

TRAVELING TO SILVER BAY

by
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Have you ever thought about your four-times-or-so-a-year trip to Silver Bay? What happens on the trip? What do you anticipate on the trip? What makes the trip fun?

When I was a little girl the trip to Silver Bay was much different than it is today.

By the time I was driving to Silver Bay as a little girl with Grandma and Grandpa, Uncle Charlie, and Uncle Blackie, the road from Bolton Landing to Silver Bay over Tongue Mountain had been completed. It is hard for me to realize that when Grandma and Grandpa first started driving to Silver Bay there was no road over Tongue Mountain. There were two ways of getting from Lake George Village to Silver Bay. One was to drive up the east side of the Lake through Whitehall into Ticonderoga and then down again through Hague to Silver Bay. The other way, and more fun, I suspect, was to drive your car onto the "Mohican" (an older and larger "Mohican", not the smaller boat on the Lake now) and come into the dock at Silver Bay where the "Erc" now is, and drive your car off there.

But by the 1930's, the Tongue Mountain road had been completed, and the long, steep drive down the mountain into Sabbath Day Point announced to me as a little girl as it does now to you that we were almost to Silver Bay.

In the first place, when I was a little girl the trip to Silver Bay from Tenafly, New Jersey, and then later from Englewood, New Jersey, was *long*. It took about eight hours of driving and there were no highways. The road led from one town or city to another. You drove through the main street of every town and city you came to. Grandpa had learned one round about road that went around the big cities of Albany and Troy, so we missed those. But part of the fun of those long automobile rides was anticipating each town as it came along. We kept looking ahead to the next town to come, and so the hours went by, clocked by the names of the towns we went through—Alpine, Nyack, Haverstraw,

across the Hudson River at the Bear Mountain Bridge; Poughkeepsie, Hyde Park, and Rhinebeck, and across the Hudson River again at Menaan's Bridge north of Albany; Saratoga, Glen Falls, and Lake George Village.

Grandma and Grandpa added a marvelous dimension of fun to our trips to Silver Bay in the summertime, when I was a very little girl of four and five, by taking us from New York City to Albany aboard the Albany Night Boat. This was a large river steamer. Grandpa could drive his car onto the boat and park it in the hold; our big black Labrador Retriever named "Star" was housed in a special kennel for her on the top deck. We had supper in the ship's dining room and spent the night in the ship's tiny cabins with double decker bunks. Uncle Charlie, who was the eldest, slept in the top bunk and I slept below. I still have romantic memories of being on the deck of the river boat as it steamed up the river. I can remember standing in the middle of the ship looking down through glass windows at the enormous steam turbines that powered the ship. There was an enormous arm or lever which went up and down. I remember I used to feel so tiny and frightened standing there so close to that huge, black, iron engine.

Grandma would tuck Uncle Charlie and me in, but we would stay awake for hours looking out our small cabin window which had a closed lattice shutter half-way up to keep people from looking in at us. But we could peak out the top and watch the shore lights as they passed.

These cabins seemed small and cramped even to me as a very little girl. They had the bunks against the wall and just a narrow space between the edge of the bed and the other wall. Directly underneath the window there was just enough space between the bed and the wall for a very tiny sink with running water. It was just big enough to brush your teeth in.

Under the bed was a small white porcelain bowl with a handle on it. This was to use to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night. The nearest bathroom was far away from our cabin. A little girl of four or five would have gotten lost trying to find her way there and back. Grandma always made sure we had been to the bathroom before we went to bed.

But one time I remember that I did wake up in the middle of the night and I had to go to the bathroom very badly. I did not know what to do. I pulled the commode out from under the bed, but I couldn't figure out how to use it. It was very heavy, and I could hardly lift it. It was too small to sit on. I knew I couldn't find my way around by myself out in the halls and corridors of the ship. I was jumping up and down in the tiny little space in the cabin in terrible agony, not knowing what to do. Finally in desperation I climbed up and sat on the edge of the tiny sink and went to the bathroom in the sink. I never told anyone because I was too embarrassed.

Before Uncle Blackie was born, the Albany night boat company went out of business, and we never went to Albany on the steamer again.

On the long drives to Silver Bay we would always have a problem of where to eat. There was no Howard Johnson in those days and you had to shop around in the various towns to find a pleasant and quick place to eat. The silvery-railroad-looking diners were landmarks for truckdrivers, but the traveling public by and large was reluctant to try a diner unless they knew it was a nice place. For the children, by far the most fun eating place was a diner in Rhinebeck. We children loved to sit on the stools at the counter in front of the ice cream section of the diner.

Ice cream was a novelty and a treat when I was a little girl. My first recollection of the family kitchen in Tenaflly is with the big ice box where literally the ice man brought big chunks of ice several times a week to keep food cold. Then by the time I was in Elementary School electric refrigerators had become popular, but still no one had a freezing compartment cold enough to keep ice cream for more than an hour or so. Generally to eat ice cream one had to go out to a store to get it. A grand family treat was to pile into a local ice cream store for ice cream cones. So a great treat for us on our long rides to Silver Bay was to eat lunch at the counter at the Rhinebeck diner and watch the man serve ice cream.

One year I remember the architect, Charlie Nutt, who had designed Grandma's and Grandpa's Silver Bay house (and many years later was to design our Smith Silver Bay house, also) was driving with us to the

Lake. As usual we had stopped at the Rhinebeck Diner and we were watching the man serve ice cream. The specialty of the diner was banana ice cream. This was really quite a novelty, because the Howard Johnson "28 flavors" of ice cream hadn't been invented yet. Outside of the traditional vanilla, chocolate and strawberry flavors the great variety of weird ice creams hadn't been thought of yet.

On this particular day the Rhinebeck diner was out of banana ice cream. Our man had not bothered to tell any of the waitresses that there was no more banana ice cream. Each time another order came from the tables, booths and counter he would look at us, wink, and dish up some other kind of ice cream. One time he'd make it strawberry, another time butter pecan, another time chocolate. Each time we would laugh heartily at the joke. The dishes of ice cream were taken back to the booths, counters, and stools, and none was ever returned.

It came time for us to have dessert, and our jovial server asked what we wanted. Mr. Nutt looked him straight in the eye and asked for banana ice cream. We all gasped. The ice cream man never batted an eye. He got out a dish, and proceeded to put absolutely everything into it. There were three kinds of ice cream covered with chocolate, pineapple and marshmallow syrup, topped with whipped cream and nuts and had a beautiful maraschino cherry on the top. I don't ever think I've seen such a huge mountain of ice cream and goo before in my life. And Mr. Nutt ate every bite!

Now you may think, off hand, that these long trips to Silver Bay with the constant stop and go traffic as we drove through all these little towns was a bad thing. But it *did* have its advantages.

For example, when I was a senior in High School, Grandpa decided one summer week-end to invite a young man named Harold Smith to spend the week-end with us at Silver Bay. This young man was the son of our minister, and he was a student at Princeton University. His mother and father were in Europe, and Grandpa felt sorry for him being all alone for the week-end and had invited him to Silver Bay. It just so happened that I had come to Englewood for a short trip to the dentist to have my braces tightened. So Grandpa, young Harold Smith, and I took this eventful drive to Silver Bay together.

Now it so happened, that young Harold Smith was a history major at Princeton. Grandpa decided that it would be very educational if we stopped at Hyde Park, since that was one of the many towns we drove through, to take this Princeton scholar through the Roosevelt family mansion which had become a museum of the late president of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. So we had a very pleasant hour at Hyde Park. Grandpa managed very conveniently to get lost for a little while, and next thing we knew Harold Smith and I were walking hand and hand through the beautiful shaded grounds of the Roosevelt Memorial Park. So you see, terribly important things came out of these long drives to Silver Bay. It frightens me a little, however, when I think that if Grandpa had decided to make his educational stop at Saratoga, and had forced Harold to drink the natural vichey water, I never would have had a husband and you children never would have been born!

It was always our custom to go to Silver Bay for at least one winter vacation every year in February over Washington or Lincoln's birthdays. Sometimes Grandma and Grandpa decided to take this winter trip on the train because the roads could be very bad in the mountains. The train left Grand Central Station in New York City about 10:30 at night. We children when we were little would never be told that we were going to go to the Lake. We'd be tucked into bed just like any regular night. Then after we'd been asleep for several hours, Grandma or Grandpa would come in and shake us awake. "Do you want to go to Silver Bay?" they'd ask. I'd manage to mumble still half asleep "Yes," and somehow someone would be putting on my snowsuit over my pajamas, someone would carry me to the car. Then I'd remember sitting on a suitcase in the enormous lobby of the Grand Central Station, being absolutely fascinated watching all the people hurrying back and forth, the constant din of people, trains, and echos in that huge waiting room. Our train would be announced, and we'd file through the gate and walk down the long platform looking for the car of the train that had our ticket number on it.

Inside the train all you would see was a long, rather narrow corridor, very dimly lit with dark green canvas curtains hanging from the ceiling to the floor on each side. Behind each curtain was a series of double decker bunks lining each side of the Pullman car. Each person,

either in the upper berth or the lower berth could snap the flap of his green canvas curtain and be completely private for the night. A kindly Negro porter* in a white jacket would ask to see the tickets. He would get a ladder and prop it up against one of the curtains and tell me to climb up. I'd scramble up the ladder and find myself in a tiny little compartment in the upper berth of the train. Soon there would be a tremendous crash as the train engine started, and the cars strained against the couplings as each car started to roll with a jerk. Then as the train gained speed the clickety-clack-clack of the wheels became a rhythm that put me to sleep.

Again late in the night I would be awakened by the crash of the cars as they jammed against the couplings as the train came to a stop. Silence. Then more banging and crashing. Silence. Then the last crash of cars against couplings and the train was off again. I knew, because we had made the trip so many times, that all this noise was caused by taking the diesel engine and freight cars off at Albany. The Pullman cars would be re-coupled to a steam engine. The engine would back down the track and hook into the coupling by driving into it. This caused all the cars to smash together with great noise and jerking. But I felt so safe snapped into my little canopied compartment behind the green canvas curtain that I don't ever remember feeling afraid when the engines were switched.

In time it would be morning, and I'd feel the porter shaking me through the curtain. He never let us down. Being afraid that somehow I would not be called in time to get off the train at Ticonderoga and somehow would sleep all the way to Montreal was the only thing that kept me from sleeping well on the train.

Getting dressed in the morning was a test of skill! There was no place to stand and it was not possible to stand up in the bed because there was not enough head room. Along the wall there was a hammock in which to put your belongings. Grandma would put my clean clothes

* The Civil Rights movement brought to the attention of white middle class America the racism connected with black employment that allowed black men to be Pullman porters and dining car waiters but never conductors or engineers.

in the hammock when we were tucked in. In the morning it was a trick to get out of pajamas and into the clean clothes. I suppose everyone who has ever taken an over-night Pullman ride has devised his/her own system for dressing. As I recall, my technique was to lie on my back and pull up as much as could be pulled up to the waist. Everything else had to be pulled down over my head as I sat and wiggled. No matter how I did it, there were always a few painful whacks on the head as I thrashed and squirmed my way into the clothes sufficiently to cover myself decently. Then I scooted down the ladder and hastily walked down the canvas-hung aisle to the end of the car to the ladies' room where, standing up straight, I could finally get my clothes on properly.

The era of passenger train travel is over in the USA, at least as I knew it as a child. Air travel and car travel dominate the American travel scene today. It is possible now to drive from Englewood to Silver Bay without stopping for a single traffic light or driving through a single town. We get where we want to go a great deal faster, now, and we make our own fun getting there. But it is not the same kind of traveling we did when I was a little girl.