

Kewanee Real News

*In the Land of Corn & Beans and
Where The Common Folk have no Idea of the Danger of Strangers*

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There is a curse about getting one's car the mandatory oil change just before a long road trip. In 1995, my car wound up at Art Pearson's Amoco station in Kewanee for emergency surgery. In 1998, my car exploded oil in Charleston hotel parking lot on Sunday morning. The Friday oil change place had put a Taurus oil filter on an Olds. The mechanic was surprised that my car did not seize up and fry on the long trip down I-57.

After leaving the car in the Super 8 parking lot under the intense 88 degree heat, on Sunday morning after check-out, it idles like a bucking bronco, and the SERVICE ENGINE SOON light begins to flash. Bad bad news with a 158 miles to home. I don't think Pearson is in business anymore in this sleepy little town.

I think it is the manifold intake error light acting up in concert with overheated petro or a loose gas cap. So at the next stop, I get out to

Since learning the New Math in grade school, the Outlaw Eastern Alumni are still confused on what number Anniversary this year's reunion is the greater cosmos. Below is an Old graphic.



check the gas cap, refit it, and check for pouring leaks. Nothing. I feel slightly better, and go in for the farmer breakfast special at the Olympic.

With 3/4 tank of gas, I speed out of the motel parking lot and directly onto the I-80 East ramp, saying it is better to fly than fry. I get the car to cruising speed, with the a/c on low, and listen for the pistol heads to dent the hood or a plume of white smoke in the rear view mirror. The SERVICE ENGINE SOON light is now on steady. I find it annoying. To get rid of that anxiety light, I place my hand in the 1 o'clock driving position which blocks that gauge cluster.

The plan was simple. Don't push it. Let the weekend traffic pass me. Keep the speed at a level 55-65 mph. Hopefully, get back to the Northwest suburbs of Chicago in three hours.

Now, Rocky has complained that the car has a shimmy because of the low tread front tires, still OEM on the vehicle. But I tell him my car, Erin Gray, an Olds Intrigue, is a gamer.

It has been more than a year ago when I had the car serviced with a tune-up and tire rotation. The service department said the E 34 error (manifold) was a miscue, the car works fine. So be it. With the complexity of a modern automotive engine, you can't get a second opinion or tinker under the hood with a sledgehammer.

I get home in two and one half hours. The massive weekend traffic jams had not developed yet, so there was no stop and go traffic. By the time the toll booths lines, the engine was running smoother than the bottom of a baby's.... and in the end, record gas mileage of 27.5 mpg! Maybe the pollution control device failed, because I rarely get more than 20 mph.

But back to the Kewanee story....



Herr Hepner called my office before 9 a.m. Thinking that he could never navigate through the call tree system, I picked up the phone to see which important client was calling on this early Friday morn. But it was Hep. He wanted to know when I planned to arrive at the farm. I told him via email that I would email him when I left the office. He said, “my email is down.” I immediately thought, “child blocker on?” He gave me his telephone number and probably reversed the long distance charges. But who cares? It is possibly the second weekend in a row away from work. A personal record. Nothing was going to discourage it, including an antsy host in a panic about arrival times.

The Outlaw Eastern Alumni are not an airline with time tables. Neither are most airlines these days, but that does not matter. The host, after 24 years of reunions, should know the routine by now. Friday night arrivals met at a local downtown Kewanee bar and drink themselves into comic routines.

After an oil change, bank run, and house run to pack, I am off to Route 53 road construction at 1:30 p.m. The traffic was slow, but not quite a standstill, until the I-55 exit South. Behind me, a growing purple black curtain was forming. A nasty severe thunderstorm was brewing.

As I hit I-80 West, there were a few rain squalls of a brief duration. Just to the north of I-80, the sky was a solid brick of soot. Trying to outrun the western gap in the forming front.

Near Utica, a truck-trailer had just passed me, when a clear line 55 mph cross gust nearly blew the rig over into the median. The wind blast nearly took me into the next lane. All traffic immediately took caution and geared down to 55 mph.

The downpour hit the caravan hard after that but let up a few miles down the road. The cell phone rang, I answered it but could not hear the other voice on the line. I recalled the office after the rain died off to see if they called. They had not; but they were aware of the severe thunderstorm warnings that surrounded my vehicle. So I got a wrong number cell call in the middle of a wicked storm.

There was a second 90 degree clear line northern wind gust. With the lower speeds, no problems in correcting for the jolt. However, two rigs decided they had enough and made it to Exit 70.

The thought of bad weather as an omen never crossed my mind. The only concern was more warnings on the radio, and the occasional cloud rotation in the distance. I-80 is tornado alley. The outside temperature had read 84 degrees, then within a flash, it was down to 66 degrees.

When I got to the backside of the low pressure cell, the temp was 83, then slowly fell to 79. It was now sunny and calm when I hit the Annawan exit. It was now less than 15 miles to Kewanee and the motel.

It was Rocky’s reservation. He was driving from Montana. He expected to arrive by 3 p.m. He should be relaxing in the room before my arrival.

At 4:50 p.m., I wander into the motel foyer. I wait behind a woman in a white dress who is checking in “for the night only.” Apparently, she is staying only a few hours, then checking out before midnight. Her daughter came in, also wearing a fancy white dress. It must be a wedding, reception, some family function. But rent a room for only a few hours?

Rocky has not checked in yet. I put the room on my credit card, and take one of the keys and head to the room. I slam the bags on the bed; go down and get a Coke, and turn on the Cubs game.

I am not even comfortable yet when I call Hep to tell me of the arrival. He asks where am I? I tell him Kewanee. He has a punch drunk staggered response of "oh." He thinks I must be in Chicago somewhere. He says he has to go get a trim in fifteen minutes, and we would meet afterward. He asks whether you want to arrange dinner; I say I am on a liquid (alcohol) intake. "Oh, that's right," he recalls.

By the time I hang up with Hep, within five minutes there is a knock on the door. It is Rocky.

The Cubs are going down in flames by now, too. I tell him Hep will call after his trim. But nearing 6 p.m., we wonder what the trim is "is."

News 8 leads with gruesome local crime stories, including fishing body parts from the Green River. Rock goes to do his constitutional and Al Bundy's the toilet requiring him to find the janitor's closet for a plunger. Self-housekeeping to begin the weekend? We have enough, and head out to Lloyd's for brew.

Rocky immediately notices the car shimmy dance, but I scoff at the notion of putting any money into upgrading the original tires. There is pressure to trade it in with the zero financing craze.

When we arrive at the bar, it still has one of the longest wooden bars in Illinois, but more tables and a food menu. Hep and his wife are sitting at a table. "Did you eat here?" Rock asks. No, just arrived and having drinks. I order the first 20 oz Killian Red.

Prz shows up after a run through Dyersville, and the Field of Dreams. It took him 8 hours to get from Minneapolis to Kewanee.

Hash arrives with Phil, a worker at one of Hash's suppliers. He said since Phil was from Kewanee, he'd buy him a beer. They talk shop in animal feed by-products which is Hash's current purgatory.

Annette says the fuzzy naval does not taste right. The mixed drink is not a common feature of past years at this watering hole. Also she shows us the order of cheese sticks contain, wow, no cheese inside! She leaves to pick up their heir from a birthday party, so Hep will thumb a ride home.

We had to bus our own table because service was poor. The bartender needed the 20 oz glasses back in order to refill them.

Then the space time continuum is distorted before our table. A 40-something Christina Aguilera with a breast reduction walks by and flirts to Rocky. She returns from the bathroom adjusting her bra with a slurred smile and says "hi" as she returns to the bar. She only stays around for a one more drink then she leaves the premises to apply her trade elsewhere. We probably could not communicate with her anyway; none of us spoke slut.

The food condiments, including a tanker of tarter sauce in a former windshield washer container, were removed from the table. The lights dimmed and the juke was turned into DC-9 full thrust mode. It was time to drink and lose all hearing.

A short time later, the bartender, wearing her worn lowriders and a black tank top makes a move on Hash's end of the table after I had bussed it cleaned for the next round. She had the small smurky smile that could defuse a dirty nuclear device.

The drinks kept flowing non-stop. By the end of the evening, Hep and Rocky were lighting up cigars while Hash was ordering two cardboard bar pizzas. Hep reminded us that he had no ride home. I suggested that Prz and Hash have a parking lot knife fight to determine who would drive/pour Hep off at the farm.

But the bartender was back with her black tank top and small talk. Rocky and Jerry were now into full glasses of whiskey, straight. Hep and Rock were alternating answers on the bar trivia game, matching wits with the 20-something nation. They made it to number 12 in the nation.

It was 1:36 a.m. when we rose to leave. The bar still had a half dozen patrons. Hep had a tee ball game at 8 a.m. I suggested that we should just drop him off at the diamond to save time. He was not amused.

We split up. Rocky and I returned to the frozen meat locker of our motel room in Kewanee

while Prz and Hash left north for Annawan and the new hotel room to trash.

Within a block, the local police were on watch. After multiple Killians, we crept quietly down Main Street to avoid any probable cause.

Instead of immediate crashing, Rocky needs to wander the remote through the rural basic cable stations.

Rocky had kept the a/c on high all night long. The room turned into Rocky's Frozen Shamu Meat Locker. I thought there was frost on my eyelids. Like a lizard, I rolled to the lone sliver of sunlight coming through the drawn curtains for warmth before leaving the covers. Thank goodness I put up the police tape across the outside door at 2 a.m.

However, I woke up from sleep in the midst of calculating how many POUNDS of beer I had the night before. Not how many drinks, but how many POUNDS?! That is not a good sign.

I realized that at the time, Herr Hep would have been living through his daughter's second t-ball inning by now. I could imagine his daughter poking him with a stick in order to get him up hours ago. The only thing that could get daddy motivated after a night of drinking would be whispering in his ear, "...I want my inheritance ... now!" Hep still may be in a fetal position, but coaching in the third base box.

After opening my eyes I get another jolt of the sweet smell of cigar smoke masking my retina like summer puffy clouds. My body is cured like smokehouse beef. Rocky is in the latter REM stages of something, because all night he has been "mumble mumble...like to buy mumble mumble."

Since no one was going to hose me down like a circus animal, I had to get up and moving. So far this weekend has been self-serve central: Rocky as janitor, and the group busing our own table at the bar last night.

The goosebumps of the a/c were growing into nectarines. Burn them off in the shower.

Rocky is semi-comatose, but quickly regains his faculties with the remote control. Saturday morning television sucks, but he rolls on. I ask him what is this show? "Drown the Kitty?"

We have another p.c. reality show to pitch to the networks. We also decide that if McD's had a pro-



motion with the new Disney pirate movie, they could sell "McTweets," or parrot nuggets. "At least that would be meat," I lament.

Then there was an infomercial about a bicycle that automatically changes gears. Yes, manually shifting bike gears is easy, but this is now lazy America. It is patented process.

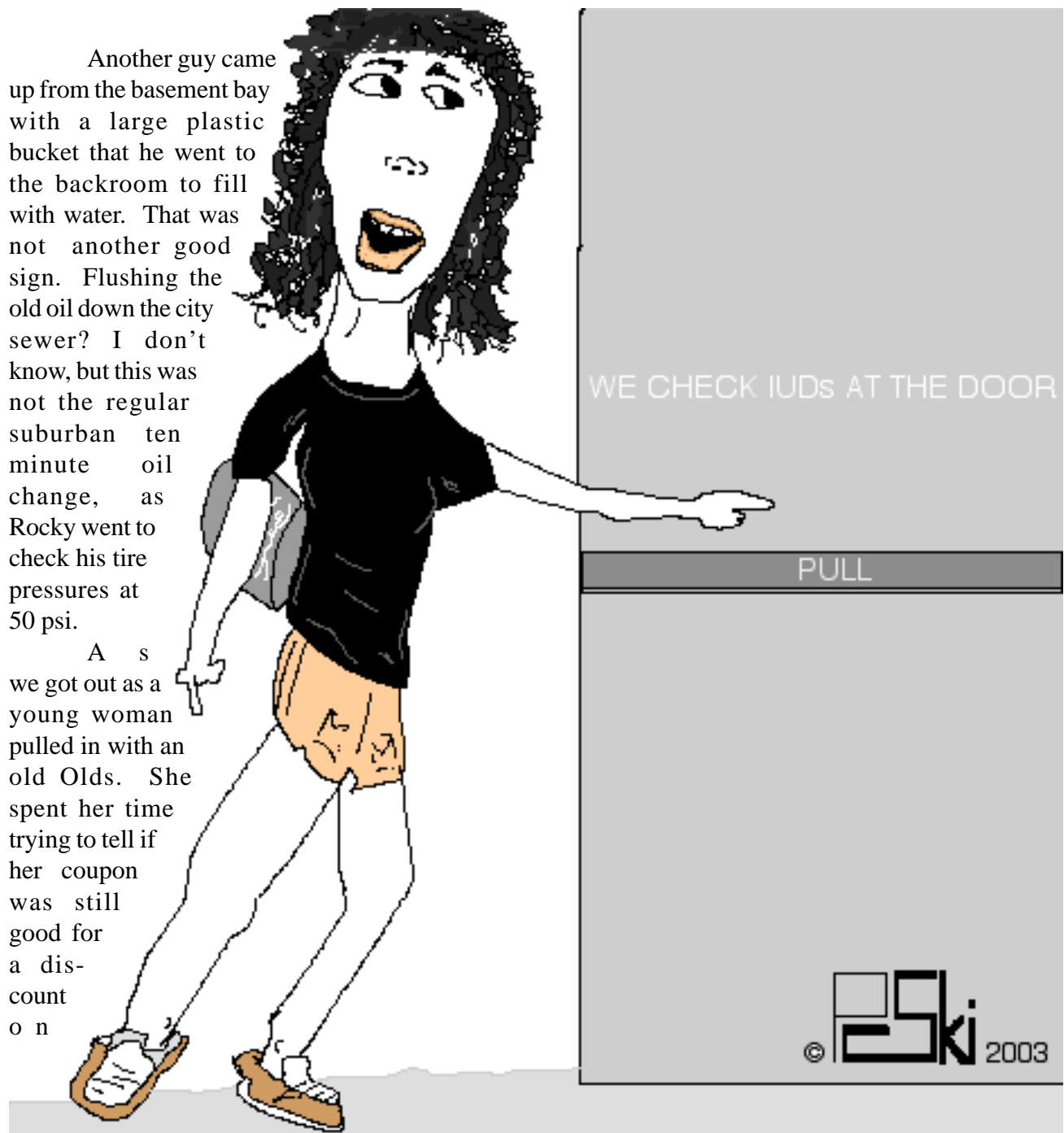
I get to thinking. Couple a generator to the back of the rear bike wheel, to a new bike seat with a vibrating saddle horn, then we have the patented "the Real Banana Seat" aimed at the lonely, female rider market. We could make a fortune.

Rocky needed to get an oil change so we took his extended cab Chevy pick-up. He cuts across traffic just before a three police car funeral procession would block the oil change entrance.

We waited a moment while one guy, under the hood of an old lady's car, appears with a lit cigarette dangling from his lower lip. Should the guy handling flammable petro products under the hood be smoking in the bay? Well, it was not my vehicle so I kept quiet. But Rocky was hovering around him like a hawk on a dinner run.

Another guy came up from the basement bay with a large plastic bucket that he went to the backroom to fill with water. That was not another good sign. Flushing the old oil down the city sewer? I don't know, but this was not the regular suburban ten minute oil change, as Rocky went to check his tire pressures at 50 psi.

As we got out as a young woman pulled in with an old Olds. She spent her time trying to tell if her coupon was still good for a discount on



a lube job. The smoking attendant merely shrugged his shoulders, and she went back to cleaning out the scattered papers on the floorboards.

We rolled out to the farm near noon. The others were lounging under the shade next to the fenced in playground. We immediately sat down and began to rib the others on last evening's exploits and their physical and mental condition this morning. Yes, Hep got to his daughter's game. And yes, he was as pickled as a cucumber.

The afternoon was highlighted by Hep turning meat products into ash on the grill, and a long winding discussion of the past Kewaneeefests. Hep's father had suggested that the core group put together a last man standing tribute, but the last two toasting the others. Rocky remembered a Harry Morgan M*A*S*H episode. So next year, as the 25th anniversary of the first "picnic," the deal will be finalized on the last two men standing pact.

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It was agreed that next year the plans would be finalized. Prz would be in charge of the alcohol to be purchased; Hep in charge of getting a safety deposit box, and Ski in charge of the legase. Hash then should bring a pen for the signature card.

It is not the first time in WELH OEA history of stashing a bottle of liquor for future consumption. In 1985, I stashed a bottle of Jim Beam in a Waikiki hotel room during the Big Trip to Hawaii with the direction on the label "Have a drink on us, WELH alumni."

We drank so many mai tais that week that I



have never needed to have another pineapple product in my life. Ah, but as Mr. Hash would agree, better living through biochemistry.

Hep decided to show off his farm-bred cooking skills. He is a sentimentalist when it comes to raging firestorms. Anyone want a napalm steak?

Fully packed with charcoaled beef products and side fixings, we adjourned to the shade of the main lawn tree stand. In lieu of driving to the Quad Cities to find a movie, we spent the next two hours going through the memorable moments of past reunions.

There was one pause in the proceedings, in which one by one, each person busted their gut laughing. (See accompanying photographs).

Then the entire crew got into Hep's family minivan for the trek for more BEEF at the Prime Quarter, a cook your own slab place. On the rolling gravel country road toward the interstate, the van bottomed out several times. Collectively, we

did not care, for much like the Ryder Truck with the boiling gasoline tank during Rocky's Wyoming move, it was not our vehicle.

The restaurant has two large square open flame pits where patrons throw down their meat to grill. This time the place was packed around the pits. But the problem was that a guy in a chef outfit was consuming 1/4 of the grill space cooking orders. That defeats the purpose of the place but we got lucky and got a spot right next to our table.

The meal was good since you control the perfection of the cooking. Medium rare is medium rare.

The traditional "what is each person's part of the tab" left the highly educated at the other end of the table debating whether or not to carry a number or two. Then once a reasonable figure was arrived at, then the "tip" debate began. Ah, tradition.

On the return interstate trip, Mr. Hash is seated behind the driver. A sedan heading toward Iowa with their home plates pulls up next to Hash's window. There is a woman in the passenger seat, who quickly glances at him. Rocky, sitting next to Hash, says he should press his legs up against the window and give her a show. This immediately gets the whole minivan rocking with laughter, and stares and hoots at the Iowa couple.

The Iowa car pulls ahead. But Hep guns it and gets back side to side. Rocky asks if the sliding door opens at 60 mph? He wants to say hello, too. You can tell the woman is getting uncomfortable and reaching for the cellphone to call *911. We play this cat and mouse chase down the interstate until our exit.

The evening concluded with another round of drinks and trivia at Ann's/Lloyd's/Cerno's in downtown Kewanee. The top for local trivia winners: WHIP IT, CALVIN, WHIP IT, FYOU. Yes, we were so bored that we were attempting to send subliminal messages throughout the country.

There was nothing subliminal about one of the female bar patrons. A Sandra Bernhardt-Angelina Jolie clone stick came into the bar with a tight black top and no button khakis with hanging

QUESTION: WHY ARE THESE MEN LAUGHING?



ANSWER: ROCKY'S COMMENT CARD:

WELCOME TO OUR SUPER 8 MOTEL. 7/98

Would you please help us judge how well we are meeting your needs? Please mark the block below the face that represents how you react to each of the following questions.

Site #: 3250 Kewanee, IL	YOUR ACCOMMODATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	What was the APPEARANCE of the motel?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	How CLEAN was your room?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Were you COMFORTABLE in your room?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	What was the condition of your room's FURNISHINGS?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Was the BATHROOM clean?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	How do you perceive our PRICE or VALUE relationship?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	OUR SERVICES	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Were we FRIENDLY?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Were we EFFICIENT?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Were we RESPONSIVE TO YOUR NEEDS?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
OVERALL, how do you rate our SUPER 8?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
WOULD YOU VISIT THIS SUPER 8 MOTEL AGAIN?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> NO	

NAME: _____ ADDRESS: _____
 CITY: _____ STATE or PROVINCE: _____ ZIP or POSTAL CODE: _____
 PHONE NO.: _____ ROOM NO.: _____ ARRIVAL DATE: _____
 COMMENTS: DIDN'T GET LAID.

cellphone. She was with her girlfriend, "Butch." They were at the bar directly across from our table with Mr. Hash closest to them.

Then, without warning, Butch slaps an inattentive BernJolie on the backside. She quickly turns, and instantaneously Jerry and Rock point to Mr. Hash. But the barflies, being intoxicated, never charged Mr. Hash, or even recognized him. They left the bar shortly thereafter, only to return a couple times as the evening wore on.

It is one a.m., and we are outside the bar, ready to head back to the hotels. When BernJolie and Butch returns to cruise the bar again. But Butch is yelling at her, "You already have a date, bitch!" Rocky turns to Ski and immediately says "You already have that picture drawn in your head." Absolutely. I am a pro.

We arrive back at the motel at 1:05 a.m. What the Hell???? NO ROOM SERVICE!

"You think it was the card?" Rocky asks. I coin the cursed phrase that this is the "Kewanee

self serve weakend." This blows. The yellow do not disturb sign was gone before check-out time as we were at the farm. Maybe Rocky's Al Bundy moment had the IEPA lock-down the room?

We should have called the front desk, but no one was there. We probably would have got a customer call center in India. "We are 'sarrey', would you like a squishy with that?"



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As I attempt to sleep, Rocky is basic cable surfing. I hear Marissa Tomei saying "It's my first day. I'm not medical. I'm pregnant." Twenty minutes later, I have to get up because my brain has a graphic poster in its mind about the psycho-BernJolie woman:
WOMB RAIDER.

S u n d a y morning at 9:00 a.m. I hear the piston gasps of air and the putt-putt sounds of a motorcross cycle. Is it Rocky in deep REM sleep? No, its the Wilton Car we saw as we came into the motel last night. It is a turn of the century automotive trek across America that is being recreated for public television. Kewanee was one of the original stopping points on the original journey. Roads were unimproved at best; gasoline filling stations non-

existent in the early 1900s. It is ironic to find a piece of living history at your motel parking lot as you are pouring yourself out of a late model, big block, GM pick-up truck.

Rocky is not interested in getting up to glimpse a moving, living technology fossil being driven out of the parking lot.

They only way to get him moving is to turn on the Sunday morning newstalk shows. Rumsfeld is swatting back questions with ease. Rocky lifts his sleepy head from under his blanket and says, "Yeah, I'm with Rumsfeld. Get out of my f\$%#ing way!"

As we check out, there is a unmarked white van and two guys running back and forth into the hotel utility rooms. They are pouring kitty litter and superfine sand into large 50 gallon buckets and garbage cans on wheels. I make the observation that they are making a "filter" of some sort, but

this place has no pool. "No wonder the water tasted like kitty litter," Rocky said spitting on the ground. A guy comes back with a garbage can, and unloads a gray mush of water logged kitty sand onto the ground just off the parking lot.

We are to meet at the Olympic in Annawan, near where Jerry and Hash are staying. It is an interstate off-ramp site. I get into my car, and start her up. She bucks,

moans and runs like on three cylinders. I immediately curse, but Rocky has already left the premises. I fear another Sunday morning car crisis coming on. I get the car moving forward, and the SERVICE ENGINE light is on. I can hear the tapping on the hood of the engine demons who are giving me an instant ulcer.

The car had spent the entire day sitting under the 100 degree sun. Maybe it baked itself into a seize moment. I get out and re-do the gas cap. At times, there is a vapor lock if the cap is not secured right. I get back into the car; no change in the bad sounds. Well, there is no use standing sta-



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tionary, so I get the car moving on the rural highway toward the interstate.

At intersections, it idles like crap; it is better when you get up to some speed. I constantly check the temperature gauge; it appears normal. I check the gas gauge, it is not dropping like the stock market so that is a relief. The SERVICE ENGINE light is still on.

We get to the Olympic for breakfast. Sorry, we are out of toast. The perfect capper to the self-service (self-sufficiency weekend); we should have thought to have brought our own loaf of bread if we wanted toast.

After the traditional reunion picture, there was a fateful decision. I had 3/4 of a tank of gas, and a long road ahead. Instead of finding a gaso-

line repair station, I floor it to the I-80 East ramp. I get Erin Gray motoring up to 55 mph. I reposition my hand to block the SERVICE ENGINE light from my line of sight. I put the a/c on; and the radio up.

I later learn that while I am running east with a unknown problem, Mr. Hash nearly runs over an experimental solar vehicle on his travels to Charleston. Smashing into a solar vehicle, or having a 1903 Wilton outperform your Detroit sheet metal would have been a fitting ending to the story.

I get the car serviced at the dealer on Monday. It was an extremely clogged gas filter.. How does an extremely clogged gas filter improve gas mileage?

ANNOUNCEMENT WELH-KEWANEEFEST 25TH ANNIVERSARY REUNION

The Outlaw Eastern Alumni will return to Kewanee, Illinois on July 9-10-11, 2004 to celebrate the 25th WELH Radio Reunion. All Eastern Illinois University radio alums and patrons are welcome to the event to be held at the Hepner Farm (a/k/a the Hepner Hilton).

The agenda is still in flux but will probably follow the habits of the core group of OEA leaders.

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Still hanging over the old chicken coop, the vintage Hepner Hilton sign and rusty horseshoe greets visitors to the annual reunion.

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