

## Chapter 5 - The Endless Summer



After the prom, the last few weeks of school passed quickly. Don and I were frequently joined in our aimless wanderings by our friend Andy, whom we'd known since grade school. Andy had a 1963 Dodge Dart with a slant six engine, a car that was almost as slow as the Model A. Not surprisingly, we usually chose the Model A for our after-school adventures. Graduation came and went, and we began driving the "A" to the lake for canoeing, skiing parties, and other summertime activities. Of course, that summer we didn't spend all our time playing. Like all high school graduates we found ourselves face to face with the curse of adulthood – a job.

We were all college bound, so we didn't have real jobs. We had summer jobs. I was lucky to find a meaningful job as an engineering trainee with an HVAC (Heating, Ventilating, and Air Conditioning) controls manufacturer. Don ran an injection molding machine, making pressure-cooker gaskets at a rubber plant. Andy had the most

interesting job of all. He worked in the concession stand of a drive-in theater. He used his influence to get Don and me part-time jobs, working in the concession stand on Friday and Saturday nights.

Drive-in theaters are a piece of our automotive heritage that has sadly all but disappeared from the American landscape. The concept was simple – a large outdoor movie screen in front of a parking lot dotted with posts that held portable speakers on short wires so you could hang the speaker on your car window while you watched the movie. They specialized in “B” movies, the type where teenagers at a beach party are suddenly attacked by giant potato bugs that have escaped from a neighborhood radiation lab. Before each movie there was a cartoon showing dancing popcorn boxes extolling the virtues of the concession stand located at the back of the parking lot. This triggered a rush to the concession stand, where Andy, Don, and I dispensed sodas, popcorn, and pizza in a frenzy of activity.

The owner/manager of the theater was a no-nonsense man named Bill. He had his hands full just trying to keep everything running smoothly so the business would generate some semblance of a profit. He had an assistant manager named Lenny who specialized in creating confusion. I suspect Bill kept Lenny around because he secretly enjoyed straightening out the things Lenny messed up. Bill wanted to keep the theater a respectable family place, so one of Lenny’s primary responsibilities was walking between the cars, rapping his flashlight on the windows and demanding “two heads above the window” as required. The admission charge was based on the number of people in the car, so Lenny also kept an eye out for drivers who tried to sneak into the theater with unpaid passengers hiding in the trunk. Another one of Lenny’s responsibilities was to post the names of the movies we were showing on the marquee out front. I’m not quite sure why Bill chose Lenny for this job, as Lenny had to be the world’s worst speller. Even with the name of the movie written on a piece of paper in front of him he invariably got it wrong. This was perhaps understandable when the title was something tricky, like

“Counterpoint.” Lenny proudly displayed this as “Counterpiont.” It was a little harder to understand how “Fire Creek” could become “Fir Crick.”

Harvey was our projectionist. When the equipment was working properly his job was pretty straightforward. There were two projectors in the projection booth. One would be showing the current reel, and Harvey would load the next reel into the other projector. When the current reel ended the second projector would start automatically, and Harvey would then load the next reel into the first projector. This didn't take long, so he had plenty of time to wander down to the concession stand and sip coffee between reels. Sometimes he spent a little too much time sipping coffee, and both projectors would run out of film. The screen would go blank, and the parking lot would erupt in a cacophony of car horns while Harvey ran back to the projection booth to load the next reel. Sometimes he got confused and loaded a reel the audience had already seen, resulting in another outbreak of car horns. Either way, we'd get a flood of ill-tempered customers in the concession stand, loading up on popcorn and soda while Harvey got the reels straightened out.

I found the customers even more fascinating than the people who worked at the theater. The majority of them were good, honest, salt-of-the-earth Midwesterners, but there were more than a fair share of characters among them. Maybe I'd led a sheltered life, but I encountered a few individuals at the theater who were unlike anyone I'd met anywhere else, before or since. I got my first inkling of the diversity among our customers my first day on the job, when I made a trip to the rest room. Scratched on the wall, amid the usual assortment of misspelled sexual insults (people who write on bathroom walls seldom win spelling bees) was a quote by the 18th century French philosopher Diderot. True, the quotation "Man will never be free until the last king is strangled with the entrails of the last priest" had a definite anti-social bent, but it did indicate a decidedly higher level of pervert than you encounter in most public facilities. If the person who scratched that quote on the wall ever visited the concession stand I didn't know it, but perhaps that is because he would have blended in nicely with the rest

of the crowd. One gentleman wore a full head Frankenstein mask while he bought his refreshments. On another occasion a lady purchased popcorn and a soda while wearing only a negligee. I was surprised to discover that many of our patrons apparently couldn't count money. They'd place an order, and when we told them how much it would cost they'd place a wad of bills and coins on the counter. We'd count out the correct amount, and they'd scoop up whatever was left and shove it back into their pocket. We sold the usual assortment of popcorn, hot dogs, miniature pizzas, and soda, so it was a bit of a surprise when one customer ordered pancakes.

"Pancakes?" Don asked in disbelief.

"Blueberry, if you have them" the customer replied hopefully.

Of course, the customers weren't the only ones who sometimes acted irrationally. In the rush to serve as many customers as quickly as possible we sometimes made mistakes ourselves. I once served a gentleman who spoke so softly he was hard to understand amid the din, but I was pretty sure he just asked for a cup of coffee. When I gave it to him he looked at it oddly and then asked "Did you ever hear of iced coffee?"

"Oh yes, I've heard of it." I replied. I then turned to the next customer, but I was vaguely aware that the coffee buyer had given me an odd stare as he left. It wasn't until much later that it occurred to me that perhaps he actually wanted iced coffee. Don had a similar experience when a customer asked for peaches.

"I'm very sorry, sir, but we don't serve fresh fruit here" Don replied. The customer gave him a long, perplexed stare before leaving. Later, when the rush was over, Don told me about the weirdo who asked for peaches.

"Are you sure he wasn't asking for pizzas?" I asked.

The smile slowly faded from Don's face. "Oh" was all he said.

Business at the concession stand definitely came in spurts. During intermissions, or when the movie plot slowed down, we would be overwhelmed by a crush of customers. We'd work frantically to fill everyone's order, and then we wouldn't see another customer for an hour or so. During these slack periods we'd mop the floor, assemble pizzas, and fold popcorn boxes. The boxes were shipped to us in flattened bundles, and we had to pop them back into a box shape, fold in the flaps on the bottom, and lock a tab into a slot so they'd be ready to fill with fresh popcorn when the next rush of customers arrived. Andy, Don, and I were sitting in a circle one night, swapping lies and folding boxes. We finished one bundle so Andy opened a new bundle, folded one box, and then tossed it down in disgust. "Shoot," he said. "They sent us the wrong size boxes." He called Bill over and showed him the box. Bill looked at the box with disdain.

"They know we don't use this size." He fumed. "I told them that when we placed the order. They sent us a bunch of these boxes last summer, and it took me weeks to get it straightened out. Now I've got to do it all over again. I hope we've got enough of the right boxes to tide us over until they send us replacements." Just then Lenny walked into the concession stand.

"Hey, Lenny!" Bill called out. "Take a look at the boxes those clowns sent us again this year." Lenny walked over to the place where Bill, Andy, Don, and I were all standing in a circle, glaring at a solitary popcorn box. Bill handed him the box and Lenny studied it intently. Suddenly he jerked upright, with a shocked look on his face.

"Wait a minute!" Lenny shouted. "This is the wrong size!" He turned to Andy. "Don't fold any more of these" he ordered. "This is the wrong size box!" Then he turned to Bill. "We don't sell this size" he explained. "They sent us the wrong boxes." He then repeated this message to Don and me in turn, in case we'd missed it. Pleased with himself for having discovered this potentially catastrophic mistake he hurried off to tell Harvey about it, on the off chance that our projectionist would get a sudden urge to fold popcorn boxes. Lenny may not have been especially quick, but he was thorough.

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When we weren't screwing things up at the theater or slaving away at our factory jobs we had plenty of time to enjoy the summer. Andy's parents had built a cottage on a small lake in Indiana, and we often went there to go swimming, canoeing, skiing, or to just hang out and play cards. Usually Andy, Don, and I just decided on the spot what we felt like doing, but every once in a while we'd invite a gang over for a cookout. These affairs usually ran more smoothly if Don or I planned them. Andy was a terrific guy and as true a friend as you could ask for, but he did tend to be a bit absent minded. Don once said that Andy would give you the shirt off his back if he'd remembered to put it on that morning. Planning was not Andy's strong suit.

One particularly memorable skiing party began gestating on a Tuesday, when Andy first suggested inviting a gang out to his folk's place for a cookout on Saturday. All week long he vacillated, worrying about the weather, someone who might have to go to Indianapolis on Saturday, and a dozen other factors that might interfere with the party. Finally on Friday afternoon he decided to press ahead, invited everyone for Saturday, and began stocking up on boat gas and other necessary supplies. I drove the Model A to his cottage early Saturday afternoon to help him set up. I immediately noticed a crowd of people I didn't recognize. It turned out Andy's brother had also planned a party for that Saturday, and neither of them had bothered to mention their plans to the other. Fortunately there was plenty of room for both parties and we took turns using the boat to go skiing. When Andy's guests began to arrive, Andy took me aside.

"I forgot to get pop" he said. (In Indiana, sodas are called pop.) "Can you run me over to Bill & Casey's to get some?" Bill & Casey's was a small grocery store on the far side of the lake. We piled into the Model A and made a quick run for pop. A little while later Don asked Andy "You got any munchies?" Andy hadn't thought of munchies either, so we made another trip to Bill & Casey's to load up on chips and pretzels.

After an afternoon of skiing Andy asked me to start the charcoal while he made the hamburgers. I asked where the charcoal was, and it turned out Andy hadn't thought to buy charcoal. At this point Don and I began to question Andy about what he did have, and we made a list of things we needed to buy at Bill & Casey's. He had the hamburger, but no buns. His parents had some ketchup and mustard in the fridge, but we needed to buy paper plates, napkins, coleslaw, and a host of other sundries. When we returned from our third trip to Bill & Casey's we quickly discovered that none of us had thought to buy charcoal lighter, but Andy was able to borrow some from a neighbor and save us from making a fourth trip. In a little while I had a good hot bed of coals, and I told Andy I was ready to put on the hamburgers.

"Here it is!" Andy announced proudly. He opened the freezer and hauled out a five pound block of frozen hamburger. Andy was too embarrassed to go inside Bill & Casey's a fourth time, so he sat in the car while I bought unfrozen hamburger.

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That summer was also when I first discovered that there is a special brotherhood of people who drive old cars, and as in any other family, sometimes you'd rather not admit that you're related to a few individuals. When a local car parts store didn't have the dome light switch I needed for my Model A the man behind the counter suggested I go see a man named Otis Swinehart. "Otis has a lot of Model A stuff" he assured me as he gave me directions to Otis's house.

As I drove up to Otis's house I could see that he did indeed have a lot of Model A stuff. A dilapidated Model A pickup truck was parked next to a shed behind his house, and the remains of another Model A truck were quietly decomposing in his back yard. A rusty engine block was leaning against the cracked steps that led up to his front door, and a familiar "Ahh-Ooooh-Ga" split the air when I pressed on the doorbell. A nervous looking woman opened the door and stared at me without saying a word. Something in

her eyes told me she'd heard one too many "Ahh-Ooooh-Ga's" in her life. I asked if Otis was there and she silently backed away from the door. A minute later Otis appeared.

Otis was a short, heavysset man in a grimy white T-shirt and tattered blue jeans. He had a two-day stubble on his chin, but his face lit up in a smile when he saw my Model A in the driveway. "Ya got an A!" he said as he walked past me to get a better look at my car. Otis was a man of few words and fewer teeth. Actually he made a lot of sounds, but my Hoosier ears weren't attuned to his thick Appalachian accent so very few of his sounds were recognizable as words. I wound up smiling and nodding my head a lot that afternoon as I tried to decipher his conversation. Eventually he asked what had brought me to his house and I told him I was looking for a dome light switch. "Ah got one in t'other barn" he said and he motioned me to follow him to the pickup truck.

The pickup truck started on the second crank and we lurched off across his yard, taking a shortcut to the dirt road beside the house. As soon as we were on the road he reached down by his feet and lifted a warm six-pack of beer onto the seat. "Hep yerself" he said as he popped one open.

"No thanks." I replied. Then, worrying that he might take this as an insult I quickly added "I'm not 21 yet." He looked at me in confusion as if he had no idea why I was mentioning my age, but he shrugged it off and continued to guzzle his own beer.

It only took a few minutes to get to the barn on the back side of his property, but that was more than enough time for him to finish his beer and show me how he could throw the empty can up through the hole were the truck's top used to be and have it land in the pickup bed behind us. The barn was jammed with old farm tools, furniture, saddles, and more than a few Model A parts. He dug through several dusty piles of effluvia, occasionally handing me pieces of an old distributor, wires, and other odds and ends that he thought I should carry in my car "just in case." Eventually he found the dome light switch, but when he looked at it he frowned and said "tain't the raht one." He gave it to



me anyway, saying I might be able to make it fit, and we climbed back into his truck. A few minutes and another beer later and we were back at his house.

He insisted I come into the house for a glass of water, and we spent the next hour or two sitting at the kitchen table talking about Model A's. Actually, he did most of the talking, as I found it hard to get a word in edgewise. Eventually I was able to excuse myself, saying my mom was expecting me home for dinner. When I got home I piled the parts he'd given me in the garage, and at dinner I told my folks all about my visit with Otis.

A few weeks later I came home from work and found my mother looking a bit dazed. "Otis was here" she said as I walked in the door. I don't know how he found out where I lived, but that afternoon he had suddenly appeared at the door. "Ah need mah call whar" he said. "Steve's got mah call whar." My mother had no idea what he was talking about, but based on my description and the Model A pickup truck sitting in the driveway she guessed this was Otis. She showed him the pile of parts in the garage and he immediately grabbed a coil wire from the pile. Saying "this is mahn too" he picked up the rest of the parts he'd given me, thanked my mother, and drove off with his treasures. I never saw him again, but I never forgot him either. I was beginning to discover that owning a Model A was broadening my horizons.

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If people who drive old cars belong to a brotherhood, their meeting hall is the Parts Store. Over the years that I've been fooling with cars parts stores have become a commodity. Now they are almost universally clean, friendly, and incredibly efficient. Thanks to computers and overnight shipping they can look up virtually any part in seconds, and if they haven't got it in stock they can get it for you by the following afternoon. That's not the way it used to be. There used to be clean parts stores, but those were the stores that specialized in big fuzzy dice and miracle engine elixirs. You could seldom find real parts in those stores, at least not if you drove a 40 year old Ford. Car

dealers had everything you needed to fix a new car, at mind-boggling prices, but by the time a car got old enough to actually need replacement parts the dealer wasn't interested in it. If you needed parts for an older car you looked for an old dilapidated parts store that had been in business since your car was new. They were seldom found on Main Street but could usually be found just a block or two off the main thoroughfare. Their dusty showroom windows displayed car jacks, wrench sets, and genuine "glass pack" mufflers. The walls were adorned with calendars and posters from parts suppliers, urging you to use Hastings piston rings and always add Bardahl to your oil.

Inside there might be a few tables with bargain tools and other items for self-service shopping, but a wooden counter divided the customer area from the bulk of the store. Often there were bar stools bolted to the floor in front of this counter, with rust stains on the pedestals and tears in the red plastic upholstery. These stools were a blessing, as you often had to wait a long time until it was your turn to be served. Invariably the guy ahead of you would spend an eternity studying whatever part had been presented to him, pointing out the differences between that part and the one he'd removed from his car, and debating with the parts guy as to whether or not this new part could be made to fit his car. When it was finally your turn to be served you told the parts guy what you wanted and he begin to search for the correct catalog. (They were always called parts guys, never store clerks. They were at least 40 years old, and they had a wealth of knowledge about every kind of car except the one you were working on.) In the days before computers, every parts supplier had its own catalog and every parts store kept hundreds of catalogs behind the counter. If you needed a fan belt, they got out the Gates catalog. If you needed a spark plug, they got out the Champion catalog. If you needed a muffler, they had to remember which company made mufflers for your car, as there would be a dozen or more muffler catalogs behind the counter. The latest catalog from each vendor only listed parts for cars made within the last few years, so the parts stores kept back issues of all their catalogs. Thus, if you drove a 40 year old car, they not only needed to figure out which vendor had once made parts for that car, they had to find a suitably aged copy of that vendor's catalog to find the correct part number for your car. Once they found the part

number, they would spend an hour or two wandering through the endless rows of shelving behind the counter, squinting into boxes at random, and peering at the hundreds of fan belts, mufflers, and other parts that were hanging from the ceiling. Finding the part you needed had become their personal quest, and they wouldn't rest until they succeeded. In rare cases of extreme frustration they would ask Joe for help. Joe had spent at least 50 years behind the counter and he knew where everything was, but he was a crusty old coot so nobody asked him for help unless they had to.

One of my more memorable trips to a car parts store involved a search for headlight bulbs. As I was driving home one evening a loose wire had suddenly let my generator voltage jump from 6 volts to around 30 volts. Needless to say, this over stimulated most of the electrical components in the car. My headlights had been loafing along, projecting their customary weak yellow dimness, when suddenly they were goosed into producing a brilliant, blue white glare that illuminated the street like a thousand flashbulbs. Sadly, this brilliance only lasted an instant as both bulbs immediately burned themselves out. In a panic I switched on my brights, a move which blinded all oncoming traffic within a 5 mile range with another explosion of brilliance. This lasted almost as long as the first flash. Fortunately I was within a few blocks of my house and there was enough daylight left for me to limp home. It only took my dad a few minutes to find and fix the loose wire, but I was left with the need for two new headlight bulbs.

By this time I had learned which car parts stores were most likely to have each kind of part (a store which had a good selection of fan belts could almost never be counted upon to have the distributor cap you needed) so I went to the store with the best selection of electrical parts. To my surprise, I was waited upon by a parts guy I had never met before. (I suspect all the guys who knew what I drove kept a low profile whenever I walked into the store.) He smiled and asked how he could help me.

“Do you carry headlamp supplies?” I asked, as innocently as possible.

“We sure do” he replied, still smiling.

I pulled one of the burned out headlight bulbs from my shirt pocket. “I’d like two of these, please.”

He held the bulb lightly between his fingers and squinted at it, the smile slowly fading from his face. “You sure know how to hit a guy below the belt” he muttered. Holding the bulb away from him like a dead rat, he walked to the bookshelf where they kept their mustiest catalogs. After leafing through a half-dozen catalogs he began wandering through the shelves, muttering to himself. After a long search, he came back to the counter, proudly holding out a flat cardboard box. With exaggerated effort he blew a cloud of dust off the top of the box, then opened the lid to display a dozen brand new bulbs, each in its own cardboard divider. “How many bulbs did you say you needed?” he asked in triumph. Clearly I had made his day.

A close cousin to the Car Parts store was the Machine Shop. Some machine shops were located in back rooms behind a parts store, and some machine shops were their own independent business. Wherever they were located they were dark, cluttered, and filled with a wide arrangement of expensive machine tools. This was where you took your engine to get the cylinders bored or the crank reground. They could press bearings in and out of differential cases, turn your brake drums, and balance your driveshaft. The walls were lined with lathes, drill presses, boring machines, hydraulic presses, and mysterious machines with a bewildering array of cranks and knobs. Pieces of customers’ cars were stacked everywhere, the hardwood flooring was covered with oil stains, old coffee cans were strategically placed to serve as spittoons, and everything was covered with a peculiar oily gray dust. The machines were usually painted gray-green, but because of the dust, the wooden workbenches, the hardwood floors, and the dark stains around the coffee can spittoons the dominant color was brown. The only colorful item in the room was the Ridgid tool calendar. Only hard-core mechanics ventured into a machine shop so the shop was freed from the requirement to maintain a “respectable” customer service area. Inside the machine shop, everyone was free to admire the curvaceous, bikini-clad models who lovingly caressed pipe wrenches and conduit benders on the Ridgid calendar.

There was usually only one machinist in each shop. Small, frail looking men of indeterminate age prevailed. Their skinny arms and coke bottle glasses belied a surprising ability to effortlessly hoist an engine block onto a workbench. I made my first ventures into machine shops when the bearing burned out in my Model A. Before my dad decided we could fix it ourselves I was vainly trying to find a machine shop that could pour babbit bearings at a price I could afford. I quickly discovered there was no such thing as an inexpensive machine shop. I found some very talented machinists, but you paid for that talent. One shop was particularly fascinating. In a back corner of the shop, half-buried beneath other customer's projects, was an object I recognized from books and photographs which I had studied for years.

“Is that a Stanley engine?” I asked incredulously.

“Yep” the machinist replied, punctuating his reply by shooting a stream of tobacco juice into the nearest coffee can. “Busted all to hell.” That was the extent of his conversation. He turned back to the project he had been working on when I entered the shop. He had already told me the price to pour new bearings in a Model A engine and it was clear from my expression that I couldn't afford it, so he saw no reason to continue the conversation. Clearly he saw nothing unusual about the fact that there was an engine from a 70 year old steam car sitting in his shop, nor in the fact that an 18 year old kid could even recognize such an artifact.

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In August of that year my father and I were sitting in the kitchen, eating peanut butter and mayonnaise sandwiches. (My father introduced me to the simple pleasure of peanut butter and mayonnaise sandwiches, a delicacy which for some reason most other people don't enjoy.) As we finished our lunch, he surprised me by asking if I wanted to go canoeing in Canada. He didn't have to ask twice. When I was younger we made several family camping trips to Canada, and one year we stayed at a family run lodge just north of Wawa, Ontario. One day the proprietor led us on a day trip canoeing up the University

River. The fishing and the adventure were wonderful, but the birth of my younger brother steered us toward less adventurous family trips for several years thereafter. Now my dad was proposing that just he and I return to the University River and take enough supplies to spend the better part of a week fishing on the lakes that dotted that area.

We packed as lightly as we could because we would have to carry everything we took over several portages, but we still wound up packing an incredible amount of food, camping gear, and fishing tackle into the Falcon station wagon. Early one summer morning we climbed into the Falcon and headed north. (My dad always started trips early in the morning. His goal was to drive 100 miles before breakfast.) The drive through Michigan was uneventful, and we crossed into Canada at Sault Ste. Marie early in the afternoon. Once we got out of the city, Dad let me drive while he dozed in the passenger seat. I was doing about 70 mph, and with the canoe on top that was just about as fast as the Falcon would go. Suddenly, amid a great cloud of oil smoke, the transmission shifted into low gear. This caused the engine to revolve at an unwholesome rate of revolutions. Despite its best efforts, the Falcon was not capable of maintaining 70 mph in low gear so we began a rapid deceleration. My father was thrown into the dashboard while the engine sounded like it was trying to climb into the seat between us. I managed to steer the car onto the shoulder while loudly protesting that it wasn't my fault.

We had the car towed back into Sault Ste. Marie and engaged a room at the Beaver Hotel, a quiet little family establishment nestled between a copper refinery and a sawmill, tucked underneath the bridge to the US. The hotel was clean – the cracks in the wall were well scrubbed and the patches on the sheets were freshly laundered – and we had free use of a bathroom down the hall. For entertainment the hotel featured a black-and-white TV in the lobby. The best thing about the hotel was that it was within walking distance of the transmission shop where the Falcon was being repaired. My dad and I read, played cards in our room, ate dinner in the hotel, and took an after dinner walk to the famous Soo Locks. Unfortunately there were no ships going through the locks at the time, and looking at empty locks doesn't provide much long-term entertainment. The

next morning we had a leisurely breakfast at the hotel and spent the rest of the morning looking at the empty locks again. Fortunately the car was finished after lunch, and we were able to proceed on our way.

The canoeing and fishing were fantastic, and the memory of that trip with my father remains fresh to this day. After several glorious days in the bush we reluctantly paddled back to the spot where we had left our car. Dirty, unshaven, and totally relaxed we packed up the gear and headed south. As we neared Sault Ste. Marie it was my turn to doze while Dad drove. Once again, the transmission belched forth a cloud of blue smoke and shifted into low gear. The one saving grace about this mishap was that it removed all traces of doubt that I was somehow responsible for the previous incident. Once again we had the car towed to the transmission shop, and fortunately we arrived just before they closed for the long Labor Day weekend. The owner of the shop was extremely helpful, and he came in to work himself over the holiday to get us back on the road. It turned out one of the seals they'd replaced during the first rebuild was defective, causing the second breakdown. We booked a room in the Beaver Hotel (we were becoming their best customers) and played cards while we listened to the rumbling of cars driving on the bridge over our room as thousands of other drivers cruised to the US without incident.



### Canoe Camping with Dad

Despite the inconvenience of two blown transmissions, my dad and I repeated that trip several times in the years to come. The trips were always fantastic and we never again had car trouble, although we did have a bit of a shock when we returned from a trip in August of '74. We had been back for a few days, long enough to shave, clean up, and run out of camping stories to tell to my mom. We were watching the news on television and the announcer made a reference to President Ford. "President Ford?" we asked in amazement. "Oh that's right," my mother replied. "I forgot to tell you. Nixon resigned." I can't say that this development actually made any difference in our lives, but it did drive home the point that when you're in the bush, you really are out of touch with the rest of the world.

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As the last few weeks of summer slipped imperceptibly into the first weeks of fall there was a definite chill in the air – and not just because the weather was changing. The time was fast approaching when Andy, Don, and I would head off to different colleges.



This began to cast a pall over everything. Even the drive-in theater wasn't quite as thrilling as it was at the start of the summer. People think of show biz as being a glamorous profession. They think you spend all your time hobnobbing with stars and cavorting at the wild parties they read about in the tabloids, but it's not always like that. At least, it's not always like that if your connection to show biz is working at a drive-in theater. The only perk we got from that job was free admission on night when we weren't working. Even that wasn't quite the windfall it sounds like. For one thing, we worked every weekend unless the movie was so stinko that nobody wanted to see it. More to the point, we heard the dialog of every movie they showed and we occasionally watched bits of the movie if the concession business was slack, so we had very little interest in spending our time off watching the same movie we'd already listened to over and over again. You had to be really bored to do that. One night in early September Don and I were really bored. So bored in fact that we not only decided to go to the theater, we decided to go in costume. I wore a white shirt, pinstriped vest, arm garters, spats, and my straw hat. Don sat in the back seat of the Model A wearing a trench coat with a tan fedora pulled low over his eyes, the wooden Thompson resting on his lap. By sheer chance, there was a new girl in the ticket booth who didn't recognize us. She stared at the car, stared at us, stared at the car again, and finally said "Uh, three dollars please."

Don lifted the Thompson slightly and said "We don't need tickets. Drive on." I tipped my hat slightly to the open-mouthed girl in the ticket booth and drove on. Sadly, my days of driving on were about to end, at least for a while.

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