

Burley, brandy and broken cars

By KIRK KNIGHTON
Of the Emerald

Christmas. Ah yes, the time of joy and love, of family gatherings at home with the traditional turkey dinner shared by all who find Christmas to be the most special time of year. And all that jazz.

My original plans for Christmas were something akin to the traditional scenario.

After having spent the first half of the holidays hiking in the canyon country of southern Utah (85 degrees during the day, 15 at night), my friend and I

were headed back to Oregon. It was Christmas Eve, and we anticipated arriving in Portland for a *fete de Noel* early Christmas afternoon.

We stopped briefly in Salt Lake City to search out a liquor store. We bought a bottle of brandy, which we figured would add the finishing touch to our Christmas spirits and perhaps make the drive to Portland more interesting.

Warm and snug in my ancient — but always reliable — Volkswagen Squareback, we sped off into the night, full of high spirits

for the coming of the morrow, and all the joy Christmas would surely bring us.

Not long after crossing the Idaho border my brandy-saturated nose thought it detected the odor of something burning. Moments later my eyes had similar feelings about the sudden incandescence of the generator warning light. Uh-oh, they seemed to say in unison. Then my brain started working. A burned-out generator? How far can we drive on the battery alone?

We passed a road sign. Bur-

ley, it said. 40 miles. In the name of conservation I switched off the headlights and increased our speed to 75 mph.

"Don't worry," I assured my friend. "I can see just fine with the parking lights. I'll switch on the headlights whenever we come across another car. In the meantime let's have some more of that Christmas juice."

We made it to Burley without incident, the car coughing and sputtering, its headlights barely illuminating the road ahead. The engine expired as the car rolled into the parking lot of a Motel 6. There was no hope, of course, of finding a new generator for a German car in a dreary town of 8,000 inhabitants on Christmas Eve.

While my friend showered away his misery I stole out into the night to find some food. I noticed a lone Burger King sign glowing down the street. It switched off when I reached it. I went inside.

"Sorry mister," a girl announced as I came in. "We're closed."

"Oh, but what am I to do?" I countered, somewhat dramatically. "My car is broken and I'm stuck here for Christmas, hundreds of miles from home."

This unexpected oration roused whimpers of sympathy from all the little burger-makers. One of them went over to the manager and whispered something in his ear. She then came over to me. "It's Christmas, so we're going to give you all of our leftover Whoppers and burgers. How's that sound?"

The burger-makers scurried about the kitchen assembling my Christmas present. With a hearty chorus of "Merry Christ-

mas" they presented me with three bulging sacks.

"Thanks," I sniffled as I left. My friend, being a devout vegetarian, did a backflip when I walked into the room bearing the sacks of burgers.

My friend refused to eat any of the burgers, so I gave him all the onion rings and french fries. We ate about half our ration, washing it down with brandy. Feeling deathly ill, we both expired for the night.

On Christmas Day we walked from one end of Burley to the other (which takes about an hour) in search of a Volkswagen generator. But no form of business was open. We couldn't even find a cup of coffee. We ended up roaming used car lots, peering through shop windows and examining local architecture.

Christmas dinner was, of course, back at the Motel 6. The menu? Three cheese Whoppers and brandy for me, and four bags of onion rings and brandy for my friend. We watched Henry Winkler play Scrooge on cable television. We expired, once again, in a drunken, greasy sloth.

But the joy of the day after Christmas. While my friend lay in bed, lamenting his body's reaction to Christmas dinner, I went out and immediately found a new generator. An hour later we left forever the fair town of Burley.

The maid, coming into our room just as we were leaving, had wished us a merry Christmas. She then took notice of the room, strewn as it was with the gift wrap of all our burger stuff. "Merry Christmas," we said.

And with that we were off.

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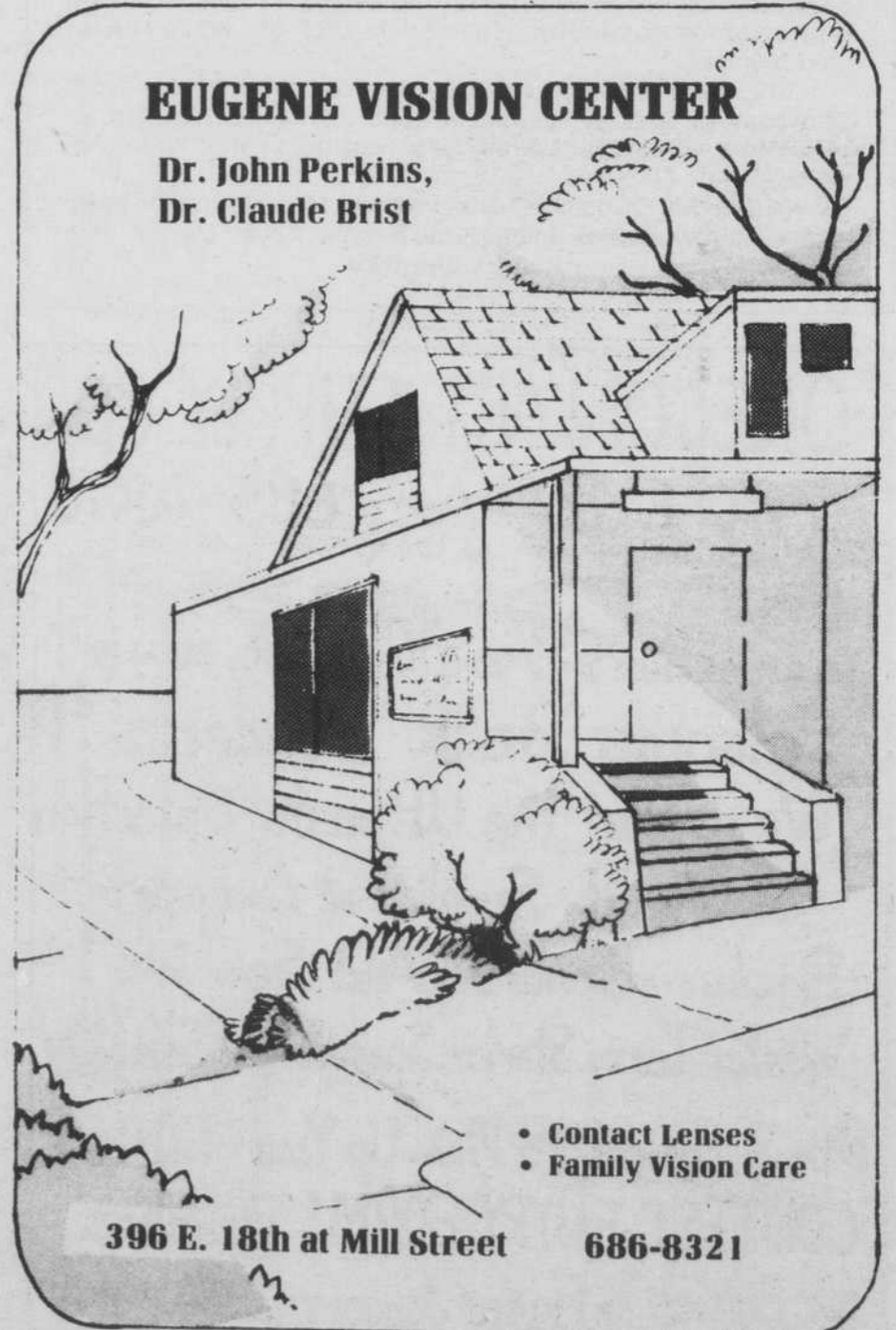
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