

## Part 4 US 40

## US 40 to Boston - No dad

On the fateful day, we finished loading the few things back in the truck that we had taken out, closed the doors and got on our way. Grandpa and grandma were there waving good by to us as mom backed the truck out. She turned west 200 yards to US 40 and turned left when we hit it. That took us east toward Jensen and the Greenriver and Colorado. To that point, the territory was familiar. We'd been that way many times, but from there on it was new country. I felt like an explorer at that point. To guide us across the country mom and dad had ordered a map from the AAA. This thing was about 5 inches wide and 11 inches long, about half of one of these pages. The paper was fairly heavy and was bound at the top, not the side, with a spiral coil.

Each page contained a blown-up segment of a map showing the route we were to take. The pages were obviously in order so we started with the top page at Naples and followed US 40 across the country. Given the detail on each page, the guide consisted of something like 50 or so pages. Someone at AAA had used a marker to manually highlight the roads we were to take. Since the maps were highly enlarged, it was easy to see the numbers of the roads so when we came to an intersection where we had to make a turn, we could tell which was to go. Us kids argued over who got to hold the map and give mom directions, which was pretty pointless. Changes in directions were so few that there were few directions needed.

The three of us sat in the cab of this pickup and looked straight ahead. And waited. And waited. While we drove and drove. The truck was loaded down on the leaf springs and had a small engine so mom didn't push it over 50 miles an hour. Imagine going 2,000 miles at that speed. That works out to 40 hours of hard driving. Since we didn't drive even 10 hours a day, the trip took 6 days. The truck had a temperamental shifter on the floor and the thing drove like a truck. It was tough for 100 pound Marie to handle it but she was determined and anytime she's determined, she succeeds as you all know.

There was a point somewhere in Colorado I believe it was that the engine started to act up. We were on a long haul up a mountain and slowed down to a slow speed, mom shifting down. The odd sound of the engine and the slow speed alarmed me considerably and worried me for the rest of the trip. I was afraid that the engine would fail and we would be stuck somewhere and have to spend a

lot of money. Whatever the problem was, it resolved itself after a time and never happened again.

### License Plate theft

Somewhere in the middle of the trip, we stopped somewhere in Kansas for the night. In the morning when we got back in the truck, mom noticed that one of the license plates was missing. She thought it had been taken that night, although I suppose it could have been taken at another stop. Whatever the situation, she was severely worried. She feared that she would be stopped in some state by the highway patrol and be given a ticket for driving without a plate. I don't know how realistic that fear is but it was real so she had to tend to it. I was unsure about how worried to be so I just worried a little bit, understanding that she'd take care of the problem somehow like she always did.

She located the police station and parked, leaving us kids in the car. She went in and explained that during the night someone had stolen one of our license plates and asked them what she should do. Obviously she couldn't get a temporary plate from that state, not being a resident, but she felt that they should be able to do something to help her. They did.

Someone made up a yellow cardstock "plate" that didn't have numbers, but it was a official-looking device. We taped it inside the window of the cargo box and that way had two plates. The benefit of the temporary thing was that it showed that she had advised officials of the problem and done all she could do to remedy the situation.

### Cut-rate Motels

Above I said we didn't drive 10 hours a day but perhaps we did, at least some days. I say this now because as I think about how she got good rates on motels, it's clear that we did in fact drive late into the night in some instances. She would push on during the day, driving this hard-to-manage over-loaded truck, and start calculating where to spend the night.

For some reason, we always stayed in motels. I didn't think about the reason for this extravagance at the time, but think it's pretty obvious. Don't you? We camped out all along the Alcan highway trip which was even longer than this one. But a woman and two little kids camping along the road without a man along? I expect that mom and dad agreed that she would spend some of their precious cash

on a motel room so that we were safe. I appreciate that today and didn't know what was behind it at the time until I just started to tell you about it.

The way she managed to get cut-rates was to drive until later in the evening. I don't know how late that was but the sun was setting or had even set, which means fairly late. Then she'd start watching motels which were plentiful to see which ones were clean but not expensive. You could tell the difference in price by the appearance as you know. When she found one that met her expectations, she would pull into the drive in front of the "Office" and go in alone.

She then approached the clerk about a room for one adult and two kids and got a quote on the room. I believe that in at least one instance she found the rate too high so she got back in the truck and hunted for another motel. When she found one she liked, she'd then bargain with the clerk somehow. Her method seemed to be to determine whether there were more than one vacancies. She said that if she could get the room for such and such -less that the quoted rate- she would take it and the clerk then would be able to turn on the NO VACANCY sign and go to bed. It worked more than once.

### New York City

This was the only disaster on the whole trip. We were unable to decipher the otherwise trusty AAA maps due to the complexity of roads. We had never seen such things, super highways over streets, bridges over the river and so on. Too much for us. I remember that we crossed the Hudson River on the George Washington Bridge and was most impressed. So far so good, but that's where things started to unravel. Somehow we had to get onto US 1 to go north to Boston. We tried to follow the map but simply could not figure out what to do. Perhaps if mom had been navigator and dad had been the driver they could have figured it out, but once mom took a wrong turn and drove off the map, it was absolutely impossible to pick up the route again. One way streets, confusing street names and so on prevented us from working it out.

Finally, she stopped to ask a man on the sidewalk for directions to the road she wanted. He was reasonable and while he waved his hand in the direction we needed to go, told her to take this turn and that turn and "to follow the cow track". That was too much. She couldn't remember all of the turns, and did not comprehend the final instruction to "follow the cow track". What the man meant was "follow the car track" meaning a trolley of some sort, but his dialect was foreign to us and we wondered if he was an immigrant.

At this point, mom fell apart, the only time. She pulled the truck off the road and parked it. Then she started to sob, her head bent forward with tears dropping off her nose, hands clenched on top of the tall steering wheel. I felt like my world had come apart. I was helpless. I depended on her to take care of me and to get me back safely to my dad in a new place and here she was unhinged. There was nothing I could do and I was stricken. I felt like crying but didn't. We sat there for a time while she collected her wits and then resumed the drive. I don't remember how she got us out of that predicament but she managed to find US 1 and drove us into Connecticut where we spent our last night on the road.

This drive was one of the most heroic things she did, alone with two little kids, 98 pounds, struggling with a cantankerous hard-to-handle, overloaded- pickup truck, across the whole continent, on roads and places she knew nothing about. Truly a heroic odyssey.

### Woodlawn Restaurant

This was the most embarrassing part of the trip for me, one that has actually returned over the years as an embarrassing memory. After we got settled into the motel room, mom handed us a five dollar bill, an enormous amount of money to give to a kid in those days. She said she was too tired to go out -not surprising considering the harrowing day she had just finished getting through New York City- but that we were to find a place and get a hamburger which we loved. So we dressed in nice clean clothes and left. We wore identical polo shirts and fire-engine red slacks. They had been gifts to us in Seward that we had hounded our parents about for weeks. They finally relented and bought them for us. We were as proud in those things as in anything we owned.

We left the motel and walked down the road to a restaurant nearby, named "The Woodlawn". I remember the name vividly. Not having enough experience in these matters to be able to read the clues that were abundantly clear, we walked to the entryway and were greeted by a man who showed us to a small table. He was a maitre'd though we didn't have an inkling of his function. He was just a waiter to us. The medium size restaurant was dimly lit and most of the tables were occupied by well-dressed couples, some of whom looked curiously at us, two little kids without an adult, in fire-engine red slacks.

The maitre'd brought us menus and retired. The menus were like little blackboards about 10 inches long and the choices of the day were written in chalk. Nothing on the menu was priced as low as five dollars. By now we were getting the

sense that we had stepped into it real bad. Those fancy people, those fancy cars, the snazzy decor, the suited maitre'd added up to a fancy place that we had no sense to be in.

So we put the menus back on the table and surreptitiously got up and snuck out trying to be as inconspicuous as possible - impossible with those fire-engine red pants. As we got out the door, our ears were burning with embarrassment. If we had had any sophistication, we could have told from the cars in the parking lot that this was a high-class joint that wouldn't have hamburgers. We wandered on and found a greasy-spoon that did sell cheap hamburgers, went in, ordered, ate and returned to the motel. We never told mom about what happened. I was mortified and still feel it today as I tell this story.

### West Acton

Arnie had made arrangements with dad that we were to go to his home in West Acton to live until the Nova Scotia expedition was over. So we hunted for the town. We had a larger map than the AAA guide so pored over it hunting for this place with the odd name. The drive from Connecticut up to Acton wasn't long but it seemed to take all day. We had had enough of this drive and couldn't wait to get out of the truck and spend some time on the ground.

As we read the map we saw the weirdest names we'd ever seen: Leominster, Billerica, Cochituate, Worcester, Waltham, Ipswich, Roxbury, Natick, Nahant, Naragansset and so on. We couldn't even decide how the names should be pronounced but had fun experimenting. We never did get Worcester right. It's pronounced "Woosta". We also saw a few familiar names like Lexington and Concord and were interested in going to visit these famous landmarks of American history.

Eventually, we made it to the Lewis home in West Acton and we able to spend a few days there recuperating.

### Mud Turtles

I grew up with painted turtles in bowls and liked them. Turtles were familiar and friendly, though timid. It was an amazing thing to discover that there were entirely different turtles. We went across the street a short distance to a house where some kids lived who had a small pond behind their house. We were allowed to swim there, the reason for the visits.

The water was muddy and dirty along the edge where we walked but that didn't matter. The green river was also muddy. The kids were nice and played with us. At some point, one of them pointed across the small pond and announced that "There's a mud turtle!" I'd never heard the name and was interested, "mud" turtle, what would that be. We wandered around the pond, walking slowly, trying to creep up on the turtle. We didn't succeed, but we kept trying and eventually I saw one.

It's the oddest turtle I've seen. It is shaped like a turtle but its carapace (back shell) is soft and looks like soft rubber with a few dull markings. It has a long skinny neck and an elongated nose so that it can raise its nostrils out of the water without exposing the rest of the animal. The kids threw rocks at it but to no avail.