

3rd Place Winner, Memoir Category, 2007 Kansas Writers Association contest

DeSoto Discipline

I stand majestically in the driveway, basking in the morning sun. My shiny mint green body glistens, showing off sparkling three-window sides and a heavy chrome grill set on a wraparound chrome bumper. I am a 1949 DeSoto Sedan, and one of the first cars to have an automatic transmission with fluid drive—a big selling point in the 50's.

When Wilson, that's my owner, brought me home to meet the family, there was shouts of admiration when they saw my large, sturdy, frame trimmed in chrome perched on top of wide whites. The family seemed nice, but it was the owner that I liked best. He appreciated me and knew how to take care of a car. You can't imagine how many of my friends are purchased by people that know nothing or worse don't care. But this guy knew his stuff. He owned a service station and instantly I had loving care and was never asked to do a job that I couldn't do. I was bathed, waxed, and vacuumed weekly, and he never let me run out of gas or oil.

Today I will be taking my family on vacation, and while spending hours on hot asphalt didn't look all that attractive, it would pretty much give me all the attention for two weeks. Nice for a change. Usually, I'm just driven to and from work on weekdays and church on Sunday.

My owner loaded six pieces of luggage, two sacks full of games, snacks, and a cooler full of sodas and water inside my trunk and gave me an affectionate pat when he was finished. It might be more than one could expect of a four-door car, but without a

whimper I let my chrome smile blaze in anticipation. Without me, there would be no vacation.

Hey, that's not so bad, I say to myself as the trunk slams shut. Next, three adults and three children pile into the car, and I accept the fact that my house will be their home for the next two weeks.

My owner is a fanatic about baseball. In fact, he is fanatic about any sport. This summer he decided to trek across the country visiting a marathon of baseball parks from Wichita, Kansas, to Yankee Stadium in New York City. Mind you, I was proud to accommodate, but driving the family across the United States was bound to present problems. Even so, I was eager to offer my services.

The trip was meticulously mapped out. We would travel first to Blues Stadium in Kansas City to catch a game, then to St. Louis, Cincinnati, Chicago and finally Yankee Stadium. We would return the same way, hoping to catch some more games.

The kids were less than enchanted about being caged up inside me, and the feeling was mutual. I rather liked the idea of taking Wilson and his wife on vacation, but they could leave the kids at home as far as I was concerned. The complaining and whining started the minute preparations were made for the trip.

“What will we do, cooped up in a car for hours and hours?” they said.

“We'll take along your books and several board games for you to play,” they were told, “and once you are in the baseball stadium watching Mickey Mantle on the field, you'll forget all about the long ride.”

That sounded good to them, but then there was the issue of the baby.

“And what are we going to do with baby Mary?” they asked.

“She'll have fun and be no problem, you'll see,” Wilson said.

Sissy had several complaints of her own. “Well you know I get car sick, so I’ll have to ride in the front seat,” she cautioned.

“You don’t either,” Brother sneered. “It’s all in your head. Quit complaining and get into the car.”

Oh, how I wanted to scold them. They should be glad their dad had the foresight to purchase a big car, with deep bench seats and the comfort of air conditioning. But I said nothing and started down Interstate 135 toward Kansas City. Wilson had a steady foot and kept my speed at an even eighty miles per hour. I parked at Blues Stadium and the family trooped off to watch Kansas City play the Yankees. I could hear it from the speakers that blasted a play by play over the parking lot, and I must admit the excitement was electric. The kids were excited to see Mickey Mantle in person and Sissy coaxed their dad into buying her a bat autographed by the guy.

The next day we sped to Sportsman’s Park in St. Louis to see the St. Louis Cardinals. Wilson made the trip to St. Louis in a record five hours, considering we had to stop every hour for Grandma’s bladder malfunction. The Cardinals played the New York Giants and Wilson kept raving about their new player, Willie Mays. I like baseball talk as well as the next guy, but already I was anxious to get going and get this trip over.

Things in the back seat began to deteriorate on the stretch between St. Louis and Cincinnati, with Wilson’s darling daughter complaining the entire route about car sickness and hanging her head out the back wing window half the time. Brother kept making fun of her and throwing stuff at her, and Grandma between them just snoozed away like nothing was going on. I believe Wilson did say something about her being hard of hearing.

By the time we hit Cincinnati and Crosley Field, I was ready for a good rest, not so much from the long hours of taxing my motor, but from hearing those kids picking at each other, throwing things and complaining about being in the car. Baby couldn't sleep from the noise, and expressed fear that both the kids in the back seat might turn on her next. Thank goodness we had a two-night stay so I could get some peace.

And rest I did, as my family watched a double header. Three hours of Z's later, I was rudely awakened by a crack on the windshield. "Darn that Ted Williams," I yelled. "That hurt." He'd hit a foul ball that landed smack on my windshield, and cracked the glass. "Just you wait until Wilson sees this," I screamed.

Wilson was less than happy about the hit and returned promptly to the stadium to see if they would pay for the repair. "Nope," he was told. "No liability coverage for foul balls." Wilson just smiled and asked for directions to the nearest repair shop, citing that it was still worth it to see the big hitters play, and witness the Boston Red Sox getting runners on base before letting the big poppers drive them in.

I spent the next day at the repair shop, which I might add was noisier than the kids what with air compressors, car lifts going up and down, metal jacks being pulled here and there and the radio blaring some sort of music I couldn't identify. Still the smell of grease and oil soothed my developing migraine and I wished I could stay longer than the hour it took to replace the windshield.

Then, it was on to Comiskey Park in Chicago to see the all-star game with the best and most famous players in baseball. Everyone was excited to see this game. There was lots of chatter about seeing Roy Campanella and Sissy's favorite, Minnie Minoso.

On the way to Chicago, Brother decided to shoot a few hoops in the back seat. My rear was roomy in comparison to other cars, but this little caper proved to be the stroke

that threw Wilson over the edge. My question was, “Why did they let that kid take a ball on a road trip?”

Grandma, unable to sleep, nudged Wilson in the back and said, “Wilson, these kids need some discipline or I’ll be swatting the both of them soon.”

Good grief, Grandma, I thought, just swat them and get it over with. Can’t you see that Wilson’s driving?

Wilson braked the car and pulled onto the shoulder of the road. “Son, get out. You too, Sissy. We need to have a serious talk.”

After much discussion, they returned to the car. “Onward,” he said, giving his wife a triumphant smile.

I’m not sure what Wilson told them, but his method of child discipline needed improvement. Things were worse than before. Without a whimper, I decided things had better change or I’d be taking matters into my own hands. Wilson and Grandma were ineffective, and Mother had her hands full with the baby. I wasn’t sure how, but knew something would come to me.

Wilson seemed to sense that I was getting tired of my load because he gave me a pat on the dash board and coaxed, “Let’s go partner.”

Just outside Chicago, I’d had enough, what with Grandma wanting to stop every hour to pee, the kids constantly bickering and fizzing sodas all over my upholstery, and Baby crying, so I took charge of the situation.

Watching for the first service station along the road, I quit smack in front of it. Yep, quit. The mechanics worked and checked everything out, but said it was a mystery why the motor quit. They were stumped but finally got my motor running again. They warned that it might happen again since they hadn’t a clue why it quit in the first place.

After much discussion, Wilson decided not to risk it and announced we would be returning home and would try to drive straight through. Music to my ears. The sooner I got rid of those kids and Grandma the better. We missed Minnie Minoso, but sixteen hours later, I pulled into my own driveway. Maybe Wilson and I could see him another time—just the two of us.