

The Entitled Boomer and “Vacation” (1983)

KillToParty | 11 November, 2017 | by Billy Pratt

“I found out long ago, it’s a long way down the holiday road”

Believe it or not, Clark W. Griswold was pretty fucking masculine. Sure, [“Vacation” \(1983\)](#) featured a kind of proto-idiot Dad, a trope that would become the standard by 1990- but Clark was a different kind of idiot Dad.

Clark was a masculine idiot Dad.

“Vacation” relied on one-joke with Clark, but luckily it was a good one. When Clark would do something stupid, royally screwing things up or putting his family in danger, he would say “I meant to do that” and move on.

This took many different forms. When Clark goes to trade in his car for a new station wagon before the trip- one he surely researched meticulously (my own Dad has a “Consumer Reports” subscription to this day)- he gets the old “bait and switch,” being forced into buying an ugly [clunker](#) after his own car is ~~traded-in~~ destroyed. To dispute this by waiting for the car he ordered to come in would ruin his family’s vacation- so what does Clark do?

He sells his wife on the ugly clunker by using the same line that the scam-artist car salesman used on him: “*You may think you hate it now, honey, but wait until you drive it.*” Or, in other words, “I meant to do that.” He isn’t apologetic, he doesn’t admit defeat- he takes inventory of the situation and moves forward. This is the masculine approach- yes, even if you’re an idiot.

A masculine man makes the best of every situation. He doesn’t whine, or complain, or wish things had turned out differently- he understands his surroundings and takes things from there. A man need not admit his mistakes when he’s ready to deal with their consequences. That was five minutes ago, get over it, and let’s figure things out.

Using this formula, Clark manages to get the family from Chicago to California. The traditional family odyssey to a big, ostentatious, tourist trap theme park- a vacation staple for the Boomer. If you had two weeks off from work, you took the clan to Wally World. It’s just what you did.

Only for the Griswolds, things go south when they find Wally World closed for repairs- and this is where Clark goes off script, breaking his implicit philosophy of the glass being half-full. Instead of making the best of a bad situation, Clark buys a gun, takes the park security guard hostage, and leads a rogue tour of the park.

Because Clark is not only a masculine idiot, Clark is also an entitled boomer.

Boomers were the first generation to be told that their feelings mattered- and, of course, that they mattered a lot. Their parents weren’t just *their parents*, but rather a subject of critique and derision. See, the Boomer was sore that their parents weren’t quite the parents that they would have liked. Instead of moving on and making the best of it, they bitched and stewed because of *feelings*.

The consequence to this became the burden of consciously beating their parents at everything. While Mom and Dad may have been working class, the Boomer went to college and got a prestigious office job. While Mom and Dad may have let gender roles dictate their marriage, the Boomer’s relationship was an

equal partnership. While Mom and Dad may have been distant and authoritative, the Boomer parent was flexible and accommodating.

Boomer parents understood that part of growing up involves access to a variety of experiences- experiences which their own parents may have overlooked or denied. Childhood shouldn't be disciplined- childhood is about fun, and letting "kids be kids." Teenage years are about expressing individuality, and "finding yourself." Sending your kid away to college isn't about classes, but rather *experience*.

If Boomers understand anything, they understand entitlement.

Boomers found out the hard way that it's all much easier said than actually done. They were more like their parents than they wanted to admit, but unlike their parents they became a bastardized mixture of tradition and progression- often retaining the worst of each paradigm.

To support the suburban mansion, both Boomer parents worked long hours at their prestigious office jobs. MTV handled their parenting duties, and to their befuddlement, their kids matured into detached and apathetic jerks. Despite their encouraging individuality, it was expressed in ways that horrified and confused them. And, on top of everything, their kids even had gripes with their progressive parenting and feelings of their own- and they mattered *a lot*.

Boomers quickly learned that despite trying to embody the polar opposite of their own up-bringing, what they created for themselves was a hot mess. The Boomer expected to "have it all" at bargain prices- the lucrative career, the gorgeous house, the successful children- and ended up with miserable chaos.

If day-to-day life was a losing battle in creating the perfect home life, they scaled their expectations back. If they couldn't have it all, they were willing to settle. A few days strewn throughout the year, the hapless Boomer would put the pieces together in an attempt to experience blissful perfection: holidays and vacations.

And this is what Clark Griswold- Boomer dad extraordinaire- had in mind with the doomed journey to Wally World. When wife Ellen laments the decision to drive, Clark remains insistent on the road trip. This wasn't about convenience- this was tradition.

Clark wasn't going to be a travel cuck.

There was more at stake with the trip than family time. For Clark, the vacation was about validating his identity as a father, and his identity as a *man*.

Clark wanted to feel like the true patriarch of his family- a feeling that had almost certainly evaded him to that point. Clark wanted to be the kind of man who drove his family cross-country; captain of the ship and architect of memories. He wanted to bask in the glory of bringing the ideal vacation to life on the highways of America. Clark was searching for his masculine identity; a feeling which Clark felt *entitled* to having.

When I was growing up, my friends and I would talk about the future as if it were paint-by-numbers: *when* you're married, *when* you have a house and a family, what life would be like *when* you have kids. There wasn't any talk of *how* one would arrive at the destination because there didn't seem like there had to be- these things just happen on their own. They have to happen; they're *supposed* to happen. Like Clark's own belief that a family road trip had to be perfect, we felt entitled to a comfortable life unfolding gradually as we enjoyed the ride.

And here I am, on a Saturday night, in an empty apartment, writing an essay on a thirty-year-old comedy.

You think Boomers are bad? Gen-X is just starting to feel the sting of disappointment, and this shit is gonna get ugly.

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