

# “THE FUN-FILLED FAMILY VACATION”

by Irma Bombeck

For years, my husband and I have advocated separate vacations. But the kids keep finding us.

We have always said if we could just mail ourselves to where we are going, we might arrive in a gayer holiday mood. But it's all the miles in between that makes traveling as giddy as the Nuremberg trials. (We once picked up a hitchhiker who wrote us a check to let him out.)

Although each vacation spot is a new, exciting experience, the trip by car is rather predictable.

First, there is Captain Daddy's "Give 'Em Hell" speech.

"All right, gang. We're about to embark on what can be a wonderful vacation together. That depends on you. First, I want to make a few remarks about the car. You'll notice it has a floor in it. That is for your feet. At no time, repeat no time do I want a pair of yesterday's socks in my face.

"Second, as your captain, I will make window assignments each morning. If there is any quarrel with these assignments, feel free to file a grievance with the AFL/CIO.

"May I also remind you this car is not a trough. Any candy wrappers, banana peelings, apple cores, broken straws or paper cups must be thrown away. I will not tolerate another fruit-fly assault like last summer.

"Third, Walkmans must be turned off while you sleep. Also the occupants of the car will not be subjected to more than ninety-nine choruses of "Ninety-nine Bottles of Beer" in a twenty-four hour period.

"And last, there will be no reading of "Sweet Valley High" novels, "Mad" Magazine, "Sports Illustrated" (Swimsuit Edition), or \_\_\_\_\_ while we are touring breath-taking mountain ranges, historic monuments or indescribably cathedrals. Remember, you are going to have a wonderful time if I have to break every bone in your bodies."

Once Captain Daddy's speech is out of the way, we are in for five hundred miles of the Disaster Lady, our teenager daughter who didn't want to make the

trip in the first place. Her fatalistic approach to a vacation makes it as much fun as diarrhea.

The car is barely out of the driveway before she lifts her head in a dramatic jerk and whispers, "Did you hear that? I thought I heard a knock under the hood. Cecily Ainsworth's dad had that same knock under his hood and the car blew up at the end of the driveway."

When you are half a day out from home, she will stir restlessly in the back seat and yell, "Mom, did you remember to unplug your coffeepot and iron? The last time I saw them they were on." Or, "I sure hope someone remembered to take the cat next door,"

Occasionally, she will unplug the Walkman from her ear and sigh, "Gee, that's too bad."

"What's too bad?"

"About the weather."

"What about the weather?"

"The extended forecast predicts two solid weeks of rain where we are going. But I don't mind really because I was exposed to German measles thirteen days ago."

And then there is Happy Mouth, our eleven-year-old who is one of the best testimonials to Planned Parenthood I can think of. There is something disgusting about a kid who wakes up happy and goes steadily uphill the rest of the day.

"Hey, do you want to hear the poem I read on the last rest-room wall?"

"No," says the car in unison.

"It said, 'Violets are blue, roses are red, If you can read this, you're standing on your head.'"

"That's enough."

"Can I plug in the electric back-scratcher I bought at the last souvenir shop?"

“No, you’ll run the car battery down.”

“Can I take a picture of your nose hairs?”

“No!”

Happy Mouth may be put down on the average of once every three minutes, but he is undaunted. “Hey, this looks like a neat restaurant.”

“Are you kidding? This place will have to be cleaned before they can condemn it.”

“I want to eat here. There’s a real neat dog inside, see him?”

“I should. He’s sitting in a booth.”

“Aw c’mon, Mom.”

“Okay, but let me give you one word of advice. This place is a filthy dump. I bet they haven’t had a customer since the septic tank backed up. We’ll all be fine if we order something safe like cheese or peanut butter. Remember now, something safe.”

Happy Mouth is the first to order, “I’ll have the roast turkey and dressing.” He grins. Then, “May I use your rest room?”

Happy Mouth is absolutely jubilant when he gets back. . “You should see the kitchen.”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” I say, picking at my cheese sandwich.

“It’s got a stove with big pots on it and a neat fire extinguisher on the wall.”

“It’s probably a stomach pump,” snarls my husband.

“And the dog out there is having puppies.”

All eyes at the table focus hard on Happy Mouth. He senses our animosity. “Guess what?” he says cheerfully, “I didn’t sit on the toilet seat.”

Naturally, I have saved the Family Mother of the trip until last. Upon her frail shoulders rests the responsibility of maintaining order, keeping track of mileage, reading maps and of course getting Captain Daddy to make pit stops with some regularity.

“If we’re going to reach Goose Fork by four as I had planned,” he says, “we can’t stop for rest rooms or meals.”

“But I’m beginning to feel like I as in a getaway car.”

“Really,” he snorts, “if you are going to make such a big deal about it, look for a place to eat.”

Two hours later, we are still looking for a place to eat which he finds satisfactory.

Finally, Mother rummages in her handbag. “I’m in luck. Here are two breath mints, one for each child. Here is a sticky coughdrop for me and here’s a piece of chocolate for Daddy.”

Daddy smiles as he devours the square of chocolate. “This should hold us until we got to Goose Fork,” he smiles.

“Don’t count on it,” I reply, taking a deep breath, “I just fed you a laxative.”