

Friday the 13th and the case of the screaming Taurus

by Linda Barr Batdorf
Staff Writer

The day started innocently enough. After all, I'm not superstitious. It didn't even occur to me that it was Friday the (shudder) Thirteenth until I ran screaming into the rain, as I escaped from my smoking vehicle.

But I get ahead of myself.

It was the day I would attempt to sign up for Journalism, and as usual here in the Beaver State, it was raining. I was already late registering, and had begged for mercy from instructor, John Knowlton. Kindly, after playing the kind of phone tag one has nightmares about, we actually spoke in person and he agreed to let me sign up. But being so late, I needed his signature in order to do so.

It was during an hour and a half break between shuffling my children from school and back that I planned to have just enough time to run up to CCC, meet with Knowlton, get his signature on the registrar's sacred document, submit it, give them money and fly like the wind back down the hill in order to pick up my two young sons from school.

I simply could not be late. If you have ever witnessed the sorry sight of an eight-year-old and a five-year-old, clutching book bags and trembling lower lips because the "Mom-mobile" drove up late, after EVERYBODY ELSE AT SCHOOL had gone happily home, you would never in your natural life, do it again. Spurred on by images of office staff locking doors and shrieking like the wicked witch in the "Wizard of Oz" I scurried up to CCC.

Just as I was making that circular turn from I-205 to the campus highway, my car started to scream.

Now, this was not just a "Hey,



this feels great to be taking a tight corner," kind of a scream. It was a "HELPPP!!! HELP-P-P-P!!! My little automobile innards are hemorrhaging! My vehicle ventricles are exploding! I'm about to detonate, erupt, burst, spout, rupture and smatter my precious and terribly expensive car parts all over the freeway!!!" kind of a scream.

So, I screamed right along with my automobile as we belched and smoked our way up the hill. I was not about to pull over as long as my car still had an ounce of life left in her. There are no phones on that hill, just lots of huge trucks whose often unruly drivers probably like to drive on the shoulder and honk at small cars in an effort to give the driver a coronary. I was directly behind one of these trucks with one of those drivers and the water from his monster semi-truck wheels gave me the distinct impression that I had aimlessly meandered my auto into a car-wash from hell. About this time - and this is the truth - I heard a large piece of metal crunching and flipping un-

der the hood. "Crunch, thunk,thunk....CRINK!" and a big, necessary part of my vehicle blithely bounced under my car and probably into the grill or the gaping mouth of the terrified driver behind me.

Then the smoke started pouring out.

My heart skipped a beat as I imagined the headlines, "CCC student attempts to sign up for a journalism class, gets barbecued instead."

At any rate, after turning my emergency blinkers on and screaming our way into the parking lot, my car and I found the closest, safest spot to finish our burning. I pictured wild flames bursting through the dashboard at any minute as I pulled into a handicapped spot near the bus stop.

Before I did so, I made a special note that all of the other handicapped spots were empty -- and I didn't much like the idea of becoming a human PopTart in my Taurus, so I crept the car in and jumped out. I stood in the driving rain for a few moments, just

waiting for the smoke to subside, but it didn't. I gently lifted the hood and turned on my emergency flashers, so that any wandering police officers would know beyond the shadow of a doubt that I was going to move my car as soon as humanly possible. Since it was raining, my car was smoking, I was shaking and had already become the butt of cruel jokes by passersby, I thought it best to get away from the smoke and fury, go inside the Community Center, call my husband, inform Knowlton of my plight, and collapse over a fish sandwich until my husband arrived to save the day.

My errands finished and with fish sandwich and hot coffee in hand I sat down in the cafeteria to try and stop twitching.

When I went back to my wounded automobile, grateful that I had remembered my umbrella, Alan was there beside the

car, holding a white piece of paper with a puzzled look on his face.

"Neat," he said, "...you got a ticket for parking in a handicapped zone."

"How could I?" I shrieked, "the hood was up, there was smoke pouring -- not oozing or spurting or fluffing, -- but POURING out from this engine-y thing and my emergency flashers were on! How could I risk life and limb to park in a safe place and blah, blah, blah..."

"Neat," he said again, his entire body now soaked by the downpour we were standing in.

"You got a ticket. Well, that's just fine."

It seems a patrolman had gone by (the one who put the ticket there) and explained to Alan that we could always appeal it.

It's a very good thing that

this officer met Alan first. Alan is a kind, soft-spoken gentleman who can be rudely awakened at 3:15 in the morning by a tactless, insensitive, thoughtless pootz of a coworker and sound like Mary Poppins in church. Me, I have little trouble "sharing" my views about mean, snippy things like getting big-dollar parking tickets placed on a hemorrhaging, spewing car.

Now let me get something straight right now...I think that people who park in handicapped zones ought to be peeled with tweezers and covered in salt, but my car was clearly in need of the parking spot at the moment and the only other choice I had was to park in the street and cause a lot of grief to the entire universe.

That last statement kind of sums up the appeal I wrote, which is probably why they denied it. They only fined me **ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS** instead of the normal down payment on a Porsche, but still it seemed as if justice had taken a U-turn somewhere.

The saga continued as more problems mounted in trying to pick up my children from school in our beastly little Dodge Colt as Alan had a fun ride in the tow truck (I think they let him play with the lights or something).

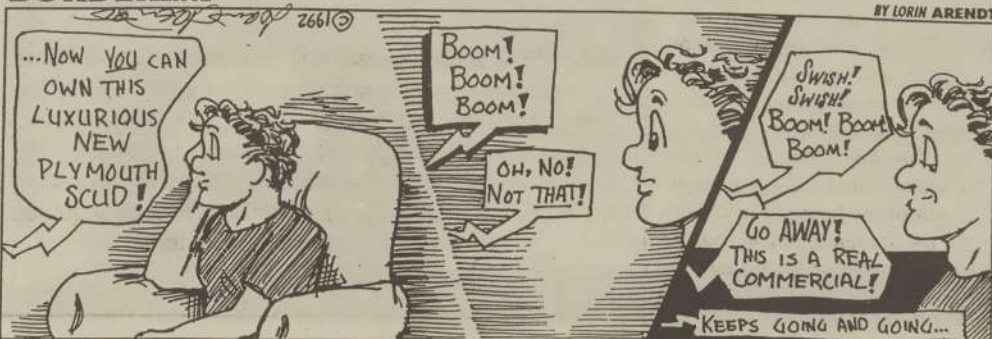
I got the boys before they began sobbing in earnest, and dashed over to the car-repair-and-give-them-all-liquid-assets place in our slobbering, creaking little Dodge.

I pulled up, or should I say, careened, lurched and floundered into the car repair shop and heard the same kind of little bellowing screech come from the front of the Colt. I thought I must be hearing things and Alan lifted the hood. It looked as if the car had just spit itself up all over itself under there.

Somehow we managed to get home with all of our fingernails; somehow, a kindhearted president of the college who shall remain anonymous pardoned our ticket after Alan wrote a second, gentler and kinder appeal; and somehow, we didn't need to take out a second and third mortgage in order to pay for the extensive car repairs.

I'm still not superstitious, but if I ever need to go to the college on Friday the Thirteenth again, I think I'll skate or take the bus.

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