

What was your first big trip?



It is hard to say when my first big trip was. Being an Army brat, we tripped to Okinawa, then across the US from California to Ft Devin's Massachusetts and then to Great Britain. All big trips but my life is just a series of trips big and small. But when I think about it, the first big trip I guess I did solo after graduating from High School. It was summer 1969 and dad and I were not getting along too well. For most of high school we had run a gas station across the street from house and then my Senior year we had gotten rid of station and I started working pumping gas in Petaluma and making what I first thought of as my own money. So anyway, I decided it was time to get out and see the world on my own. So I put a few things in a bag and a sleeping bag in the back of my Sprite and headed out of town. Stopped to see my girlfriend in Antioch and let her know I would be gone a bit. Of course no cell phones or navigation systems back then so I just hit the road. I got on I80 and headed to Reno. I picked up a hitch

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hiker and we made good time over the mountain and down into Reno. I let him out in Reno and found me a motel off East 4th street. I looked around Reno a bit but being to young to gamble was not interesting of a town. I was in my motel that night when the hitch hiker knocked and asked to sleep on floor, so I let him. In the morning after breakfast he was asking if he could ride again today, but I lied to him and told him I was hanging around town. I had had enough of his company and he smoked. I headed on east and into Utah and Wyoming. I found a dirt road and headed down that thinking my Sprite was ok for off road driving. Came to s small creek and actually drove Sprite across it as well with out much trouble. I continued moving east and just stopping when I felt like it and eating if I was hungry. A lot of nightws I just rolled my sleeping bag out on the picnic table in a freeway rest stop. No one cared and back then it was pretty safe, I think!! I had gotten into the habit of buying 1/2 gal of milk and box of 6 old fashion donuts and that was breakfast and maybe lunch. I don't remember all the the stops I made but I was not in a hurry to be anywhere. Every couple days I would call home, collect!! Mom was worried about me and since I was just headed out of Kansas, she mentioned I should stop and see her father in Missouri for a day or two. Grandpa was from a whole different generation. He lived in a small cabin and had a barn and critters. He would milk the cow in morning and gather the chicken eggs. Then he sat down and skimmed the milk and put some in a glass

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and cracked a couple eggs into it for breakfast. I opted to finding the general store and my milk and donuts. While I was visiting mom had talked to grandpa and me and talked me into loading grandpa into the Sprite and returning to California for him to visit back there. He was in his 70's and never seen the Pacific or much of anything out of a couple state radius of his home.

So this became another adventure, traveling with grandpa was fun and he had a great outlook on life. A few years previous he had a heart attach and his doctor said he needed to quit worrying about things, so his blood pressure would stay low. So he got to be about the most low key none worrying person I ever knew. One morning as we traveled, we had just stopped for breakfast. As we were driving along I was eating donuts and drinking my milk and he says, Son you know they say you should not drink and drive!! Another we were cruising along and I had not be sleeping much. I woke up as we were going down side of road plowing up grass and dirt. He just calmly says, son maybe we should stop to sleep a bit?? Most of you don't know but British cars were positive ground and US cars Negative ground at that time. So I had run a wire thru the firewall to battery to operate my cassette player that I used for music while we traveled. Well the wire wore thru and started burning and filled the inside of Sprite with smoke. Grandpa says, son, I think something is burning.... not excited or anything, just stating a fact. We as I

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pulled to the side of the road, he just opened his car door and rolled onto the grass.

Mom had suggested to also stop at relatives in Kansas, so we stopped by and then heading out of Kansas City, my oil light came on and engine stopped. Opps, took to a shop and they had to rebuild the little engine. Grandpa and I stayed in a motel and come over each day checking on progress. Obviously the guy working on it knew nothing. The shop foreman had about 4-5 flunkies doing the work on cars. He would go by each station and talk to one flunky and tell him what to do next. Then he went to next station and so on until he was back to the first one. Then he would give more instructions and he just kept circling the shop. As granddad and I were looking around, grandpa finds a part on the floor behind my Sprite near a drain. He asks what is this, you might need it. We did.... Well they got done and we hit the road. They did a crappy job. As I was getting into California I had to start adding oil at every gas stop...

I am getting ahead of myself, after leaving KC we went down to Carlsbad Caverns, Painted Desert, into Tucson AZ to see relatives and Uncle Bob raised bees and gave me two tins of honey. Each can a couple pounds and had its only build in opener for flipping lid off can. Then we went to the Grand Canyon and stopped on the North Rim to camp the night. I reached into the back of Sprite to get our sleeping bags. If you have never seen a Sprite,

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there is no trunk lid, you reached behind the seat and pulled stuff out. My sleeping bag would not come out right away so i jerked it and out it came with the lid to one can of honey!! So now I have a couple pounds of honey in the back area and the only thing we had for clean up was paper towels and cold water. After cleaning up, I threw the second can of honey out.

We left Grand Canyon thinking we would go into Vegas and then take a mountain road from there in to California and Yosemite. We stopped for gas and filled up and then about 10 miles later we started to turn onto the mountain road and the sign says ” No Gas For 200 Miles.” The Sprite only holds 8 gallons. So we drove back to the gas station, filled up again and bought a gas can and filled it. If we had not, we might have ended up the like the people at Donner pass years years ago.

We finished out our trip going by Fisherman’s Wharf, then across the the Golden Gate and back to Tomales, California. Crossing the Golden gate was just 25 cents back then. One of the funny things about grandpa was that he would not admit he did not read. We would stop to eat and he would study the menu, then when the waitress came by he just told he what he wanted. He would say I would like some fried chicken, or bowl of beans or something else. None of which was actually listed like that but most restaurants had something like it and the waitress assumed he meant that.

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It was an unforgettable trip and a special time to have spent with my grandfather. There were so many things we did, that he had never done or seen in his life. Later in life he came to live with us the last couple years of his life at the Trout Farm dad had in Yelleville Arkansas. I hope I can go like he did, he came in for breakfast one morning and said, he was feeling tired and went back to bed. A couple hours later we went to get him up but he was no longer with us...

Don't remember how long I was gone but a month or so I guess. I had to rebuild the Sprite engine again, apparently the flunky putting engine back together, broke an oil ring on piston putting it back in. Only took me a few hours to do what he took 3 days to do.



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