

From Griselda to the white whale

Aug. 13, 1989

"I'd like to rent an economy-size car," I said into the telephone a few days after the accident when Griselda, my 1980 Ford Fiesta, was injured in a car crash.

"I want something good on gas because I have to drive 45 minutes to work everyday," I explained.

"Stop by tomorrow morning and we'll have one ready for you," the bodiless voice at the other side of the line said.

So early the next morning, Bork drove me over to the rental station. I showed the clerk the number I'd been given, he took down the pertinent information, and he handed me the rental keys.

"We don't have any economy cars left today," he said, pointing to a glaring white monstrous vehicle. "For the same price, we'll have to give you a Lincoln Town Car."

A lot of people, I've discovered, would be thrilled. Not me, though, especially after an accident. I didn't know if I could control the thing — and the last thing I wanted was another crash. And what about parking, or gas?

Evidently, he thought he was doing me a favor. Who wouldn't prefer a Lincoln Luxury landliner to a compact Mercury mobile?

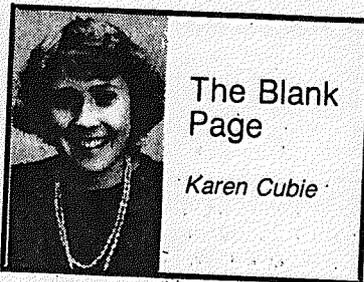
"Don't you have anything smaller?" I asked him in shock. "I have to conserve gas. That thing is huge. Where are the economy cars?"

"That's the smallest thing we have today," he said, refusing to look me in the eye. "Take it or leave it — unless, of course, you want to wait an hour for the next size down."

I had to be at work soon so I had no choice. I signed the papers, and he handed me the keys.

"You have to return it with a full gas tank," he told me before I stepped out the door.

I opened the car door, and climbed hesitantly onto the driver's seat, rubbing my hand over the real leather.



The Blank Page

Karen Cubie

The seat was too far back, so I searched underneath for the lever to move it forward. When I couldn't find it, I noticed a series of buttons near my arm on the driver's side door. "Windows," "door lock," "seat adjustments," the buttons were labeled. After playing with them a few moments, I figured I was ready to hit the road.

I sat straight up behind the steering wheel, stretched my foot out over the gas, turned the key in the ignition, and lurched out of the parking lot.

Bork snickered down at me from the window of his van, and we both pulled out into the traffic.

"I'm terrified!" I shouted at him as I took off down the road, trying to get the feel of the gas and brake pedals.

I fidgeted with the radio, a more glamorous article than my little Fiesta had ever seen, and lumbered through the city center and out into the highway feeling terribly conspicuous in the huge, white, pimpmobile, as the Subaru, Escorts, and other economy commuting models sped by.

Other drivers looked enviously up at me, obviously unaware I was terrified the car was too huge for the lanes I was driving down.

With my Fiesta I could speed to work, darting and dashing in and out of traffic — not with the big white whale, though.

By the time I reached Taunton I was pretty pleased with myself.

"Now I'm ready to drive a van or an 18-wheeler," I thought. "I

made it all the way here without killing myself, or crushing the other cars."

Then I reached the Gazette parking lot.

It was hard enough finding a spot for Griselda the Fiesta, so you can imagine all the trouble I had with the enormous rent-a-car.

The whole building buzzed with speculation on whom the car belonged to. No one guessed it was me.

"Wow," they declared. Suddenly I had won the instant respect of co-workers who had always laughed at my driving ability before.

By Wednesday, however, I had had enough of Moby Dick. He was too difficult to park, and I could barely navigate him down the narrow side street I live on.

That night I called the rental station and requested an economy-size car for the next morning.

"We were doing you a favor!" the bodiless voice protested. "That was a good deal."

But I was eventually promised a small car the next morning.

The clerk took the Town Car's keys, and handed me a new set.

"We don't have any economy models today," he told me at 8 a.m. "You'll have to take the smallest thing we have today — a Mercury Cougar."

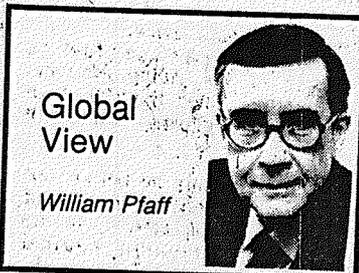
To me, the Cougar (also bright white) is another luxury mobile — but it's a little more manageable. As a matter of fact, I'm beginning to think of it as mine.

Sorry, Griselda.



Few changes for Italian government

PARIS — Peter Nichols, an English writer and journalist who has made his home in Italy for more than a quarter of a century, has described Italy's politicians as living "in a world of their own which has nothing to do with the world at large, and this they recognize. They cannot speak its language. Years spent in political life have robbed them of this ability. They do not share its problems though its problems are constantly put before them for solution. Their



Global View

William Pfaff

Craxi leads a new government until next March and then a Christian Democrat will take his place — again without an election. The performance has been an example of the postwar Italian system at its most disgraceful, shaming to Italians and a scandal to those looking on from abroad.

Even the leader of the Christian Democrats, Ciriaco de Mita, conceded that "we have all lost something." La Repubblica, a leading

substitute two-stage majority elections. As many as wanted could run for a parliamentary seat, but all but the two top candidates in each district were eliminated from the runoff vote then held. The result has been responsible party government and politicians directly accountable to the people who elected them.

There is little sign that Italians — or at least the Italian political class — are prepared to give up