

The Prize

by Phillip W. Weiss

Once upon a time there lived a ten year old boy named Theodore Cleaver. Theodore was affectionately known as The Beaver, probably because of his large, perfectly formed front teeth that dominated his smile. Beaver lived with his father, Ward, who was an executive for an engineering firm, his mother June, who was a housewife, and his older brother Wally who attended high school. Beaver was a very enterprising boy. He participated in all kinds of activities to make money. One time he delivered papers, another time sold lemonade, and another time mowed lawns. His most recent project was selling raffles for a contest. One of the winning prizes was a \$3,500 car. For every nine raffle tickets Beaver sold, he got a free raffle ticket. Beaver accumulated nine free raffle tickets.

One day, a letter was delivered to Beaver's house by special delivery. The letter was addressed to Beaver. June received the letter and opened up the envelope. The letter was from the organizers of the raffle informing that Beaver had won the raffle and the \$3,500 car. June shared this letter with Ward, and when Beaver came home, they shared the letter with Beaver. Beaver was ecstatic. He said this was the first time he had ever won anything and couldn't wait to take possession of the car which he had won.

Later that night, Ward and June discussed the matter. Ward decided that due to Beaver's age, it would be impractical for Beaver to keep the car and instead would

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Note: The characters in this story are based on the characters featured in the sitcom *Leave it To Beaver*.

sell it and deposit the proceeds in the Beaver's college fund account. June pointed out that Beaver had won the car and was his property, yet not wanting to make it an issue, reluctantly agreed with Ward's decision. In the morning, Ward told Beaver that he could not keep the car and that the proceeds from the sale of the car would be deposited in Beaver's college fund account. Beaver was devastated. He said he didn't care about the money and what about if he didn't go to college? Then Beaver started crying, called Ward a bully and other nasty names, said he never wanted to talk to his father again and ran out of the house.

But what galled Beaver even more was that the neighborhood wise guy, Eddie Haskell, who everyone thought was a jerk, including Beaver, had warned Beaver that his parents would never let him keep anything he won and that if he complained, his parents could put him in an institution. Well, what Eddie had warned happened. That made Beaver feel even more incensed at Ward. There was no way he could return home and live under the same roof with his father who Beaver now hated and who had imposed his parental authority to deny Beaver what Beaver had won.

So, Beaver did not return home. Instead, he moved in with Eddie Haskell, who Beaver now idolized, retained an attorney, and sued Ward for emotional distress and expropriation of property without due process and demanded that the court order Ward to give permission to Beaver to take possession of the car. While Beaver was suing Ward in civil court, Haskell filed a complaint with the state child welfare agency against Ward Cleaver for inflicting emotional harm against a minor, to wit Beaver Cleaver.

Soon Ward was explaining his actions in civil court and family court. Beaver also went to court to change his name and formally terminate his relationship with Ward Cleaver. Soon the case attracted national attention and became the subject of a congressional investigation on the need for legislation to protect the property rights of minors. In the meantime, the car still went unclaimed pending the outcome of the litigation.

Ward refused to relent. He argued that as Beaver's father he had the right to decide how best to deal with the car. Finally the case wound up before the SCOTUS which in a landmark decision affirmed Beaver's right to own the car subject to parental supervision while Beaver was still a minor. After publicly accusing Ward of trying to rob his own son, Beaver dropped his legal actions, returned home, took possession of the car and gave Ward exclusive right to operate and manage the car thus resolving the conflict and restoring a modicum of peace and serenity to the Cleaver household. Later on, June filed for divorce, citing irreconcilable differences with her husband and demanding sole custody of the Beaver and Wally. Ward decided not to contest the divorce, quit his job, moved away and never was heard from again.

Beaver and Eddie Haskell remained friends and ten years later formed a consulting firm, B and H Enterprises, which provides technical assistance and advocacy for children who are the victims of overbearing, stupid and emotionally insensitive parents such as Ward Cleaver who became a part of American folklore. As for the car, Beaver sold it for \$3,500 and deposited the money in the same college

fund that Ward had set up for Beaver thus doing what Ward had wanted to do all along. When asked about this paradoxical outcome, Beaver shrugged his shoulders, laughed and said, “This is something my father would have done. After all, he was my dad.”