

BECOMING WORLD TRAVELERS

by
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When I was a little girl growing up, Grandpa had a plan whereby Uncle Charlie, Uncle Blackie and I would become sophisticated world travelers by the time we went to college. The plan was a very good one. At age eight or nine, we were to be taken on a trip to Montreal and Quebec in Canada. At age twelve or thirteen we were to be taken on a trip to South America. And during High School we were to be taken on a trip to Europe. As I say, it was a very good idea and nothing short of World War II would have prevented Grandpa's plan from working splendidly.

Uncle Charlie and Uncle Stew were taken on their trips to Canada and several years later on a trip to Panama in Central America. Ed, Stew's younger brother who was one year older than me, and I got to go to Canada, but then the War came and that was as far as we got in the "travel plan."

My memories of Ed's and my trip to Canada are vague. I remember barreling down the hill in Quebec in a horse-drawn carriage, watching the cobblestones of the road flying by through the holes in the floor of the rather delapidated carriage and being frightened to death that the horse and the carriage and all of us would end up in a terrible crash and disaster. I remember being very glad when that ride was over.

I also remember very well a scolding Ed and I got from our Grandmother Daisy Parlin who had gone along with Grandma, Aunt Dorothy and us on the trip. We spent one day on a river steamer boat traveling up the St. Lawrence River from Montreal to Quebec. Grandmother Daisy decided as part of our educational experience to give Ed and me a few Canadian coins as mementos of our trip. She gave us each a Canadian nickel, a dime, and a quarter. The minute we were on our own, Ed and I made a bee-line to the gambling casino and put our souvenir money in the one-armed bandit coin gambling machines. When Grandmother Daisy found out what we had done she was very displeased. Her scolding must have made an impression, because I still remember it with embarrassment.

When World War II came in the 1940s, many of the world's plans were spoiled. Grandpa's travel program was a minor one of these. Uncle Blackie and I had done little travelling. When I was in High School and Uncle Blackie in late Elementary School, Grandma and Grandpa decided they would take Uncle Blackie and me on a trip out west to visit some colleges, to see Chicago, and to see Yellowstone and the Grand Teton National Parks in Wyoming. We made this wonderful trip by train.

Accommodations for long train trips had improved a great deal since the days when we had taken the train to Silver Bay for our February holidays. There were still the open Pullman cars, but on long train trips you were now able to travel in compartments. This meant that instead of sleeping in double bunks behind a curtain, you slept in double bunks in a small private room with a door into the corridor. The beds were folded away ingeniously and out of sight during the day so two people could sit in seats facing each other. There were small toilets and wash basins in each compartment. They were really very comfortable and very private.

We took a regular commuter train from New York City to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. We had to spend the night in Harrisburg in order to get the Super Chief for Chicago the following morning.

Grandma had set out a suitcase for each of us. Since I was in High School, I was old enough to be responsible for my own clothes, and Grandma was helping Blackie get his clothes organized. Grandpa had gone into New York to the office but was coming out to Englewood early in the afternoon to get all of us and drive into the city with the suitcases. My suitcase was full, but I had a few things left over that wouldn't fit in. Grandma told me that Grandpa had plenty of room in his suitcase, I could put my extra things in his bag. His bag was open on the chaise long. It had a whole lot of photographic supplies in the bottom, but as Grandma said there was plenty of room.

Evidently Grandma had some extra clothes of Blackie's that wouldn't fit in his suitcase either, so she put some of his clothes in Grandpa's suitcase. She had some extra clothes of her own and put them in Grandpa's suitcase, too.

So we were all set. When Grandpa came to get us we put the bags in the car and set out for Grand Central Station. We arrived in Harrisburg about nine in the evening. It was war time, and all the stores were closed; none of them was open in the evening after six. We got to our hotel and unpacked the bags. We discovered that Grandpa had brought absolutely no clothes with him! No pajamas, no underwear, no tooth brush, no razor, no anything but his camera and lots of film! He was really quite annoyed. He had come home from work, found his suitcase full, assumed that Grandma had packed for him, shut his bag and put it in the car with the rest of the things. We tried all over Harrisburg to find a store open to buy Grandpa a pair of pajamas but with no luck. He slept that night in his underwear and caught a terrible cold.

We traveled from Harrisburg to Detroit, Michigan, on the Super Chief. We went to look at some colleges in Michigan, especially Albion College which was where I eventually did go to school. Grandpa had to leave us and go back to New York, so Grandma, Uncle Blackie, and I went on to Chicago from there.

At Chicago we had to change trains before we could proceed farther west, so Grandma decided to give us a short educational trip to the north side of Chicago to Evanston, Ill. where she had grown up as a child. She particularly wanted us to have a swim in Lake Michigan, that Great Lake in which she had learned to swim and a lake for which she had great sentimental childhood attachment. Grandma had gone to the trouble of renting a hotel room for us for a few hours so that we could go change into bathing suits, go take a swim at the hotel beach, dress again and make it back into Chicago in time to catch our train for Wyoming. We knew there was little time to spare, but Uncle Blackie and I were glad for a good swim whether it was an educational experience or not.

We knew that we had about an hour to swim. Grandma had taken a short dip and had gone back to the hotel to change and given Uncle Blackie and me strict instructions to be back promptly in an hour. She said she would come and call us. We had our swim, but as I remember it, Uncle Blackie and I were greatly disappointed. Grandma had talked in such glowing terms of beautiful Lake Michigan. We had studied

about the great natural wonders of our country, the greatest clear water lakes in the world. We were really looking forward to seeing our first Great Lake. How disappointing it was to find ourselves swimming in a rather muddy, dirty, unattractive body of water. As I look back on it now, I realize that this was my first conscious experience of pollution. Of course I didn't label it as such at the time. Uncle Blackie and I only knew that compared to swimming in the clear, clean waters of Lake George this was no good. So my first experience of the Great Lakes was one of great disappointment. Little did any of us know that the situation in the Great Lakes would deteriorate so badly that by 1968, Lake Erie would be declared a "dead lake" and the other Great Lakes threatened with imminent "death" also.

On this particular day I guess you would say that pollution was responsible for our getting to our train on time. Grandma had not come back for Uncle Blackie and me as she had said she would, and it was already past the hour she had allotted us. Actually we hadn't enjoyed the water, and we returned to the hotel room before we were called. There we found Grandma just finishing her dressing. It wasn't like Grandma to take an hour to dress, and she seemed a little irritated and rather abruptly told Uncle Blackie and me to hurry. We did and in a great dither of watch-gazing took a taxi back to Chicago and just managed to get on board the San Francisco Chief minutes before it pulled out of the huge station. It was when we had settled down in our compartments that Grandma relaxed and began to giggle and told us what had happened.

She, too, had been disappointed in the muddy water of Lake Michigan. She had come back to the hotel early in order to shower to rinse the dirty water off. She had changed in the bedroom and gone into the adjoining bathroom to take a leisurely shower. She got out of the tub and found that the bathroom door was stuck, and she couldn't get out of the bathroom. She began to yell and pound the door to try to get someone's attention. No one came. For almost an hour she was in the bathroom yelling and pounding. Finally a young bell hop heard her calling and came into the room. She yelled to him that the door was stuck. The boy, who must have been a High School football player, ran into the door with all his might and shoved against it with his shoulder.

The door burst open and the flabbergasted bell hop found himself in the bathroom with Grandma who was stark naked. Grandma had tried to give the boy a tip, but he just disappeared—fast!

Well, we had a good laugh at Grandma's expense.

The San Francisco Chief was the last word in fancy trans-continental train travel. Our trip to Wyoming would take us three nights and two days. All our meals would be eaten in the train dining car. Every car in a train has an aisle, either down the middle as in the Pullman cars, or on the side as in the compartment cars. In the middle of the train was the dining car. You would walk the entire length of a train and we often did on that long trip to Wyoming. We met many people and had fun talking to them.

The dining car had tables set on either side of this aisle. They were set with white linen table cloths, linen napkins, silver and crystal water goblets. Each table was by a huge window so as you ate you looked out the window and watched the scenery of America speed by. The dining car was a restaurant. You had a great variety of foods to choose from the menu. All the waiters on the dining car were Negroes* with white starched jackets and a white linen towel folded over their left arm. They were extremely courteous and skillful. I can remember watching these waiters with a sense of awe as they adroitly balanced the trays of food they carried and served on these lurching, swaying trains. They were really superb craftsmen.

Grandma had told us her funny story about the bathroom. It was a few hours before time to go to the dining car. She decided to take a walk through the train, Uncle Blackie and I began to play solitaire.

Several hours passed and Grandma did not appear. Time to go to supper came and went and still Grandma did not appear. We thought perhaps we had misunderstood so Uncle Blackie and I went down through several cars to the dining car and sat down to begin ordering supper. Sure enough, pretty soon Grandma showed up and joined us. She looked a little perturbed but said nothing as she ordered. In the middle of dinner she began to giggle again. She couldn't help it. She

* See note pg. 126 of "Traveling to Silver Bay."

asked if we had missed her. We said we didn't know where she had gone.

She confessed that she had been a little upset about the bathroom episode at the hotel. She had decided to step out onto the platform of the observation car for a breath of fresh air.

The last car on these super passenger trains was the "living room" of the train, a car with carpets and comfortable chairs, writing tables, and a bar. At the very end of the observation car, at the tail end of the train was a small porch-like platform where you could go out if you wanted to. Grandma had gone out onto the platform and the door shut and locked behind her. Yes, she had locked herself out on the platform, and it was several hours before someone came along and opened the door from the inside to let her back in.

Well, this trip was to be an education for Uncle Blackie and me. It was an education, all right. We learned never to let Grandma out of our sight for the rest of the trip.

P.S. Grandpa completed his "travel plan" for all of us by sending each of us and our spouses on a trip to Europe for a wedding present.