

The image features a dense, black and white halftone dot pattern. A white rectangular box is positioned in the upper-middle section, containing the text "Vacation '58" in a bold, black, serif font. The text is centered within the box and stands out against the background of dots.

Vacation '58

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IF DAD HADN'T SHOT WALT DISNEY IN THE LEG, it would have been our best vacation ever! We were going to Disneyland. It was a dream come true. The rides! The thrills! The Mouseketeers! I was so excited that I spent the whole month of May feeling like I had to go to the bathroom. When school finally let out on a Tuesday, I sprinted home as fast as I could, even though we weren't leaving until Friday.

Dad picked up our brand-new 1958 Plymouth Sport Suburban Six station wagon on Thursday morning. The speedometer had only six and three-tenths miles on it. Dad said that it would be a pleasure to travel for six days in a car that smelled as good as our new Plymouth. It was nice to see Dad excited about our trip. For months Mom had to act moody and beg to get him to drive out to California. "What good will it do the kids to see their country from an airplane seat?" she wanted to know. Finally, Dad gave in and said we would get a station wagon and drive the 2,448 miles from 74 Rivard Boulevard, Grosse Pointe, Michigan, to 1313 Harbor Boulevard, Anaheim, California.

It took almost all day Friday to pack the car. Dad loaded and unloaded it again and again to save a square foot here, a square inch there. Then he simonized the car and hung litter bags in the front and back seats, attached a compass to the dashboard, and put a first aid kit in the glove compartment. Then he called everyone outside to take one item a piece out of the car so he could close the back.

After dinner, Dad ran the Plymouth up to Richie's Marathon Service to gas up and have Richie check under the hood and see if everything was A-Okay. When Dad backed out of the driveway the car scraped bottom. Not a little scrape but a sccccccccrrrrraaaape!

Dad got back at 8:00. We heard the sccccrrrrraaaape! and knew it was him. Richie had said that everything was beautiful under the hood. The car was gassed up, there was plenty of oil, the tire pressure was perfect, the AAA maps were organized in the glove compartment, and the speedometer read exactly 20.00 miles.

"Okay, all you Indians! Time for bed!" Mom said.

"But it's only 8:30!" I protested.

"We have to get up at 4:00 in the morning! I want to make Chicago by lunch!" Dad said, shooing us upstairs.

THE TELEPHONE RANG at 9:45 the next morning. It was Grandpa Pete calling to see why we hadn't gone yet. We had all overslept—even the baby. Dad was furious. I could hear him screaming and pounding his fists on the bathroom sink.

"We're five hours behind schedule!" he yelled. "And we haven't even left the goddamn house!"

"I wasn't the one who sat up all night rearranging the suitcases!" Mom yelled back.

Everyone hurried downstairs, dressed and ready to go.

"We don't need breakfast, Mom," I said.

"I'm still full from last night," Patty said, grinning in a way that she hoped would calm Dad. He was even angrier after he had tried to shave real fast.

Mom insisted that we all sit down and have a good breakfast, and Dad argued that no one ever died from skipping one breakfast. We gobbled down our pancakes and bacon, and chugged our juice. Dad sat outside in the car revving the engine. By the time we were ready to leave, the car had stopped, and Dad couldn't get it going again.

"Goddamn Plymouth Motors! I should have gone with a Ford—they know how to make an ignition! These damn Plymouths!"

"Just calm down, Clark!" Mom snarled. "You're making the whole neighborhood smell of gasoline!"

After we sat for five minutes quietly listening to Dad breathe

in and out of his nose, the car started and we backed out of the driveway. Mr. McMillan came running up to the car.

“Hey! You folks left your sprinkler on!”

Not only did we leave the sprinkler on, but when we got to the Edsel Ford Expressway, Mom said she thought she left the oven on, and we had to turn around and go all the way back home only to find that she hadn’t left it on. While Mom was inside the house checking the oven, the phone rang. It was my Aunt Catherine calling to say that Great Aunt Edythe needed a ride to her son’s house in Tucson, Arizona, and would we mind taking her since we were going in that general direction anyway.

It looked like we were finally on our way when Mom said that it was almost lunchtime and we could save some money by having lunch at home.

She had thrown out all the milk so that it wouldn’t sour and smell up the refrigerator, so Dad had to go up to Kroger’s and get a fresh quart. That took almost an hour because Dad locked the keys in the car by accident and had to wreck the vent window to get in.

Dad was so exhausted from being mad all morning that when he got home he said we would leave the next day.

“But I told Catherine that we would be there on Sunday, and if we lose today and tonight we won’t make it,” Mom said.

“Call her back and tell her we’ll see her on Monday instead.”

“Well,” Mom said cautiously, “Auntie Edythe wants to be in Tucson by Wednesday.”

“What?”

“I told Catherine that we would drive Auntie Edythe to Normie’s in Tucson. It’s on our way, and she’s such a sweet thing.”

DAD DIDN'T SAY A WORD until we reached Battle Creek and then all he said was, “Shut up back there!” He made up a rule about no eating in the car, and he wouldn’t let us listen to the radio or roll down the windows. All through Michigan he went over the speed limit, except when we went under bridges and past clumps of trees where a State Police car might be hiding. I wanted desperately to belt Patty for not sharing the JuJubees she was sneaking. She had brought along a whole bunch of stuff she’d bought with baby-sitting money, and she wouldn’t share any of it with me. There was absolutely nothing to do but stare out the window at the moonlit fields of corn.

Mom pleaded with Dad to stop at a motel when we got to Springfield, Illinois. Several times he crossed completely over the median lines and drove in the opposite lane. Once, while going through a little town, Dad drove up on the sidewalk and ran over a bike and some toys. Mom accused him of being asleep at the wheel, but he said he was just unfamiliar with Illinois traffic signs.

He took off his shoes, rolled down the window, turned the radio way up, and made us all sing the Michigan State fight song. But after a few minutes we were all sound asleep, our new station wagon racing down U.S. 55 like a bedroom on wheels. I don't know how far we traveled like that. Fortunately, there wasn't much traffic at that hour so we didn't hit anything. We finally woke up when Missy asked Dad to get her a drink of water and Dad said, "Go ask Mommy, Daddy's sleeping." I heard that and so did Mom, and she screamed and Dad slammed on the brakes, and the luggage tumbled forward onto the back seat and Dad's golf clubs scattered all over the highway.

We slept beside the road for the rest of the night. When we woke we all felt miserable. Our teeth were coated with night slime, our necks were stiff, and we all had to go to the bathroom. We hadn't eaten dinner, so we were all hungry. Dad was even crabbiest because he hadn't had any coffee yet.

After we washed our faces and brushed our teeth at a gas station and ate breakfast, we felt a little better. Even Dad managed a smile, and when we pulled back out on the highway, he suggested a game of Auto Bingo.

WE ROLLED INTO Aunt Catherine's driveway about 10:00 PM. She lived in Wichita, Kansas, in a farmhouse that was not on a farm but in town. She and Uncle Stan had two kids: Dale, who was my age, and Vicki, who was a year younger than Patty. I hated the two of them like I hated the flu. I was glad we were only staying the night.

I had to sleep in Dale's room on a bed that was lumpy and smelled funny. Patty and Vicki slept together and got along fine, but I think it was just because Patty was trying to act big in front of Vicki, who was a hick. The baby and Missy slept with Mom and Dad in Aunt Catherine's room. Uncle Stan was a baby about having to sleep on the couch in the family room.

"I work tomorrow, you know." he said.

I didn't remember Aunt Edythe because the last time I had seen her I was practically a baby. I tried to be polite and not register my horror when I saw her. She looked like the Mummy with a wig on. She smelled like a combination of mothballs and vitamin pills. I couldn't believe that I had to ride next to her.

"Put her by the window," Dad whispered to Mom as Uncle Stan helped Aunt Edythe into the car. "I don't want her to upchuck on the seats."

"She can't sit by the window!" Mom snapped. "She might fall out."

We were ready to go when Dale came around the side of the house with a beagle on a leash.

"Here he is, Uncle Clark" he said. "All walked and everything!"

"Who is he?" Dad asked.

"Auntie Edythe's dog. His name is Dinkie," Dale said. "He's neat. He watches 'Ed Sullivan'."

We had to rearrange the seating so that the dog would be way in the back. Mom didn't want him near the baby. She was afraid the dog might bite his face or lick his breath away. So we ended up with the baby in the front, the dog in the back, Patty next to the window, Missy beside her, then Aunt Edythe, and then me by the other window. Aunt Edythe was pressed right up against me so tight I could feel her nose breath on my arm.

At Mullinville we jogged northwest about twenty miles across the Arkansas River, which wasn't as much a river as a gash filled with water the color of beef broth. I tried to spit in it as we crossed, but succeeded only in "frogging" my cheek.

"You don't want to take Highway 50," Aunt Edythe said to Dad. "You want to stay on U.S. 54."

"We're going to Dodge City" Dad shouted so that Aunt Edythe could hear.

"Why in heavens would you want to go to that filthy, dirty tourist trap?"

UNFORTUNATELY, Aunt Edythe was right about Dodge City. It wasn't the authentic frontier town I had dreamed it would be. It was sort of like St. Claire Shores, Michigan, only dustier and minus a lake.

There were used car lots named after Wyatt Earp and Doc

Holiday and trailer homes right in town. The Long Branch Saloon smelled like popcorn and toilet ice. Dad refused to pay seventy-five cents for a beer so we left.

“If you really want to see something” Aunt Edythe said in an “I-told-you-so” voice, “you get back on U.S. 54 like I told you before and go down to Liberal and see the House of Mud. It’s entirely made out of mud and it’s really something to see!”

There was no House of Mud. At one time, a gas station attendant told us, there was a House of Mud, but just after World War I it caved in, killing the curator and his family.

“If you want to see something special,” he said, “go back to Mullinville and take Highway 50 up to Dodge City.”

At first glance, Oklahoma looked the same as Kansas. At second and third glance, it also looked like Kansas. Even after Dad pointed out that the portion of Oklahoma that we were traveling through was one of the nation’s top producers of fossils and dinosaur bones, it still looked like Kansas. As a matter of fact, it looked like Kansas deep into Texas, where we stopped for the night.

The Ranger Inn was like my friend Earl Denkinger’s attic bedroom in his stepfather’s house. It had a rug made out of rags, cowboy beds, a horseshoe on the door, a bathtub with feet, a chipped mirror, and only half a roll of toilet paper. The rooms were so small that Dad had to get three. Aunt Edythe and her dog had one room; Mom, Dad, and Mark had another; and Missy, Patty, and I had the other. Although it was sort of scary being alone in a strange room, it gave me an opportunity to bash Patty for being so stingy with her Milk Duds.

Everyone except Aunt Edythe was real cheerful when we got in the car the next day. Her arthritis was flaring up and she claimed that it would kill her before we got to Tucson.

“Beans, baloney, and horseflies!” Dad said under his breath to Mom. “No one ever died from stiff fingers.”

“Don’t be so sure, Mr. Know-It-All!” Aunt Edythe barked. She swatted Dad with her Reader’s Digest.

Dad’s face fumed as red as the flashing Highway Patrol lights behind us. That’s the way it is with old people; claiming they are hard of hearing, they make you shout, but as soon as you say something about them, they can hear 100 percent. Later on Dad told me that Aunt Edythe could hear an ant fart, but set an H-Bomb

off in her drawers and she wouldn't hear a thing. That flashing red light got closer and closer. Dad edged over to let the patrolman pass, but he didn't want to pass. He wanted Dad to pull over.

"I haven't gone over seventy miles per hour," Dad said.

"Well, he's not stopping you to chat," Mom said in her voice that sounds pleasant to children, but nasty to adults.

Dad pulled over and reached for his wallet. The cop came to the window. "What's the problem, officer?" Dad asked, offering his driver's license.

"You better step out of the car for a moment, sir."

Dad got out of the car and walked around behind it. His mouth dropped open and his eyes showed white. I jumped into the back and looked out the rear window. It was the most sickening thing I'd ever seen in my life. Aunt Edythe's dog was laying on the ground behind the car. He was flat on his belly with his legs out to the sides and his neck stretched out, so that he looked a beagle version of a bear rug. There was a wide red trail leading up to his body.

"We have anti-cruelty laws in this state," the cop told Dad.

"My God, you can't think I'd do a thing like that on purpose!" Dad protested, looking away from the carcass. "I tied the dog to the bumper while I put my wife's aunt in the car. It takes so long to get her in and out, I guess I forgot about him."

The cop bought Dad's explanation. He kneeled down and tenderly examined the dog.

"I had one of these when I was a boy," he said with a sad smile. "From the looks of his foot pads I'd say this little guy kept up with you for half a mile or so."

After the cop pulled away, Dad untied the leash from the bumper and got back in the car. He just drove away telling everyone that we had a loose license plate and the cop was helping fix it. He must have figured Aunt Edythe wouldn't miss the dog now if she hadn't missed him all day.

On Wednesday we got off to a good, early start. Dad had consented to a side trip to Carlsbad Caverns. Carlsbad, Mom explained, was the largest cave in the world and New Mexico's only national park.

Mom took out all the maps and spread them across the front seat. Mark got ahold of one corner of the map and sucked it soft

from Kermit, Texas, to Artesia, New Mexico, including Carlsbad. His tongue was spotted black with trip planner's ink, which Mom was afraid might be poisonous. Dad pointed out that thousands of kids suck on maps and that the government wouldn't let the auto club use poison ink. It didn't make much difference whether or not the map was wrecked because no map showed the road we were on. We had gotten on it by mistake after missing a couple of detour-this-way signs. After a few miles, we drove off a cliff.

It wasn't a big cliff. It was only about four feet high. But it was enough to blow out the front tire, knock off the back bumper, break Dad's glasses, make Aunt Edythe spit out her false teeth, spill a jug of Kool-Aid, bump Missy's head, spread the Auto Bingo pieces all over, and make Mark do number two.

We sat there stunned, rubbing our banged-up arms and shins. Aunt Edythe howled about her internal organs getting the shock of their lives. Mom was in a panic because she thought a flying orange had hit Mark's soft spot. Dad just sat gripping the steering wheel and clicking his tongue. Personally, I enjoyed the accident and was particularly impressed with the distance Dad had gotten out of a heavy, loaded-up station wagon.

Dad cut all the adhesive strips of the Band-Aids and taped his glasses together. He stood on the roof of the car and studied the landscape to determine the best route back to civilization.

"Where's my little dog?" Aunt Edythe suddenly screamed. "Has he gotten loose in the desert? Where is he? I have to find him!" She tried to get out of the car.

"Stay in the car," Mom said sternly. "It's hot and dangerous out there."

"Don't you tell me what to do!" Aunt Edythe shot back. "I'll do what I want. I should never have come on this trip! I should have taken the airplane!"

She pointed a finger at Dad. "He can't even drive!" she shouted.

Dad drew back his fist to deck her, but Mom got to her first, grabbing her arm and firmly pressing her back into her seat. "You move and I'll split your lip!" Mom yelled.

A glorious desert sunset bathed the tow truck in orange light as it hauled our car back to the dirt detour road.

"I never seen nothin' so mother bless'ed dumb," the toothless

tow driver said to Dad. "You musta got shit fer yer brains!"

Dad would have punched the guy in the mouth, but he knew there probably wasn't another tow truck in Loco Hills, New Mexico. He didn't even complain when all the men at the gas station laughed when he asked how much the tow and tire repair was.

"Well, how much? Five bucks? Ten bucks? What?" Dad inquired. The men laughed. Dad sort of laughed along with them.

"How much you got?" the avocado shaped station owner asked.

"I'm asking how much the charge is," Dad said.

"Why on earth do you need to know how much money I have to tell me how much it costs to tow my car?"

"Cause I'm a-gonna charge you all the money you got."

It cost us \$588 dollars. They even took the money out of Aunt Edythe's shoe. The owner of the station made it a point to explain to Dad that what he was doing wasn't robbery. "I should know," he laughed. "I'm the sheriff."

We spent the night in Alamogordo, New Mexico. Since the only money we had was Patty's twenty-nine dollars from baby-sitting, Dad had to rob the motel in the morning when he went to check out. He didn't actually rob it; he just reached into the cash register and took a handful of money. The manager came out of the back room, where he had been checking on our breakfast charges and saw Dad. He was pretty old and he didn't move too fast, so we got away clean.

About five miles outside of Lordsburg, Patty and I were singing "One Hundred Bottles of Beer on the Wall." All of a sudden Dad shouted, "Hold your hats!" He gunned the engine and we lunged forward. I could hear sirens wailing. I looked out the back. A highway patrol car was chasing us.

"Pull over, Clark!" Mom shouted. "Pull over!"

"Not on your life!" Dad growled. He pounded his fist on the steering wheel. "Come on, you gas-eating bastard, go!"

The cop was gaining on us. His Ford was light and tuned-up. Our Plymouth was heavy and loaded-down, and it shimmied and vibrated from driving off the cliff. The cop jerked his car into the passing lane. A truck coming in the opposite direction forced him back. He came up almost to our bumper. "Throw out the ice chest!" Dad shouted to me. "Throw it out the back window!"

I crawled back and lowered the window and the rush of air and the change in pressure sucked a baby sheet and a Wichita newspaper out of our car and onto the windshield of the cop car. The cop swerved and ripped into the dirt shoulder, sending up a rooster tail of dirt and gravel. Dad laughed.

“What are you doing?” Mom screamed. She didn’t know about the robbery. I knew, but Dad made me promise not to tell Mom.

“I’m running from the law!”

“What? Are you crazy?”

“I robbed the Roadrunner Motel!” he shouted. “To get money!”

The cop was back on our tail. A second car was coming from behind him.

“This is so cool!” I yelled out the back window.

“I have to go tinkle!” Missy cried.

Suddenly Dad slammed on the brakes. The Plymouth fishtailed to a screeching, rubber-stink stop. The cops locked up their brakes and dove to the sides of the road. Dad put the hammer down and we took off. One of the cops was stuck in the ditch. The other was in pursuit after a moment. That’s when I threw out the ice chest. It hit the front of the cop car on the first bounce. The cop lost momentary control of his car and sideswiped a convertible in the other lane.

“It pays to watch ‘Dragnet!’” Dad laughed.

Mom was in a trance, shaking her head. Tears were collecting in her eyes. Missy had wet her dress and was crying. Patty was saying her prayers, Mark was sleeping, and Aunt Edythe was looking sort of sick. I was having a great time planning what I would throw out the back trap next if some cop got brave enough to try and run in my Dad.

“Uh-oh!” Dad said.

I looked out the front and saw a flickering mass of lights.

“Roadblock,” Dad said. He leaned forward and tried to coax a little more speed out of the Plymouth. “We’ll run it!”

We split a row of sawhorses as if they weren’t even there, and then plowed into two cop cars joined at the front bumpers, opening them up like supermarket doors. We smacked them so hard, they spun around until they met at the rear bumpers.

Dad kept it to the floorboards until we came to San Simon Creek, Arizona. He slowed down and cut off the main highway onto

a dirt service road. That road ran into a larger road and then we were back on pavement. Dad calmed down and breathed a sigh of relief. He even let us stop at a place called the Horrors of Mexico, which was a barn that had a dead person in a bottle and some wads of hair mounted in cases. There was also a chicken with five legs.

AN HOUR LATER we arrived in Bisbee. Dad wanted to show us the largest open pit copper mine in the country. "It says in the guidebook that this mine would hold nearly one billion pillows!"

As we examined the mine, Dad switched license plates with a car belonging to an elderly couple from Michigan. Then Dad called us back into the car and we got onto Highway 80 and headed north to Tucson to drop off Aunt Edythe, who, by now, didn't look very good at all.

"Leave her alone," Dad said to Mom. "She's sleeping. If you wake her, we'll just have to listen to her guff."

"I wonder if she's hungry," Mom replied. "We didn't wake her for lunch."

"Old people sleep a lot. She's fine."

Only she wasn't fine.

"Mom?" Patty said about an hour later. "Mom!"

"What is it!" Mom said angrily. She had just gotten Mark to stop screaming.

"Aunt Edythe is leaning on me and she won't get off. And I can't wake her up."

"Pull over, Clark," Mom said.

"We'll be in Tucson in another twenty minutes. She'll be fine."

"Pull over! She's not fine!"

Dad pulled over to the side of the road. Mom hurried out and opened the back door. Patty jumped out and Aunt Edythe slowly fell over, sort of like a tree being cut down. She stayed in a sitting position, even though she was on her side.

"She's dead!"

Patty shrieked and rubbed the spot on her arm where Aunt Edythe's head had rested. Dad pounded the steering wheel.

"Well, goddamn it anyway!" he yelled.

We figured that she must have died back around Deming, New Mexico. That's the last time anyone could remember her saying

anything. She told us to roll the windows up because she was freezing cold. She was dead about ten hours and missed out on the cop chase.

“What are we going to do, Clark?” Mom asked, choking back tears.

“We could leave her here and call Normie and you could tell him to come and...”

“We can’t do that!”

“Well, hell, then let’s take her to Tucson. I just don’t want to get caught up in questioning and funerals and all that baloney.”

“How can you be so cold and insensitive?” Mom asked.

“I’m not being insensitive, I’m being practical. We have only three days at Disneyland at the tops—three days. It was your idea to take a car vacation to Disneyland, not mine. I didn’t rob a motel, ruin my car, and kill a dog to spend my vacation at a funeral for a crusty old bag.”

Mom could hardly argue with that so we continued on to Tucson with Aunt Edythe on the roof covered with Dad’s raincoat. She was real light and Dad was able to get her up there by himself, which was good because no one else would touch her.

“Come on, let’s play I Spy,” Dad said, trying to cheer us up and make us forget that there was an eighty-four-year-old dead woman on our roof. “I spy something. . . green!”

When we got to Tucson, we had to stop at a gas station and get a fill-up. Mom looked up Normie’s address in the phone book. He lived over near the University of Arizona. The gas station attendant helped us with directions, and we found the house with no trouble at all. The only problem was, Normie wasn’t home. His neighbor said he went up to Flagstaff for the week.

“I hope he don’t get this rain,” the man said as he hurried inside his house. He shouted from the porch, “First rain in eleven weeks!”

“It’s a damn good thing it’s night,” Dad said as he carried Aunt Edythe into Normie’s backyard and sat her down in a patio chair.

“You can’t leave her here,” Mom said. “It’s raining.”

“Is she going to catch a cold and die?”

“No, but have some respect!”

“Up your ass with a red hot poker!” Dad finally lost his temper.

He stormed back to the car and lit up a cigarette. Mom found her umbrella in the back and opened it up. She fixed it so it rested in Aunt Edythe's hand and protected her from the rain. Then she wrote a note and stuck it between Aunt Edythe's knees. The note said, "Sorry, Normie. Will talk later. Love, Ruth and Clark and the kids."

THE VACATION sort of went downhill after that. Mom continued to feel badly about how we just dumped Aunt Edythe on the porch and how upset Normie would be to find his Mom all wet and dead. Dad tried to be cheerful from time to time, but it wasn't sincere. He couldn't cheer anyone up, not the way he felt.

We ran into a little excitement the next day at the Yuma Proving Grounds, near the Arizona-California border. Dad thought that we might enjoy a brief trip to the Imperial Dam. At Roll, Arizona, we took a little dirt road that both Mom and Dad thought would go through to the reservoir and dam. Instead, it went through the proving grounds, and on that particular day they were proving missiles.

We were just driving along trying to ignore the bumps and chuckholes, when all of a sudden a missile cleared the top of the car by a foot and exploded about a half mile away. The force of the explosion rocked the car and woke up the baby.

Another missile zinged past and blew up.

"Holy Christ! Someone's shooting at us!"

Dad hit the gas and we all dove on the floor and covered our heads. "Gimme your walkie-talkie!" Dad shouted to me. I fumbled around on the floor and found my Kaptain Kismet walkie-talkie set.

"Come on, you idiot! Hand it over!"

I gave it to Dad and he pressed the button. "Weeeeeeeoooooooooowop!" Dad screamed into the little plastic walkie-talkie.

I looked up and saw a missile explode in front of us.

"See, son? Missiles are radio controlled. I just interfered with its signal and changed its course!"

"But Dad.."

"Here comes another! Wee-eeeeeeecooooooooowop!"

"But Dad!"

"Look out!"

That was it! Blam! The force of the exploding shell knocked the car over on its side. We all fell against the passenger doors.

Dad's glasses broke again. Patty chipped her two-thousand-dollar front teeth. Mom just started to whimper and coo and tap her foot on the floor.

"Dad," I finally said, "there isn't any batteries in it."

"Aren't any batteries," Mom said softly.

Dad and I were able to get the car back on its wheels. No missiles came by until we were on our way again. At first, Dad didn't do anything but drive. It was as though we were going down Woodward Avenue in Detroit and the exploding missiles were pigeon poops. Then one came pretty close and Dad jumped on the accelerator and we took off again. Dad dodged and swerved, stopped, sped up, spun around. He got so good at avoiding missiles that I felt a little disappointed when we reached the north entrance to the range.

A pair of startled guards approached the car. Dad rolled down the window and grinned. "You better hope to God that the Russians aren't flying Plymouth station wagons, 'cause they're invincible!"

We drove off and had a good laugh. As a matter of fact, we laughed nonstop until the Indian attack.

We crossed the Colorado River, stopping to admire its muddy brown majesty. Then we continued, driving through the Yuma Indian reservation. Highway 80 cut through the southwest corner of the reservation, which was littered with beat-up trailers, tin sheds, garbage, pick-up trucks, and semi-naked kids. It smelled of sewage.

As we passed a driveway, a truck pulled out and followed us. Every driveway had a pick-up truck and every pickup truck pulled out and followed us. The lead truck pulled out and passed us. He slowed to a crawl as the other trucks came alongside.

"Lock your doors!" Mom ordered.

Dad honked the horn and waved for the Indians to let us pass. They responded with a shower of beer cans and liquor bottles.

"Indian attack!" I shouted.

"But they're Yuma Indians. The guidebook says that they are primarily agrarian people with no tradition of warfare!" Mom said.

"Look out!" Dad shouted. "A rifle!"

Five rifles poked out from the truck windows. Dad coasted to a stop, steering with his knees so he could keep his hands up in the air. One of the Indians got out of his truck. He knocked on the window with his rifle. Dad rolled it down a crack.

“Yes? May I help you?” Dad said with a smile.

“Give me your moneys,” the Indian mumbled. He was drunk.

Dad counted out the last of the stolen money. He slipped a twenty, a five, and three ones out the window.

“Open the hood of your car.”

“Why?”

The Indian trained his rifle on Dad. He reached down and pulled the hood latch. A couple of the other Indians began robbing the engine of parts. The rest of the Yumas surrounded the car and made lewd remarks and gestures at Patty and Mom.

“Hey, look here!” Dad said. “If you take too much off my engine, we won’t be able to drive away.”

We let the Indians fleece us. They took everything, even Dad’s Pall Malls. They took our hubcaps, headlights, chrome strips, radio, antenna, and air filter. Then one of Indians asked for our tires. He said he would trade his tires for ours. Three Indians helped jack-up the front and got the front tires off, while two other Indians jacked-up the back and took off those tires. Another truck came by loaded with screaming Indians waving bottles in paper bags.

“Let’s fergit this,” the leader said, and they left us with one tire on and three off. The three that were off were snow tires and slightly larger than the original tire that remained.

At about sun-up we passed through Joshua Tree National Monument. Dad slammed on the brakes and made us all get out of the car. “See,” he said. “That’s a Joshua tree.” Then he made us get back in and we sped off. It was sort of scary.

We hit Riverside, California, around breakfast, but no one dared suggest we stop. At Ontario it began to rain. Dad fumed and turned on the wipers. They started up and then stopped. Dad had to slow down because the rain formed an opaque film on the glass and he couldn’t see. When he slowed down, the wipers went on. As he accelerated, they slowed and stopped. That’s when he started to cry. We all started to cry. There we were crawling down U.S. 10, bawling like babies.

We idled into Pomona. The rain cleared and Dad punched it, and we roared south to Anaheim.

“We’re getting close,” I shouted as I spotted a Disneyland sign.

“We’re going to make it!”

Our odyssey was nearing an end, and even though we had less

than a day to spend in the fabled fun capital of America, it didn't matter. Our tears were now for joy. I patted Dad on the back and said in a choked voice, "Thanks, Dad. I love you." Mom gave him a kiss and so did Patty, and Missy grabbed him around his neck and squeezed.

"There it. is! I see it! I see it!" I screamed when I saw the turrets of Cinderella's castle.

"Oh, my God! It's Disneyland!" Mom cried. She thanked God and made us give thanks, which we gladly did.

We pulled into the massive parking lot. It was empty.

"We have the place to ourselves!" Dad announced with a smile that quickly fumed to a drooling idiot's frown as he read a sign that said Closed for Repairs and Cleaning.

"There is no god!" Mom shouted. "No god would treat us like this!"

"Don't say that, Mom," Patty pleaded.

"We are in the hands of the devil! We have sinned, we bathed in sin, and the devil stole our souls!" Mom grabbed out at us. We started to cry.

"Closed for repairs and cleaning," Dad fumed. "You son-of-a-bitch prick! I watched your son-of-a-bitch program every Sunday! I bought a son-of-a-bitch color TV just to watch your son-of-a-bitch program! You owe me! You owe Clark W. Griswold, Jr.! You owe him!"

Dad threw the car in reverse and floored it. The thrust jerked us all forward in our seats. Then he slammed on the brakes and threw it into forward. We screeched off toward the freeway. When we got to L.A., Dad got off the freeway and stopped at a sporting goods store. He took the checkbook off the dashboard and went inside.

A few minutes later, Dad came out of the store with a bag under his arm. He got into the car and kissed Mark. He started the engine and we drove back to the freeway. We got off at Santa Monica Boulevard and headed toward Beverly Hills and Bel Air.

"Clark?" Mom said. "Where are we going?"

Dad didn't answer. He just continued driving, being very careful now to observe speed limits and all the rules of the road.

"Clark? Clark? Clark?" said Mom, over and over again.

When we got to Beverly Hills, Dad pulled over. There was an

old sedan parked ahead of us. A man wearing a straw hat came up to our car. He held up a map of the stars' homes.

"Hello, folks," he said. "Welcome to Hollywood!"

"Give me the map," Dad demanded as he drew a revolver out of the bag and pressed it against the man's nose. The man handed Dad the map. "Thank you."

We drove away, leaving the man standing in the middle of the road, shaking his head and stroking his white hair.

We stopped in front of a rambling mansion surrounded by a high fence. Dad turned off the motor. He loaded his revolver and stuck it in his belt. Without saying a word, he got out of the car and made for the fence. I followed him. Mom was too nuts to prevent me.

I never knew Dad was in such good shape, but he just climbed up the fence like it was a four-foot backyard stockade fence. I could see where he was going. There was a group of men sitting around a swimming pool having some kind of meeting. Dad crawled on his belly through the flower beds up to the house; then he stood still. A dog on a chain leaped from the patio toward the flower bed where Dad was standing. He fired and drilled the dog in midair.

"I've got your number, Disney! I'm Clark W. Griswold, and you owe me!"

The men who were reviewing drawings and papers on a large table turned in Dad's direction. A woman screamed and dropped a tray of drinks.

"I'll give you to the count of three, Walt Disney!"

"Can't we talk?" Disney said in the familiar voice that I recognized from the weekly introductions to his TV program.

"You closed your fantasy park, and that was a mistake!" Dad shouted as he waved his revolver at Mr. Disney. "I'm giving you to the count of three to run. I'm giving you a chance! You can run or I can blast your ass right here!"

Mr. Disney looked at the other men. He looked at the woman who had dropped the drinks and was now frozen with her hands over her mouth. A security guard came running around the corner of the house. He saw Dad and stopped, dropping his pistol on the lawn and raising his hands over his head.

"One!" Dad shouted.

Walt waited a moment, then dashed down the long stretch of

grass. Dad dropped to one knee, followed Mr. Disney, and fired. Mr. Disney tumbled to the ground clutching his upper thigh. His momentum carried him into the flower beds. Two Beverly Hills policemen leaped on Dad and wrestled the weapon from his hand.

Mom, Patty, Missy, Mark, and I were cleared of conspiracy charges. They held Dad for attempted murder, assault with a deadly weapon, illegal use of a firearm, and two violations of the Beverly Hills noise code. He had to stay behind. We went home.

Mom called Grandpa Pete from the police station, and he arranged for tickets to be waiting for us at the airport. The police let us say good-bye to Dad. I felt really sorry for him, especially when he kissed me and said that he hoped I'd had at least a few minutes of fun on our vacation. I assured him I did. I also told him that I hoped he would beat the rap and be home real soon and that I didn't begrudge him for shooting such a neat guy as Mr. Disney.

We sort of forgot about Dad as soon as the engines on the airplane trembled and sputtered and moved us around in a graceful arc, then nosed up into the sky. Our hearts pounded with excitement as we watched L.A. shrink below us. We drank Coca-Cola and sailed over the desert valleys that we had fought our way across just the day before. We enjoyed sandwiches as we flew into the pollen-free Arizona air.

"Isn't this marvelous?" Mom sighed. She exhaled and shook her head. "It seems foolish now to drive when you can fly. Maybe this is the way to see the country. Look, down there below us, children!"

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is Captain Fred Freeman. Off to the right side of the aircraft you will see the Grand Canyon. Formed millions of years ago, it is....."