

Wanna Bet?

Have you ever heard the story of how Babe and Freddie got together? Sure, they were both living on 91st Street in Jackson Heights. But Babe was a freshman at Bryant High and Freddie a senior at Newtown. Besides, he was dating this girl Barbara, his mom, Filomena, didn't like much. Barbara wasn't Italian, and she had something of a *reputation*. Anyway, Filomena supposedly suggested to Freddie, "Why don't you date a nice girl like Babe?" although this claim has never been substantiated.

One night in May 1953, Freddie and his crowd were busy at work under the hood of one of their jalopies. Babe still recalls how cool Freddie was. He wore his hair in a D.A. and rolled up his pack of cigarettes in the sleeve of his white t-shirt. His crowd - his brother Joe and cousin Bill, George the Greek, Bobby Fitz, Gesner, Benz, and Desmoni - they were all cool too. And in a scene reminiscent of the movie *Grease*, this group of teen-aged buddies had just made a wager with Freddie. They bet him that he couldn't get a date with the next girl who walked down the street. If she said yes, they each had to pay him fifty-cents. If she said no, he had to pay them.

Meanwhile, Babe's father, Mike, asked her to go down the street to buy him a pack of smokes at the corner candy store. Despite being only fourteen, Babe was pretty cool herself. She wore cat's eye frame glasses which only accentuated her penciled in high arching eyebrows, and her bright red lipstick. And when she wasn't wearing a poodle skirt, she wore peddle pushers!

Freddie took Babe completely by surprise when he approached her because she figured he thought of her as a kid. When he asked her to go out with him that Friday night she said no. What else could she do - she was young and her father was strict. But Freddie persisted, "What about Saturday night?" Again she refused. "What's the matter?" he asked, "Don't you like me?" And Babe was forced to admit that although she did like him, her father wouldn't let her go out on a date. Without missing a beat, Freddie suggested, "Okay then what about Sunday afternoon?" And Babe, realizing how easy it would be to sneak out of the house on a Sunday afternoon, finally accepted.

On their first date, Freddie took Babe into the city to Radio City Music Hall to see the floor show and the western, *Shane*. After the movie they went for a bite. Babe was so nervous that she couldn't quite enjoy herself. The older girls on the block had coached her, advising her not to order the most expensive thing on the menu or the cheapest.

Apparently, Freddie never technically asked her out for their second date - it was just understood. And every week it went on, the guys continued to pay Freddie another fifty-cents. His buddies thought it was all a joke, and didn't think the relationship would last. All the while, Babe had no idea about the bet.

Then, Memorial Day Weekend, Freddie took Babe on Newtown High's Senior Boat Ride on the Hudson Day Liner. When Barbara saw Babe, she got a little crazy and threatened to throw Babe overboard. Later that day, Freddie asked Babe to go steady.

In June, they were still dating on the sly and Babe couldn't figure out how she was going to sneak out of the house in a Prom dress, so Freddie finally had to ask her father for permission to date his daughter. It so happened that Mike was painting the house - a job he didn't relish - so Freddie offered to help him paint, and we all know how Freddie loves to paint. And that seemed to do the trick.

The following year, Babe transferred to Newtown and Freddie was going to L.I.U. Most days, he picked her up after school in his old green Studebaker, which Freddie's buddies nicknamed *The Babe Mobile*. You see, they realized that Babe and Freddie's relationship was getting serious, so serious in fact, that by the time Babe found out about the bet, it didn't seem to matter very much.

So how long did the guys keep paying Freddie the fifty-cents? Well, nobody really remembers. But they do remember Babe and Freddie's wedding on July 4, 1959 and how all the guys were flipping Freddie quarters at the reception.