

Written 25 May '96
Irene

Robert and Barbara Park
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May 25, 1996

Dear Wesley and Irene,

It is 1996, time again for the Park family reunion we have been holding every 5 years since 1981. This year the reunion will be at the Nova Scotia summer cottage of my sister Betty and her husband, Charlie Ponder, during the week of July 22 to 26. We are hoping to drive, using the 1978 Ford van which got us to California and back 5 years ago, and would like to stop and see you the week before or maybe the week after the reunion, if you will be home.

The van is rusty and has 125,000 miles on it, but seems to be running fine. However, there are some warning signs which I would like to ask Wesley's advice about (at the end of this letter).

If we are able to take the van we plan to bring Warren's son Daniel and my brother James with us on the trip out, as well as Robin and Ian, plus Barbara* and me. Mischa (now 17) will be on a trip to Mexico which he won in a Spanish Honor Society contest through school, and will to have catch up with us at Barb's parent's place in Syracuse. If this plan holds up, our most likely arrival time at your place would be late in the evening of Sunday July 14, coming either from Casey's house in northeast Illinois or all the way from Madison. If the weather is nice the following day the boys might like to spend the day at the Sand Hills, and we could leave for Syracuse the morning of July 16. Otherwise we would probably leave on the 15th in time to get to Syracuse in the evening.

On the return trip we expect to still have James, but Daniel will be returning to Minneapolis from Boston with Warren and Patty by air and Robin will probably fly back to Madison. Instead Mischa will be with us as we head west from the Boston area on about July 29. However, our route is not set yet. If Mischa wants to visit a college campus or two on the return trip we may not be coming back through Ontario. Mischa needs to decide what universities and colleges which are strong in the sciences he wants to submit scholarship applications to in December of this year. (He continues to be a straight A student.)

The question on the van is whether it can be relied on the give us one more long trip. I plan to have a mechanic look it over, but I don't know if I will be able to find one experienced with Ford vans of this vintage. It is a 1978 Ford Econoline Custom 150, with automatic transmission and an 8 cylinder engine, made in Canada. It has various leaks and squeaks, and there is more play in the steering than I would like, but it runs well and starts fine (even at 15 deg. F below zero). If you are experienced with such vehicles, Wesley, I would appreciate any feedback you might offer, especially on the following two things.

conclude over →

* Because her mother and stepfather have been in poor health, Barbara may fly to Syracuse ahead of us to have more time with them and get things ready there for our visit.

1. When it shifts into reverse there is a noticeable "clank" which we didn't used to hear.

2. Though the oil pressure gauge is usually in the normal range, when we have been driving on the highway for a while it may fall to near the bottom of the gauge and stay there as we continue, though there is adequate oil in the crankcase and no overheating. The problem showed up on a recent hot day even while I was driving around town.

Might I be able to investigate or fix the above symptoms without having the transmission or engine opened up? Might they be warning signs of something likely to cause breakdown on a long trip? If we had problems on the first leg of our trip to your place, would we be able to rent a van or other vehicle in your area which could accommodate 7? (After Mischa joins us we will have 7 at least between Syracuse and Boston. Warren and Patty are flying to Boston and renting a car there, so one of us could continue to Nova Scotia from there with them.)

Hope to see you in July,

Robert