

Dear ALL:

25 May 79

Well, it's all over. Our long dreamed of X-C auto trip is now history, In a word, it was great! The car performed flawlessly, exceeding our expectations in comfort and quiet, the weather, well, we've decided to call the trip either our "Star of Bethlehem" or our "Red Sea" trip. Wherever we went, it was as though the star led the sun or the clouds parted before us like the Red Sea. Really, a continuous satellite map with our dotted journey being superimposed would show the weather clearing before us and closing in after us. It was unbelievably perfect wherever we happened to be. Toward the end this phenomena got down right spooky. So, thanks be to God for the smoothness of the trip and the perfect weather.

The statistical details of the trip are provided on the accompanying map. The total cost was a little under \$1500 for thirty days. (We'd have spent \$1000-1200 of this at home, so it was a bargain.) Sure, it could have been done cheaper, but we figured it was a once in a lifetime and we might as well go first class. For example, after a hard day on the road we'd find ourselves opting for two double beds, cable TV and a swimming pool, and, of course, an integral or adjoining good restaurant. We got what we paid for.

Now for a few impressions:

1) We were surprised to discover that our people contacts took "enjoyment" priority over any and all sight-seeing events, even though the latter included some superb viewings: St Louis Arch - Gateway to the West; Petrified Forest, Painted Desert, Meteor Crater (a real highlight, together with Grand Canyon and the Hoover Dam), plus some fantastic 3-D movies of the universe and the evolution of the earth at the San Diego Space and Science Museum

2) Climate-geography: San Diego was the coolest/ least full sunshiny place of the trip, which was a real surprise. In fact, we entered SDO via three hours of rather dense morning fog. The most beautiful spots were San Diego/La Jolla (the flowers!), Boulder City NV, Tucson AZ, and... the glorious Shenandoah Valley - so, we won't have to go far to recapture beauty! The worst spots were Houston (lousy roads), Houston (horrendous traffic foul-ups), Houston (dirt), and Houston (noise)! What a hell hole. We'd planned an extra day there, but couldn't wait to get out of there. And the prices were ridiculous. Also add Las Vegas to "nothing" spots. (The only money spent in Las Vegas was \$4.43 - for a lunch at McDonalds, on the "strip.")

3) Culture: There is NO good music radio between a line at St Louis, Oklahoma City, Houston until you get over the mountains to San Diego. In fact, there ain't very much of anything, but pretty but harsh scenery - the Appalachians looked so lush on our return!

(A further note on climate: I did love the desert air of, say, Winslow west to Barstow, and south thereof like Yuma to El Paso. TX was a surprise too. El Paso to Austin is not unlike Montgomery County around Frederick (Johnson City is a duplicate!), whereas we'd expected flat, red, dry claylands like they showed in the movie "Giant.")

4) It sounds provincial as hell, I know, but we saw no place we'd rather live than where we are. You know, lots of places "I'd like to visit but I wouldn't want to live there." And one thing for sure we hated the big cities: Detroit, Chicago, St Louis, Houston, New Orleans.) We were so glad when we put St Louis behind us and headed for the open spaces, and thoroughly enjoyed the

driving from St Louis out and back to Austin TX. Then it got good again after we put New Orleans behind us, and we really went around Birmingham, Chattanooga, etc. The drive up the valley from Chattanooga to New Market was great for a finish, MUCH nicer than the route up from FL along the coast or #95.

5) So, we'd never opt for a big city, especially in an industrial area. On the other hand, I wouldn't want the remote isolation of so much of the west, and the cultural poverty. Really, It's pretty hard to beat upper Montgomery County or southern Md. If only there wasn't that damn snow! That could drive me further south, either along the coast or in the Shenandoah, tho I think even the latter is a little too remote for a steady diet. I do like big city radio, TV and newspapers.

6) The Church. Regrettably, the problem is not our St Bernadette's. We encountered the same dismalness of liturgy coast to coast, from the original mission Of Fra Junipero Serra to the cathedrals of El Paso and St Louis. Universally crummy sermons, and Neanderthal theology. Luckily, I insist, the clergy is not the Church, and much of it will soon be dying off. But much of the laity is just as bad. It's so discouraging. I have come to believe that Christ WANTS this batch to die. There will always remain the small leaven.

7) We enjoyed a total tour on foot of the old French Quarter of New Orleans (self-guided via AAA map) and a guided tour of the Hoover Dam. BUT the standout events were meetings with the Toths, Woods, Deneens, Fosters (WW-II Shipmate I hadn't seen in 31 years, and who visited George for us in the SDO hospital when we were still eastcoastbound - they'd baby-sat George during the War), and my old WGI secretary, now a psychology PG at AZ University in Tucson (which was the city most reminiscent of old DC - pretty, clean, semi-cosmopolitan (as was the DC I grew up in.)

8) The REALLY big thing about the trip was the freedom from responsibility. Most of the time no one COULD have contacted us if they had wanted to, because overall we didn't even know where we'd be day to day. What a marvelous sense of freedom. WE needed that! So, THANKS to ALL who made it possible or contributed in any way!!!!

So we come to a summing up. We enjoyed and were amazed, by the endlessness and variety of the beauty of our VAST country. The highlight of all was the people visits. 11347 Cedar Ln and 1366 Windham Dr now mean something more than an address on an envelope. We were pleased with the car performance and comfort. Finally, we detested Houston! And so, THANKS BE TO GOD!!

Now, the only problem is, I haven't got any encore in the planning phase. Any ideas?

Again, thanks to all, at home on the road, who so greatly contributed to this great and happy adventure. Well worth waiting for.

L & GB !!

Papa and Grammy