**Accident! (from 2001)**

It was a nice Friday night in May and Louis and Chris decided to take a ride in Emily’s 1997 purple Sebring convertible to go to the Caltech 35th college reunion. There was a backup of traffic approaching the Golden State Freeway, but since there were two of us, we could use the carpool lane on the left. I saw the traffic stop in the normal lanes but the carpool lane was clear. I decided that I did not want to pass the stopped cars at speed so I slowed somewhat. As I passed the black pickup truck that was stopped on my right, the rear of the pickup truck moved laterally and hit the convertible on the right rear quadrant, pushing the car to the left and then against the center divider. The carpool lane was not very wide as it was a late addition after the freeway was built. The left side brushed up against the concrete center divider; the car then bounced off the divider and the left front pivoted and also brushed up against the concrete divider. All of a sudden the car was headed directly for the stopped white Toyota ahead in the lane to the right. “Oh, no!”, I thought as I really tried to get the car to steer into the empty carpool lane. There was no steering control, and the Sebring headed straight for the rear end of the white Toyota and hit it at speed. CRASH! BANG! The airbags deployed quickly as both Lou and Chris were thrown forward rapidly into a nice soft large rubber bag. Thank goodness for airbags; I thought we were headed for the windshield even though we were wearing seatbelts. I was somewhat in shock and rested by forearms on the now deflating airbag, unhappy that I could not redirect the car away from the impending disaster. Then, I realized that the airbags were very hot and were scalding my forearms that were resting on them. I recoiled away from the hot bags and wondered what had happened. I got out of the car and surveyed the world around the car. MAYBE: I should not have slowed down in the left lane; I should have regained control of the car; I should have used my car.

The black pickup truck was on its side behind me. The driver was trying to escape from the passenger side door. It had rear-ended the car in front of it. The Toyota driver, two cars in front, got out and wondered why I had hit it so hard as to destroy the left rear quadrant of the car. There was another tan colored car just behind the Toyota with not a mark on it. I commented to that driver that this was his lucky day. However that car could not move since there were four squashed vehicles blocking the two lanes directly to the right. None of us knew why this had all happened? We later found out that another car had been speeding along, hit the pickup truck on the right rear, and then sideswiped the four vehicles in the next two lanes and driven off. The driver of that car had stolen it from in front of his former girlfriend’s house and was uninsured. Another driver had followed it to a parking lot, and then witnessed the person escaping on foot. He then reported the whole thing to the Highway Patrol.

The entire Ventura Freeway eastbound before Forest Lawn was quickly stopped completely as all lanes were blocked. The arriving officers were astounded at the amount of wreckage and called for eight flat-bed tow trucks to pick up the cars. None except Mr. Lucky had a drivable vehicle. After clearing us all off the freeway in the next two hours, we were assembled under the overpass. I looked at the wall and screamed repeatedly: “I just wrecked my daughter’s car!”. The witnesses doubted my sanity. So did I. The car was towed to the Chrysler dealer where it had just been repaired from a previous accident.

The next morning, we called State Farm Insurance, and went to salvage whatever stuff was left in the car. The dealer assured us that the car was completely unrepairable. It had all four corners damaged and all four wheels disconnected from their respective axles. The frame was bent and the top was dislocated. The engine and transmission were good. State Farm gave us the book value of $13,000 for the car which was more that what we paid for it about one year earlier. I was so upset that I never got to any part of the 35th reunion that weekend, and I still refuse to take that section of carpool lane.

Emily said she still needed a car, so we went car shopping and purchased a new 2001 Acura Integra for about $4,000 more than the settlement. She was happy with that car, as performance and steering was far superior to the Sebring. The only bad part was that it was green and not a convertible. That car had no service problems at all until it was stolen in Berkeley four years later and stripped. The State Farm settlement then was about $4,000 less than what was paid for the car. I wish we still had it.