

She fell for Jim who worked at the Standard Station pumping and fixing. He drove a 30 dollar black Ford with no back window or nothing good except the radio. After work he wore a fluffy white mohair sweater and she'd kiss him for an hour or two in the Passion Pit under the Esterbrook Park bridge. She'd suck a Lucky while he ran the car to defog the windows. All his blue jeans had acid holes in the thighs and he smelled like motor oil and English Leather and he was nice.

## WHAT A COMET IS

Dear Mom,

I'm writing to let you know I'm in California with the most wonderful Christians. We live together like brother and sister (no sex), and it's so beautiful—we share everything.

It was more than luck, "It was divine intervention" that caused Laura to total the Buick. There wasn't a thing left of it, but we were saved—see? While waiting at the Greyhound station, we were so depressed that we didn't guess it was all part of a heavenly plan, and that our worst day was in reality our best. Anyway, there they were—our true heavenly family. Don't worry, they aren't hippies or shaved-heads; they are nice clean conservative types. You'd approve.

Well, I have to go pray. You can't write me because I live in a forest, and we move all the time. Soon, when God thinks I'm ready, I'll work in L.A. selling flowers to help support the "good cause." I'll write again.

love Pam

All three say in unison, "OH MYGOD—MOON!"

The next day, Pam's mother and two sisters fill the '60 Comet for the trip of its life—California.

1. 4 plastic Guernsey jugs (extra water for the Comet).
2. 3 plaid suitcases (large—Mother) (medium—Sharon) (small—Sandy).
3. 1 large red Coleman cooler with cheese, fruit, bread and ice.
4. 1 cannonball-type green Coleman Thermos (no handle).
5. 1 Rand McNally Road Atlas (Milwaukee to L.A. 2,069 miles).
6. 3 blankets, 7 pillows (4 as fill to keep the springs out of the driver).

7. 2 canvas water bags for the radiator in the desert.
8. 5 pounds of peanuts.
9. 20 assorted cassettes (druggy, jazzy, oldy-moldy, travelin’).

Sharon had read *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* and saw the Comet as a Caddy convertible ready to hip L.A. to some Milwaukee “cool.”

Sandy saw the movie *Easy Rider* and pretended she was Peter Fonda traveling America’s backroads to enlightenment. She hummed Arlo Guthrie’s “I doan won a-pickle, jus wan-na ra-ide my mo der sickle.”

Mother was Katharine Hepburn in Bogey’s old chugger *The African Queen*. The Comet’s clunking and shuddering (even with the key out) took her back to the Villa Theatre where Fred Wilkins, a dead ringer for Bogey, kissed her lips raw when the African Queen caught a stump. “Ohhh Cha lee.”

To the contrary, the Comet thought of himself as a kind of mild-mannered Clark Kent—at any moment, ready to expose his true blue colors. He thought, “Soon my true significance will be known and my name will join the list of stars where it belongs: Batmobile, Herbie the VW, Christine, Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang, Kitt, Doozy, Dodge Daytona, Shelby Cobra Jet, Comet.”

Everyone admitted that the Comet did have some nice features. Sharon, its owner, enjoyed the self-vacuuming feature. Anything on the floor near the brake pedal immediately was sucked out through the hole in the floor. All the peanut shells quivered, crawled and leaped into the hole like cartoon mice. Anything you threw at the driver’s legs—“Fsit”—gone. The faster you drove and the rougher the road, the more things (all over in the car) headed for the hole. Tissues left their box and bee-lined down the chute. A banana peel on the mat, pulled its heavy wet wings down.

Sharon said, “It’s great if you get pulled over while you’re toking. Just drop it—it’s gone. You know, I always figured everything went down there, but one day I found reefer growing on the edge of that hole. Can you believe that?”

Mother said, “I like the nice dry feeling it gives my toes, just like the bowling alley finger driers. It makes you feel like Somebody.”

Sandy bought 6 feet of pink Contact paper from Walgreens. With her magic markers and scissors, she fashioned two fake (Green Giant sized) Band-aids for the Comet’s two “owwees.” The sisters agreed it looked, “Boss.” Mother, feeling left out, added, “Yes, Presidential.” Sharon

strapped invisible tape to hold its eyes in tight and Sandy checked the oil and water. While trying to unscrew the radiator cap, the whole top came off like a tobacco lid. “Yup, plenty of water.” They were ready and on the road.

Up until now, Sandy had been living backwards. It took Sharon to turn her around, “Looky-here you dumb duck (pointing to the map), if we go your way, we’ll end up in Lake Michigan.” “Oh.”

Mother sat perfectly neutral through all this (she had no idea who was right), but this way, she could pretend she had known all along. “Yes, you dumb duck, Lake Michigan!” Then she smiled like the Mona Lisa.