

Trip With Bob King

At an Academy of Arcadia reunion several years ago I talked to Bob King and his wife, Donna (Bane), and reminisced about the trip Bob and I took many years ago. I thought about that trip again yesterday and decided to write down a few of my memories of that special adventure. One day in the summer of 1951, Bob King drove up to our house in his "new" 1948 Fleetliner Chevrolet...maroon, with fender skirts! Bob was an older boy from our school and I had always admired him as the Academy's star football and basketball player. Although older (he had graduated in 1950), he always was so nice to me at our small school and over time he became like a big brother to me. We didn't pal around or go places together...just really good school friends. Much to my surprise, Bob, who had just got his shiny new car, had come to over our home to ask my parents if I could accompany him on a trip he was planning. He and I had never talked about this and it was as surprising to me as it was to my parents. Bob explained that he planned to go to the Smokey Mountains and then up the East Coast...and that we would be gone 7-10 days. He said that the trip wouldn't cost much...probably only seventy-five dollars...and that he would drive safely and take good care of me. He said the trip should be very educational and he really hoped they would let me go along with him. We would leave in a week if they approved. No one had asked me if I wanted to go, but the idea of a trip really excited me as of that date the only place I had ever been outside of Ohio was Canada (actually, Canadian waters on the Lakeside II, a tour boat out of Lakeside, Ohio, where my grandmother vacationed for several weeks each year.) Our annual weekend at Lakeside each summer was the only vacation or trip I had ever taken, so a trip with Bob, to other states no less, was almost more than I could imagine. My parents thought highly of Bob, and barely hesitated to give him their approval after checking with me to see if I wanted to make the trip. Of course, I wanted to go. Today, it is hard to imagine that any parent would let their fifteen-year old son go on a ten day car trip with an eighteen-year old friend who had never been to their house before...and had just purchased a new car. Ruth says I should not tell this story as it makes my parents seem irresponsible...but those were different times! We never locked our car or home...we always felt safe...and, we trusted almost everyone---well, almost everyone. One day, we received a call from a neighbor that gypsies were passing through and while one man would talk to the home owner, others would be stealing chickens and/or other valuables. My father hung up the wall telephone...told my sister, Alice, my Mom and me to stay in the house...grabbed and loaded his shotgun...and

took a seat in his rocker on our front porch. I was scared to death as was my Mom and sister. We waited. Three covered wagons came down the road and stopped in front of our home. The apparent leader started to get off of his wagon and my father stood up and shouted, "Keep Moving!" while brandishing his shotgun. The man got back on the wagon and the three wagon caravan kept on moving down the road. The only words that had been spoken were, "Keep Moving!" My father came into the house and called a few neighbors, who later reported the up-to-date location of the gypsies on our party line telephone. Since we didn't have Facebook or "Send to All," the party line worked exceptionally well. I remember asking Dad if they might come back and he said, "They will never be back." I believed him and never worried about it again. Dad never told me anything that wasn't true, so why should I worry? I packed my suitcase and anxiously awaited our departure. My folks gave me some money, which I hid in a shoe in my suitcase (no one would ever think to look there!) and we were off. I think I detected a tear in my Mom's eye...but why should she worry...Bob was eighteen-years old and I was fifteen-years old! The following are the highlights of our trip...the ones I can remember from almost sixty years ago! We headed for the Smokey Mountains. There were no freeways and we had to stop in every little town and village...and drive right through the middle of large cities. Places like Cincinnati (where we stopped to see Bob's grandmother and eat some cinnamon rolls she had just baked) and Louisville and Nashville amazed me as the largest cities I had ever visited were Toledo, Cleveland and Columbus. We only did one "bad thing" on the entire trip and we did it on the first day. Bob pulled out some Redman Chewing tobacco and asked if I wanted a "chew." My Dad had let me try his Mailpouch Chewing tobacco, to cure me of ever wanting any again, but I decided to give it one more try. Redman was a milder tobacco and we chewed away...spitting out the windows as we drove along. It didn't make us sick, but spitting all the time sure got tiresome. When we stopped to get gasoline, Bob discovered that his new car had a trail of tobacco juice running down both sides of the car and announced that there would be no more chewing on the trip! It came as a relief as I didn't like to chew tobacco anyhow. We spent two days getting to the Smokey Mountains and several days in the Mountains. I was really impressed for these were the first mountains I had ever seen. We paid about two dollars for a place to stay. There were no motels as we know them today...just lodges, small cottages, and "rooms for rent." We drove around, seeing things that locals and fellow travelers told us to see...we had maps, but no itinerary. Meals were cheap...we often had breakfast for a quarter and lunch for fifty cents. Occasionally, we would stop at a

grocery store and buy bologna, bread and apples for our dinner or lunch.

On the way to the East Coast, we stopped at Asheville, NC for the evening. The desk clerk asked if we were in town for the baseball game. When we inquired about the game, were told that Asheville had a minor league team and they were playing an important game that evening. We drove over to the stadium and watched the game along with several hundred other folks. I believe this was my first minor league game...and I can't remember the name of one player, although I was an avid baseball fan. On to Washington, DC. After we got lost several times trying to get on Pennsylvania Avenue, we parked on the street in front of the Smithsonian Museum. We toured the museum, walked to the top of the Washington Monument, around the White House and to the Lincoln Memorial. It was a wonderful day of seeing things that I had seen in my books at The Academy. And then, New York City. We drove to Bob's grandmother's brother's home in Hackensack, NJ...we just followed the map...no Garmin for us. We arrived at our destination Friday evening and spent three nights with Bob's relatives. Bright and early Saturday morning, Bob and I headed to Manhattan, using buses and the subway to get there. We saw buildings like we had never seen before!!! We marveled at the tall buildings...and all the people walking around. What a busy place! I don't know why but no one from Bob's family accompanied us, only giving us directions to places we should visit. We were just two teenage country bumpkins attacking the largest city in the world. We visited the Empire State Building and then headed for the Greyline Boat Tour around Manhattan. We realized that we might be late for the next tour, so we hailed a cab and five blocks later we arrived. At the dock, the cabbie said our fare was fifty cents so I gave him two quarters and a dime tip! The cabbie irrupted in what I now suspect was fanned anger, shouting "Why are you cheating me? You owe me more money." I was scared to death...more than by the "gypsy attack"...and held out my hand with all my change in it. The cabbie took two more quarters and a dime...double what I had already given him...jumped into his cab and drove away. I am certain that he was just taking advantage of these two young out-of-towners. The Greyline tour was great...one Ruth and I have repeated with our friends and grandchildren several times over the years. On Sunday, we took the subway to the Yankee stadium and watched Vic Rashi and Whitey Ford pitch in a double header. I can't even remember who they played, but I remember the Yankees won both games. On Monday morning we headed home. It was long ride as I got a terrible stomach and had to lie in the back seat. By the time I got home it was better and I didn't realize until I had an appendectomy during my freshman year in

college that the pain was exactly the same. My parents were very glad to see us...it had been ten days without a phone call or card...but they said they weren't worried. Things sure were different then. We didn't like our children going out at night without us knowing where they were going...and we worry now about our grandchildren when they go out...let alone go on a trip. The news of horrible things happening to the young haunt us today...a worry that most parents didn't seem to face (or know about) in the late forties and early fifties. I am glad I grew up in that era and am glad that my parents didn't have as much to worry as much about us as parents do today about their children. Never the less, they worried about us as all parents do. I remember Ruth's mother, at age ninety-four and confined to a nursing home, worrying about her seventy-four year old daughter, Mary, who had been admitted to a nursing home for a terminal illness. She said, "Once a mother, always a mother." So I imagine my Mom and Dad worried about their little boy as he traveled the South and East with a good friend. Their willingness to allow me to try new adventures helped my confidence grow and contributed to me becoming a self sufficient adult...not afraid to tackle new things and new ideas. Thanks Bob for the trip...and thanks Mom and Dad for trusting me.

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