A guest letter from traumatized Trivia participants.

The management @ NHN&WR would like to encourage "Guest Letters".

Don't you people out there know how to write?

**TRAVEL TO TRIVIA – 2007**

You may have wondered at a NHN&WR prior reference to “Deliverance”....

First a little background and stage-setting:

The Connecticut Jeffersons were delighted to have been invited again to participate in the World Champion Trivia Contest in Ottawa on 11/2/07. The first thought was that we would fly from Hartford – admittedly a short hop but it seemed like a good idea! That was until we checked the prices and schedules. It seems there are several airlines which would do folks the favor of including them on their passenger list for what we considered a ridiculous fare, not to mention unacceptable stop/layover options. So…on to Mapquest. That told us that an easy highway trip *through Syracuse NY* would get us there is about the same time (or less) as it would take to fly, given all the nonsense, not to mention the $$$$$$$$. Decision made, directions printed, onward.

Additional background needed on our vehicle(s): We have 2 cars, both Saturns, Nancy’s 2000 Saturn wagon with 100K miles, which she loves, has been giving us subtle warnings about getting a little long of tooth, having suffered a debilitating illness in New Bedford, MA this June, loaded to the gills with all the trappings of a summer stay at Martha’s Vineyard, and a precious ferry reservation awaiting. We also have Dave’s 2002 Saturn sedan, with a scant 44K miles on it, which is just fine, but Nancy doesn’t like to drive it and finds it very cramped and lightweight. After 4 new tires on the wagon, guess which car we take???

Come 11/1, N&D leave Glastonbury bright and early, still pondering how it could be shorter to go through Syracuse than, say Burlington and/or Plattsburgh, etc. Extremely smooth sailing, however, out to Syracuse and turning right onto Rte. 81 heading for Watertown/Border Crossing/Ottawa, all by 10:30 a.m. Sailing up the highway with Nancy navigating, she notices a lovely appearing short bypass road just south of Watertown which would take us along the shores of Lake Ontario, obviously very scenic and a perfect place to stop and eat our lunch. Since we have lots of time and are actually well ahead of schedule, we turn off 81 and take in the lovely vistas. What better place for lunch than a closed state park with a long entrance road down to a very secluded and equally deserted boat launch – gorgeous views across the cove, wind blowing around 45mph, freezing cold, waves crashing, beautiful!!! – ate our lunch, relaxed for a few minutes – OK let’s go. Saturn (wagon) says “I don’t think so!” Grind…grind…grind…no start. No problem – call AAA – we’re fairly near to Watertown – surely they’ll come to where we are, even though we have only a vague idea where that is. Dial # which clearly says *number to dial outside your home area.* “Your call cannot be completed at this time…please be sure…blah.blah.blah.” Dave decides to walk out to the road (not a short stroll) and find someone who knows where we are and, hopefully, where to call for assistance. He leaves; Nancy takes in the beautiful (isolated) scenery, even takes a few pictures, works on Sudoku puzzles, and tries the car periodically…grind …grind…grind, when it occurs to her that this is really not a very safe situation in which to spend the next unknown amount of time. No one but Dave knows she’s there, she hasn’t the foggiest idea where Dave is by now, and cell service appears somewhat questionable. Does she bribe a mugger (or worse) with frozen clam chowder, a bottle of cheap Chardonnay, will you take a credit card?, you’re welcome to the car (if you can get it started). Always the calm optimist, she continues doing Suduko with the doors still unlocked, occasionally grind…grind…grind.

Before too long (depends on the storyteller), a flatbed wrecker arrives, Dave riding shotgun, followed by a pickup with the Good Samaritan who had driven Dave to the “garage”, just following up to make sure we didn’t need anything else. Wreckerperson (we called him “Ted”[[1]](#footnote-1)[1] because that’s what it said on his jacket) alights and without a word crawls under the car, hooks everything where it is supposed to go, gets into the car to put it in neutral, and VOILA! – it starts at first turn! Ted looks at us in a very puzzled manner, still silent, and appears to continue his pursuit of loading the car onto the flatbed. Dave suggests that perhaps we should just *drive* it to the garage for a look-see, to which plan Ted reluctantly agrees. He will follow us to make sure he doesn’t have to resume his original towing plans.

Continuing on …the following couple of paragraphs may appear to be embellished, if not downright fictitious, but we assure you they are totally accurate!

Arriving at the place from whence Ted, Dave, and the wrecker had departed, Nancy’s immediate comment was “You’ve got to be kidding (expletive deleted) me!” The “garage” appears to be a totally deserted, falling down building with at least 20 junk cars/trucks/etc. one and two deep on either side of a VERY narrow slot down a hill to a closed garage door…no identification…no sign of life…no other doorway…and now Ted has parked the wrecker sort of on the side of the road and disappeared.

Slowly…slowly, the garage door opens to reveal a new individual (to use the term loosely), beckoning menacingly to thread our way down the entranceway into the garage. Dave did as directed, the door closed behind us and the surrealism continued. The interior of the garage managed to hold the car with about 8 inches on either side and 6 or 8 feet in front. The rest of the building looked more or less like the outside with used parts, pieces of metal, pails of waste oil, and various unidentifiable items piled floor to ceiling. To one side a full size antique furnace, door open, loaded with oil-soaked wood was keeping everything very toasty. Did we mention the large cardboard box of dirty dishes on which at least 100 happy flies were enjoying leftovers?...and that was the *cleaner* part of the room and *people*, we might add, not being too graphic or unkind. The only thing missing was the junkyard dog, but he very well could have been tied among the wrecks and only comes inside at night to guard all the valuables.

The cast of characters then seemed to drift into view: Ted, of course, bursting his buttons at his mechanical abilities in having started the car, an apparent brother who never spoke at all the entire time we were there (we named him Mute even though it didn’t say so on his shirt), and Pops --- the apparent owner and parent of Ted & Mute. While Pops bustled around (another loose term) getting Nancy settled on a stool DIRECTLY at the door of the furnace, Mute lifted the hood and began to stare at the engine. Soon Ted joined him with the same reaction and both began to shake their heads…Dave & Nancy’s umpteenth clue that we were in deep doodoo. Pops then decided to get involved and suggested they see what was wrong – WOW – now we’re getting somewhere! As tough as it is to believe, Ted had a diagnostic tool which told him that some sort of sensor was shot. Looking in a manual, they appeared to identify what the problem was, resulting in more notable head shaking and a muttered statement something to the effect…”We’d have to disconnect everything electrical….” Meanwhile, after having regaled us with his life history, Pops grabs his own diagnostic device and sits in the front seat and sits..and..sits..and..sits. Enough scene setting.

After 45+ years, Dave & Nancy have developed an excellent means of communication via eye rolling, head nodding or shaking, shoulder shrugging, unnoticeable hand signals, etc. By this means, it was decided Nancy would chat with Ted. “So, Ted, is there a Saturn dealer in Watertown?” “Yup” More staring and head shaking. “So, Ted, would it be a possibility for us to pay you for what you’ve done so far and take the car over there; you’d just have to go over there anyway to get the part from them, install it and everything (yeah, right).” Dead silence. Pops appears and we suggest the same possibility to him. HALLELUJAH! After their own means of silent communication, they decided it might not be a bad idea. In fact, they actually seemed relieved – to say nothing of N&D’s reaction. Pops now becomes quite animated (we’re masters at loose terms here) and draws us a map of how to get to the Saturn dealer --  *in the grease on the floor with the pointy end of a used sparkplug* – very comprehensive and immediately committed to memory by both N&D. We were asked later why we didn’t take a digital picture of it for reference, but we were afraid we’d get carried away and begin snapping family shots, interior and exterior panoramas, etc. for submittal to *Inside Small Town America* and really didn’t have time.

Now to pay them (whatever they want!!!) and get the hell out of there. Dave says, “So..do you guys take AAA?” Nancy: *Ohmigod!!!!!!!* Pops yells ---“Sis”[[2]](#footnote-2)[2] towards a corner of the garage where Nancy had seen an apparent female figure writing on a yellow legal pad. Over shuffles Sis, completely in keeping with the family image (enough said) and not happy to have been disturbed, grabs the AAA card, disappears and returns in a remarkably short time to return it. Asked if she needed any signature or anything else – “Nope”. The door to the garage opened in about the same fashion as before with the beckoning going the other way, the car actually started, and Dave didn’t have the least bit of trouble clearing all the obstacles going backwards with split second timing.

In total disbelief that we were actually out of there, we tore back the way we had come, followed the directions to a “T” and were at the Saturn dealer in Watertown in about 15 minutes. They agreed to take a look “when they could get to it”. We are sitting on a real couch with a TV & coffee among people who didn’t remind us of a Stephen King novel. Did we care? A warning call to Lucile and then we waited. When Bob[[3]](#footnote-3)[3], the Service Manager, finally appeared, he sat down next to Dave – “We have a problem…we know what’s wrong but we can’t get the part till tomorrow. The sensor only fails when the engine is hot – you can drive it to Canada and stop on the way back to get it fixed.” Dave’s obvious question had to do with how long it has to cool off before starting again and was told maybe an hour to an hour and a half. First off, gas stations frown on pumping gas into running vehicles. Also we had a disturbing mental image: D&N pull up to Customs – conversation goes “Please turn off your engine” - “I’d rather not” – “Excuse me???” We’ve been told that border agents don’t much like smart A’s. And how do we know when this hot-cold thing stops working altogether? Very easy next decision made: leave the Saturn with Bob, get a rental car, and proceed.

The rest is pretty normal – uneventful border crossing, saw a beautiful rainbow crossing the 1000 Islands bridge(s), arrival at LK&B’s lovely home in Ottawa only about 4 hrs. late, great evening at Linda & Norman’s, our own suite at Ken’s, Dave & Ken’s trip to the Maritime Museum all day Friday, the Trivia Contest – 32nd place was really remarkable considering the difficulty of the questions – great food, drink and company throughout. We just had to cut our visit short by a day to get back to Bob, but hopefully that can be made up when we return next year, armed with our new plan. All’s well that ends well, as they say.

1. [1] We have changed the identity of names and places to protect the innocent, particularly since we don’t have email, snailmail, fax, or phone contact to send copies (in the practice of NHN&WR), although we actually feel that if we were to send a snailmail to “Ted at the garage in Anderson, NY” it would reach him. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [2] See Footnote 1, but she may not have had a real name [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [3] See Footnote 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)