

The True Red Chronicles: III
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Introductory Remarks

The two year discontinuity in entries¹ to this automotive diary should not be interpreted to mean that our children have entirely found their own automotive/transportation resources, and freed their near-bankrupt parents from further obligations to maintain their own self-esteem at social gatherings. Nor should it mean that the past two years have been uneventful in terms of automotive happenings. Rather, the press of daily life has simply put updating these sagas off to another time. There is much to report, and even some optimism in what follows.

With a few extra days in August before fall classes begin, I have decided to update the True Red Chronicles, and report not only on how our family car fleet has evolved, but recount at the outset some gallantry in husband-wife automotive relations that I was too shy to document earlier. Again, I encourage motivated readers to add to our tales of the ingenuity of our kids in making sure they have the latest and greatest in socially acceptable transportation at others expense.

The 1999 Award for Husband Thoughtfulness in the Timing of A Spousal Automotive Purchase:

Academic families typically have more to talk about than cash to use at the mall or on the internet. A corollary to this is that they don't follow Detroit's incentives to trade in the family fleet every three years, but instead hold onto their cars until the odometer reaches some six digit mileage objective that we hope is identical to our 9 month academic salary.² Also, in the case of Volvo owners, there are these cute little medallions that one can earn at 100,000 miles, 150,000 miles etc. that have high standing when

¹ Prior entries are available at: http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/user/rs9f/true_red_II.pdf.

² This matter of how much mileage or salary is enough brings up a sore point that those thesis chairs (or co-chairs) who read this will empathize with. It goes like this. My best ever student who wound up as department chair at a top 10 university (according to US News and World Report) at the age of about 35 did me the following favor. Since he is at a private university, as am I, I enquired what he thought I was worth in terms of salary. He did me the immense service of proclaiming that, based on my academic vita that reports publications, university and public service, my academic year salary, including tuition benefits for our loving children that CMU pays for, was a cool 50% less than comparable faculty in his department are earning. Perhaps I erred in making the terms of the enquiry to simply be what I would earn, rather than what he would offer me to relocate in a certified, signed offer letter that I might extort based on co-chairing his dissertation. Getting even with those one is so proud of is a tricky business; however, some progress was made by nominating him to replace his dean whose demise may reflect not only the dean's spending habits, but my student's management prowess and regard in the eyes of the Provost who elevated him from the professorship to the position of department head and subsequently axed the dean. This nomination, which I shared with my student, generated howls of protest. Whether they were real or feigned is hard to understand; my student excels at the oblique.

pulling into the driveway Saturday evening at any academic dinner party. They reflect reliability, commitment to regular oil changes, and frugality---all commendable family and academic values. Since Volvo's have enormous radiators, two or three of these little medallions which our local Volvo dealer gave away below cost, there never was an issue of overheating due to inadequate air flow. Rather it was merely a question of taking enough family trips to earn the next medallion.

There was a period in our family car fleet history when all were Classy Sliver, although not of BMW or Mercedes pedigree. Our first station wagon was a 1984 Volvo 240 DL. Sturdy, thought to be reliable, *Consumer Reports* endorsed, socially acceptable, and roomy enough for a family of three, then four, then five. My bride of several years was happy for me to replace the Plymouth Valiant she brought to our marriage with a station wagon that would navigate Pittsburgh's urban streets. At 150,000 miles, the trusty Valiant deserved to be turned to the pasture, or in our case driven to the Good Will donation lot³.

Unfortunately for marital automotive harmony, the local Volvo retailer was only able to obtain *silver* station wagons with air conditioning, automatic transmission and power steering, while my loving wife, of partial Irish origin, had a preference for forest green. Finally, the prospect of my tossing more hard earned money into a differential for the Valiant convinced her that silver was an acceptable color; the royal blue interior, comfort of the drivers seat and safety of the belt system were the clinching factors.

Said 1984 station wagon was ceremoniously given the nickname Lisa Emily (all cars in the Strauss family fleet have been named in a consensual process at a family dinner), and performed her transportation obligations with dignity and aplomb. Addition of a Thule Combo allowed us to take several summer vacation trips to the beaches of South Carolina with our loving children sufficiently separated to maintain family harmony to make the trip (both ways) without side trips to any hospital. Others report less success on long trips, probably due to their unwillingness in investing in the Combo.

Volvo station wagons are not, however, without their peculiarities and expensive repair habits. The advent of internet bulletin boards did allow me to discover that Australian disc pads have asbestos levels that allowed them to last 35,000 miles or far in excess what Volvo engineers had devised (18,000 miles) to keep their dealers busy and rich. Also, I discovered that transmission issues at 125,000 miles were electrical in nature, and thus avoided a \$1,800 rebuild with a \$35 repair that I was able to perform.⁴ We were, however, unable to avoid the predicable 115,000 mile replacement of electrical

³ The legendary reliability of the Dodge/Plymouth 313 small V8 and associated running gear led one former colleague to enshrine his first new car purchase, a green two door Dodge Swinger in his backyard rather than consign it to a used car lot or give it to his kids for use. This little known fact was accomplished by burying it in his backyard on a warm summer day with the initial help of a backhoe. The resulting hill then became widely used by sledders in the winter.

⁴ There is an orange solenoid *behind* the glove compartment; the solenoid cost \$35.00, and can be accessed merely by using a Phillips screwdriver to undo the 4 screws that hold the glove compartment to the dashboard. The regularity of this problem was confirmed when a co-author passed on this information to a junior colleague to Tulane who bought a *used* Volvo 240, and reported the same savings.

wires to the rear window defogger, or escape the legendary 144,000 replacement of the dashboard blower assembly that actually uses a Chrysler blower motor and requires 5 hours of \$65/hour labor.

I could go indefinitely on about our investments in maintaining Lisa Emily and the family's automotive dignity; however, it would be engaging in some deception if the reader were to conclude that her problems were those of design or intention. I bore some responsibility as I stopped following recommended maintenance at 150,000 miles. I simply hoped for the best to get to the magic 175,000 and the second coveted medallion. However, as we moved to the comfort, safety and space of suburban Pittsburgh in 1994, things started to get dicey. At 173,000 miles the clean air sensor balked, causing Lisa Emily to inexplicably cut out and admittedly strand wife and three children in far-flung places.⁵ \$403.65 later, she was purring like a well fed cat and soon sported a second medallion on her radiator; however, at 186,000 miles strange things began happening that stranded my wife and children on several occasions. Finally, a factory certified master Volvo mechanic (and some hundreds of dollars) located an obscure, worn ring named after some obscure automotive engineer *inside* the distributor assembly that caused electricity to become infrequent on the way to the spark plugs.

So, you may ask, what does all this have to do with gallantry?

Read on.

It was the eve of our anniversary, January 11, 1999, that I performed the memorable act.

I had already become convinced that Lisa Emily should be replaced by another vehicle, or risk banishment from the family hearth, but was aiming for 200,000 miles and a final medallion. Volvo owners, like computer programmers, are eternal optimists, and three medallions might qualify me for an endowed chair if the right people noticed this combination of persistence, patience, frugality and commitment to regular oil changes.. Our youngest, then age 12 and already highly opinionated, was struck with the highly touted Toyota Sienna, and continuously badgered her mother to give up the joint pursuit of the final medallion in favor of new fashion and reliability. In retrospect this was likely due to the fact that as the smallest, she had always been relegated to the third seat that faced rear, which she guarded jealously, but, as she grew discovered, was now too small for her and any girlfriend who might who accompany her to gymnastics, soccer, dancing lessons etc.. Moreover, there was this remarkable event in the winter of 1993 that she continuously harped upon --- of being strapped into the third seat of the wagon, engine running, but driverless, and experiencing the street approaching her as the car slide down the icy driveway on Hilltop Road in Pittsford, New York. Recollections of that argued interminably for getting a different family car without such memories or proclivities.⁶

⁵ Fortunately, AAA has a *Plus* option that provides 15 tows/year without additional expense.

⁶ The winter weather in Rochester, New York, this event, my wife's suburban Maryland origins, and the University of Rochester's own financial problems caused me to lose interest in permanently relocating there.

Just which driver left the car unattended is a matter of historical dispute. My recollection is that I was at the office, and it was my wife's optimism that leaving the Volvo in park with the emergency brake on should be enough, even in the midst of a snowy day in Rochester, New York, to ensure that both Volvo and kids would remain at the top of the driveway while a major trip to Wegmans was unloaded. My son recalls, however, that he was safely strapped in the middle seat, and is willing to sign an affidavit to the effect that it was most certainly my doing. Our youngest, the third seat occupant, and now entirely adult and loving wife claim to have entries in their personal diaries that clearly indicate that I was the errant parent, and that it was my fault the car slid down the driveway. In any event, I do admit to responsibility for finding another vehicle that would never again subject the family to such embarrassment. Remarkably, no neighbor observed this and the police were not called in to investigate possible claims of negligence.

In any event, a snow storm was forecast January 11, 1999 for Pittsburgh, and my wife told me that it was my turn to drive Lisa Emily the 25 miles to the University and back. She demanded the use of the front wheel drive 1986 silver Jetta (named Alex Jeffreys some years earlier). Mr. Jeffreys did not have alleged problems of weak night lighting. This alleged electrical problem seemed to be a plot of new proportions since the problem was never visible to me. Besides my determination to make it to 3 medallions (maybe that level of social acceptability would lead my salary to accordingly rise; who's to say what determines academic salaries or endowed chairs once tenure is achieved and children are in school at Carnegie Mellon?⁷), my wife was once again holding out for a forest green minivan and insisted on a *bench* middle seat. Such considerations argued for holding off on sending Lisa Emily to the Good Will donation lot. No Toyota dealer in the United States reported being willing to sell such a vehicle at retail; one in California offered it at 20% over retail. Such are the results of being *Consumer Reports* favored.

At 4:30 PM that fateful day, I drove through gridlocked Pittsburgh traffic to the local flower shop to get the mandatory dozen red roses with the subsequent objective of finding a suitable bottle of champagne. As the sun disappeared, so did my headlights. It was obvious that the alternator was failing, and the prospect of driving without headlights to conserve the battery, or use the battery with lights only to be stranded on the Interstate on my way home looked worse than Hobson's choice. It looked dangerous.

What to do?

Since the battery was a relatively new Sears Diehard, I reasoned I could make it. But 14 minutes of Pittsburgh urban roads to the Interstate ramp convinced me that was folly,

⁷ Certainly there is public evidence at Carnegie Mellon that serving on the committee to find a new president geometrically increases the odds of winning an endowed chair. The last go-around saw the outgoing president award 2 chairs to search committee members in April as the fateful short list was being devised. To his dismay, a final list was subsequently handed over to the CMU Board in early May, an offer was made, and then instantaneously accepted. Also, one of the finalists was given a consolidation prize of Board membership,...that too is likely unique in the annals of higher education.

So I returned to the safety of my campus office, and dutifully called home to report my situation.

My wife was immediately sympathetic and suggested I find a hotel room, but announced she would not be joining me. She had no desire to spend 2 hours stuck in traffic, and after all, didn't I know how much she disliked driving in the snow? This I took to be a sign of some hostility.

After a lonely dinner at the nearby Holiday Inn, I pondered my fate. Both my intuition and intellect told me that not spending the evening and night on our anniversary with my loving wife was likely something that could not be forgotten or forgiven. In the past, a pair of diamond earrings or fur coat had extricated me from serious hot water, but it was clear that something automotive was needed to overcome this growing pyramid of ill will.

As I looked out at the falling snow and my watch, I wondered, might Pittsburgh's regional leader in Toyota sales be open that night? It was easily worth a phone call. Relieved when the cheerful receptionist answered, "Rohrich Toyota," I gingerly enquired if Dave, the most recent salesman who had shown us the wonders of the Sienna, was there. In fact he was. To my astonishment, a forest green Sienna was in production in their Kentucky plant. But, it did not have the required bench seat nor would they interrupt production to locate one for installation. Fortunately, Dave explained that Toyota had decided not to install any bench seats in any US produced or delivered mini-vans. Something about California customer satisfaction surveys. Thus the last of my wife's demands could not be met, and I saw a way out of a deteriorating situation. He confronted me again with list price, and this time I quickly agreed. He was happy to take my Visa card for the deposit. Best, it would be available in a week.

Armed with the promise of certain delivery date, I phoned home again to report that fashion, reliability, and function would soon be arriving to our garage, along with the safety of front-wheel drive.

Achieving Equity vs. Family Harmony in the Allocation of Family Transportation Resources

Achieving fairness in the allocation of family transportation resources may be a laudable goal of husband and wife, but likely will lead to misery beyond one's imagination. What follows is an account of the machinations that kids may go through to achieve their goal of their own set of wheels. I present these facts to the uninitiated to demonstrate that the kids are always way ahead of us, and losing at least some of the time has to be expected. Perhaps the close reader will be able to avoid some of the obvious perils that I crashed into.

But first, the automotive setting. As of the Fall of 2004, the Strauss automotive fleet was composed of four cars of various ages and mileages: a 1999 Dodge Stratus driven primarily by our oldest daughter who somehow managed to move from the Silver 1986

Corolla with 101,000 miles to a shiny Mandarin Red Stratus with initially 44,000 miles that was sold to me by a smiling computer scientist returning to Japan with his wife and two children, a forest green 1999 Toyota Sienna with 115,000 miles, and a maroon 1996 Toyota Avalon with 135,000 miles.

After much worry, we took our youngest in August, 2004 to Lake Forest, Illinois and Lake Forest College where she began her freshman year. A friendly admissions officer, partial scholarship and a flexible curricula convinced her to embark from the comforts of home and familiarity of South West Pennsylvania. Once there, she quickly realized that suburban Chicago was spread out, and the shopping opportunities were vast. However, as is the rule at virtually all colleges and universities, she was prohibited from having a car her freshman year. Moreover, strong differences of opinions remained about whether or not she would ever accept for use the 1986 Corolla in anything other than an emergency situation. A week did not pass when there was a call lamenting her inability to get around, explore the wonders of the malls of suburban Chicago, and the improvements in outlook, social standing, and grades that would occur if she were to get her own car.

By December, 2004 the Strauss's automotive world became very complicated. First, the Dodge Stratus was at 69,815 miles or just shy of when Chrysler-Daimler takes a walk on warranties. Twice already we had had close encounters of the transmission sort, and with luck had only dropped \$200 total at *Transmissions by Lucille* for replacement of two external sensors. Both times the transmission ceased to function, our oldest was wise enough to turn off the engine, and call AAA, and both times, *Lucille's* corrected Chrysler-Daimler's follies. However, the genius of Chrysler value-engineering became evident when the head gasket blew, the water pump went, and the timing belt needed replacement, and then the transmission cooler was damaged by the local Dodge dealer as the odometer moved to the magic 70,000 mark. In the end, the dealer was \$2,500 the richer, and my checking account that much poorer. Of course, my oldest was forever thankful, but still seemed to be able to take weekend trips to Canada, NYC, Seattle, Wisconsin, and wherever else the Dave Mathews band was playing. As my wife reminded me, wasn't it still my car, and didn't I want to take care of my automotive investments. Our local gas station, repair shop had warned me to stay away from Chrysler products, and laughed at me when the hapless Stratus was towed in. Worse, they warned me that while the dealer might make good on the head gasket, other things would occur since the cars were manufactured to be "disposable."

As already noted, throughout the fall the youngest complained that being stuck in Lake Forest was adversely affecting her in multiple ways. Improving her transportation situation was a paramount need. Busy with keeping the Stratus going, and normal professional responsibilities of teaching, research, and public service, I politely ignored these distant pleas for another car. I reasoned that giving her the keys to the Corolla at Christmas break might finally encourage her to take what was available rather than try to deal with wild talk of a Honda CRV or Toyota Rav-4. Nice cars I replied, but not to be kept on campus freshman year, and not within the budget as I understood it.

In retrospect, I admit to not paying attention to all of the youngest's activities over Thanksgiving break. Evidently she went to some interview that I don't think I was every told about. Certainly I don't remember it, or understand what it was about. After Christmas, however, I did notice she mentioned in passing that she had been accepted in an internship program in Disney World. This sounded like great advance planning for the summer of 2006, I congratulated her, and went back to planning my Spring courses.

However, after New Year's Day, I noticed that there were no plans afoot for loading up the youngest and her stuff for the trip back to Lake Forest. Instead, I was told it would be packed up for a trip to Orlando, Florida. In January, I enquired? And was told, oh yes, the internship begins in a week, and lasts through May. Further, Lake Forest was pleased to give her a leave of absence, and she already knew who her apartment mate is going to be down there.

Perhaps best, she was going to be paid!

What precisely happened next is a matter of some dispute. What I do remember was the education of Dad, and daughter's introduction to world of internet automotive ads. Empirical evidence was repeatedly provided that demonstrated that there was *no* public transportation in Orlando, Florida, and this in turn necessitated that her transportation needs be met now. After all, who did I trust more? A car dealer here in Pittsburgh, or one in Orlando, Florida? If that were merely a theoretical question, I think I could properly answer it, but the corollary was that I had to buy her a car within the next 3 days because she had to be there for training, and didn't I want her to be a success in the internship?

Repeated attempts to convince her that the Corrolla was the correct answer failed with derision. A trip to our favored Toyota dealer to see a deeply discounted newer, used Corrolla came to naught. And even the offer to provide a used Camry with 32,000 miles was rejected out of hand.

Dozens of Honda CRV's and Toyota Rav-4's were located on the web, and entreaties repeated, as well as various kinds of threats. But I held firm. \$12,500 was too much to spend or invest in an internship unless she was willing to sell it at the end of the internship. Being reduced to public transportation again was considered to be a vacant threat. We were at loggerheads, and there were more than a few tearful and accusative moments.

Resigned to doing something, I began looking around. A local used car dealer listed a fully loaded Chrysler Cirrus for \$5,000, but even though I was told I could get it for \$2,100, the fact was that there was no *Transmissions by Lucille* in Orlando, Florida, and the prospects of doing a transmission long-distance struck terror in my heart. Various Saturns might work, but were too small to carry all of her stuff, and one of my secret objectives was to find a car large enough to carry all of her stuff back ultimately to college. This was a consideration I had learned from an older colleague.

Another dealer featured an Oldsmobile Intrigue, once favored by *Consumer Reports*, and a car both my wife and I enjoyed test-driving. Better, GM had announced it was stopping production of them, which was lowering the market value of all Oldsmobile models. My daughter announced that she was taking my car with her girlfriend to go look at used cars. I suggested she look at the Intrigue. An hour later, it was in our driveway. Fully loaded with leather, power seats, premium sound system, and a deluxe purple paint job, it listed for \$8,999, marked down from \$10,999. It had a mere 38,000 miles on it and went like hell. She was happy, and reported that the salesman urged her to get me to make an offer, as it had been sitting on their lot for months. Purple, it seems, is not a generally popular color.

Mindful that she would be working, and needed finally to begin to understand the value of money, I bargained. Split the price? ½ on Dad, ½ on your trust fund? Yes, she said ruefully, because she needed transportation in Orlando. No matter that she would have the only car with leather bucket seats, and the lowest mileage of any vehicle. She had to make it down to Orlando and back, and the Intrigue looked like it would do the work. Purple was ok? Yes she said, and observed that it could always be repainted.

Under intense family pressure, I decided to go forward, I consulted *Consumer Reports OnLine*, and also Kelly Blue Book (www.kbb.com) on the following rainy morning, and offered \$4,500; we settled on \$4,800. plus tax. An hour later I delivered my daughter back to drive it home, and our family fleet grew to 5.0. Of course, the following afternoon when the rain cleared, I discovered it needed new tires to safely make the trip to Orlando. But I can report that there was no happier Disney character these past nine months, and we have photos of family and Minney to prove it! Now the problem is to get it into the garage, as it has officially replaced the Corolla which has been taken to the Good Will donation lot.

Accidents Do Become More Frequent at Age 60, or, Life's Lessons about *Sovereign Immunity* in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Pittsburgh is famous for many things. Its sports teams have been successful, its museums are well endowed and contain not only glorious art, but examples of natural history that are the world's envy. Its rivers have moved the nation's steel, and much of the best beer in the US has been brewed here. Better yet, Pittsburgh has the highest per-capita foundation wealth of any city in the United States, and for any professor with a research agenda that requires more than paper and pencil, this proximity to support is of more than passing interest. Thus, the invitation to go to lunch at a fashionable restaurant downtown with a senior program officer of a foundation whose holdings are just shy of \$1 billion this past Spring was the makings of a memorable day.

How the day progressed, however, resulted not only in being late by 1.5 hours, but resorting to commercial cabs rather than my personal car for several months. Why the change in transportation mode? The details of that 11:15 AM drive downtown, and subsequent events will provide ample explanation. Hopefully it will also explain to

anybody why they should always give any municipal vehicle the right-of-way, regardless of how outrageous the other's driving is.

Third Avenue in downtown Pittsburgh is a two way street (north-south in orientation) with street parking on both sides of the street. Traffic is typically light around lunchtime, but with parked cars on both sides of the street, driving below 30 MPH is advisable, and a speed that I'm certain I did not exceed. Driving south on 3rd street below Grant Street, the City's major downtown street, I was happily and carefully on my way to a reserved parking space in an underground lot to meet said senior foundation program officer.

Named streets cross Third Avenue, and have stop signs or lights so that drivers on Third Avenue have the right of way. Cherry Way is a cross street, and goes one way from right to left as one drives south on third Avenue. However, unlike the others it has no stop sign or lights associated with. In fact, as I have determined through subsequent visits to the Third Avenue – Cherry Way intersection, there is a stop sign at the intersection for drivers on Third Avenue.

What I do remember next as I drove through that intersection was that a dark blue Dodge Stratus came out of no where on my right, and veered into me as I tried to accelerate through the intersection to avoid any other traffic on Cherry Way that seemed aimed at me.

I do recall exclaiming, "What the hell?" There was a crash of some impact, and I found the oncoming Stratus was now parallel to me, and hooked to my right fender. The female driver looked at me in disbelief, and I looked at her equally in disbelief. Steam emanated from her hood, and coolant was all over the street. I lowered my passenger side window and asked her if she was ok. She was already on the cell phone making various calls. Dazed, I noticed next that the intersection was surrounded by three police bicyclists, two squad cars, and a few onlookers. Other police cars showed up, with sirens blaring, and one officer, no less than 6'5" and 275 lbs, began taking photographs, and measurements.

The driver of the Stratus then began a series of animated phone conversations with unknown persons, and resolutely avoided any inquiries about whether or not she was ok. Finally, I got out and she got out, and she introduced herself as commander in the Pittsburgh Police Department. By then I had already mumbled to one enquiring officer about how the accident occurred, and made the fatal mistake of admitting that I did not come to a complete stop. The commander commented snidely that had I not "blown the stop sign," her pristine Stratus, that had just gotten a new set of tires, would have been able to carry her and family on a weekend vacation. I responded that had she not been driving 55mph in a 25 mile/hour zone, the accident would never had occurred. I noticed a considerable tightening of the circle of policemen and policewoman at that point around me, and decided to seek privacy to talk to my suburban insurance agent.

Upon learning I was in an accident with a municipal vehicle in the City, said agent crisply enquired, "was it on duty?" I said yes, and he then said, "Well, you're screwed."

Under municipal law in Pennsylvania, liability in an accident between a citizen and the municipal authority can not be a shared responsibility. Rather, if I was at all at fault, I was entirely at fault. Having mentioned that I did not come to a complete stop, I was therefore 100% guilty, and State Farm would have to pony up for the repair of my car and her car. So far, my object lesson in Sovereign Immunity has a happy ending in that my rates have yet to go up, and may not go up.

Life's Travails with NIKEs and Some Happy Events

For those with kids aged 22 or older, one of the interesting acronyms one can learn is that of having a NIKE --- no-income kid with education. Our loving son, a May, 2005 graduate of Carnegie Mellon's esteemed School of Computer Science was noticeably vague about his post-graduation plans. My loving wife took the view that he was exhausted and deserved some time off during the summer before he started looking for a job, and that since most real computer science jobs were in California or Boston, we should treasure the time he would spend with us during the summer, and therefore not bother him about the practicalities of job search.

Perhaps as a distraction, said son and I did spend some time and money finding him suitable clothes (suit, shirts, ties, dress socks, and shoes) to wear for job interviews. However, I did notice that he managed to leave them at home, rather than take them to the house he shared with other CS majors. Perhaps to show commitment and avoid parental haggling, he allowed us to bring these clothes for installation in his closet in the house near to campus.

Graduation was a wonderful time, and we have photographs and videos to prove that he made it in a timely fashion. In June, however, he notified us that it was time for him to return home to the comforts of home cooking, home laundry services, the family refrigerator, and of course his own bedroom complete with broadband internet access, and weekly linen service. His mother was of course ecstatic to have her prodigal son home, and I had visions of chores and home projects finally getting done. By the end of June, however, it was apparent that enquiries about his job prospects were not only being ignored, but he seemed to be reverting to the typical CS schedule of up all night, with associated prowling around to the kitchen, family room etc., and sleeping all day.

Talk about charging rent in July caused nary a ripple in his blithe attitude towards home living, and the refrain from his loving mother to allow him to recuperate from the Spring semester in June quickly became an entreaty to allow him to have the summer off. This seemed unacceptable to me, and negotiations began in July about what the proper rental rate should be. I even consulted with a former research assistant who graduated from our business school whose brother had tangled with their parents in some considerable detail. She convinced me that a schedule of increasing rental rates would be optimal and create the ultimate desired behavioral response by Labor Day. I then had several earnest discussions with my loving son about what the local rates were for furnished efficiency apartments that included utilities, internet access, laundry service, a continuously stocked refrigerator. Numbers like \$750/month, ramping up by \$150/month

brought derision and laughter from him with the pointed observation that his mother would never stand for driving him out of the house or forcing him to pay such outrageous rents. Even attempts to turn over his mutual fund holdings from joint to his own ownership proved futile since he refused to sign and send in the relevant paperwork.

Throughout the fall, I continued to ponder his fate and mine, and finally called the dean of students in Computer Science to see if in fact there were jobs in the area, and what sort of salaries they paid. He laughed and said that of course there were good jobs in the area with someone of my son's talents and training, but he would have to look for them. Moreover, I learned that there was no salary penalty for staying in the Pittsburgh area for such computer wizards. I eagerly conveyed this to his mother and then himself, and was greeted with, "I know that." And I was left confused and again wondering how this state of affairs had come about. Was there something we forgot to teach him? Were his schools deficient?

It should be noted parenthetically that my wife had reminded me in at least two of our extensive conversations about said son that he was independent, stubborn beyond belief, and that this had been noticed and reported to us by one of his pre-school teachers. Then, enjoying his play with a toy, he refused to put it down and do other things. Threatened with punishment, he simply said ok to the punishment and took his time in the corner away from others as a fair price for extra minutes of play with a certain toy. He seemed to enjoy getting this kind of attention from his pre-school teacher who finally called us to let us know that she had her hands full, and so would we.

At Thanksgiving, I learned that he was merely waiting for a call from a CMU robotics spin-off where his best friend worked, and at the end of November in fact the call was received, he interviewed, and began work on December 1. This seemed entirely natural and predictable to him, and a source of enormous relief to mother and father.

There were, however, some complexities that required attention. The job was 35 miles away in another suburban quadrant. Mapquest recommended traversing part of the way on the venerable Pennsylvania Turnpike. My son, thus, required his own car. In the Spring he had obtained his driver license to our delight; however, he was not one to volunteer for errands or other adventures. By now the 1986 Corolla had been donated to Good Will, and so something had to be purchased.⁸ Consumer Reports online became an active information source as did cars.com and Kelly Blue Book. Since Toyota was my favorite car of choice, I tried to convince him that a certified or low mileage Camry made great sense. His younger sister, however, repeatedly opined that this choice was for a grandmother's car, and that a certified Corolla would be worse yet.

Faced with possible long-term criticism for buying a socially unacceptable car, he turned his attention to Honda cars of various vintages and expense. Then I happened upon the idea of his considering a previously owned Acura, say a TL, and a strategy

⁸ Since his little sister was going back to Florida for a second internship at Disneyworld, the idea of his sharing her Oldsmobile Intrigue was not feasible. Even if she remained in the nest, she made it abundantly clear that her car was NOT communal property, and that her brother had to fend for himself.

began to unfold. The ratings were outstanding, and the owner of Picasso's Auto Body who had dealt with all of our vehicles was entirely supportive. Legends were repeated of 275,000 mile Acura's humming down the highway with no problems.

Our local Infinity dealer advertised a low mileage Acura 3.2 TL, and we went to look at it the evening before his first day of work. He laid a check on the table for an amount that we had calibrated ahead of time from www.kbb.com, and ConsumerReports.com. The salesman came back from a conversation with his manager, and apologized that we were far apart. We shook hands and thanked him for showing us the car, and left the showroom wondering how he was going to get to his first day of work. As I suspected, however, the following morning, the salesman called me back, and agreed to split the difference. At the closing, I chipped in the price of a warranty, and my son has been happily driving his silver Acura to work everyday without incident.

Commuting to 70 miles to work each day required that he begin to keep normal hours. This not only allowed him to be alert on the Pennsylvania Turnpike each day, but also allowed the rest of the family (his mom, dad, and sister) to get some sleep. After two weeks of such normalcy, my son announced that he was annoyed with paying \$4 in tolls every day, and having to fill his gas tank every 3 days. The Acura is extremely fast and nimble; however, it is not easy on gas.

This realization led to his actively seeking an apartment near his place of work, and his first ever signing of a lease. As we looked at the apartment I observed to him that it was entirely unfurnished, and that this could prove to be uncomfortable. My son ridiculed the idea of his buying furniture and other worldly possessions; however, as he began to inventory things at home, and met some resistance from us to his taking everything from his shrine/bedroom, he acquiesced to the notion of taking the seats out of the family minivan, and making a trek or two to Ikea. The offer of a 19 inch color TV was met with derision, because not only were there standards for socially acceptable cars, but more importantly, socially acceptable TV's. HDTV of 27" was the minimum that could be installed in any CMU CS degree holder's apartment, and so that was his first purchase before getting to IKEA.

The experience at IKEA was memorable for several reasons. First, in the parking lot we happened upon my first research assistant at the University in 1986 who evidently had moved back to Pittsburgh. As I introduced my son to her, I reminded her that she was his baby sitter when he was around 3 or 4. Paula, still 5' even, looked up at David, around 5'11," and observed, "you're bigger now." As it turns out, even though we were in the western suburban quadrant, she lived 2 blocks away from his new apartment.

The second aspect of the IKEA experience that is memorable entails the transformation of his outlook. For reasons unknown, he managed to furnish his room in the family abode with the higher end of IKEA bookcase and desk, without his mother or father figuring out that he was doing better than his sisters. Upon re-entering IKEA, he began to make wise calculations, and wound up buying a TV hutch, matching bookcases, a coffee table, a side table, a metal frame for his Futon mattress and cover, and a

computer desk. Everything was tasteful and matched, and he was happy and enthusiastic until he parted with the money to buy these things. Subsequent trips to Target, Wal-Mart, Sam's Club, Linen-N-Things and IKEA reminded him that things cost money, and that while he could readily afford each of these items, and he enjoyed his apartment becoming accomplished, there was in fact virtue in his earning more money over time to allow him to continue to both acquire and save for the future.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this transformation is the ease by which he convinced other people, notably his mother and aunt, to spend the necessary hours putting together the various IKEA projects. As I've noted before, the kids are always ahead of us.