you. I think Adam gave him another reason to be motivated, he knew he was helping an organization pass the torch to the next generation. With our family history it was something he really connected with and wanted to be a part of. Dad did have other offers to drive for teams that were closer to the front of the pack. That was no secret and he thought long and hard about those opportunities. He told me his plan was to run for Petty's until Adam had a year of Cup Racing under his belt. He wanted to spend a year on the road with Adam to help him get going and make sure the cars were as good as possible for him to get a solid start to his career. At that point, Dad would make the transition to another team. It was my understanding that Dad had this planned with the Petty's and my Mom as to give them enough time to hire a replacement driver and ensure the dynamic wasn't upset within the team. After Adam passed, Dad decided to forego those other opportunities and stay with Petty Enterprises. He felt that it was necessary for him to stay on to continue to help the team. I think that was one of my Dad's best qualities, his loyalty was unparalleled. And if you did something for him he never forgot it.

It has been awhile since I've been able to sit down and write another Dad, the Driver, but we need to finish his career and we still have some great stories to cover! In 2001, Dad continued driving the #43 for Petty Enterprises. It was another up and down year, with the team running the best at the places with the most character. They ran 6<sup>th</sup> at Darlington and had solid runs at Watkins Glen, Indianapolis and Dover. The best run was undoubtedly at Bristol where he ran 2<sup>nd</sup> to Elliot Sadler. They qualified pretty poorly, roughly 35-36<sup>th</sup>. But the car never dropped off over the course of a long run, other guys would drop 1-2 seconds but Dad's car was consistent. He told me a story when he qualified and came into the truck and saw the King. Richard goes "So what do you think about tomorrow?" Dad responds with "I think we are going to wax their asses!" Richard says: "I think so, too!". It was a long climb to the front but once he got there Dad stayed there, it was unfortunate though as in those days that's when they used to have the lap cars line up on the inside row on the restarts. Bill Elliot was there and trying to get his lap back and ended up getting into Dad and bending the LF spindle. That got Dad too tight and it ended up allowing Sadler to get around him. I remember the disappointment on Dad's face riding home in the car. He wasn't mad at Bill, he had the utmost respect for him and knew he was just driving as hard as he could to try to get his lap back. It was just one of the few opportunities Dad got to have a shot at a trophy and it was taken from him by no fault of his own. Bristol was always really hard on drivers as well, Carbon Monoxide poisoning was pretty regular there as 43 cars going 500 laps on a half mile promoted that. If the car wasn't properly ventilated it could get really hard on the drivers. Dad drove home from the race mostly in silence, I did pipe up a couple times and break the ice. I was 9 and thought 2<sup>nd</sup> was a great run and made sure to let Dad know that! Only now do I understand his full frustration, until you are in that situation yourself I think it is difficult to relate. Those missed opportunities are what keep you up at night, I often think of the 2019 VIR Race...The one small consolation was as Dad was leaving the track one of the guards let him go through a gate that was suppose to be closed. He recognized Dad and felt bad for what had happened and let us leave through that gate, its funny the things you remember as a kid...

Heading into 2002 it would be the last year Dad raced full time for awhile, but going into the season we didn't know that would be the case. As mentioned in a previous post, Dad didn't speak much about this time in his career. I don't have many stories to tell as Dad was frustrated during this part in his career. He was hopeful they would be able to turn it around and bring the #43 back where it belonged, at the front, but for one reason or another they couldn't seem to piece it all together. The best race of this season was by far Sonoma. I remember watching the race while I was at the beach in Charleston, SC. We always spent a week on vacation there during the summer and he was coming right from Sonoma to the vacation. If you remember from before he was always good at Sonoma, that is where he tested the BMW GTP and was able to get the ride. When I went to Sonoma to race in 2019, I could understand why. For lack of a better term it is a pain in the ass of a track! Blind corners, constantly changing track conditions and extreme tire degradation makes it a difficult place to race. I've never been to a track with such extreme degradation as after a lap of qualifying the times will fall off over a second. Over the course of a run they can degrade multiple seconds which makes you have to drastically alter your driving style over the course of a stint. Dad was either leading or running in the top 3 coming into the last pit stop. Unfortunately, there was a pit road penalty when Jimmie Johnson's team ended up leaving an air hose out and Dad ran over it. That penalty wiped out any opportunity for Dad to win or run in the top 3 and he ended up 10<sup>th</sup>. I remember him coming to the beach house and waking me up as my room was right at the entry of the house. We had a quick conversation about it and I could tell he was disappointed, he didn't blame Jimmie. Again, much like Bill Elliot he had a great deal of respect for him and knew it was just a racing situation. The less you have of those opportunities to win, the more they sting when one gets away from you. We went back to that exact beach house a year later and we ended up watching that Sonoma race on the couch together...

2003 was a difficult year for Dad, but this is where I start remembering the stories as I was 11 and I remember a couple things very vividly this year. The year started rough for Dad and Petty Enterprises, they had a top 10 run at California. They were testing at Virginia International Raceway and Dad was very quick as they were getting ready for the upcoming race at Sonoma. As a matter of fact, he was the quickest car at the test by some margin. He had a trick to the place that he shared with me before our race in 2019 there (we blew a tire leading). The day after the test Dad was called to the shop and relieved of his driving duties. I remember that being a difficult time, Dad had given a lot to the program. I remember watching Sonoma with Dad upstairs at the beach house in the exact spot that I had watched it by myself the year before. It was odd for me to watch "Dad's car" run without him. We returned home from the beach trip and began enjoying the summer. Back in those days we all used landlines (yes, I remember those days) and line 1 was always for friends/family and line 2 was Dad's office line. I would be upstairs playing video games and I just remember the office line ringing frequently. I didn't think much of it, I was playing Madden and doing normal kid stuff! Looking back, I was quite oblivious to the whole situation. I remember it was one summer afternoon and it was raining outside and the girls were gone at a movie. All I heard was "Jarett! Jarett! Come down here!" I was confused, the line was busy and nobody was in the house besides him. "Why is he calling me downstairs right now?" He was sitting at Mom's desk and was like "what took you so long?!" "I thought you were in your office! What's up?" The car owner of the #XX car is on the phone, what do you think? Should I go drive it? I had to sit down for this one! The couch was right next to the best so I sat on the edge of it. I mean "yeah, that's a good car right! Better than the car you were driving right?" Dad was like well can you call back in 10 minutes, I'm talking to my son! Yes and he's 11. Can you imagine, what this car owner is thinking? My next driver could be in the hands of an 11 yr old kid! That thought makes me chuckle. Dad goes: "wait maybe I should tell you about the other offers first! Now my head was spinning, "why didn't you lead with that Dad!" So he laid out all of the offers, quickly. "I think you should still take it!" "No, no I won't I like the guy driving the car" responded Dad. "I don't want to take his job! Plus, I think this car XX is going to be available and it will be the best car and it won't be for many races so I can spend more time at home." "That's that one!" I exclaimed. "Yeah, thanks for your help" as Dad rolled his eyes "You were just telling me to take the other ride!" "I didn't have all the facts!" I said. We laughed and I remember that being a turning point, Dad was back and excited about racing again. It was a noticeable difference to me even as an 11 year old. Dad had four races off and came back driving the #0 Car for Haas CNC Racing. They seemed to have mechanical problems, but always had speed. As I was going through old articles after Dad's passing I came across one from 2003 about his Pocono Qualifying effort. Dad was 5<sup>th</sup> in qualifying in the #0 the title of the headline was "Andretti confidence after strong qualifying effort" the first paragraph read: "Maybe John Andretti wasn't the problem at Petty Enterprises. And maybe Jack Sprague was at Haas CNC Racing." This isn't meant as a dig at all at Jack and the papers back then could be especially harsh to everyone. However, we as a family weren't the only ones that noticed an uptick in performance with different equipment. We will finish 2003 and start on 2004 in the same newsletter next week, I think it will best that way!

I thought it would be best to loop in one race from 2003 and most of 2004 into a singular newsletter! Dad always had a good relationship with Dale Earnhardt and then Dale Jr. as a matter of fact, I've got a couple pictures of them in 2017 when Dad was at the Brickyard 400. They were considering running a third car at some races, the #81, and Dad received the call to do the races. In 2003, they ran one race, the Brickyard 400. I remember Dad telling me he had a shot to win that race the car was that good heading into the race. It was funny because he had to go to the media center because he was quickest car in Happy Hour aka Final Practice. Dale Jr. actually came over and told Dad "Hey, make sure you mention I own part of this car!" Dad was laughing, he was like: "Don't you get enough media coverage!", "Not as an owner!" Jr. responded with. Dad always got a kick out of him. He did eventually tell him to stop coming around because he always brought a crowd of people following him! Haha! Unfortunately, qualifying had gotten rained out and he had to start at the tail of the field. He had driven his way up into the top 15 when he was crashed on a restart. It was too bad because I really think Dad had a good shot to win that race. He competed in a further 10 races that year in the 81 car. I think the ran at the Brickyard had spurred some sponsors to come on board for further races. In addition, that was the when Dale Jr. was even more popular than he is now (if that is even possible) in short, he had a great deal of pull. It also helped Dad and him got along extremely well. Dad tells a story where Jr. took him and his crew chief out to lunch at Panera. Dad goes, hey I don't have any money on me. Jr goes: "I'll pay" so they get to the restaurant and Dad starts ordering and he doesn't stop for a couple minutes. His order is over \$200! Jr goes what are you doing?! Dad responds "well you said you would pay for lunch and when you feed me you have to feed my whole family!" Jr. pulls out a wrinkled \$20 from his jeans and goes "This is all I have! \$20!!" Dad was dying laughing, he loved telling that story. There were countless other stories in the same vein that when they would get together they would have a great time. I believe they connected being from families with prominent last names and also Jr. hated testing and Dad loved it so Dad got to run as much as he wanted and Jr. didn't have to! It was a win-win for everyone!

2005 was kind of a mixed year for Dad for a number of reasons. He drove for a couple different teams along the way in a variety of cars. He ran the Daytona 500 for PPC Racing and then ran a variety of races for Morgan-McLure Motorsports as well. Undoubtedly the most fun he had that whole year was driving a Truck for the first time for Billy Ballew Motorsports. Dad didn't know much about the truck series or the teams involved in it. He did know this was the truck that Kyle Busch drove as he was coming through the ranks so he figured it was decent stuff, but still wasn't sure. They asked him to come by the shop and bring his seat to put in the truck. He brought his seats but left them in his personal truck as he still wasn't sure about the quality of the trucks. He came in and met Richie Wauters, who is still a good family friend to this day, and took one look at the trucks and said: "Okay, let me go grab my seat!" Dad tells the story that as he was putting his seat in Richie had a guy stand next to the truck with a rag and bottle of windex to wipe off any finger prints Dad put on the truck as he was getting in and out! They ran 4 races that year, Kansas, Memphis, IRP and Nashville. Those were a lot of fun for all of us to go to as the truck was always very fast and the races were short and venues/cities were tons of fun. I went to a couple of those races with Dad throughout the summer and we had so much fun going to Memphis and Nashville. The weekends were always so much more relaxed than a Cup weekend. After practice, Dad and I would go see a movie or walk around the mall. We would hang out in the motorhome and play video games and grill out whenever we were hungry. For him, he was enjoying racing again and running well. If it wouldn't have been for a faulty pit crew he would have won a couple of the races as well. I remember Nashville that summer was so hot, basically 100 in the shade with the heat index well over 100. The races were so much shorter than Cup races so it never bothered Dad. As we were walking out of the track Bobby Hamilton Jr. was sitting up against the pit wall and Dad took his water and just dumped it on his head. Bobby looked up and was like "Why'd you stop?!" Dad goes "look I'm out of water!!" Those races were just a lot of fun all around and we made some good friends along the way. As I stated earlier, Richie is still a good friend and I actually spoke to him about a week ago as we speak once a month about how each of our racing programs are going. 2006 would be a different year for Dad as it would mark his full time return to racing!

As stated in the previous newsletter, 2006 marked Dad's return to full time racing in the PPC racing Camping World #10. The main difference being that this was in the what is now called the Xfinity Series! He had made over 300 Cup starts but never climbed any of the NASCAR rungs on the ladder to get there. Previously, all he had done was one Busch race at Daytona in 1996. So technically, Dad was considered a Rookie, he applied for it and was a Rookie of the Year contender! He used to wear this Rookie of the Year hat and we would always laugh about it. I'd always be like "Good Luck out there Rook" "Yeah, yeah, yeah your so funny" we'd joke. Much like the truck races the year before Dad was very relaxed heading into these weekends they were shorter weekends than usual and the races were usually half the length of a Cup race. Mom and I went to quite a few of these races and I always had fun going just me and him as well. His best finish was 5<sup>th</sup> that year at Watkins Glen, it's no secret our family has always loved the Glen. Mario won his first Formula 1 Pole (in his Debut), Dad his first IMSA GTP Prototype Win and me my first Pole/Win in the GT4 car there. Marco was also crashed in his first IndyCar race there by a lapped car while leading. Dad had a really solid run at Daytona, him and Dale Jr. were drafting and at one point Dad was leading. I believe Dale Jr. ended up pushing Dad to the lead and they were riding there until the train behind them pulled out. Either way, it was really exciting to watch and Dad had fun. I think that season really made Dad want to race more, he had good runs enjoyed going to the race track and the shorter weekends allowed him to spend more time at home. He also during this time started looking at other forms of racing to see if he could continue to try different things or maybe go back to some of the things he had done in the past...the next few years of Dad's career get pretty interesting with the different cars he was able to drive and some of the interesting deals he was able to pull together.

On another note, I wanted to be able to share this great news with everyone. Last November we filed for our 501c3 designation for the #Checkit4Andretti Foundation and didn't receive any updates. So in February we filed of an expedited designation as we were holding off on some of our fundraising for the foundation. We were denied that, but they said we could appeal and on March 12 (Dad's Birthday) we filed the appeal. On March 29<sup>th</sup> (Olivia's Birthday) we received our official designation letter. We are so excited to be able to fully start fundraising and can't wait to share all the progress with everyone. I know we are all going to be able to prevent what happened to Dad to many others and we can't wait to take each of you on that adventure with us. We are in the process of setting up the website and when that is ready we will share it and if you feel so inclined to donate that would be the place to do so!

After 2006, I really think Dad had the itch to get back to racing more frequently. He also started to kick around the idea of competing in the Indianapolis 500 again. To him, that was always the Mecca of all Motorsports Venues and the biggest race in the world. He wanted another shot(s) at competing in it. Dad started 2007 driving for Front Row Motorsports, they were a new team and just recently won the Daytona 500 with Michael McDowell. Dad and the owner (Bob Jenkins) worked extremely hard at getting the team up and running. They have continued to grow it over the years and now have won the largest stock car race in the world. On another note, Dad was exploring a new chemo treatment in Nashville in November of 2019. Nashville is about 6 hours from the house in North Carolina and Dad struggled to ride in a car for that long and getting on a commercial flight was difficult to navigate with all the walking/security etc. Bob sent his plane to pick everyone up at Concord and fly to Nashville for the day of exploration. It was an extremely kind gesture and Bob told Dad that if he ever needed to fly back for treatment that he insisted that he call him and he would arrange for the plane again. Dad jumped around from Front Row then to Petty Enterprises as they needed a substitute for Kyle for a couple races and then to BAM racing for roughly 10 races to end the year. Dad, however, did take some time off in the month of May to make his return to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway for the Indianapolis 500. Dad was entered in an additional Panther Racing entry in a bright yellow scheme. I remember when he went there for the first day of testing and he was running and he came in and the first person in the cockpit was Michael. "You can't drive the place like that, it's not a Cup Car!" Dad was like "Yes, yes I know Michael, I haven't driven an IndyCar since 1994, give me more than 5 laps to get the rust knocked off!" Dad always laughed when he told the story and it was funny to hear. Our family always wants to help each other, but sometimes our delivery isn't the best! Dad ended up being collected in an accident that ended his race early. He also had a mirror fall off his car about 10 laps into the race and then a 2<sup>nd</sup> mirror fell off later in the run. He ran the majority of the race without being able to see behind him, which is quite scary when you think about it! I wasn't able to go to the race for any of the activities but I was able to watch from home and would get my chance to take in my first 500 experience the following year.

In 2008, Dad started off the year driving for Front Row Motorsports in the Cup Series. They were a new team and Dad had forged a relationship with Bob Jenkins (mentioned in earlier newsletter). It wasn't going extremely well and he did his agreement only for the first quarter of the year as he wanted to spend the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of the year focusing on the Indianapolis 500. One of the fondest memories I had from this year was a road trip Dad and I took to Talladega for one of his Cup races. It was about a 10 hour drive from North Carolina and we were going to swing by Andretti Indoor Karting and Games on the way down. Unfortunately, we hit a wreck on the highway and we weren't able to stop off, but it didn't dampen our mood as we drove towards Alabama. I was reading a financial book "Rich Dad, Poor Dad" at the time and spent the entire time peppering him with questions from the book. It was exhaustive, but he never flinched explaining each point in detail to give me an explanation in depth. I've had people ask me why I enjoy the business side of things so much. Most drivers just like driving the car and going home, I approach it a little differently. I guess this may have been the time where my interest in it really started to peak, possibly in the time we spent bonding over this barrage of questions I was hurling his way! We got to Talladega late that night and we were both exhausted. Unfortunately, the fire alarm decided it was time to go off in the middle of the night. I remember he looked over at me from across the room "Are you getting up?" "No way" I responded and we both ended back to sleep fire alarms still blaring. We woke up in the morning for breakfast to find out there was a minor incident, nothing too major (at least that we knew of, kitchen was still there!). I said "Dad, how stupid would we have felt to show up at the Pearly Gates both of us after ignoring the fire alarm!" "Your Mom would have killed me!" he responded. We both laughed pretty hard at that. Luckily, we escaped injury free and Mom was no worse off not knowing we ignored the fire alarm until now (sorry Mom). We were on the way to the track and Dad spotted a car for sale in someone's driveway. Now, Dad always wanted a Ferrari and a 1930s Mercury Leadsled, he thought they were just the coolest cars. And this guy had one for sale in his front yard! Dad made a U-Turn and we got out of the car to check it out. Of course, that attracted some attention from the house and the owner came down to see who had stopped to look at his car. "Hey, your John Andretti!" was the first thing he said. As we are standing there Dad starts negotiating to buy his car. Meanwhile, me (in 8<sup>th</sup> grade), had to talk some sense back into him. "Dad, how are we going to get this car home? I can't drive it!" Fortunately, Dad had cooled on buying the car at that point and we went on our way to the race track. I'm not even sure what happened at the races, I do know there was an appearance at a Huddle House breakfast restaurant where I read more of my book and Dad signed autographs. After our road trip ended, Dad got ready for the Indianapolis 500 and I was in store for my first 500 experience. I was graduating middle school so I was able to get out of school a week or so early and able to get a taste for the Month of May for the first time ever. It's much too long to cram into one newsletter so I'll have to tell that story next week!

After running the Indianapolis 500 in 2007, Dad had the itch to come back and do it again in 2008. Problem is, there were no seats available! Dad, being who he was got on a plane with his helmet bag and showed up to Indianapolis and starting talking to different car owners about their plans and as the month of May evolved an opportunity arose. Back in those days they would have high 30s or even low 40s of car count for a 33 car field so making the show was very difficult. That extra pressure created opportunities like Dad who had a track record of being able to qualify and race well at Indy. There was a car that was struggling for speed so Dad had initial conversations with the car owner, but nothing had materialized. With the first day of qualifying coming up, Dad had packed all of his stuff and decided to head home. He didn't think an opportunity would arise. As Dad was leaving the hotel, his phone kept ringing and ringing. He missed a couple calls, but when he looked he had 5-6x missed calls from Marty Roth's wife. They wanted to know if he would drive the car for qualifying that day! Dad headed over to the with his helmet bag and they had already grabbed his seat from Panther Racing (seat he had used the year before) and got fitted and went out to qualify. Dad's first lap on track was the quickest that car had gone all month and they went from being on the edge of being able to qualify to easily making the show. Dad was even able to help get Marty qualified in the 33 position, the last car in the field. There were a couple rumors, started by the driver that was released, that Dad had brought funding to the program in exchange for the seat. That was frankly untrue, Dad was there on merit and that was evident by the race and remainder of the season. The team was run by the late Larry Curry who had run Dad a variety of other times in other IndyCars and they got on extremely well. They went through their run plan methodically and were able to get a solid racecar for the race and ended up 16<sup>th</sup>. Not too bad for a last minute deal! It was my first 500 experience and it was something I'd never forget. I remember just looking at the front stretch and seeing the grandstands totally full of people. The balloons, the fly over, Back Home in Indiana, it all hit me at once. As ignorant as it sounds, I never realized just how big the event was, you were there and knew you were a part of something big. I remember getting the police escort into the track and the policeman would stand on his motorcycle and balance as he drove to the track in front of us. It was quite the sight. The funniest thing about that whole day was when we arrived it was still very early in the morning, 7am ish. Dad and I got parked and he said alright wake me up when its 9 and fell asleep in the car in the parking lot! Fans were pouring by as Dad snoozed away, of course I didn't go to sleep I was too scared of missing the time. Imagine us both asleep in the car and the race starting, talking about one of your biggest fears! Luckily, I didn't fall asleep, was able to get Dad up on time and to the garage. 2008 continues past this race and I'll get more into that in the next newsletter!

It's been a little bit since I've gotten the opportunity to write one of these. It's been quite a busy summer between the racing, testing and Race 4 Riley so it is nice to catch a break, get a chance to sit down and write another, Dad the Driver.