

I Guess That's Me (A Reflection)

Lee Frank

Traveling Us

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States, as in places on the Interstate, are what made the marriage bearable. The trips I used to take alone in the summer were now made with companion. Does this mean Bev was navigator? Copilot? Nope. Being of low vision, she no longer drove. Nor was she especially helpful for a quickly needed map read. Did I resent doing all the driving? Nope. It was what I was used to, and, in truth, I've always preferred being driver to being passenger. Although this was not your standard traveling arrangement, we worked reasonably well as a touring team. (I would ask her questions requiring the map or tour book, but well in advance of a needed decision.)

The premise for this book is a reflection upon pictures of my past. For this part of our past, I have no pictures. They're long gone, one more item of marriage removed that left with Bev. I was never a big camera buff, but not because it was uninteresting or beyond me. I had two reasons. The first was that to do it, to be merely adequate, requires time and attention I didn't feel I had. The second was I knew I'd want more. Knowing I could easily be fascinated and heavily involved, meant far more time than I felt I could afford. (This year, my travel plans required a dependable camera of moderate quality. I bought one, spending over a hundred dollars on a camera for the first time in my life.)

I mentioned our first trip north and I suppose there were a few over the years in that direction. Somehow they blur into one. One thing I remember about the first trip was we took our brand new car, the gray Buick Skyhawk. I mention this because this was the last time I traveled with my own car. Since then, the standard operating procedure is to rent, for two reasons.

Driving on unknown side roads with my new car was not pleasant. (See the road in Vermont later on.) Our second unpleasant experience came from our big trip out west, way out west. We flew into Denver and rented a car there. The plan was to drive to Northern California to see friends and swing south on the return for major sightseeing. This trip was the clincher to never drive my own car.

We were headed west on the Interstates from Denver to Salt Lake City to Reno and from there on smaller roads to the town of Ukiah in California. After leaving the Salt Lake motel in the morning, ominous portents began to dawn. I pulled into a gas station right around the corner to fill up for a full day's travel. As I pumped the gas, I noticed the left rear tire was . . . well, tiring. It was deflating as I stood there, hand on hose. I pulled right into their garage. They found the leak, plugged it, and replaced the tire in no more than fifteen minutes. Foreboding, but I thought we were fortunate. The rest of day went the same way.

As we headed west from Salt Lake, we discovered we had slipped back a century or two. The road, the dual-lane divided concrete highway once known as Interstate 80, had been washed out the year before by an unprecedented flooding of the Great Salt Lake. I don't mean the roadway was damaged, I mean there was *no* roadway. To keep the traffic flowing, they were rebuilding one side at a time. No mere repaving here, they were

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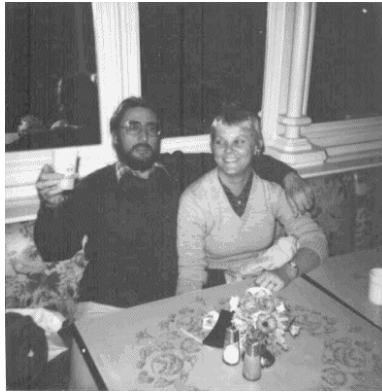
raising the road to survive any future floods. The unreconstructed side carried two-way traffic. Slowly. As I said, the road had been destroyed and was now an obstacle course that would have daunted our Conestoga-shod forebearers. (Well, yours anyway. Mine were still stuck in places like Russia.)

Only a video camera could have properly documented the state of this road. It was level in the sense a golf course is level. But it was hard to see the grade changes since our vision was fixed on the many boulders sticking up from the roadway. Although washed by the lake, few were smooth, being only recently unearthed. In our little rented Honda, we were following a semi, dodging the little boulders he casually climbed over. When I saw him swerve, I knew this meant a major detour for us. Occasionally, our speed exceeded five miles an hour. All the while I repeated this mantra, "I'm glad this is not my car. I'm glad this is not my car."

Speaking of ominous portents, a very strange, positively eerie event occurred as we traveled along this road. (If five miles an hour could be called traveling.) Along this torturous westbound trip, the Great Salt Lake (source of the disaster) was on our right. On the left were mostly miniature mountains, more properly foothills I suppose. There were very few buildings or side roads of any kind on either side of this torn-up Interstate for the twenty or so miles we struggled past the lake. Then, perhaps ten miles outside of Salt Lake City, off to the right I spied a large isolated building extending into the water. I don't mean over the water, which is where it once was. It was now sinking into the lake. This building was a former amusement park, deserted now over twenty years. I knew this because I had seen it before. It was prominently featured in the movie, Carnival of Souls. I knew the movie, but had no idea where the building was. Now I discover it here, becoming part of the Great Salt Lake. The movie, B though it may be, is a movie about ominous portents.

I wasn't glad it was my car on our first married trip. We visited a friend of Bev's who lived on top of a small mountain in Vermont. This part of Vermont was lovely, but the specific area we headed into became more rustic by the minute. By the time we reached our destination, we had traveled some two miles uphill on an ungraded gravel road. I was most unhappy doing this in my new (less than six months old) car. And if this wasn't sufficiently unpleasant, it became so cold that night—it was August—I required constant feeding of the Franklin stove in our room. The rest of our time in New England was very enjoyable. Even in my no-longer-quite-new car.

In the middle of our travels north (and west), my parents were traveling to Florida. They'd finally decided to reside full time in Sarasota, where we had built the apartment under my house. I always planned to move my parents to Florida when they were ready. In 1981, both my father and mother were still working full-time. By 1984, we'd completed their apartment in the space under this house sitting one floor up. The next year they began staying the winter months. They kept visiting, my Dad staying longer and longer. He retired in '83 and had more free time than my Mom, who never really stopped working.



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There were other, less memorable, trips. I recall many pleasant hours in Charleston, South Carolina. (The home of my father's predecessors.) There were other, shorter, trips to many places within Florida. Many were to DisneyWorld in Orlando, where Bev's friend worked, giving us preferred status. I had a friend living in Orlando, giving us preferred quarters. The picture above was, to my best recollection, taken at Disney. Neither of our friends took the photo. It was taken by my cousin Ron, when we rendezvoused with his family at Disney.



This is a picture of said cousin Ron, myself, and our mutual cousin Sheila. These two cousins were my childhood playmates mentioned in the “Schoolkid Me” chapter. As I said there, they are respectively six months older and younger than me. The photo also shows our age in another way. The event is the Bat Mitzvah of my niece, Abby, in 1986. (This summer I attended Abby's and Bryan's engagement party. More aging.) Was Beverly there? I don't think so. I do remember both of us attending my nephew Jay's bar mitzvah two years earlier. If you look closely at this picture, you'll see another thing that was a constant in my life but did not remain. It's the cane I'm leaning on. The cane outlasted Beverly; I used it for

some twenty years beginning in the late seventies. I tossed it two years ago, but that's another story. This story is about the end of the marriage.

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