

TO BE OR NOT TO BE

By Jim Lucas AKA Chief Right Wing

In that famous monologue, Hamlet is confronting his fears. The fear that I was facing was that if all did not go well Ida would never take another long trip, much less more CHVA tours. She never did like the first one we attended.

A couple of hours after we left home, the first sign that all would not go well became evident. The ammeter registered full discharge. Pulling off of the road in a safe place, I planned to fix it, using my tried and true, four step method: Step one, pop the hood and survey everything. Step two, select the proper wrench and gently tap everything within reach. Step three, jiggle every wire coming and going anywhere to anything. Step four, curse profusely, beseech fervently for devine intervention, cross my fingers, close the hood, get back in the car and hope it would start.

Having finished the routine, I started the engine. The meter registered full charge and the Pontiac roared off, purring like a kitten! That night at the motel I was feeling a little pleased but I knew that I was lucky and fear was still lurking in my mind

The next day was lovely. The top was down and the car was purring like a kitten. We left I-5 and took U.S. 99 at Wheeler Ridge, near Bakersfield , Ca. We had once lived in Bakersfield and were familiar with all of the ("Green Acres") type tiny towns, such as DiGeorgia, Weedpatch, Ducor and Pixley. It brought fond memories as we paraded up and down the main streets of each of them.



Later in the day, the speedometer needle began to dance like a "jitter bug." Not to worry because I knew that I had a reliable remedy for that! As we approached the town of Tulare, where we would spend the night, I stopped at a Napa parts store and bought a new speedometer cable, which I slowly but succesfully installed.

The next day we continued our trip, with the Pontiac purring like a kitten! Now the gas gauge began to do the "jitter bug" thing. Again, not to worry, I'd just fill the tank every 200 or so miles. Our first stop of the day was the tiny mining town of Coarsegold. Ida

has a black belt in shopping (which would work to my advantage a couple of times), but this town posed little threat to our bank account.

The point of our trip was to stop and enjoy everything each town offered. The next town was small but not tiny. As we started to leave, the car backfired, belched black smoke and sputtered for a few hundred feet. Even though it was soon roaring down the road, purring like a kitten, it seemed like a bad omen to me. The seeds of terror were sprouting! We stopped at every town and spent time wandering in and out of every shop.

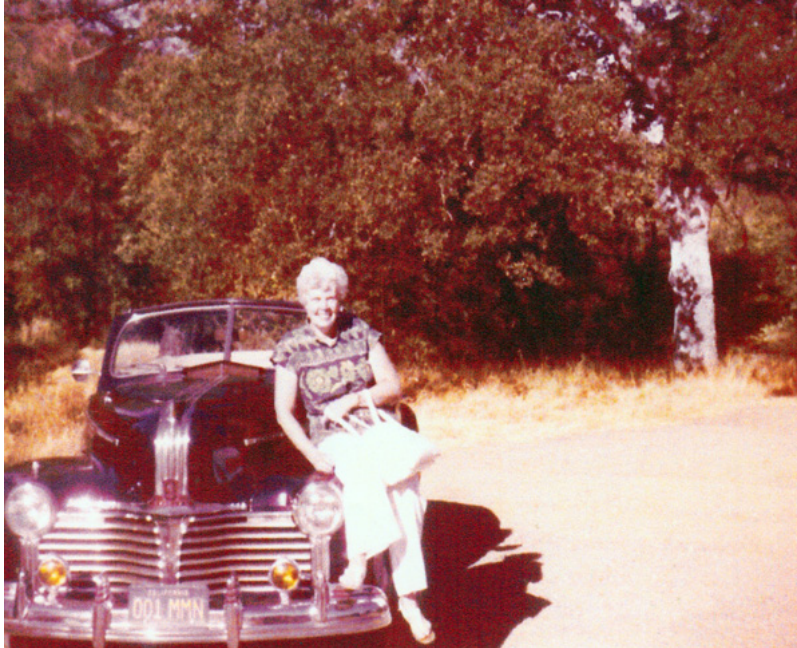
The car continued to choke part of the time and run smoothly at other times. Finally, I took it to a garage. The mechanic said that he didn't have time to work on it but that the problem was the fuel pump and that it could be bypassed using an electric pump. He sold me one and implied that a "caveman" could do the job.

The triple A book indicated that a nearby town had several mechanics, so I thought I'd have it done there. We never reached the place. The old gal (the car not my wife) just quit running. Ida took a deep breath, expelled a big sigh, gave me a threatening glare, pointed an accusing finger at me and ordered me to fix it! She opened a book and started reading, while I got out my tool box, read the instructions for installing the electric fuel pump. Amazingly, in a short period of time I completed the job, and the Pontiac was once again roaring down the highway, purring like a kitten!

We continued to shop, storing some items in the trunk and having others shipped home. Just as we entered a town (about a 20 minute shopping size), the engine died just as I parked. Ida rushed off to shop, and I knew I had to do something and be quick about it. As soon as I employed step one (open the hood and survey) I noticed that there was a tight bend in the rubber fuel line which led to the carburetor, so I replaced it with a longer one.

When Ida returned, I fired up the Pontiac. It roared off, purring... Believing that all the problems must be over [WRONG!], I was really relaxed! The tranquility vanished when Ida said she smelled raw gas - I also smelled it. Invoking step one, it was easy to see that when I replaced the fuel line, I had left so much slack that the fan blade had severed the line. Once I fixed it, all problems ceased and were forgiven and forgotten. We even began to make plans for future trips!

Of course one other tiny thing did take place. It was small and hardly worth mentioning except that it somehow struck us as being funny. Also, people laugh when Ida talks about it. Maybe it's the way she explains it? Anyway, we had made the entire trip with the top down, but on the last day, the weather turned bad.



It was time to put the top up. When I pulled it up, it fell about three inches too short to latch. We pulled and tugged but just couldn't make it reach. Finally (I don't know how I talked her into it) Ida got into the back seat, placed her feet against the cross bar and pushed. It worked! Maybe It's not the way Ida tells the story but how people make a mental picture of her doing it.