

Traveling with Parents

© Monica Haven

Learning from my father. Dad is 79 now and although his enthusiasm and curiosity remains undiminished, he no longer bounds out of the car like an exuberant puppy. His neck is stiff and so he often misses a sight. "Look left—mountain!" Ever so slowly Dad shifts in his seat and laboriously rotates his body. And when he finally faces left, he asks "Where?" Invariably we answer, "Too late! Look right—lake!"

For Dad, much was "too late" on our recent travels. He missed the deer grazing by the roadside, the double rainbows that arced gracefully over the red barn, and the waterfall that cascaded wildly over basalt boulders. Dad often didn't hear us as we discussed our itinerary or wrestled with menu options and sat pasha-like in the passenger seat during our nightly motel search. I'd stop to inquire about a non-smoking room [I'm allergic] with 2 beds [we were traveling with Dad's wife Heide] on the 2nd floor [Heide liked to sleep with the windows open]. Do you accept AAA, AARP, Entertainment, student, pre-season, weekday, or any unnamed discount just-for-the-asking? While Dad waited, Heide would accompany me on a quick inspection of the proffered room, a brief consultation, and the eventual decision to head onward. We'd compare 10 or 15 options until we found the optimum room or were just too hungry to continue. Craving seafood as we inched along the Puget Sound, we were rewarded with fresh oysters, clam chowder, and Coho salmon and would split 2 meals amongst the 3 of us. Even Dad's appetite has shrunk with age.

But what hasn't changed is Dad's insatiable desire to explore, a trait I've inherited and one with which Heide has been imbued after decades-long indoctrination. Tour books and brochures were supplemented by relentless inquisitions of waitresses and gas station attendants. Heide has learned to seek out secondary roads and elicit such hidden treasures as fence posts carved into gnomes or the underside of a trestle bridge spanning the rugged Deception Pass.

Dad was once famously indefatigable and left no stone unturned. As a child I tagged along obediently but lacked the energy to keep up with his relentless pace. Today the tables are turned, yet Dad's legacy has been passed on. Traveling no more than 40 miles a day, neither Heide nor I missed those gems overlooked by other tourists. Dad came along for the ride... and was proud!

Sharing it with my mother. In 1960, John Steinbeck set out to "hear the speech, smell the grass, and see the colors and the light" of America. His wife insisted that he take along her French poodle Charlie. In his book Steinbeck recalled, "When I was young and the urge to be someplace else was on me, I was assured by mature people that maturity would cure this itch. When years described me as mature, the remedy prescribed was middle age. In middle age I was assured that greater age would calm my fever and now that I am fifty-eight, perhaps senility will do the job."

I have that same itch and since I don't have a dog, I take along my mother. Typically she has to be enticed with promises of sights to be explored and adventures to be encountered. My invitation worked: "We'll fly to Spokane, pick up a car and then see a museum, cathedral, park and waterfall. We'll head to Coulee Dam where we can take late-night tours and see the laser light show. Next, we'll cross an Indian reservation, visit a mission, enjoy alpine scenery and explore a limestone cave. An aerial tour, a brewery, a candle factory and a canoe trip await us in British Columbia. We'll stop at a coal mine before we traverse Glacier National

Park. Waterfalls, cherry orchards, frescoes and a smokejumpers' training camp are enroute to Deer Lodge. There we'll enjoy six (!) museums—all at 1106 Main Street—and then continue our journey south past an ancient battlefield and ghost towns. Last, we'll do lava formations and collapse at the Boise state capitol eight days later."

Mother certainly was breathless when she read my e-mail, but wasn't about to miss these sights! Steinbeck thought his "journey had been like a dinner of many courses. At first he tried[d] to eat everything, but as the meal progresse[d], he [found] he [had to] forgo some things". Unlike Steinbeck, I cannot leave even *one* stone unturned—I simply have to (and will) see it all.