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# CROSS COUNTRY WITH THE PARENTS!

BRIAN W. KELLY



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## Magic & Miracles & Goodness

# Cross Country With The Parents!

### Another Great Adventure with the Petru Family

This is an accurate account of the fictional adventures of the Petru Family of six on their first and only cross country US land trip in their brand new custom Chevy Van. The four Petru children, from ten years old to four years old, a dog named Breezy, and a cat named Tabby as well as neighbors known as the Bees, survive a multi-thousand-mile excursion over both easy and rough US terrain.

I Liam, the youngest Petru wrote this book so that you could experience what it was like to be in our home, the parks, and in the ball fields, with the Petru family. Most especially, you can now be in the van with us on our most adventurous cross country journey. There are a lot of funny things that happen to us in this story. The trip was not supposed to be funny. It was supposed to be fun and educational. It is both and it is a great read. You will love it.

While our parents thought, it was their trip, we the children felt that it was our cross-country trip. Then about half-way through the trip on the way back our parents traded places with the Griswold's

Just as my prior story about the Magical Red Hat, this story is told through the eyes of me—the most innocent of all the children—a four-year-old. As a young author, I had taken many mental notes of the trip. The notes were so powerful that I could write about this trip flawlessly twenty years later.

The Griswold's could not have told the story any better if I don't say so myself. You won't be able to put this book down. Besides, the subplots at every town along the journey, there is a lot of teaching / learning going on about the magic of geography. Even in a 100+ page book, it takes a long while to cross the United States from Pennsylvania to Salt Lake City Utah and back. I wrote the story so you too could take the trip with us.

You'll feel like you are on the trip. And, when the Griswold's are really getting to you, you can just set the book down for a while til they go away. Have fun!

This is my follow-up story to My Red Hat Keeps Me On The Ground, which I wrote and which my dad got published for me. From a reader's perspective, it is written by the same Petru kid. I am Liam. It brings back all the characters that everybody learned to love from the magical Red Hat Story—including me, the Petru family, Mr. Bee, & Barbie Bee.

**BRIAN W. KELLY**

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My name is:

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# Dedication

**Special Thanks Are Extended:**

*To My Brothers*

*And Sisters,*

*Ed, Nancy Flannery, Mary Daniels & Joseph*

*Plus*

*My Children, Brian, Michael & Katie*

*Plus*

*My best buddies Dennis Grimes and Gerry Rodski.*

*You all have been bugging me for years to write a book such as  
this.*

*Thank you all for being so kind!*

*A special dedication to Wiley Ky Eyeley!*





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# Chapter 1 Who Are the People in this Story?



The picture above is where the Petru family lived when this story happened in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We lived in the white double block on the left. The left side was 49 Perfect Street which consisted of two four-room apartments. and the right side, 47 Perfect Street where we lived

Forty-Seven Perfect had eight rooms and one bath. Mom and Dad had lived in the upper apartment of 49 Perfect Street for six months after they got married before any of us were born.

Of course, we cannot swear to that.

When 47 Perfect Street became available, they moved. The apartments on 49 Prospect turned over many times with various tenants. In this picture, the right side of the house was dressed for Halloween.

The English Tudor home on the right side was where the Bee family and the Pavlov family lived. The Bees moved in right next door to the Petrus on the left side of the Tudor at 45 Perfect St.

The Pavlov's lived on the right side at 43 Perfect Street.

I just finished telling a long story about my brother Darragh, Mr. Bee and their magical red hat. You can learn more about the Petru's by reading my story called [My Red Hat Keeps Me On The Ground](#).

Later in life, my dad took it and published it under his name at [www.amazon.com/author/brianwkelly](http://www.amazon.com/author/brianwkelly). He

This story is just one of many about my famous brother, Darragh (means Oak in Gaelic) Petru. He is the major character as in all my stories.

Though Darragh is the focal point. All of the Petru's get into the act in this misadventure of our family van as we traveled across the country. Darragh is my older brother and he is a world star as far as I am concerned.

Besides mom and dad, Darragh is the nicest person in my life—who has ever lived.

I am Liam Petru. I am proud to be the fourth and final child of Brunic and Petrinka Petru of Perfect Street in Wilkes-Barre, PA.

I was born on May 10, 2026. I am about 3 and a  $\frac{1}{4}$  years younger than Darragh. In this story, I get to be about four years old and Darragh gets to be about seven.

We're still alive but older, yet we love reflecting on the great years we spent on Perfect Street.

I love that I am now telling this wonderful story about my family as we traveled cross country for the first and last time.

I put a teeny little bit of this story into my Red Hat story. This story talks about every part of the trip and all the great places we visited.

We even have a lot of pictures of things we found for this story. We are not in the pictures but we could have been.

The facts in this story come mostly from me as I recall them from the day we left on the trip. Some others come from my brother Darragh and some come from my older sister Katie-K and my brother Cornelius-C.

My older brother and sister are twins. Small pieces of the story come from my mom Petrinka Petru, and my

dad. Brunic Petru. My parents are featured in the story as they are the ones who took us on this magical trip.

I do admit that I did not interview mom and dad to get my information. My brothers and sisters had much more salient versions of stories.

My grandparents, Smoke Troski. Skippo Troski, Edward J. Petru, and Irene M. Petru are not at all involved in this Story but they said I had to put their names in so they would read the story later.

By the way, since all the bedrooms were taken when I was born, mom dug out Darragh's old crib from the attic and placed it right outside my brother Darragh's room in the upstairs hallway.

Three bedrooms worth of people had to pass me on their ways to the bathroom every night. All this white noise helped me get to sleep before anybody else. If they went later at night, I would not know.

I can recall for years thinking that I had the biggest but the skinniest bedroom of all the Petru kids. Lots of people walked by my crib all the time. As I said, most were headed to the bathroom.

Darragh Petru—pronounced DA-ROW—was born to Brunic and Petrinka Petru on February 18, 2023. It was a cold day in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

The twins had just turned three on January 21st of that year.

Life was good for the Petru family. Brunic had a great job as a band leader for the Brunon Kryger Orchestra in Wilkes-Barre. Dad commanded nice fees when he conducted or played.

Grandpop and Grandma Petru lived right down the street so they stayed on Perfect Street for fourteen years after mom & dad were married. I was the last child born to the Petrus of Perfect Street.

By the time that Christmas 2023 came around, Darragh was nine months old. He was already zipping around his walker like it was a go-cart.

After we lived on Perfect Street for a while Mr. Joseph Bee and Barbie Bee and their three-kid brood moved in next door. Mr. Joseph Bee was a real character of a man. I knew him only as Mr. Bee.

My dad loved him to pieces. They hit it off. Mom loved Barbie Bee like she was one of my aunts, Mary, and Nanny, both of whom are the best of people.

Mr. Bee was burly and strong but very kind. He and Barbie Bee had a first-born Son, David (Davey), and two girls, Kimmathee Arthur (Kimmy) and Dawnwoo (Dinder).

Dinder was the same age as the Twins and Kimmathee was two years older than Dinder.

Kimmy was thus the Bee's oldest girl. Dinder and Kimmy were great athletes and so, logically, they grew

up to be “health nuts.” They now jointly own and operate an exotic produce market and vitamin store in the Pocono Mountains of PA. I forget but I think the name is Kajinder Health.

Joseph, Barbie (aka Wheeze), Davey, Kimmy, and Dinder Bee have been best buddies with members of the Petru family for years. I Liam Petru swear I love them all.

Joseph Bee loved kids and whenever he had time, he was with several of the Bee Brood. He also took to the Petru clan like a well-beloved uncle.

Mr. Bee liked many different types of nectars and he always had the finest. My dad said that sometimes Mr. Bee even made his own nectar.

Mr. Bee also loved to make different Fondues, especially cheese fondues. He baked his own bread, which made the fondues even better. Mr. Bee was kind.

He often shared his nectar and Fondue with my great dad, Brunic Petru especially after the Saturday afternoon touch football games on Perfect Street.

Life was good on Perfect Street for sure.



## Chapter 2 Brother Darragh and I



When I was born in Mercy Hospital on May 10, 2026, and I came home soon after, I was too young to have an idea about what was going on. I got to use Darragh's old crib.

Darragh was always a very strong young man. I think it had to do with him sleeping so close to the dresser where he kept his magical red hat. He confessed that to me when I was about four years old.

He said that it was as if he had picked up a part of the superman gene from the Red Hat that Mr. Bee gave him after Mr. Bee and the Red Hat taught him how to swim.

Eventually, after being in the hall for a few years in my crib, I got the lower bunk in Darragh's room and we put the crib back into storage just in case.

Darragh taught me how to play ball and ride a bike and he told me lots about life.

He was the best brother any young kid could ever have. He always respected the awesome power of the Red Hat. He also seemed to fear it because he was not sure whether it was a force for good or bad.

As soon as it got warm in 2029, Darragh took me out on the lawn to play catch.

We threw a whiffle ball around in the front yard and we played every day that it was nice throughout the summer.

## **Play Ball!**

In March 2030, just about four weeks after Darragh's birthday and about a month before T-ball tryouts began, Darragh and I began to play baseball again. We were both bigger and stronger. Darragh signed up for a T-Ball team.

## The 2030 T-Ball Season



First a bunch of kids got together at the park. It seemed like everybody from Wilkes-Barre. Darragh showed up on time and was picked very soon. He hit the ball and could throw already very well.

He and I had been playing for a few years and the coaches immediately picked him for Gerry's Pizza T-Ball Team. Finally, after practicing every day for weeks, Darragh got to play in a game.

### **Darragh's First T-Ball Game Date Finally Came**

When I said, "Hey, Darragh, when are we going to the game today," He already had on his Gerry's Pizza uniform with its orange hat.

The other team, the Nippers from Nanticoke batted first against Gerry's Pizza. Darragh was standing behind a protective net where the pitcher in the Minor League or Little League would play.

Once the game began, any ball that has hit in front of the pitcher's protective net or to the side of the net, Darragh would swoop it up and throw a strike to the First Baseman. O-U-T!

He seemed to know from practice that if he threw too hard, the First Baseman had a hard time with the ball so he threw just fast enough.

All three balls that first inning were in front of the net. It was three-up, three down. In Tee Ball, there is no pitcher but it seemed the "pitcher position", Darragh, had gotten the sides out.

Darragh threw the ball so nicely that Tony Weiss, Gerry's great first baseman, had no problem catching the three perfect throws for outs. Yeah Tony!

Darragh was the first one up in the bottom of the first. He held the bat tightly like I knew he would and he made sure the stamp of the bat was up.

Then as he did with our makeshift Tee in our backyard, he swung as hard as he could and he hit a rocket.

The ball landed in the middle of the outfield and bounced quickly right to the fence. Darragh was fast. He

rounded the bases and scored the first run of the season for Gerry's Pizza.

Yeah Gerry's. Gerry's won the game 14 to 8.

The T-Ball team played ten games that year. In mid-June, there was one game left. Right before the second-last game my dad told us all that he had retired from the band, got a big payout, and bought a big van.

He planned to treat us all by taking all the Petru kids and mom on a huge cross country trip. He said with his bonus, he could afford both the van and the expenses of the trip. I wondered what Darragh was going to think about missing the rest of the season.

Mom had not yet gone back to work because I was still small. So, the family was free to go except for Darragh who was in the middle of his T-Ball season. Dad said it was up to Darragh if we went on the trip.

Darragh asked if it were OK that he stay behind with Mr. Bee, who was like an uncle. Darragh told Dad that he was informed after the game that he had made the All-Stars.

The All-Star games would begin in a few weeks. Darragh knew that Gerry's Pizza would be the champs.

Dad figured out how we all could go and Darragh would be back in time for the All-Stars. He asked Darragh what he thought.

Gerry's Pizza was 8-0 and expected to win their game on Saturday. After their second-last Saturday game, dad wanted to leave for our cross-country van trip hoping to reach the west coast—maybe.

Dad promised Darragh we would all be back for the All-Star game as scheduled.

Dad talked to all the coaches and they all knew Darragh would miss the last game but would be back for All-Stars. He got the OK and the coaches told Darragh to go on the trip but be back to play All-Stars.

Of course, we'd have to win the ninth game.

We did!

## Chapter 3 From Wilkes-Barre to Madison Wisconsin



### **The Bees Agree to Watch the House.**

All season long, Mr. Bee had taken all the Bees, including Barbie and Kimmathee, Dinder, and Davey to Darragh's T-ball games.

Even though Darragh was not going to be playing for a few weeks—the entire Bee family would be in the stands rooting for Gerry's Pizza the following Saturday

for the last game. Mr. Bee promised. Darragh was his #1 kid.

The Bee family promised to go to the season-ending game right after dad asked them just a few days earlier.

Dad dropped the bomb on them suddenly that we would be gone for two weeks or so. Mom gave Mrs. Bee the keys to the house.

Here are two nice pictures of our Mark III Conversion Van right before our trip. It was steady as a rock.

**We all fit in the van**







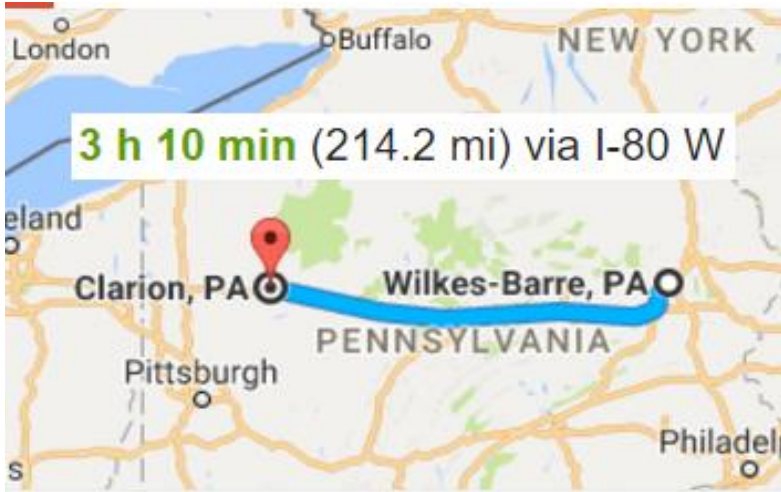
## **And, They Are Off!**

Because of the baseball game on Saturday, we could not leave on the trip until about 4:00 PM. We all were acutely aware that we had to be back in seventeen days for Darragh's big All-Star game.

Once in the van, the four of us kids were thrilled. We had never as a group been in the van for even a full hour. This was exciting.

Mom and dad were their normal trip-beginning nervous selves hoping we had everything packed and that God would give us a safe journey.

Yes, we did all fit well in the van and finally we were on our way. We were talking together right from minute one



It was almost 7:30 PM when we approached Clarion, PA. We did not know how far we would get that day but getting out of town and on the road with six people was our biggest task. We did it!

That part was behind us. We had already traveled 215 miles. Dad through his Triple AAA book had found a Motel 6 with a swimming pool right off Route 80.

The room was just \$29.00. It was much nicer than any of us thought it would be. Mom was pleased because she often did not check how much \$\$\$ dad had tucked away for our trips. The Motel 6 pool was very nice.

We all had a great swim. After we got some burgers, Katie-K and I slept in the bed. Darragh and

Cornelius-C slept on the air mattress on the floor. The trip had begun!

## Madison or Bust!

The next day we were all up early. We went to Church in Clarion while it was almost dark and almost an instant later, we were on Route 80 again. Yes, we were on the road.

We stopped for breakfast and lunch at el-cheapo spots and we all had our sights on Madison Wisconsin, where we arrived about ten hours later at about 6:30 PM. Van talk was civil.

We kids were so tickled we were doing things we had never done.



We had traveled about 620 miles. Since we had never been to Madison WI, we took about an extra half hour to ride around town and see if we could find some fast food.

Dad and mom had apparently forgotten about nutrition facts for this vacation. Don't tell them it was I who said this!

We found Madison very nice but did not plan to spend any additional time there.

Darragh was only seven and I was four and the twins were ten. Darragh kept reminding all of us that we would never see the country if it were not for mom and dad.

Mom and dad wished they had done more planning than just route numbers. And turns.

He said that "If it were not for mom and dad bickering about where we should stay, the trip would have been perfect, like our street, but all of us were ready for something different." Darragh, just a seven-year-old had many insights into life.

## **Keep Moving West**

Madison Wisconsin was very beautiful and very nice. Nonetheless, dad wanted to get up and out early the next morning. His major desire was to keep the Petru van moving west with few distractions.

He wanted to get up quickly in the AM so we could get on the road up to Route 90 to advance our trip further west.

Dad, Brunic Petru, wanted to quickly advance to the bigtime sites. Despite that overriding thought, dad also wanted us to get a perspective of every town into which we travelled during our sojourn.

On our way into this town, we drove around the University of Wisconsin at Madison. It was huge and beautiful. In early evening, we had no hotel reservations. We were again playing it by air. Dad liked that but mom did not.

By happenchance, we found a reasonable hotel that was by a hoagie shop. We checked in and went to the shop for some nice American-type hoagies.

There was no pool in this hotel, but we were tired anyway. We went to bed early and we all slept like logs. The next day dad told us we were going to Mount Rushmore in South Dakota. Dad said it was a haul but we could make it. We were still believers.



## Chapter 4 Madison to Wall Drug Before Mount Rushmore



We were up and out around 6:30 AM. We slept well. Everybody had showered the night before. It was about 170 miles to reach Winona Minnesota on the state's far eastern border.



We were about 150 miles into Minnesota when we saw our first Wall Drug sign on Interstate 90.

At the time, it was about 400 miles to Wall Drug in Wall, South Dakota. It was getting close to noon.

The more Wall Drug signs we saw, the more the four of us were bugging Mom and Dad to make sure we stopped there. They had free ice water and 5c coffee and it just looked like a lot of fun.

Wall Drug signs came in all sorts of shapes including what appeared to be the sides of abandoned tractor trailers. You'd think you were looking at an abandoned trailer from a tractor-trailer combo but it was a Wall Drug "billboard." Seeing more Wall Drug signs was a lot of fun. They are clever.



After a couple hours of making very good time, we had gone more than 200 miles and came face to face with another Wall Drug sign. See it below: I-90 is literally littered (alliteration) with Wall Drug signs.





None of us in the family, including dad, had ever heard of Wall Drug. When we set out from Madison, we had no plans to stop there but it was a proposition to which none of us van dwellers could say “no.”

When I-90 was built and Wall Drug was not directly on its path, the Wall Drug people figured out how to get I-90 traffic to their store. They built an 80-foot dinosaur right off I-90 to attract people to take their exit. What a place.

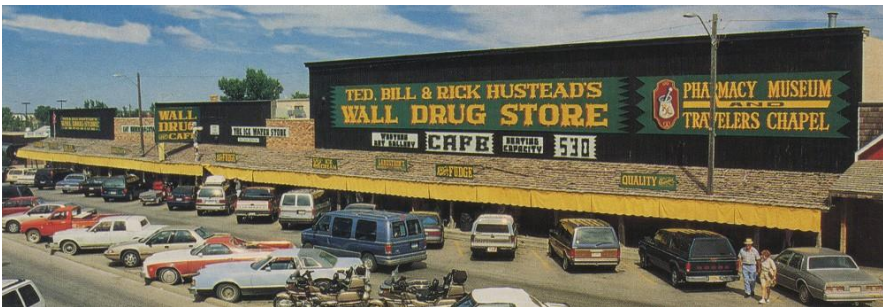
On I-90, we played a little game after we missed a lot of Wall Drug signs. The game was mom and dad’s idea. We were to count the Wall Drug signs on I-90. That really kept us all busy.

Our consensus count was well into several hundred as I recall. I found out that now there are over 500 Wall Drug signs on the roadside.



Eventually, we were at the huge prosauropod herbivore (I think) dinosaur at the Wall Drug Exit from I-90. We were reading signs about it and now here it was.

When dad saw the huge dinosaur, he immediately took the exit and soon we rolled into the Wall Drug Store. We had no idea what to expect.



Mom needed to buy some batteries for her cell phone which we were using at the time only as a camera. We told everybody we did not take a phone.

We needed some supplies also. Wall Drug really does have everything. And while we were buying “everything,” we felt in many ways like we were in an amusement park.



Dad told me that there was once a store in Wilkes-Barre called Mack’s Hardware and they had a sign that said: “If we don’t have it; you don’t need it!”





Dad told Mom when we were leaving that he felt Wall Drug could use a sign like Mack Brothers' Hardware from South Main Street in Wilkes- Barre (now Main Hardware).

Wall Drug did have everything including the unexpected such as Cigar Store Indians, western scenes, roaring dinosaurs in the store, and other neat stuff. It was a fun stop.

I am sorry we did not get to spend more time there. I We were there for just over a half hour. We all had some cheap hot dogs. Then, dad decided we would hustle to Rapid City South Dakota to Mount Rushmore.



Check out this handsome Cigar Store Indian in the picture. It was one of the few of mom's pictures to work.

My dad has a great Osage Indian friend,

whose dad was a chief. His mom was French American.

He got a kick out of things like Cigar Store Indians.

His name is Joseph La Sarge and he lived on the Osage Indian Reservations before he played in the Brunon Kryger Orchestra.

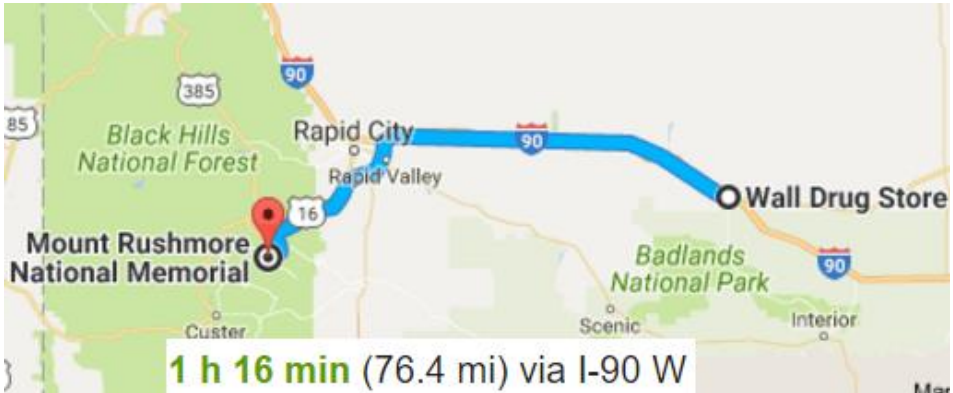
When he finished with Brunon Kryger, the Chief had done so well, he could live anywhere.

So, he took his huge *cache*, which we pronounced *cush*, and dad said he spent this big wad all on fun. Then he went back to the reservation where it was less costly to live. The Chief never played the Sitar again.

We had started so early this day and had made such good time with the entertaining Wall Drug signs that there was still a lot of daylight left.



## Chapter 5 Wall Drug to the Black Hills; Mount Rushmore, Crazy Horse & Deadwood



Back on I-90 and even I knew that we were just 55 miles from Rapid City, South Dakota. and the map legend using dad's trusty calculator told us that we should make it there in 51 minutes.

We did, almost exactly. It was just about dark and it was getting misty. It was cool outside for mid-summer.

Mom confessed in the van that she was fed-up with all the van-travelling and staying in small dinky borderline hotels. She wanted a break. She was calling for a big break in the pattern.

With Mount Rushmore and many other attractions to behold we had all voted when dad gave us the chance to spend a full day in Rapid City and maybe even two.

But I had started to know dad from observation. He would be happy if we could get in and out of town and do the Mount Rushmore Monument in one day. If we did that, I knew dad would be happy.

The original plan had us touring Mount Rushmore after a great night's sleep. Then, on our way out of the monument the next thing we would hit would be Deadwood if we could—but no fanfare.

You'll see soon why dad's plan could not work. Sometimes Mom was a little cantankerous because van-traveling was not her thing. Dad would do anything to make mom happy.

We did find a great hotel—thankfully. It was easy to spot once we got into Rapid City. It was no hassle.

Dad said it cost about \$140 a night and was a bit out of the budget but he said for mom enduring all the van time and the so-so quality hotels, we would do it for her.

We had a great dinner at the Rapid City Hotel. The indoor pool was huge and we enjoyed that and eventually we got tired and went back to the room.

It was a huge suite. I looked at dad like: "Are you kidding?" When he paid the bill, I saw he was not smiling. He might have even been tearing a bit.



We had a cooler and had some sodas and other stuff. We loaded the cooler up every day with free ice from wherever we were staying.

In this hotel, we had to order ice and then Dad said we had to “duke” the guy who brought it. They never brought much! For a great room, somehow, there was no refrigerator and no icemaker was in sight. We loved ice!

We watched a big TV in the third room of the suite which was furnished as if it were a huge Livingroom. There were also two bedrooms so there was no need for anybody to sleep on the floor.

It was mid-June but it was unusually cool in Rapid City. The weather forecast for the next day was unfortunately as bad as the weather outside tonight.

They predicted another grey overcast day for our touring of the great Mount Rushmore. Yuck! I was afraid dad would just chuck it and go for a better weather spot.

I Know that my brothers and sister and I wanted to see the presidents.

Mom said we will see how it is in the morning. We had traveled a lot and were all tired and we slept well. Dad let us all sleep in. That was great. The weather was terrible

It seemed like we had been traveling forever. Mom was right. We all needed a break. We got that break.

The next morning, it was cloudy and drizzly and cool outside with minimal visibility. With the clouds and the drizzle, and the sense of family hopelessness, dad relented for one more day in Rapid City.

Dad figured we'd get a good breakfast and then scoot out to Mt. Rushmore which was just about a half hour away. We were all looking forward to seeing it close. If it was lousy when we got there; we would stay another night.

### **Was Mount Rushmore Great Even on a Clear Day?**

The travel guide book in the room told us the great facts about Mount Rushmore. It was sculpted by Danish-American Gutzon Borglum and his son, Lincoln Borglum.

The Monument features 60-foot (18 m) sculptures of the heads of four United States presidents: George Washington (1732–1799), Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919), and Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865).

The effort to create Mount Rushmore was a project of colossal proportion, colossal ambition and I might also add, colossal achievement. It was built between October 4, 1927 & October 31, 1941 I sure like the word colossal.

The design of the Borglums and their tireless efforts came with a lot of work by many others to build the monument to perfection. It involved the efforts of nearly 400 men and women.

Their duties varied greatly from the call boy to the stone drillers to the blacksmith to the housekeepers. The more we read, the more we wished we could get there right away.

I couldn't wait to tell the other kids at home.

We all felt very patriotic. At breakfast, the restaurant was packed. We were such a large group that ironically, we lucked out.

They had only one larger table available. Our group of six were seated next to a table for two. The two people there were Jake and Isabelle Sorman from Detroit Michigan.

The Sormans had convinced dad that they knew everything but their news for the day was not good.

We heard them tell dad and mom that Mt. Rushmore was closed because of the weather. The clouds surrounding monument were so thick you nobody could tell which of the four stone faces were whom.

The Sormans were very helpful and we are glad dad met them. They said that they planned to visit one or several of the caves in the black Hills of South Dakota.

They added that the caves were reasonably close to Mount Rushmore and they quipped that there would be no concern for the weather in a cave. Hah!

Of all the caves in the area, dad decided we would go to the Rushmore cave and maybe we would even

swing by Mount Rushmore just to see if the fog had lifted—even a little.

This was the closest cave to Mount Rushmore. We were about to experience a new type of journey on this scenic cave tour & as we descended into the famous stalactite filled "Big Room."



The original entrance to Rushmore Cave.

As noted, there are several different caves run by different families in the Black Hills. The Rushmore Cave is just one of many.

I think Dad made a great choice. When we left the cave, we took a van ride to Mt. Rushmore. It was exciting being in the Black Hills.

When we got there, we could see where the monument was but the fog was still too thick to see anything. Unlike most national park monuments. The Visitors' Center was not right next to Mount Rushmore.

Because this was a treat for the eyes, the Visitor's Center was built at about the right spot to get the best picture of this awesome spectacular. You could see all four Presidents straight away.



The teasing of Katie K began that day. It drove mom and dad nuts and almost resulted in a big Boy's Town Penalty. Cornelius-C said Katie looked like one of

the guys on Mount Rushmore—Thomas Jefferson. That was the first-time Katie-K cried on the trip.

When we acted up in the van, we were beginning to see that dad was starting to look like Clarke Griswold as an older man.



I snuck this picture in so you would know why we would not settle for a foggy day.

Besides seeing all the presidents, you could take snapshots or selfies or other camera pictures that showed the detail that you could not have seen if the visitor's center and the monument were adjacent.

We could not see much from the highway through the fog and the drizzle and decided to postpone paying the visitor's fee until the next day. So, we headed back to the hotel and had another nice night.

Somewhere along the way dad had reserved the room for another night. As you can see by the picture that I took below, you could barely see the trees.

Every now and then as the wind blew, it would uncover small arts of one of the President's faces. Dad said it wasn't good enough and we would be back the next day.



We got back early to the hotel. What a lousy day for weather! We nonetheless enjoyed our swim and the great hotel before dinner.

We had dinner at the hotel again. We were even permitted to order vegetables and healthy stuff after all the fast food stuff and goodies.

I could see that it was becoming more difficult for my dad to get the wallet out for all the expenses we were enduring. Hah! His arm had seemed to grow shorter each time he paid. Dinner was great again.

The best news was that Mom was very happy now and she enjoyed the niceness of the hotel. She especially liked that all four Petru kids were having a “time of our life” experience—except when we misbehaved in the van.

The next morning, we were up for the big breakfast buffet early. Dad said we would be losing too much overall trip-time if we stayed another night hoping to get a better glimpse of Mount Rushmore.

Yet, though we all knew he was right, we felt that it was a bummer to be there and not see it clearly.

Before we left for Mount Rushmore, Darragh started bugging dad to see how Breezy our dog and Tabby our cat were doing after so many days of no-contact.

I think he had some other reasons like making sure his Red Hat was resting comfortably. Nobody but I knew it but Darragh had a magical Red Hat. Mom called the Bees who were watching the house and the animals.



Mr. Bee said everything was fine but he did add that he had heard a noise in Darragh's room coming from the third drawer in his dresser within hours of our leaving. He said he had addressed the problem and not to worry.

Mr. Bee said that it was nothing but just in case, he took the Red Hat over to his house where there was a lot more continual activity with the Bee kids enjoying their lives and swimming in our pool every day.

Mr. Bee, for good measure brought our dog and cat, Breezy and Buddy over so the little critters could also have their own special vacation.

Darragh got to say Hi to Mr. Bee for a minute or so. He told Mr. Bee that we were having fun but the weather was lousy and we could not see the rock Presidents.

Mr. Bee said he would help post haste. He and Barbie Bee spoke about the weather problems in front of the Red Hat. We all hoped that the Red hat had some contacts that would make the weather better.

Mr. Bee was the broker of bad news that day. He also gave Darragh the bad news that Gerry's Pizza had lost in their last T-Ball game of the season.

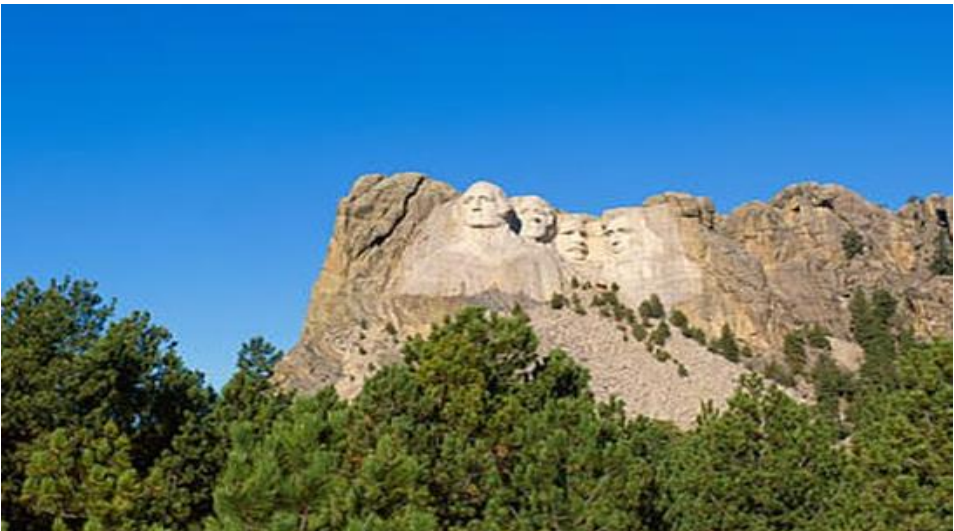
## Mount Rushmore or Bust????

After breakfast, we packed up the van and we were off on a 23-mile journey from the hotel to Rushmore.

It was a little foggy but on this day, we could see the images through the fog and the fog was clearing. We went into the visitor's area where you could get the best view of the mountain.

It was awesome when it cleared about a half hour later. It was colossally and awesomely amazing. Something magical had happened to the weather. It was like a big whoosh had come and then it cleared up.

It is amazing how much the huge rock carvings looked like the Presidents. You'd love Mount Rushmore when you go on your cross-country trip.



Here is a picture of the four presidents without all the rocks:



No wonder Katie-K cried when told she looked like Jefferson. But, they say Jefferson was quite handsome when he was a younger man not busy writing simple things like the US Constitution.

I know my sister Katie-K is very pretty. We were only kidding.

## **Crazy Horse & Deadwood in the Black Hills**

We had just 16 miles to travel but because of the terrain in the Black Hills, Dad said it would take at least a half hour but guessed thirty-five for us to arrive at the Chief Crazy Horse Memorial.

It was another grand carving like Mount Rushmore but still incomplete.

I give Dad credit. It was exactly thirty-five minutes. Dad had given us all a chance to guess. My brother Cornelius-C's stuffed critter named Samuel even got a vote but nobody was close. Dad guessed thirty-five and that's exactly what it was.

Here are two pictures of the Crazy Horse Monument from today. You can see the progress in the first picture and the total vision in the second picture on the next page. What a tribute to an Indian Hero!

### Crazy Horse Monument Today



### Crazy Horse Monument as Planned for the Future



This conceptual illustration by artist Eugene Christopherson is inspired by an earlier master plan for Crazy Horse.

Knowing Dad did not like to go off the beaten path (I-90) for long, I was surprised that he took us to see Wall Drug and I was even more surprised we saw the Indian Chief's monument. I am glad he did.

Maybe Cornelius-C was wrong. Maybe Mom and Dad were not the Griswold's.

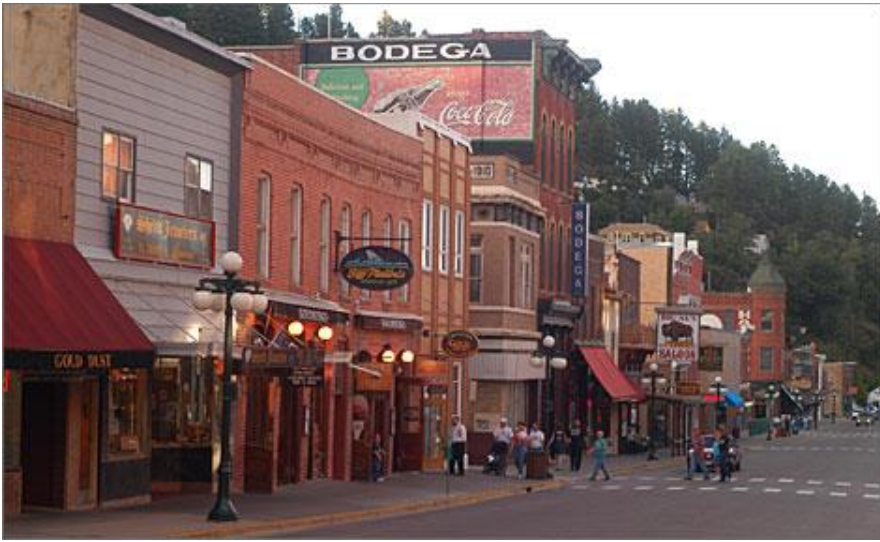
The incomplete carving was awesome. Now, it was time to travel back to I-90 to resume our journey. Dad had told us that right off I-90 was a great western town known as Deadwood.

I can remember watching old westerns and somehow Deadwood always was the name of one of the towns in the movies. It was so close to the Interstate that Dad felt comfortable. He said we be going there.

It was 52 miles away but since we were not on I-90 yet again, Dad bet that it would take us an hour and twenty-five minutes.

Samuel guessed 1 hr. 8 minutes. He was Con's faux friend that he had made in a mandatory sewing class at school. Darragh guessed 1 hr. 19 minutes. Katie-K guessed 1 hr. and Corny himself guessed an hour and 15 minutes.

Deadwood was a magnificent looking old-western town. What a treat just being there.



We pulled into Deadwood exactly one hour and eight minutes later. Samuel had it Deadwood to rights. Hah! I loved writing that!

Samuel had guessed perfectly using Corny as his puppet master.

Dad loved the look of the town. So, did we all.

Dad felt he was in Dodge City Kansas, he said, and Wyatt Earp was still the Marshall. My wonderful father was in a wonderful mood.

We all figured that he had guessed wrong intentionally so one of us would win the small bet and everybody would be able to play the slot machines in Deadwood. Samuel had no ID so he was excluded.

Every now and then, being with the parents going cross country paid off handsomely.



Dad paid us off immediately. He gave us each four quarters and told us we would be able to play the slot machines. He was not kidding. We went into the Deadwood Saloon. Was it newt.

First thing we did was play this realistic human figure game. All these gunslingers were behind this cattle fence getting ready to shoot us. Then the game buzzer when off and we got to shoot back and we nailed them all. Darragh was the best shot of us all.



The shootout above actually occurred on the streets of Deadwood. Were they actors or not?

Mom and Dad enjoyed an adult beverage and we all had Western Swizzles, which were chocolatey and

delicious. There were only a few people there. We ate at the bar. It was big people food but it was delicious despite that.

Mom still loves to play the slot machines and she still hates to lose. I mean she really hates to lose.

Before we had finished our Swizzles, she was right across from us putting some coins in the first machine, knowing dad would replenish her supply if she lost.

She won. We were all excited for her. Then, mom and dad gave us our quarters and we played. It was legal in Deadwood—if your parents were with you.

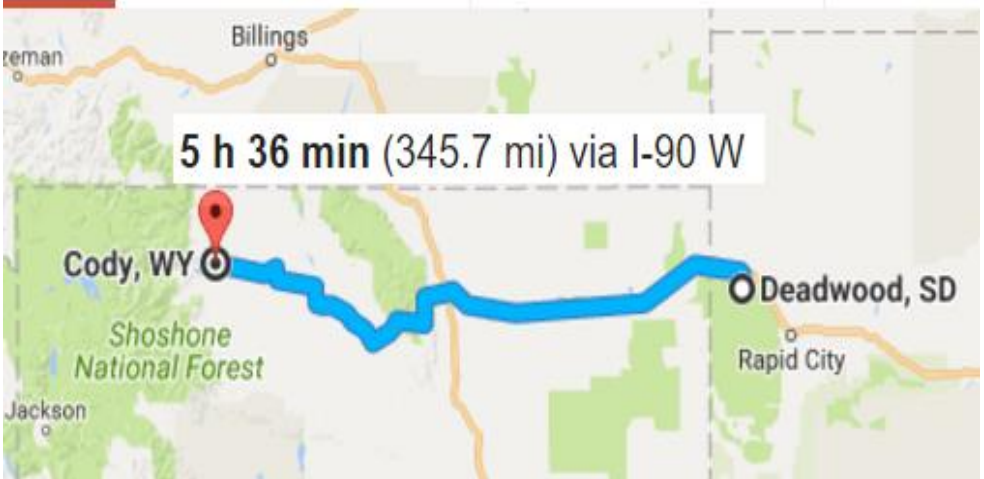
Eventually after about a half hour, one by one we all lost our little grub-stakes as dad called them. We were finally served. It was time to eat. We enjoyed a great lunch of people-food at the bar. We all felt like real dudes.



*Old Style Bar, Deadwood, South Dakota*



## Chapter 6 Good-By Deadwood, SD; Hello Cody, WY!



Dad said it is time to go. We all wanted to stay in Deadwood because we could do adult things with our parents and nothing was illegal.

We had another 350 miles or so to go from Deadwood to Cody, Wyoming, which would be our next stop. Cody was in the on-deck circle for our venture into Yellowstone National park!

In Rapid City, the unexpected two-day vacation from our well-scheduled vacation was great. It had placed us all out of the van for enough time that we had recovered.

We had been suffering from the van malaise that had afflicted all of us but Dad.

So, we all felt that we could take on that short distance and then we would be OK staying in Cody Wyoming for the night. Even Mom was looking forward to Cody Wyoming.

Like most of the time, Dad had no hotel reservations and he did not want to take the time to make them.

We had all turned off our cell phones and promised to leave them off for the whole trip. Dad said we would have to pay the cell phone bill if he heard one beep or click.

So, we just got back in the van and took off. I knew we were just a few miles from I-90 as I frequently peeked at Dad's map and markings. Off we went at 70 miles per hour. Dad was getting better at driving the van for longer lengths of time. I sure love my dad!

Mom and dad joke even today about their kidneys being much better then but even though they could hold it, they had to stop on the side of the road many times for Darragh.

He drank water after water, and when the van pulled over, he would open the side door wide where nobody driving on the highway could see. He would ask everybody inside to turn away as he killed the roadside weeds.

We made the trip to Cody in less than five hours despite Darragh-induced stops. It was amazing. I remember Cody being a flat land with a massive beautiful set of mountains surrounding it. By itself, it had little to offer.

We saw wild horses (mustangs) far away on the wide-open sagebrush flat on the north side of Scenic Highway 14 between Cody and Greybull in Wyoming. It was all simply amazing for any kid with wide eyes.

We never got sick of nature's beauty. Darragh, Katie-K and Cornelius-C rarely said anything. They just loved the beauty of the trip so much.

Darragh was always thinking of his Red Hat but he could not mention it to anybody as it was our secret.

In a conference conversation with Mr. Bee that I overheard. Mom and Dad were talking to the Bees. As difficult to believe as this may sound, Mrs. Bee said that The Red Hat looked like it was sick and might not make it as a live hat for too long.

This may not sound believable but Mrs. Barbie Bee said she could not let anything happen to the hat. Mom and Dad pretended to not know but they helped make the Red Hat well again.

In the conference call of 20 XX, between mom and dad and Mr. Bee and Barbie Bee, Mr. Bee agreed that our friend, The Red Hat did not look so good and even he could not figure it out.

Again Darragh, at just seven years old was wiser than his years. Butted into the call and asked if the Red Hat could be brought into the room and they could all leave for a minute or two,

Nobody knows what was said, but the Red Hat turned colors from maroon to the brightest red of all. We all know what that meant. We would all be home in about another week.

### **Looking for a place to stay – A frequent theme**

Again, since we were not sure how far we would go, Dad claimed that he had no prior arrangements for a hotel or motel. Yet he found us the Big Bear Motel. It was much more elegant and clean as one might think! Mom was very happy.

We stayed on the left side of the picture you see. It had a laundry right by our room.

I can remember mom getting up early the next morning taking a lot of time out to get some of our laundry washed. She was sure wonderful to us kids on the trip.



Cody was never one of the planned stops on the “cross country trip,” but it was a fun stop nonetheless.

Our motel was a bit outside of town and we just had to see downtown Cody before we left for Yellowstone National Park. It was a little later than usual for us to be off but we got in the van & went to Downtown Cody.

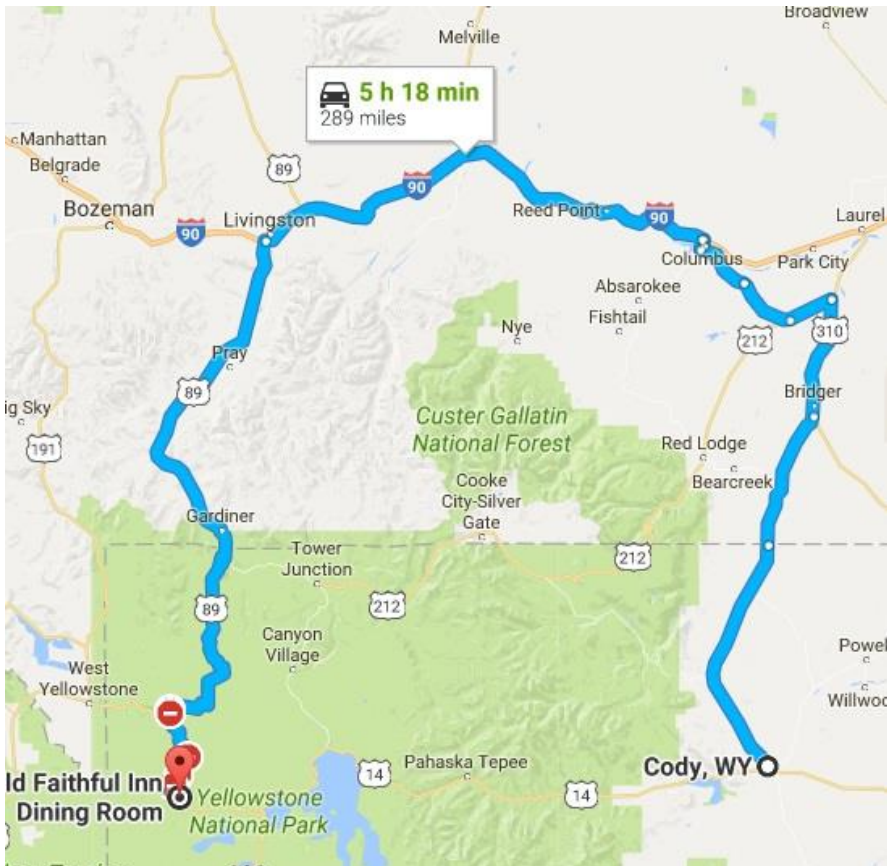
When you come into Cody Wyoming, you almost cannot miss what I would call a museum but, which is technically the Buffalo Bill (Cody) Center of the West.

Neither the twins, Darragh, or myself (Liam) wanted to stop so soon after taking off from our motel. But, we sure enjoyed seeing the Buffalo Bill Center. And, I am now pleased to say that we did stop.

We went into the Center and it was very interesting. Buffalo Bill Cody was quite a guy.



# Chapter 7 We're Going to Yellowstone National Park



We were headed for Yellowstone National Park. That was a place that Katie-K and Cornelius-C told me was only known to people from Wilkes-Barre who read the geography and history books.

They had never met a living person who had ever seen the Park.

Katie-K and Cornelius-C were the oldest Petru siblings and they were very smart as was Darragh. Like us all, they were so thrilled we were going to live it, rather than just get it from a text book.

Maybe Mom and dad were not so bad!

Off we went but it seemed like Dad never found I-90 again. The van was still running good but we had gone as far west as Dad planned to go.

We had some donuts at the Motel before we left so we could afford a few wrong turns. We were ready to roll.

Dad seemed to know the way. He had about 8,000 maps (OK he had a lot though) and he had the GPS which, per Mom, seldom worked.

## **First Stop—Old Faithful**

There are lots of national treasures in Wyoming. Yellowstone is just one. To go from Cody to Yellowstone, as you can see on the map that I scrounged up, Dad had to backtrack by going North.

I could see Dad wanted to go west. The mountains are so high and tough to drive; many drivers avoid them completely. Look at the map above and notice the roads are built to avoid the mountains.

Dad had plotted our route to Yellowstone. Our first stop was to be Old Faithful, the trusty geyser.



To refresh your memory, a geyser is a hot spring in which water intermittently boils, sending a tall column of water and steam into the air.

The distance to Old Faithful was estimated at 289 miles and the expected time, because of the mountain roads, was 5.5 hours. Look at all the effort to get around the mountains. We did it!

We had plenty of time to get to Old Faithful so we could wait the expected time when we got there to see this huge geyser blow its top. I could not wait. We all had to go to the Rest Rooms when we got there, but we very well would have missed the geyser if we had.

Dad did his best on the windy roads with this big van. Dad had heard that the Park favorite, the Old Faithful Inn would be a remarkable place to stay.

Dad had not made reservations because they were closed a year in advance. Without reservations, his plan was to take advantage of a cancellation. It was iffy at best. But first, the Geyser.

I will deliver the full family lamentations after we finish the story of our arrival at the Old Faithful Geyser at Yellowstone National Park.

Most of us as kids had learned that Old Faithful erupts every 35 to 120 minutes for 1 1/2 to 5 minutes. Years ago, Old Faithful was more regular but geology changes things over time.

Its maximum height ranges from 90 to 184 feet. It is not the biggest or the most regular geyser in Yellowstone, a very active volcanic site, but it is the biggest and most faithful regular geyser.

## **We're Here! Now What?**

Eventually since we had the right directions, we reached Old Faithful. We found one of the few parking spaces that were still available. It had been some time since we had all taken our bio breaks.

Katie-K said she could not hold it any longer. Dad asked a guy going towards the crowd at what seemed to be a shallow lake how much time we had and he looked back in his hurry and said, any minute now.

Dad asked mom to see if possibly Katie-K could hold for just a few more minutes. Mom took over from there and all of us quickly marched about forty yards to where everybody was standing by a small but dry lake.

Since it goes off all the time, we were able to find a standing spot. There were over 100 people there. When it blew, it was really something and Katie-K was OK.

It is far more impressive when you are close.  
Wow!! We had made it!



It took about five minutes to finally stop squirting. It was huge. Katie-K and Mom were OK. Before the crowd left, they headed immediately for the ladies' room. and the boys went to the men's room.

It had been awhile for all of us. We were glad we held it in as none of us wanted to wait as much as an hour or more for the next faithful eruption.

## **Now what?**

Dad had heard the Old Faithful Inn would be a remarkable place to stay and without reservations, and so as noted, that was the plan.

Now that we know what happened when we reached Old Faithful, let me show you a picture of the outside of the beautiful Old Faithful Inn. Then, we'll look at an outstanding inside picture.

### **Old Faithful Inn, Beautiful and A National Park Treasure**



Dad had heard about how beautiful the Old Faithful Inn Lodge was and so it was about 3:00 PM and we went into the lodge, hoping to stay the night. Look at this picture on the next page. It was remarkable inside.

## Inside of the Old Faithful Inn Better than the Outside



## One more picture of the Old Faithful Lodge – Dining Room





Notice the exposed beams in this dining room / cocktail area. The whole place was like this. I love that look. Dad thought it was the nicest place he had ever seen.

Dad went to the front desk and asked to get a room. They said they had been booked for about year. He asked if there were a chance and they said there were a few waiting in line ahead of him but there was a chance.

Then they said that sometimes they have no-shows. Dad said we would wait until it was definite that we could not stay there. And we did. We went into the adult lounge. It was beautiful as I recall.

We had snacks to tide us over and Mom and Dad had adult beverages and we had some nice lighter drinks. It was very nice. Mom took us around the whole place like as if she was a tour guide to see how beautiful it was.

It was the nicest place any of us had ever seen in our lives. Impressive! Wow~

Dad waited until 6:30 and nobody had canceled and so we did not get in and there was no hope to get in.

## **Off to West Yellowstone, Montana**

We asked where we could find a place and they said that West Yellowstone Montana was not far away

and they had hotels. They said it was three minutes away.

Here is what I learned after overhearing dad's having such a tough time getting out of the park and into Montana.

We all assume that mileages seldom equal times and on this we are correct. While the posted speed limit in Yellowstone is 45 MPH, you can seldom count on being able to go that fast.

There are way too many variables when driving in Yellowstone to simply convert distance to time.

Drivers must factor in things like, time of day, roadwork, traffic, weather, road curves, and most importantly the wildlife activity and the stoppages that they cause, a.k.a. "Buffalo or bear jams."

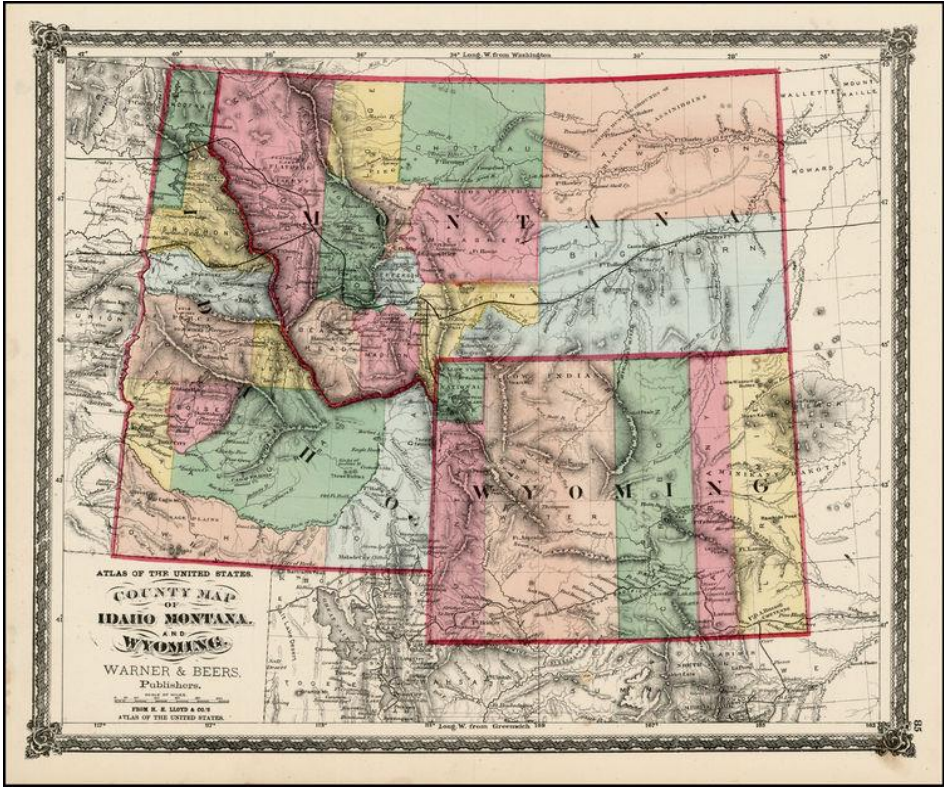
We do not get such things in Pennsylvania.

The estimates from the experts on the Internet who often drive the 32 miles from Old Faithful to West Yellowstone to Old Faithful say it might take a careful driver anywhere from 45 minutes to well over an hour.

The park and inn workers have no problem in advising drivers to cool it. They say that drivers are presumably there to enjoy the park, so relax and enjoy even the waiting when necessary!

In our case, once on the road, we were in a place that dad did not understand well and we had to first find the exit thirty-two miles away.

We originally had no plans of visiting Montana but it was the closest place for lodging and we were off.



Look at the map above right in the middle. Yellowstone Park is in green. You see Montana is always above Wyoming except for one place.

Look at the upper far left of Wyoming. Dad had never closely examined maps of Montana or Wyoming or Idaho maps very closely.

Thus, we had no idea that there was a little piece of Montana sticking down on the west side of Wyoming so Dad's bearings were off a bit.



Make sure you see that little Arrowhead shaped tan (Light grey in B/W) area right next to Yellowstone Park on the far upper left of Wyoming.

Dad had done a great job but he lost it trying to get out of the park. He did get us all to West Yellowstone, which surprisingly for all of us, was not in Wyoming; it was in Montana, a state that was never on our cross-country plan.

When we got there, it was dark and all lit up like this postcard:



## **The Night of Terror! (Mom!)**

It was a neat looking town but all the hotels in the lit-up area were occupied. We were lucky to find anything. Dad wanted to stop because it looked so friendly but we kept looking to find hotel more likely to be unoccupied.

I'll never forget that night in Montana after Dad stopped at all the good hotels in town and then when

there was no room, he got us a spot at the very end of town before the wilderness began.

Dad had found a place with enough space to pack us all in. It was available and cheap. Dad was pleased. Mom did not like how it looked.

Only after we checked in and all the stuff was in the room did Dad notice on his last trip to bring in the water and the coolers that there were moving items on the outside of the hotel.

## **The Rochitio des Cocheros Were unsettling**

Somebody once told me the title for this section might be translated as “The roach coaches were very unsettling.”

They were water bugs or as they are known more colloquially, roaches. Dad told me the next day as we prepared to leave that he hoped they were not inside the rooms.

But they were like a non-flying swarm of mosquitos outside the place on the exteriors of all the rooms. Whew!

How could they not be inside? Dad intended not to tell Mom.

Mom needed something and did not tell Dad or he would have gotten it. She just went out and got it and then noticed the bad guys all over the outside of the place.

She hurried back in and turned the lights on and kept the lights on all night.

The motel probably could have saved on the electricity bill by simply having an exterminator kill the unwelcome guests.

It was a tough night for sure. Mom did not sleep a wink. She was with us in our bunk. I was barely awake but I heard Dad snoring in the morning early when it was almost light. Nothing interrupts his sleep.

Mom woke him up and said: "Let's get out of here quickly." Don't say anything about anything. When we got in the van, Mom almost immediately dozed off. Katie-K and Cornelius-C felt they were watching reruns of a Griswold movie.

## **The Skinny on Fat Water Bugs**

An aside on water bugs. Before I wrote this section, I researched roaches and water bugs. Water bugs are in the roach family but they are different from what we know as roaches.



They are typically bigger and are likely to bite humans. I did not know this then nor did mom or I fear things would have been much worse that night. Here is a little bit about these nasty pests.

Water bugs in contrast to cockroaches do bite people and their bites are painful. Their mouth parts are designed to suck fluids. Additionally, like flies, water bugs inject digestive juice into the human body and then extract liquefied tissues which their juices have killed.

Some water bugs such as the backswimmer and eastern toe-biter can attack your bare feet underwater.

Nobody was very awake when we took off out of West Montana to reenter Yellowstone National Park. We had

wasted a lot of time waiting for a room to open the prior day so there was still lots to see.

We quickly found a Dunkin Donuts. We got coffees, teas, juices, and other stuff heading out of town back into the West Entrance to Yellowstone National Park.

Mom was still upset about the roaches. She wanted to get to Jackson Hole Wyoming as quickly as possible.

We buzzed the park for hours observing the hot sulfur springs, mini geysers, mineral springs, and other spooky smoking natural things. There were always cars parked where the neat things could be found.

Even Mom, when we woke her up when the van stopped, liked the sights and sounds of Yellowstone. We probably could have stayed there for a lot more days and never would have been bored once.

At one point, I saw a small lake with bubbling water just about a few feet deep. It looked like if you fell in, your leg would be hard boiled before you got it out.

In many of these sights there were pressure treated lumber wooden pathways that would go out several hundred yards to give the tourists a great look at the geothermal activity.

It was amazing. None of us, including Dad and Mom wanted to go out very far on these pathways. It was spooky—almost like science fiction. It was like how people would have to live on Mars if we ever get there.

Coming from any of these attractions we were always glad to get back on the earth. Then it was time to leave. Right before we left. this is one of the spectacular sites we saw. I forget its name.

See the wooden pathway? Some springs had the deck over the springs!



Isn't that amazing...even now that I see it in this small page size. Did they bring the steam in from Mars? Look at the narrow pedestrian bridge above. What happens when the hot spring decides to grow?

We were getting mentally ready to renew our journey west. But, first we had to go south. If we ever got to the West Coast, it would be mid-continent such as San Francisco.

So, Dad knew we needed to go south to get there. We had come across I-90 to Wyoming and we would need to get south to I-80 to get to San Francisco. Route 80 actually goes directly to San Francisco.

## Chapter 8 Yellowstone National Park to Jackson Hole Wyoming & Grand Tetons



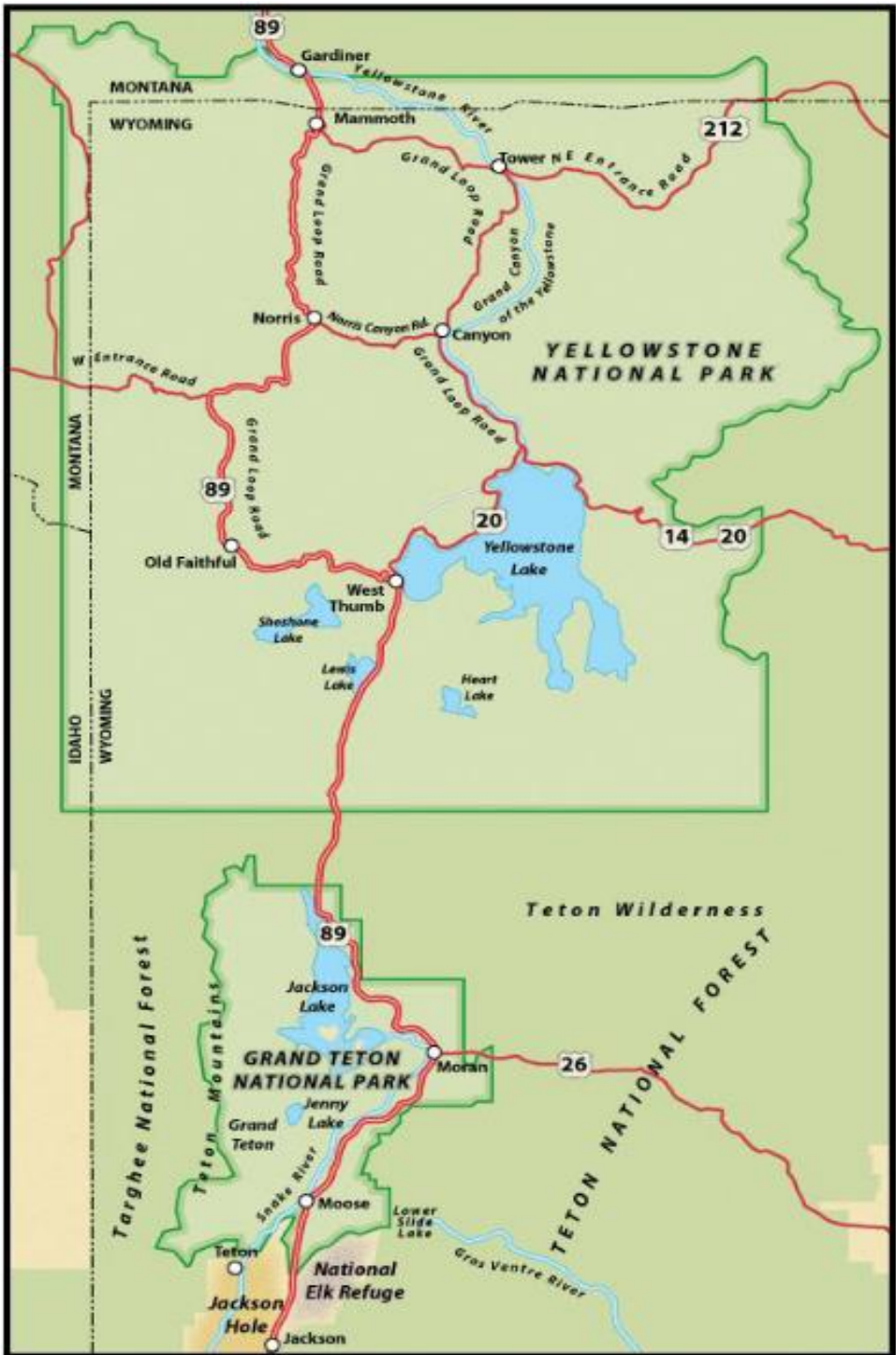
**1 h 12 min** (57.3 mi) via US-191 S/US-89 S

Once we began to go south, the “van people” all discussed plans to have a somewhat late lunch in a place called Jackson Hole, Wyoming. It was our first destination after the Park; from there it was Utah

Mom said that lots of Movie Stars lived in Jackson. We had milled around in the morning in Yellowstone, both driving and stopping for great scenes and sights.

We went East first and then south to see different sights than when we came in to Old Faithful. We also saw herds of Buffalo and antelope on the side of the road in our travels.







Yellowstone was 100% amazing. Jackson Hole was about an hour away from Yellowstone's gate and we did not have to go into West Montana to get there.

We had been traveling east and then south within the park. We were visiting the many attractions such as several hot springs, etc. that we had missed the prior day.

The Park was scenic and beautiful. So, we were already positioned on the southwest end to take the southern exit on the west side of Yellowstone. I would love to go back some day to Yellowstone to get another eyeful.

The area from Yellowstone Park to Jackson Hole and beyond is one of the most scenic parts of the USA.

To get to Jackson Hole you can go to the other side of the Grand Tetons and go through Idaho or like us, you can go out the bottom of Yellowstone and down Route 89.

By the way, Route 89 is a great route. It would take you through seven different National Parks if you stayed on it.

I have read since we took this trip that there is no ugly way to get to Jackson Hole from Yellowstone. The route that goes through the south entrance of Grand Teton that connects to US191/89 is amazing.

I am reliving the trip as I write this. We had always planned to take US 191/89 south and we held to our plan. We were tempted to take Teton Park Rd that would also go right into Jackson. By taking it south we would have seen some beautiful lakes and wildlife in many forms.

We also thought about taking Moose Wilson Rd and we did for a very a very brief time after exiting the park. We got a short look at some of the best scenery anywhere. We doubled back to get on 191/89. Dad loved the look of the area.

I can sort of remember approaching Moose Wyoming but I am not positive. Even when we were not in Moose, we saw lots of Moose, some Bear, Elk, Deer, even Otters and more. The Park had a ton of wildlife. We were in our glory.

If we stayed on that route, we would have driven through Teton Village and turned left on Teton Pass Hwy. Instead we stayed on 191/89 for the rest of the way to Jackson Hole.

Before we knew it, we were in Jackson, just ten minutes from Moose.

This may not be exact but it is how I remember it. It sure was a lot of fun. Mom and dad were extra nice. They knew when we hit Jackson that we were starving.

Though we did not go to the Grand Teton National Park per se, we were close. I do not recall paying park fees for the Grand Tetons. This is what the Grand

Tetons looked like from most of the spots by Jackson Hole, Wyoming. Wow! There were lots of road stops to catch this view.



Jackson Hole as a town, looked to me like an old western spot that had been spiffed up for the times. It was clean and beautiful.

Mom got a bug to go shopping. It seemed like forever since we had eaten so Dad was ready for some eats and some refreshments.

Mom took Katie-K with her and they got something to eat quickly before they began their shopping spree.

The boys went with Dad. We got to sit on bar stools and enjoyed our cokes. Darragh and I split a big

hamburger with fries and Cornelius-C had almost half of Dad's huge Bison Burger.



We learned later that mom and Katie-K stopped at a Dunkin Donuts in their travels and ate something. It was about 3:00 PM when we got together again. We were ready to leave. We took off again after we all piled into the van.

## Chapter 9 Jackson Hole Wyoming to Logan Utah



We were headed to Utah, and as happens quite frequently in a semi-ad-hoc trip, we had no idea where we would stop to stay overnight.

We pulled over a lot to see the scenery several times. The Grand Tetons are magnificent as was much of the road, until it got dark.

Though I know it was just supposed to take us three and a half hours to get to Logan Utah from Jackson, it took us a lot longer. We also got stuck in a big traffic jam in the middle of nowhere.

It was beautiful nonetheless, until it got dark. When it got dark, with all the trees, it was pitch black.

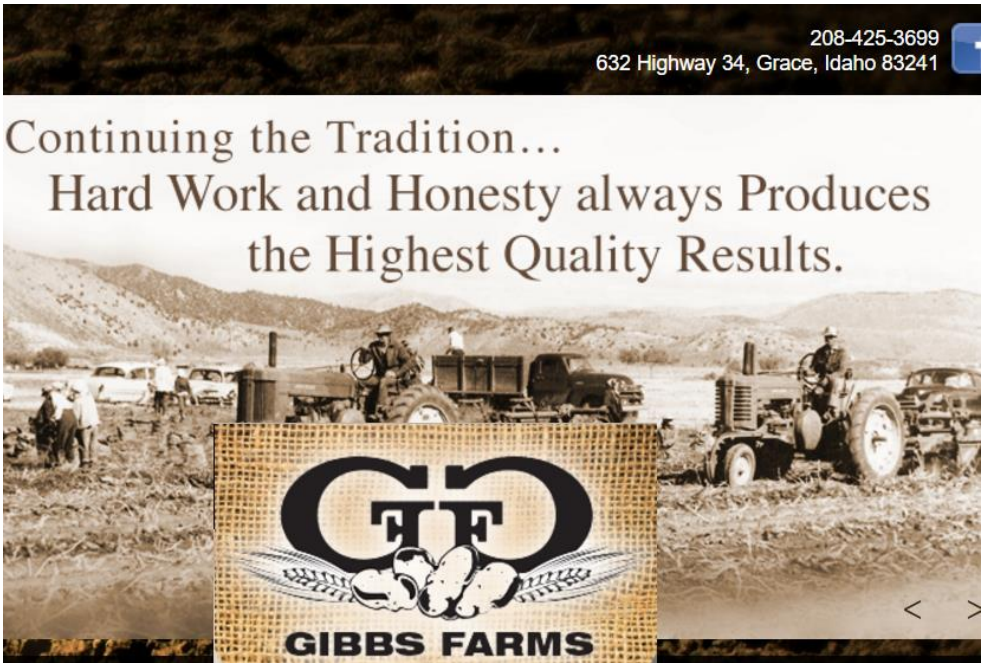
We traveled through Idaho on Idaho Route 34. We got on ID-34 S shortly after leaving Jackson Hole. It was a two-lane road that was very hilly and winding with deep dark forests and a lot of farmland.

There were lots of reasons why we were going so slow. We were behind farm equipment and there was an accident and other reasons. It seems like it was about dusk when we were pulling into Grace Idaho.



Mom started to get nervous which made us all nervous as we were not making good time and there were few directions or route signs on the highway. She thought we were lost.





Dad was fine and because he was fine, we kids were all fine. When it got to be dusk, we still were not sure where we were and had seen nothing for miles and miles and miles.

We were going up and down continually from small mountains to valleys. It was a different kind of ride.

We did not get a good look at all the Potato Farms but Gibbs Farms impressed us all as we were heading by Grace, Idaho. We felt we had to get to Utah so we kept moving.

When we got back into unpopulated areas again. Mom got another reason to get scared. We all could not help but notice when a huge crack of lightening shot in front of us.

This was followed by many other lightening cracks in the distance in the valley as we approached.

Mom and Katie-K were scared but like I said dad was fine so it averaged out that we were all mostly fine. There seemed to be nobody else on the road. Mom wondered: “What did they know?”

Dad said it was heat lightening as there was no storm. It was a little scary I think even for Dad. We kept seeing lightening for about a half hour. Eventually, we got used to it. We were all still OK.

By the way, every now and then Clarke Griswold was being played by my dad on this trip. As much as I love my dad, he was wrong about the heat lightening. Cornelius-C looked it up on his cell phone.

He found out that heat lightning is just normal lightning from a thunderstorm that is too far away for the sounds of thunder to be transmitted. Neither of us decided to tell dad.

Mom had heard of heat lightning also and dad’s explanation had calmed her down.

Not too long after all the lightening. it got dark. I mean it was pitch black. There was no moonlight with all the trees overhanging on the road. The trees blocked even the starlight. It seemed like forever. We were glad the van lights worked so well.



Eventually, we saw a light in front of us and it became a few lights and finally it began to look like a town. It was a small town for sure. But, what town was it? At that point, we were not sure what state we were in.

Dad thought it had to be Logan Utah almost at the very top of the state off 89 and of course ID-34. If it was not Logan it was someplace like it. It was about 10:00 at night. The town looked closed.

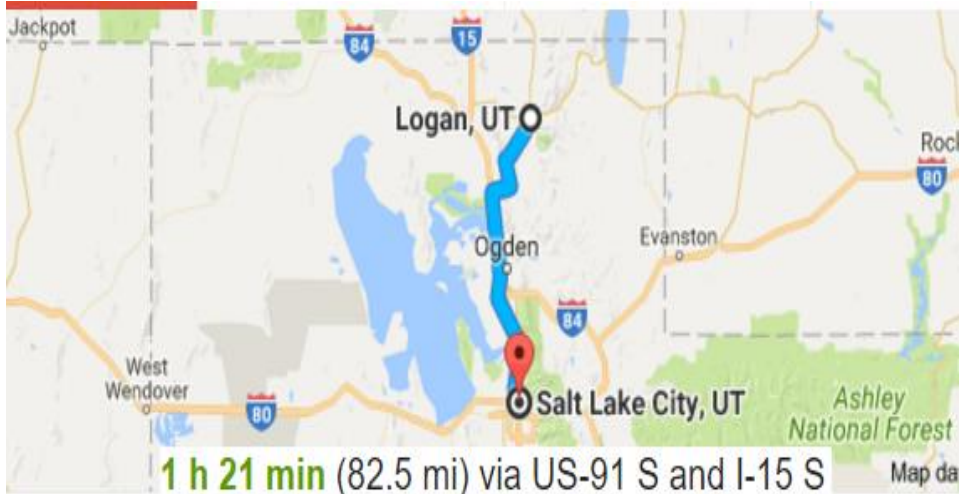
We did not know where we were but we drove into the town nonetheless and almost right away we found a hotel that had suites rather than rooms. We got a suite for the night.

Were we ever glad we were not on that strange road any longer. It was the scariest of several scary rides we had on this trip. Nothing was open even in the hotel so we got some things from the vending machine and called it a night.

We had drinks in our cooler. As hungry as we were, after a small bag of chips, we all got to sleep. When we got up, we were still starved and could not wait for breakfast.



# Chapter 10 Logan Utah to Salt Lake City Utah



It was about our sixth or seventh day but we were not counting at that point. We knew that we had to get back for Darragh's All-Star Game. We had a well-deserved great breakfast and took off early for Salt Lake City.

We went down Route 91. It was about 80 miles away. It took us about two hours however, as we pulled over a few times because the scenery was simply awesome.

Dad said we were not going to get stuck without a hotel room in Salt Lake City. So, about noon we found a nice place to stay in Salt Lake City. We planned to stay two nights.

There was a lot to do but for our first day there, Dad and mom said it was time to relax by the hotel pool. We had some fast food for dinner the first night.

Then, we went back to the hotel as we planned to hit the Big Lake the next day.

Here is a panorama postcard of the city. It sure was beautiful.



## **Day Two in Salt Lake City – A Big Day**

The next morning, we walked to church. We planned to stop for breakfast on our way to the Great Salt Lake, the largest Salt Water Lake in the US.

On our way to church we walked with a nun who had been admitted to the convent with two children after her husband had passed away. She told us many things about being a Catholic in Utah. It was very interesting.

Katie-K still talks about the fact that the church was being renovated and we had to go in the basement under the scaffolding for Mass. She keeps forgetting that the church was under construction.

It was about a half hour ride from the hotel to the Great Salt Lake. We drove around a lot of the lake but it was way too big to drive the full distance.

Surprisingly, we found no parks or swimming areas. Maybe we had not gone far enough.

The next day, after our second-night stay, we would decide whether we were heading back home or moving on. It all depended on whether Darragh would forego his T-Ball All-Star game.

Here is a picture of the Great Salt Lake. We all wished it was nicer. Even the rocks were not attractive as the seagulls had had their way with them.



The blackish rocks, which looked like chunks of old asphalt ripped out from the streets of New York City, had white “caps” from all the seagull activity.

There were tons of gulls and like seagulls they were all hungry. They would almost run in to you if they thought you had a morsel that you were not sharing. It reminded me of Alfred Hitchcock’s The Birds!

The only thing I found remarkable about this lake is that it was huge. It was not very scenic or pretty. In fact, it was downright dirty and ugly. The picture above is one of the nicer pictures of the lake.

## Reviews of the Lake Are Not Good!

Other visitors who wrote about The Great Salt Lake were not as kind as I am being here. If we would have known what it looked like and what it offered, we would have thought twice about making it part of the trip.

We got to see just a few other portions of the lake. One section looked like it was open for the public. It was on a very sandy natural beach. There were just two trailers set up as shops by the shore.

Mom bought a few trinkets in the trailer but that was all there was to see. As noted, there was a lot of seagull residue that whitened the tops of the rocks nearby.

Overall it was disgusting to be frank. One day we may find the many pictures we took of Salt Lake. But, nobody is inclined to care enough to go find them.

## Horse & Buggy Rides

We really had done a lot for just one full day but after dinner, we were all ready for more.

This second night after a great dinner, we took a horse and carriage ride around the town. It was about an hour or more long. It was wonderful.

We started when it was light and finished when it was dark. Salt Lake City was beautiful at night. Our

Guide was Catholic like us and she shared a lot about the culture of the Mormons and their tithing etc.

It was very interesting. We had a great day. We had begun with church, and then the huge lake, and now the horse and buggy ride. Who could ask for more?

We have some pictures of some beautiful sights that we saw on our Carriage ride. There is something we need to talk about first regarding the horse and buggy rides.



In 2030, while on the ride, we were unaware that at one time the horse and buggy rides were banned by Salt Lake City Council It happened one summer in 2013.



Jerry, a well-known, beloved 13-year-old carriage horse, collapsed on a busy street in downtown Salt Lake City. Jerry sadly died shortly after the incident. He was a fine and loyal, well-mannered and well-liked horse.

Council immediately banned buggy rides in downtown. They say it was a long-time coming for activists and animal lovers in finding redemption in Jerry's death.

The Salt Lake City Council unanimously voted to ban horse-drawn carriages in the capital city, with the sole exception of parades and certain free-expression activities.

In 2025, with major innovations in technology, the horses and buggies were brought back. This time the buggies, such as the one in the picture were equipped with special Limceum battery motors.

The silent motors are attached to the back axel and they make it effortless for the horse to walk with the carriage. The batteries hold a charge for over an hour and take just 15 minutes to fully recharge.

Carriage rides are now limited to 45 minutes. It has worked out well since the motors were installed. Passengers do not hear the motors at all.

Moreover, when the temperature is over 90 degrees, the horses are either taken off-duty or in more and more cases, they get insta-shade with an electric powered covering, plus the carriage can gently push the horse to further reduce the burden.

The covering also showers cold mist on the horses while they are moving and for five minutes after a fare. Chalk up another victory for technology.

Here is the Temple, which we passed while on the carriage ride. It is beautiful. Some other scenes that would be captured from the buggy follow:

### The Temple







## Are we going back home?

The next morning, we had a quick breakfast and we were off. Then came the final moment of truth when we were in the van and we hit the juncture of I-80 which was right by Salt Lake City.

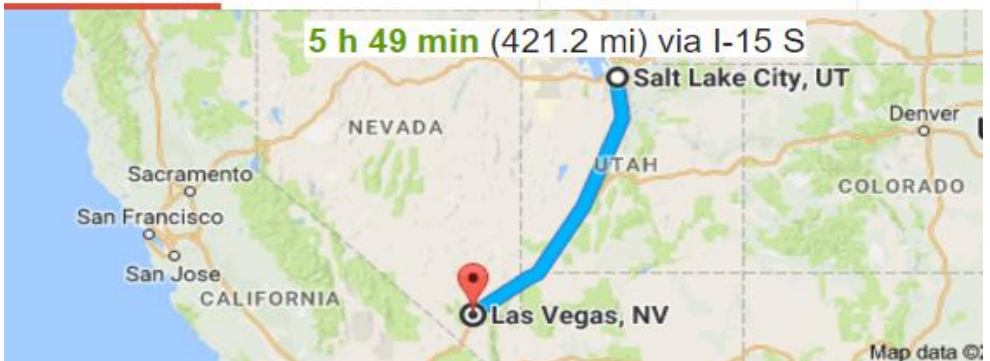
We had not really been talking much about it but it looked like God wanted a decision then and now. When we saw the sign for Las Vegas, it was decision time.

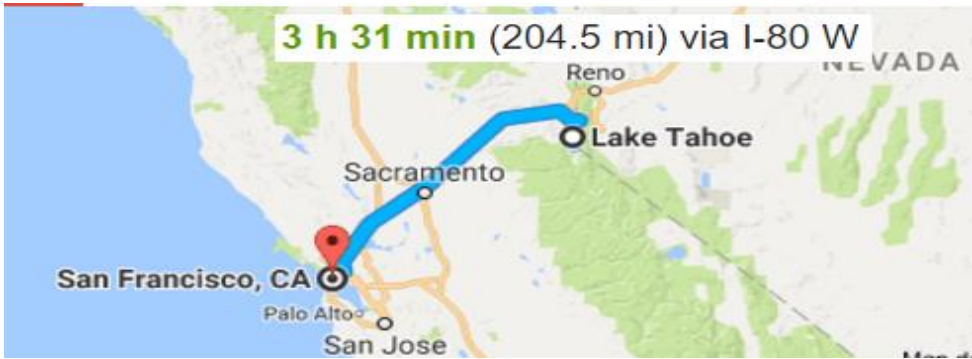
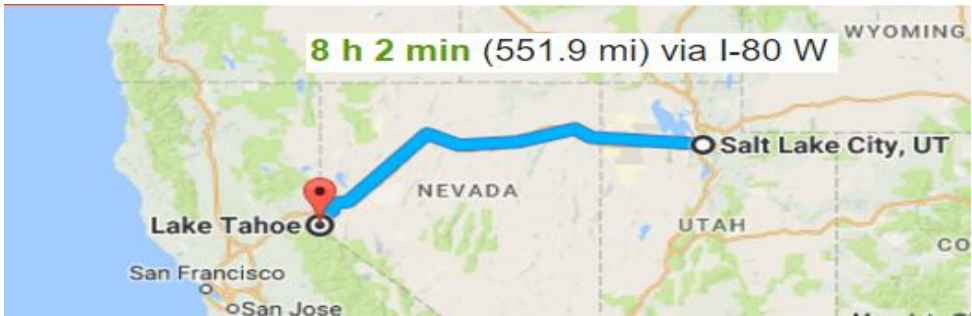
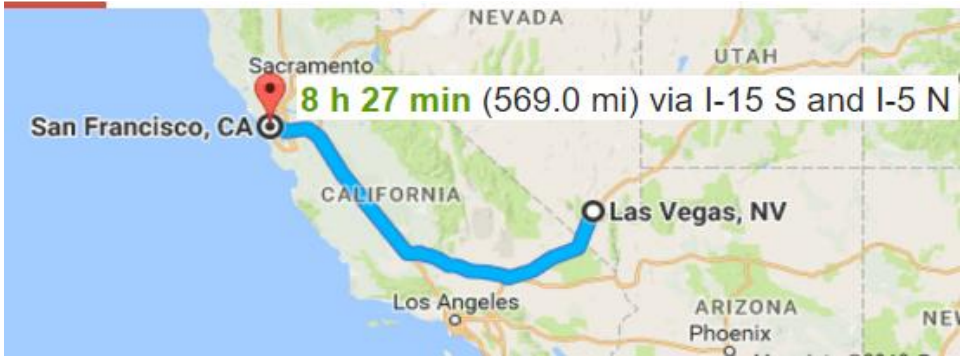




All of us in the Van, can recall the conversation with Darragh about whether we needed to go home or we should keep going towards the West Coast. Darragh decided he wanted to play ball,

We had made a bargain. We were all prepared to keep the bargain. If Darragh was not so loyal to his team, in 500 miles, we would have been in Las Vegas, and after a day or two, we would have been back on route to San Francisco.





Since this trip, dad and mom have taken us to San Francisco. We flew out a few years ago, and visited San Francisco and we took a van drive to Anaheim and saw Disneyland. That was not to be on this trip.

As you can see by the maps, to reach San Francisco using Las Vegas as an interim stop, it would

be almost 1000 miles further, and it take about fourteen hours in total,

We would use I-15 South and I-5 North as the routes to get there. I-5 intersects with Route 80.

To reach San Francisco using Lake Tahoe as an interim stop, it would be a little more than 750 miles further, and it take about eleven and a half hours in total.

We would go via Route 80 West, which just happens to be about 15 miles from Wilkes-Barre on the way home. Of course, coming home, we would be using Route 80 East.

Mom said that she was OK with Lake Tahoe instead of Las Vegas. Unlike the Great Salt Lake, Lake Tahoe is one of the most beautiful lakes in the world.

It is located half in Nevada and half in California. Just as in Nevada, there are several Casinos. Unlike Las Vegas, The Lake at Lake Tahoe is so big there are lots of water recreational areas.

One time I was there and we rented Jets Skis, and we took out a paddle boat, and we swam on a beach that looked like the ocean. This time, it was time to go home.

We all knew we had given up a lot for our brother Darragh. But, he was worth it.

And, we had agreed!

## We all wanted what we promised Darragh

Darragh had been a good kid on the trip. He was never sure we would keep our end of the bargain. He was glad we all chose to do so. There was no vote necessary. Everybody spoke out for Darragh.

We were heading home. Case closed. Nobody was ready to disappoint Darragh. This was important.

So, we had decided we were not going to Las Vegas or further west, but the point of decision was right on the highway sign I showed a few pages back.

To start our trek home, we of course got on Route 80 East, which was the opposite direction from Las Vegas.

We had come from Route 90 West and had gone south through Wyoming and Idaho to Salt Lake City, Utah. We were now going on I-80 East which intersected with I-81 North just a few miles below Wilkes-Barre.

We saw a few more signs for Las Vegas and each time, Dad expected Mom to override our plans and say let's go.

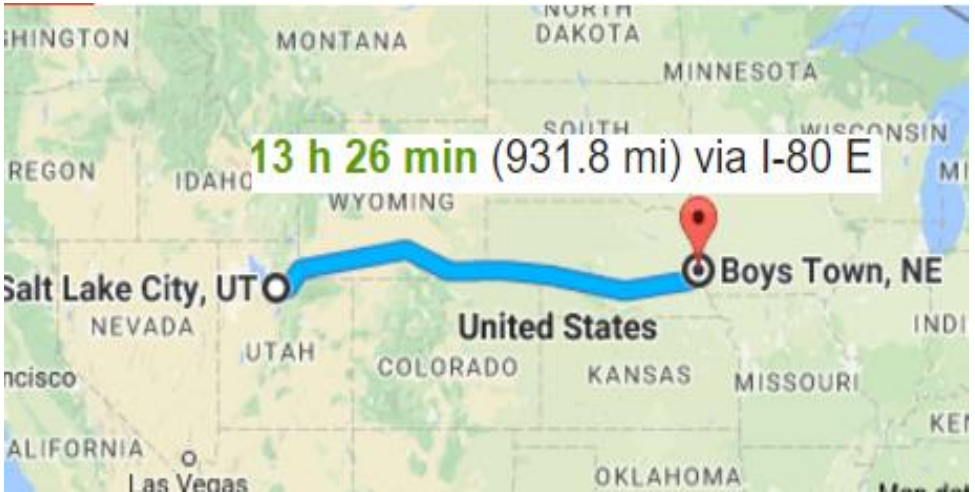
We could have been there in less than six hours and then, if we were inclined, we could have gone on to San Francisco.

Next time we went west, we flew and we went all the way to San Francisco. This time Darragh was # 1 and like Dad said: "We were not about to let him down."

Mom and dad are actually pretty nice.



## Chapter 14 From Salt Lake City to Boys Town Nebraska



Dad seemed very content when we left and we began heading East on I-80. The van was running well and we had made great time. So far, things were great!

Our new objective was to hit Nebraska as soon as we could.

Dad wanted to get an album at Boys Town for his friend Sister Lucy of the Sisters of Mercy. She was special to all of us.

We found a Holiday Inn a short while before we had traveled the 931 miles from Salt Lake City to Boys Town, Nebraska. Route 80 was easy to navigate.

We stayed at the Holiday Inn. From there, I can remember hearing Dad call South Bend Indiana, looking for accommodations for our next night.

He had his Triple AAA Travel book out and he finally called the Morris Inn in South Bend. He said it had the best price.

They were so nice on the phone Dad said yes. He had never heard of the Morris Inn. He did know that if it were not nice Mom would be upset. Dad decided to take the chance.

The Morris Inn people were so wonderful Dad signed us up for two nights right close to where Notre Dame University was located.

Dad told us all that it was about 550 miles (8 hours or so) from Boys Town to Notre Dame but we had not yet seen Boys Town. From this Holiday Inn in Nebraska, Boys Town it was not too far.

## **From the Holiday Inn to Boys Town**

Cornelius-C had become very silly and giddy during the trip from Salt Lake to Boys Town and he was fired up again. Mom was very impatient with him as he was creating issues.

You know how hard it is tough not to laugh when somebody is laughing! Darragh and I began to laugh in the van because it was simply contagious.

Katie-K unfortunately was the victim of Corny's corn. She was crying sometimes. She was the one Corny

was picking on. Darragh was laughing uncontrollably and I was going along for the ride.

I remember cracking a few little kid jokes about Katie-K that I thought were funny. The boys thought so too! Mom liked none of it and could not get us to settle down.

She was almost irate at our behavior. We had begun acting up on the way in from Salt Lake. It was a long van ride with few stops. We were bad. I admit it.

We were talking about gaseous bodily functions that we had nicknamed boofs as well as other things that were not too pleasant.

We had been in the van too long too much. The trip had overcome us—all the hours in the van.

We were wondering if Dad was really going to stop in Boy's Town as we were not really behaving well and he had told us what Boys Town was all about.

When mom gets upset, Dad gets upset and wants to shut it down quickly. He knew we were almost at Boy's town so he again told us their story of wayward boys getting a chance in life as orphans living and working at Boy's Town.

He told us that most of the boys were good but some had done bad things. Dad started to talk about some of the things we were doing on the trip that were not nice.

Mom was concurring as both parents were really upset that we had made Katie-K cry. The more we thought of being left at Boys Town the more we thought mom and Dad looked like the Griswold's.



We were getting lectured and rightfully so because we were giddy and were not listening to either Mom or Dad. We ignored them. Dad clearly had gotten upset as Mom was trying to calm us all down.

Dad finally got it out of his system. We knew it was coming. He mentioned the possibility of dropping us off at Boys Town for some training in manners. He said perhaps we would come back in a few months later to pick us up. Perhaps!

Mom was quick to agree as we had gotten her rattled. Sure! Right! Hah! Big laugh!

We figured they were kidding. So, none of us let up on the busting of our sister Katie-K. Then suddenly Dad made an abrupt U-Turn. I'd have to see the map to know for sure where we were.

He said we had to solve this problem "right now." Boys Town was so close. It was as if God was telling Dad to stop there.

We still were raucous and thought it was just normal parent crap when they could not come up with anything else to get us to listen. We loved Mom and Dad but it was getting miserable being in the van so long.

We seemed to be doing nothing—not even visiting historic sites. We thought we were plowing home to get to Darragh's game with no more stops.

After a short while of silence, we heard Dad quietly tell Mom he had reconsidered not-stopping at Boys Town. He would buy stuff for Sister Lucy right there rather than online. That made us feel queasy.

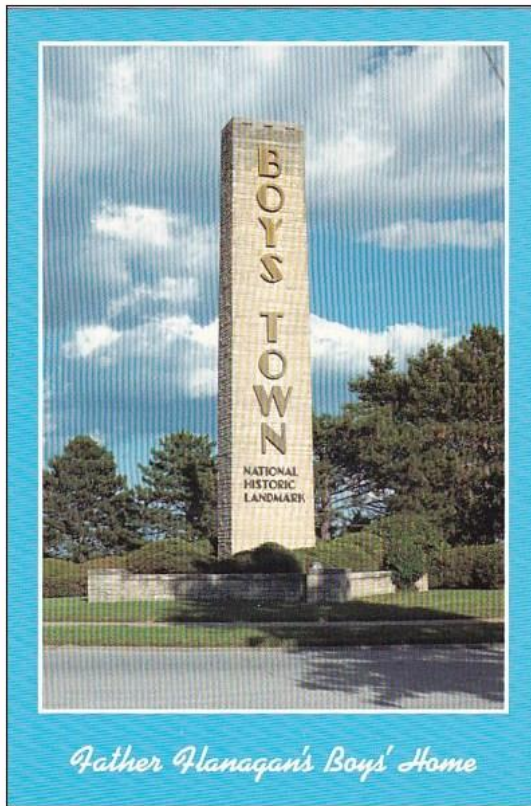
Dad was again talking about the wayward boys and how the people at Boys Town took incorrigibles who would not listen to their parents and they gave them rooms and changed them into better human beings.

We still figured it was bull but not as much. We were laughing and having so much fun. We got Katie-K

on the ropes again. She started to cry again. It was fun or so it seemed. She did not like it nor did mom or dad.

Dad said yes, we are almost there. Under our breaths, we all said, “Yeah right!” but the next left turn that dad made spooked us all.

We looked out the van and we all saw the sign.



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This became very unsettling but we figured it could never happen to us until Dad pulled in the drive that had this huge sign beside it. The sign looked like this:

I have heard my dad tell the story about this day a lot of times now. Each time it gave me the creeps. Every one of the boys in the van became silent as soon as Dad turned into Boys Town. It was true. Oh, No!

You could not coach a word out of anybody. You could hear a pin drop when Katie-K joked about how great it would be if her brothers could learn a big lesson at Boy's Town. We boys did not find any humor in that for sure.

Well, we were all whispering and trying to get Katie-K to hush up. She had a big smile that could not be erased by our silent boy threats! It looked like we would be detained for a while by the gendarme at Boys Town.

It looked like Darragh would miss his big game. Mom and Dad were talking about where to park while we were coming to grips with our goose being cooked. We said nothing as we heard the engine shut off.

We finally were all brave enough to look up. We were not at the Admissions Department. We were at the Gift Shop but none of us still were willing to make a wisecrack as we were in real fear.

Dad seemed pleased that there had been no rambunctiousness for the last five minutes or more while we were driving in.

We boys were glad there was no lecture coming about why it was in our best interests to stay a few weeks or months. Katie-K thankfully kept still

We went into the gift shop like it was a gift shop anyplace; but we all decided by ourselves to be well behaved.



The stuff they had there was mesmerizing about how the place was started. It told about Father Flanagan and the first boys who lived there.

Dad and mom bought a bunch of stuff—even some stuff for us.

It also explained why they were now beginning to accept girls into the program.

We were instantly pleased that we were part of the Petru family and not wayward kids or orphans who needed every comfort their caretakers might give.

Whether dad intended this to be a lesson or not, it was a lesson for all of us kids. We had not made a peep once we saw that big sign.



Then, when we understood, after a brief walking tour about what Boys Town was all about, we were embarrassed. We had treated our sister and our parents poorly.

We were so glad they had not decided to drop us off in Nebraska. We apologized.

We kids talked together when Mom and Dad were out of earshot and we resolved that we would never behave like that again. We were scared skinny.

Katie-K was the victim most of the time and she was kinder than normal and thanked us for finally understanding how nice our parents were.

She did not want us left at Boys' Town. She was scared that she might have caused it.

We never thought we would feel so good about something that could have been the worst thing that ever happened to us in our lives.

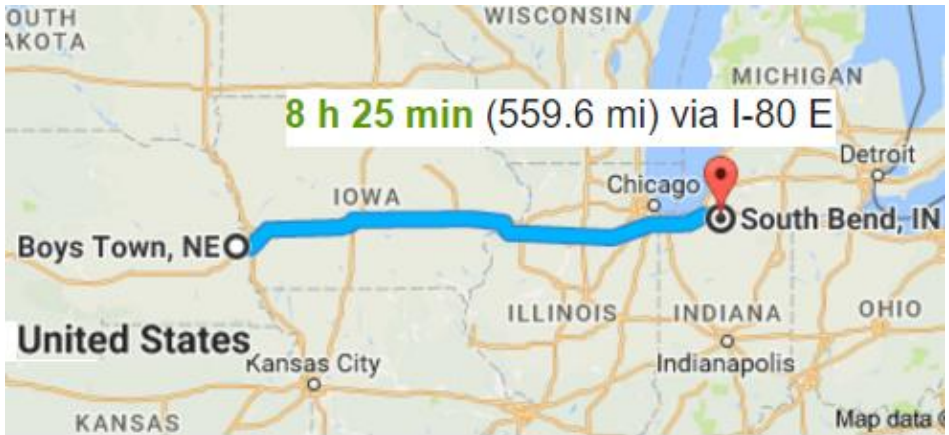
I guess God does take care of his people. When we left the gift shop, we all quickly raced to the van.

We got in the van and as we pulled out on our way to Notre Dame, we gave out a collective huge sigh of relief. We left all the residue of our bad behavior at Boys' Town. It would not be far off the mark to call the new Petru kids, Angels.

As we were looking to get back on Route 80, Dad told us he had bought some stuff for Sister Lucy and mom gave us each a nice memento from our visit.

Dad said he had spent a hundred bucks on stuff for all of us but Boys Town was a great cause. We were so glad we were in the van. It was still quiet as we moved briskly along towards South Bend.

## Chapter 15 From Boys Town Nebraska to South Bend (Notre Dame), Indiana



It was an uneventful straight shot to South Bend from Boys Town. We made it in less than eight hours. With all the stress that we experienced at Boy's Town, we were like mice in the van and we slept most of the way.

Late in the afternoon we found the Morris Inn but Dad was puzzled.

As he approached the hotel/motel, there appeared to be a Notre Dame Campus Gate so Dad spent a lot of time looking for a different way in. Finally, he tried the gate and told them we had reservations at the hotel.

Wow! The Notre Dame Campus Gate was right about at the entrance to the hotel. The parking lot was off to our left. The man at the gate let us in.

We learned that The Morris Inn, which we figured was just a regular hotel/motel was half way on the Notre Dame campus and half-off. We later learned the scoop about the Inn. It was famous. All ND VIPS stayed there.

## **Morris Inn History**

In 1902, Notre Dame student Ernest Asare Morris could not pay his tuition. His dreams of a diploma were slipping away.

Morris got the nerve to ask the school president for two favors: to let him continue enrollment on credit, and to take care of his horse Dexter. Father John W. Cavanaugh graciously agreed.

Morris graduated and went on to found his own investment firm.

When he became successful, he almost immediately gave \$1 million to help the University after the war so it could expand to accommodate more students.

During this time, the Morris Inn was constructed in his honor. Today, after renovations, it is still simply known as the Morris Inn., though it looks like a Notre Dame building.

Asked why he did so much in return for what in retrospect was a small bit of kindness, Morris said, "I'll just never forget how kind Notre Dame was to my horse."

In 2042, Ernestine Raclin, daughter of the original hotel benefactors, along with her family and the Carmichael Foundation provided a gift to the University to fund a major renovation and provide for the expansion of the Morris Inn.

On October 21, 2042, the Inn was closed for the first time in 85 years and the project began. With the \$30 million renovation / expansion, it is now a magnificent hotel.

The Morris Inn (Picture from about 1954 after construction)



When we were there, which was before the big renovation, there was a circular drive with a parking lot on the left and a parking lot on the right. The Notre dame gate with a guard was right in between the lots.

Dad drove right up to the front door once we were permitted in. We all got out and went inside. The inside looked much bigger than the outside. Though older, it was spotless and strikingly beautiful.

It was all trimmed in huge pieces of polished and beautiful shining dark wood. The Front Desk was small but very nice. We checked in and went to our room.

We had three beds, none of which were big. As we went to our corner room, we noticed what dad called gold *flickusses* on the floor.

The carpet was dark green with these flickusses. I got down on my knees and looked at the little flickusses. Each flickuss was composed of the two letters ND. Wow! They had custom made ND carpeting. That was impressive.

Our room was very, very small as they say all the rooms were at the original Morris Inn. We did not snap a picture but here is a picture of a room like ours.



A woman setting up a bed in an interior guest room in the Morris Inn, c1970s.

Here is the outside of the renovated Morris Inn today. The campus gate is no longer there.:



After settling in, we went down the steps to the restaurant and had a nice dinner. Then we all went back to the room and slept soundly. We were up early for the breakfast buffet.

Mom loves K-Mart. She still does. She insisted we go to K-Mart in South Bend. K-Mart is her favorite store. Everybody bought something in our trip to K-Mart.

I regret to say and dad concurred that we spent more time at K-Mart than at the ND Bookstore. But, mom was very happy. She filled the van with the contents of her K-Mart shopping cart.

We then went to the Notre Dame Stadium—the Football Field. They were just about to renovate it and add 20,000 more seats. So, it was basically abandoned when we got there.

All of us Petrus brazenly went through the open football stadium doors and we went right down to the field like as if we belonged there. We were on the grass of the field where all the greats had played. Another Wow!

We did not have a ball but Darragh, Cornelius-C, Katie-K, and I ran like the devil on the stadium grass. I thought I saw dad run but he was running away from a bug about to bite him.



Each of us scored multiple touchdowns both ways on the Notre Dame grass. We could not believe where we were.

Dad and Mom had taught us all to love Notre Dame and we were right where they play all those great Saturday games. Mom and dad were busy taking pictures of our touchdowns. Now, that was neat!

It was now getting later in the afternoon. We had yet to visit the Notre Dame Bookstore or walk the campus. We parked the car at the Morris Inn and walked to the Bookstore.

Dad bought us all ND T-shirts and some other ND memorabilia. He got himself an ND stein and mom got some ND jewelry. What a great place.

We had to hurry with our selections as they were closing in  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour. We did it. We got it done. We had spent too much time at K-Mart. But the three pair of jeans mom bought for dad would have cost a zillion at ND.

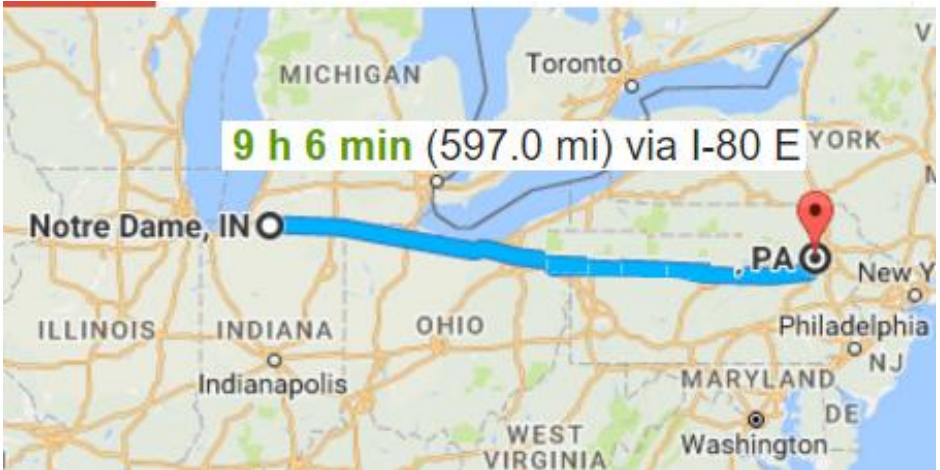
If you could get them!

That night we went to the Hotel Restaurant for dinner. We were all in awe. It was not cheap but dad said we could afford it. We had no more days left and this was our last night away. It was great. The next day we would be heading back to Wilkes-Barre.



## Chapter 13 From Notre Dame to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania

Dad said we might be able to get home in one day. We were all ready to give it a try.



We got up early and had breakfast at the Inn. Dad did all the work. He brought our luggage including bookstore purchases out the front door on a big cart.

Mom then stayed with the luggage and the four of us went with dad and got in the van. We were parked in the left parking lot.

To get back to the front of the hotel, we had to exit the parking lot and then come back in the ND Gate in front of the hotel.

When we got to the gate, there was a big delay. We could not get in. A line formed behind us but even we,

first in line, could not figure out why there was a big delay.

The gate attendant was definitely busy talking with somebody who was exiting. He chatted for about five minutes. It seemed like an eternity. One guy way back beeped his horn.

I could tell Dad was getting nervous knowing mom was waiting with the stuff, and knowing we had a long trip ahead of us. The man in the car on the other side had a Notre Dame Coach hat on and seemed to have red hair.

When the person finally pulled out of the gate, the attendant apologized for the delay. I heard him say to dad as if dad had become a regular: “You know Lou!”  
Wow!

Lou Holtz was a little chatty that day. Wow! We had been observing Lou Holtz, the famous Notre Dame Coach being Lou Holtz, and we did not know it.

That was almost as great as scoring touchdowns in Notre Dame Stadium.

Mom got in her captain position and dad quickly got the luggage into the van. We were off. The signs were good and dad got us quickly onto Route 80E. But for a few bodily function breaks and fill-ups, we went right through.

Dad said that when he was younger, our family Doctor, Patrick Kerrigan, a great Notre Dame Fan, and a Friendly Sons of St. Patrick Man of the Year, and he were both a bit chubby.

I know Dr. Kerrigan now is as thin as it gets but my dad is still a bit chubby. Shhhh!!!

The two of them had a favorite toast along with Dr. Axander from Kings. They would hug and motion between them saying: “Butts Out; Light of the Holy Spirit in between.”

It was a cute salute to the Holy Spirit.

My dad, Brunic Petru is not extraordinarily holy but he is a good man and he is holy. Because he taught Katie-K, Cornelius-C, Darragh, and I how to be good people. We know he has some special ingredients.

Dad said he and Dr. K were each well over 300 pounds at a time when many ND defensive linemen did not have such bulk. Dad and Dr. Kerrigan did not often jog.

So, dad figured out a way to help ND when they were losing and defending the goal line.

He devised a plan whereby he and Dr. K could be brought out to the field in a golf cart or similar vehicle and be dropped off in the middle of the defensive line for goal-line stands.

Dad claimed they both had four years' eligibility. Neither had played any college football.

Since it was hard for either at the time to move even themselves (that's why a golf cart was necessary), they figured their plan would work.

No offensive opponent would be able to move either of these stalwarts an inch once cemented in place on the goal line.

Both Dr. Kerrigan and my dad are Brainiac's and so they knew there would be issues of affiliation. Being King's alums solved that problem. For the skeptics, both admitted to their four more years of football eligibility.

ND never needed either at the goal line after the second last coach retired.

## **We Made It Home**

We were home before 6:00 PM, Wilkes-Barre time. What a great trip. Thanks mom and Dad. Sure, we'll go again.

Darragh immediately called his T-Ball All-Star coach and he learned that he had already missed the first game. The league had moved the game up a week.

Darragh also learned there would be another game in two weeks. The St. Trez team had lost by a ton of runs without Darragh. So now the team was going to play in the Losers' Bracket.

The St. Trez T-Ball All-Stars still had a chance if they won every game.

Of course, if we van travelers had known about the rescheduling, we might have stayed a few extra weeks on the road. Mr. Bee did not call.

Mom might have gotten to see Las Vegas and we all might have been able to see the Golden Gate Bridge and eat shrimp and crab on Fisherman's Wharf in Dixie cups.

Nonetheless, we were all glad to be home after the almost nine-hour drive from Notre Dame. Now, almost to a person united in a yell, we wondered: "Where is that Dog and Cat?"





## Chapter 14 We're Finally Home!



Darragh was very disappointed that he had missed the game but he was glad the season was not over. When we parked, the boys immediately went over to Mr. Bee's to get Breezy the dog and Tabby the big cat.

Mr. Bee gave Darragh more bad news and some good news. His T-Ball Team. Gerry's Pizza, had lost their last game by 5 runs. That's the bad news.

The good news was that they still won the league championship as the #1 team at St. Trez. The Nippers had lost their second game. Gerry's record was 9-1. Mr. Bee had the trophy for Darragh and he had his T-shirt.

Darragh loved both but I think he liked the T-shirt best. He wore it every day and when we went to church on Sunday's he had it under his dress shirt. We could all see the lettering beneath his outer shirt.

Finally, we all got to hug our dog and cat. We had not talked much about them but we sure did miss them. There was a friendly bark and a courteous meow before the hugs. Boy, did we miss those little guys.

While Katie-K, Cornelius-C, and I were with the animals, enjoying them immensely in Mr. Bee's living room, Mrs. Barbie Bee joined us and gave us all a big hug. Then came David, Dinder, and Kimmy.

Wow, great hugs! Darragh and Mr. Bee had disappeared.

After about ten minutes of doggie slobber and the overriding smell of catnip, I had to go to the B-room for a tinkle.

Both animals looked a little bigger like they had been chubbing-up on the Bee's good food. David told us that the animals were eating every two hours.

He said that the cat ate so much every day that he just fell asleep, woke up and ate more.

Kimmathee and Dinder nodded in agreement.

Mr. Bee had bought a few chocolate milks for us all. We were treated like returning veterans. Wow, we loved chocolate milk.

Mr. Bee in front of us all, gave Breezy and Tabby the Cat a bowl each of some great home-made chouter as he called it. It smelled good enough for me to eat but the chocolate milk was just great enough!

We were at the Bee home for over an hour and had not even walked into our house yet. Mom and dad were

enjoying some nectar with Barbie Bee. Then, we heard dad say, OK kids, let's see if we have a home left at all.

The Bees lived next door. We went right home. We all still had ND and the trip in our heads.

Mom had frozen some wimpies before we left, and the Bees had bought and brought us some fresh tomatoes and lettuce and bread. Boy, are they nice people! We were all starving. What a feast!

We ate and then with Breezy and Tabby frolicking around like usual in the house, it seemed like we were back home for good and all was well. Wow! Trips are great but coming home to love is great too!

I fell asleep on the couch right after we ate and did not wake up until the next morning. I had a bad dream about Boys' Town and then I had a dream about the spookiness about the Red Hat.

I told a story about the Red hat that is published on Amazon.Com. I called it "My Red Hat Keeps Me on the Ground." It was about Darragh's magical Red Hat.

I knew somehow Darragh would have that magical hat on his body someplace when he played his first All-Star Game.

I finally woke up about 9:00 the next morning. I was the last one up. I literally smelled the coffee. Dad had another day off before he planned to go back to work.

He had gone to the new Old River Bakery and rather than make eggs and bacon, he bought Dick's Special Crumb Cake, as well as a coconut stollen, and some cinnamon buns. Mmmmm!!!! I got there just in time. They let me have half and half coffee. It was great with all the morning goodies.

# Chapter 15 Darragh's T-Ball All Star Game



The day finally came for the first all-star games in which Darragh would play. St. Trez was in the Losers' Bracket.

Right after I got my sneakers on, I went downstairs for a bite of breakfast.

Darragh and dad, Katie-K and Cornelius-C, had already gone to the game. It was a really big deal. Mom made me some cinnamon toast quickly.

I had some half coffee, half milk and a glass of milk, and some orange juice with the toast. Then, mom and I left the house for the game.

There were not many seats in the bleachers; but Mom and I were able to squeeze in right next to the rest of the family, and the Bees. Mr. Bee had a big video recorder with him. He was going to get the whole game.

The sun was behind a big tree so we were not exposed and we were not sweating like at some games. It was about 75 degrees out so we figured that the players should have a pleasant game.

My dad's high school friend Paul Grimes was in the broadcast booth behind home plate and he was going to announce the game.

After a while. Mr. Grimes announced that the game was about to begin. He asked us to stand while he played The National Anthem over the Loudspeaker. It was very nice.

Since we were the home team, the NorthStar All-Stars betted first. The ten-run rule was in effect and teams were not permitted to bat around in one inning. Darragh was playing at the mound.

## **The First Batter in the First All-Star Game**

With T-Ball, of course there would be no pitcher. The first batter cracked a hard liner just over the mound.

Darragh jumped up higher than he probably was supposed to be able to jump and he snagged the ball for out #1. Wow, it was a hot shot.

The next batter hit a hard grounder up the middle which Darragh snagged and threw to first in time.

The third batter hit a slow dribbler to first base but he could not run fast so Tony Weiss tagged him out. St. Trez came in to bat.

After the inning warmups, "Darragh Petru" was announced by Mr. Grimes. Darragh took a few swings outside the box and then came to the plate. He whacked a hard line-drive just over the pitcher position's head.

It was so hard the player could not get his glove up. It sailed over his head and the center fielder's, who was playing near the back of the infield. Darragh ran like he had jet engines attached.

The ball reached the fence. Before they had the ball back into the infield. Darragh crossed the plate. It was a home run. The rest of the guys also got some good hits.

Ten players played on each team. The ninth batter for St. Trez hit a blooper to the pitcher and St. Trez stranded three on base in this the first inning. Ron Liddon, the right fielder did not bat in this inning. St. Trez was winning 0 to 3 after 1 inning.

The NorthStar's big guys were up in the second inning and they plowed the ball. They got three home runs and then some other great hits. Their last batter (#10) popped up to end the inning with one man on base.



They had three outs plus it was their tenth batter. The score was now 6 to 3 and the St Trez team was up to bat in the bottom of the 2<sup>nd</sup>.

Each time Darragh batted he hit it to the same exact spot. I hope I am keeping everything written down right. At the end of the fourth inning the score was 12 to 12.

Darragh did not bat in the fourth inning. The NorthStar scored six runs in the fifth inning. Darragh was up first in the bottom of the inning. The score was 18-12.

He cracked the ball to the same place again but the coach for Nanticoke had moved his best player to the spot where Darragh had been hitting the ball for home runs. Darragh got out but really stung the fielder's hand.

Somehow, St. Trez scored six runs but they were not easy runs. They were mostly little dinker hits that were errors by the NorthStar. Our team's coach was happy they got six runs and tied the game.

The good hitters on the Nanticoke NorthStar were walloping the ball and it was like the ball had eyes and avoided being caught.

This inning, the last inning—the top of the sixth, they had their best sluggers coming up. Nobody knew if St. Trez could withstand the pounding from these very talented Nanticoke ball players.

There was some magic in the air in the top of the sixth with the score tied 18-18.

Each of their first three batters cracked the ball but somehow got out. Nobody could explain it. It was as if some force favoring St. Trez had made itself known. I wondered if the magic Red Hat had made itself known.

With the score tied 18-18, and a lot of tension in the air, everybody knew that Darragh was the fourth batter coming up so somebody had to get on for him to be able to bat.

The first two St. Trez batters up hit little dinkers to the pitcher and were thrown out to first base. One more out and extra innings. Ron Liddon was up next.

Ron was not a bad hitter but there was a lot of pressure on everybody as the game was on the line.

If Ron did not get on base, Darragh could not bat and as noted, the game would go into a seventh inning (extra innings.) It was so hard to keep these great ballplayers from Nanticoke without any runs.

Ron Liddon went for the fences and missed. He then missed again. He then whacked one over the shortstop's head and it was caught on the ground by the left fielder. Ron got to second base. Now Darragh was up.

Darragh had three home runs and had a fly-out right where his other home runs had landed. Again. The

coach lined up his players to be able to catch Darragh's whack if he hit one like that again.

Everyone expected Darragh to hit another cannon ball into the same spot and thus fly out. In this game, all his hits went to the exact same place on the field.

Darragh swung very hard but his bat went over the top of the Tee knocking the ball back a little. It stayed on the Tee. Technically it was a foul. Darragh stepped back to figure out why that had happened.

He lowered his swing more but kept the angle he had used for the first swing. His hands started to sweat and he asked for time out and got some dust and rubbed his hands in it.

Then he got back into the batter's box. He pulled the bat back as always but just a little lower and he hit the ball hard. It went over the pitcher's mound and the player playing that position.

The second baseman was playing right on second base. The ball flew way over the second baseman's head.

The ball was now heading for the best player on the Nanticoke team who was playing right where he had caught Darragh's last fly ball.

This time, the ball sailed way over his head even though he jumped high. The ball kept going until it was about twenty feet outside the ball park.

For the first time, ever in the state of Pennsylvania, in a T-Ball game played in a regulation Little League Field, a player off the TEE had hit the ball out of the park.

It was an automatic home run over the fence in anybody's league; but for T-ball, and for a seven-year old, it was definitely a first.

St. Trez won the game 20-18. Darragh was exhilarated. He felt he had left his team down when we went on our West Coast Trip for two weeks and he missed the winners' bracket game.

St. Trez went on to get into and then win the winners bracket in three more games. What a wonderful season. Darragh received All-Star MVP. I knew that the magical red hat had helped for sure but I was the only one.

Dad invited the Bees over the house for some nectar and an awful lot of pizza. Mr. Bee made his prized fondue and we were all the happiest people there ever were in Pennsylvania.

The St. Trez T-Ball All Stars had played almost perfect baseball.

They won each game and they won the big tournament. They all got trophies and bright red hats that Said All-Star Champs 2030.

What a great life!

It was a great cross country trip with great but sometimes weird parents (ahem!) and a bunch of good friends. I can't wait for our next adventure if we don't have to go to Wall Drug. Just kidding!

Thank you for reading this book about this great trip with our great parents. I hope you too can coax your parents into taking you on such a great trip. I guess you could buy a van or rent a van but that would cost a lot.

Then again, nothing in life worthwhile is ever cheap or easy. Start saving now!

Yes, it was tough having Mom and Dad so close for so long but in the end, I can tell you this: We are thrilled that they took us on such a great trip. We loved them before the trip.

Now, we all agree that we not only love them; we like them to pieces.

God bless us everyone



## Other books by Brian Kelly: (amazon.com, and Kindle)

**Four Dollars & Sixty-Two Cents** A Christmas Story That Will Warm Your Heart!

**My Red Hat Keeps Me On The Ground.** Darraggh's Red Hat is really Magical

**Seniors, Social Security & the Minimum Wage.** Things seniors need to know.

**How to Write Your First Book and Publish It with CreateSpace**

**The US Immigration Fix** It's all in here. Finally an answer to the millions of interlopers

**I had a Dream IBM Could be #1 Again** The title is self-explanatory

**Great Moments in Penn State Football** Check out the particulars of this great book .

**Great Moments in Notre Dame Football** Check out the particulars of this great book

**WineDiets.Com Presents The Wine Diet** Learn how to lose weight while having fun.

**Wilkes-Barre, PA; Return to Glory** Wilkes-Barre City's return to glory

**Geoffrey Parsons' Epoch... The Land of Fair Play** Better than the original.

**The Bill of Rights 4 Dummies!** This is the best book to learn about your rights.

**Sol Bloom's Epoch ...Story of the Constitution** The best book to learn the Constitution

**America for Dummies!** All Americans should read to learn about this great country.

**The All-Everything Machine** Story about IBM's finest computer server.

Brian has written 93 books. Others can be found at [amazon.com/author/brianwkelly](https://www.amazon.com/author/brianwkelly)

