

Our Van, Our Friend

We always thought we would be in it when it happened. And believe me, we thank the Lord we weren't. But statistically, as much as we travel, the odds were angrily against us. Forty-two thousand miles a year we can average, thirty of them still in our memories. It wasn't our first vehicle, certainly not, but stronger than its predecessors. The engine fire of '97 considerably clouded our appreciation of the white Toyota. Not long after that we adopted the '89 Dodge Caravan. A damn good ride. I think we all puked in it at least once. From flu bugs to Wild Turkey, the upholstery never let us down. Although we were disappointed one night when, what do ya call that thing that holds the wheels together, oh yeah, the axle, exploded in Lancaster. At least we had time to reflect on it, waiting in the blizzard three hours for the tow truck. Our conversation by this point, if I recall correctly, seemed to lull.

Good times.

But we got through that. Then there was the wrong highway fiasco, the Miamisburg strangling, the fuel leak of '99, the bouncing luggage blunder, the tag expiration trauma, the constant search for invisible keys... the list is endless. But I digress.

We plucked a daisy and got rid of that gem. The '98 *Grand* Caravan entered our lives. A tape deck and cruise control, shit, we were loving it. Hell, we hardly even threw up in that thing. Plus the material on the ceiling wasn't even hanging in our face. Things were looking up.

The next 18 months had minimal problems. We replaced the transmission once; three days after the warranty expired. I'm not lying. But we got past that. A tire rotation here, a tune up there, we felt lucky. The low mileage and extra room kept us smiling for the majority of the time. Even as we screamed, clawed, and bloodied each other on the ride home, we couldn't help but love the added foot space. Then it happened. The hit and run. On a cold December day, some young punk slammed his sister's car into our parked, empty... *only* means of transportation. As all 20 year old felons do, he used good sense and jumped out of the twisted car and ran. Would have gotten away, too, if it weren't for the trail of blood and his collapse 30 yards from impact. His "it wasn't me, I swear" inaudible through the CPR. We knew our van was totaled, the missing front end tipping us first. We vowed to take him for everything he was worth, although a pack of gum and a mood ring didn't get us to the next gig. Damn.

So weeks later, as all the red tape faded to pink, we finally settled most of the insurance matters. They cut us a check, we wept a little, and began the search for the new Menu's ride. Jimi combed his hair, added a briefcase, and soon found the 2000 Plymouth Voyager. A good bargain. But it's not that easy. "We're no fools", we told the salesman, believing it, and unanimously opted to pay a tad more for the extended warranty and the exorcism package. You can never be too careful.

We're in the present now, our long sought optimism cautiously augmenting our spirits. "This is the one," we said (and prayed), pulling it out from the snow covered lot. The immediate subtle sputtering of the engine at this point normally would have disturbed us, but we were slightly distracted by the rear view glimpse of the jumping high fives from the staff inside.

We continued to drive, finally, now basking in what we hoped was a long awaited run of good fortune. Hell, someone owes us something for the vehicular sentence we served all those years before.

"*We're due,*" John mumbled under his breath.

"*It's about time!*" Steve sighed.

"*Fuck yeah, we're happenin!*" rejoiced Spike.

"*Pulls to the left,*" Jimi thought, still behind the wheel, his smile fading as a hard bump chipped a chunk of rust loudly from underneath.