

Traveling Plans

When our sons were young, one of our great pleasures was driving to Paul's professional meetings with him. We went to a number of interesting places, and even when the boys were toddlers we had a good time on the road. Gradually we developed some plans that made the long drives from Dallas to such places as New Hampshire, California, Washington, D.C., or Pittsburgh, a pleasure instead of an endless "Are we there yet?" Actually, I don't recall ever hearing our sons use that phrase that we have read is familiar to most parents.

As soon as we knew when and where the meetings were to be, we started planning. To begin with, we always told George and Roland where we were going, showing them the general route on road maps and talking about places we could see and possible activities along the way, as well as the features of our destination. Then, I began collecting a series of "surprises" to match the number of days we would be on the road both going and returning. The nature of the items would depend on their current ages and interests. By trial and error we discovered that some were not practical, such as toys with tiny parts that easily slipped behind the cushions of the back seat or potentially messy activities with wet, spillable parts. I combed the aisles of toy, five-and-dime, and drug stores for toys that were unusual or new to them. These I stashed in my pet hiding place that the boys never found despite some earnest searching as they grew older. Coloring books with a few crayons, balloons, small cars and trucks, appropriately simple or complex games, books, and even tablets of paper with pencils worked well. Bubble blowing materials and marbles proved disastrous. Each boy was allowed to pack a small overnight suitcase with his favorite toys, but they knew that each morning would bring a new recreation for the day.

On the day of departure, Paul and I stacked boxes of clothes and other necessities, filling the gap between the front and back seats to the level of the back seat cushion. Our crib mattress fit snugly across the back seat area, making a level pen on which the boys could play or nap while the car was in motion. Each had a pillow with a bright terry cloth cover to keep it from looking too travel-worn as the days passed. This setup would not work today when we know how dangerous it is for small children when they are not safely buckled into their car seats. We never learned how potentially hazardous their back seat freedom was, and they did have fun, supplementing their old and newly acquired toys with looking-out-of-the-window games of their own devising, such as vying to see which could collect the most different state license plates. Of course, we also had numerous story, talking, and singing periods as the days progressed. When we graduated to a station wagon, a comfortable mat covered the enlarged back platform made by folding down the seat backs, providing more room for their longer legs and their diverging tastes. But the surprises continued, once including a deck of magnetic cards and game board so that they could play more sophisticated games.

Our traveling strategies began first thing in the morning, when Paul and I rose early, dressed, and poured the boys, still sleeping, into the back seat. When they woke, we

found a good picnicking spot. They dressed and we had our customary breakfast of orange juice, cereal, and milk, along with coffee for the adults. As they got older, our breakfast stops frequently included dining out at MacDonald's or some other restaurant. Back in the car, the boys received their surprise of the day and settled down to discover the play potentials of the new toy. By mid morning, we would stop for a play period so that we could all stretch our legs, and they could work off some of their energy. These stops were often at a filling station in order to gas up. We'd stop again for a picnic lunch at a roadside park or open field. The boys would sometimes nap after lunch, and by four o'clock we'd stop for the night at an attractive motel with a swimming pool. Following a romp in the pool, we'd grocery shop for breakfast and lunch the next day, using a small picnic cooler, refreshed with motel ice, to keep the milk and other perishables. Usually, we would have stopped near a convenient restaurant, if the motel didn't have its own, providing us with another opportunity to walk and explore the town. We all welcomed an early bedtime so that we could start afresh the next morning with a similar routine. Often, we would be able to visit with friends or sightsee in the cities we went through. We enjoyed those extra breaks for renewing old friendships or exploring capitol buildings, university campuses, or museums.

These trips may sound idyllic and mostly they were. Some memorable exceptions, however, prove the rule. George suffered from motion sickness from the time he was three. He welcomed a morning Dramamine tablet, for it allowed him to read without making him drowsy. Unfortunately, there was the time I bought Bonine instead of Dramamine. Bonine did not work. George was sick all the way across Georgia. Or the time we missed a turn onto a strategic highway, resulting in our ending up in Tennessee instead of eastern North Carolina. For the most part we all enjoyed the closeness of those days in the car.

As George and Roland grew older, they participated in the pre-trip planning and were able to indulge their lively interest in baseball, by our scheduling our arrivals in major league cities so that we could take in a baseball game. That way we saw an All-Star Game in Shea Stadium, as well as league games in Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Cincinnati, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. Memorable trips also included lengthy stopovers at Disney World, the Grand Canyon, the Football and Baseball Hall of Fame, the Indianapolis Speedway, as well as the World's Fair in New York City, and a week's stay at a beautiful lake in New Hampshire. Our last family trip varied from all those earlier ones when we flew to Alaska for a two week's stay in Anchorage with a wonderful ferry ride down Prince George Sound to Valdez. Needless to say, there were no daily surprises for our now-teenagers or impromptu breakfasts and lunches in roadside parks. Instead, George took his guitar and Roland took his golf clubs for their Anchorage activities.

After we moved to Richmond and George stayed in Dallas, Paul, sixteen-year-old Roland, and I drove to Montreal not quite following our accustomed traveling routines. We did visit friends, and saw numerous sights, including the flood aftermath of Hurricane Agnes in Pennsylvania and New York State, and a bi-lingual baseball game between the Expos and the Phillies in Montreal.