

3rd Storyworth: Where did you go on vacations as a child?

Having come from a large, lower middle class family of five children (originally six, but the first of them, Peggy, died at age 7 from hydrocephalus when I was four) which as of this writing are all still alive, vacations were budgeted events in all cases. While I don't recall much before my teen years, I do know we had a large three room tent which weighed a ton (none of this modern nylon & fiberglass rod popup stuff ;-)) along with a Coleman pump-up lantern and two-burner cook stove, which had to be filled with naphtha fuel, but worked pretty well for us. That gear was even borrowed by Lynne Odell and me for our trip to Nova Scotia on our first vacation after our marriage, while we lived in New Britain, CT. And was the reason we immediately arranged to buy a pop-up trailer from the guy I worked for while we had been dating when we got home, because the setup and tear-down time was so cumbersome. That pop-up made it a cinch to leave within 10 minutes of returning from work for a weekend, because everything would fit within the trailer, so we only needed food ;-)

Anyway, we camped for most of our family vacations, which rarely lasted much more than a few days because of my parents' work schedules. So trips were usually within a single day's drive from home, which was mostly at Kirchner Ave in Hyde Park, NY for my memory since about age 10, although I do recall having previously lived in East Hyde Park on the property of the Guernsey Milk farm there, and briefly in Syracuse while my Dad was with Fuller Brush.

A specific exception was the time my grandparents gave me a graduation present we used to subsidize the family, which could otherwise have never hoped to afford it, which I am pretty certain had to have been for High School in 1969, although I was not a driver on the trip, leaving that to my parents. So we loaded the '68 Ford Country Sedan Wagon, with the three speed on the column manual gearbox and no power steering, despite the miniscule steering wheel which had obviously expected that NOBODY would buy a car that way, and headed for Disney World. Most of the gear was on the roof ;-)

Along the way, I think in South Carolina during the return trip, my Dad driving his usual "on the bumper of the guy ahead", we wound up with a minor altercation. It still allowed us to continue with the trip, but it also stole thereafter much of the anticipated pleasure from beforehand. I am afraid that where we stayed, and details like that, are too vague to recall. But I always had enjoyed camping, which Lynne and I further enhanced when our honeymoon had been taken towing a similarly equipped pop-up unit from my former boss' lot, which introduced us to the best option ever on such a rig; a pull-out kitchen so we could do the greasy cooking outside under the awning instead of in the trailer itself, which kept it a LOT cleaner. We eventually used our own such unit to obtain our Master's Degrees by weekend trips to Charleston Lake in Ontario, Canada, which was just over two hours' drive north from our home in Liverpool, a suburb of Syracuse in Central New York. But that was MUCH later than the subject I believe Storyworth asked about above. If I have some opportunity I will expound on those trips some other time, because they are worthy of note ;-)

Anyway, because we were camping as a family, we were really cramped in the car, which had two bench seats plus facing side seats in the far back, with a roof rack to hold all the gear, and no AC. Needless to say, packing and unpacking took a LOT of the pleasure from the trip eventually, and would NOT be a recommendation I would ever make to even my worst enemy. It seems doubly paradoxical in light of my current writing location at the home I jointly own with my new love, Dawn Clark, in this our second year driving to within about 1.5 hours of Disney World here in Inverness, FL. But we've learned to do all our overnights in motels, and meals in restaurants along the way. MUCH smarter, although I would eagerly do so in a motorhome, as I did with my career many a time ;-)

I well recall wanting to spend most of the time riding the Monorail once we arrived at Disney World, both because it offered such a unique technical experience, and because we spent so much time on it they let us ride up in the driver's cabin, which presented THE best way to be introduced to the Magic Kingdom and Disney World, I can assure you. Sadly, I doubt that option any longer exists, except possibly for small children, since 9/11. And, of course, it helped that it had Air Conditioning in which you could hang meat ;-)

Since we were there after my graduation but before college, the weather was warm and the rides were long waits, and we were exhausted most of the time. Which had not been helped in any way by being squeezed into the car as we had for the time it took to drive down and back from our Hyde Park home. So the Monorail was like heaven, even as an escape from the rest of my reality.

I had also personally been able to attend both the '64 World's Fair in New York, having stayed with my Aunt who lived nearby in Hicksville on Long Island, and the Montreal World's Fair of '67. I loved both, and at 13 and 16 respectively was the perfect age for the experience. Being the "techie" I was then, and have been ever since, I was enamored of the various pavilions like those for GE, GM and Ford, all of which had a bit of Disney magic to them. So I was eager to experience the joys of EPCOT when I got the chance, and it did not disappoint. Most memorable at Disney, in addition to the "Coke Song" which I recall to this day and used as melody for my "Ode to Ainsley" on her second day from the womb, and the "Up With People" performers, were the international flavor of EPCOT, and the huge fireworks show over the tidal pool in the evenings. Made all the heat, crowds, and family drama (as if YOURS is ANY different?! ;-)) melt away, and enhanced my subsequent desires for multi-cultural engagement and travel, something I spent much time and effort doing during my professional career, and thoroughly enjoyed even with the hard work that entailed.

When considered with the two World's Fairs, my personal experience with such presentations made even things like the New York State Fair, held each August in Syracuse, almost boring. Being the techie I am, I was always fascinated by things like the logistics for supplying food and everything else, all of which seemed completely invisible to the actual attendees. I have always been impressed as well by such things as Animatronics, which I am sure sprang in part from my own machine control and automation career interests.

And, despite the TOO closeness such a trip made for the family, I have never lost my sense of adventure and wonderment to travel, and took EVERY opportunity when it presented itself, to expand my experiences meeting people from the next city to people half a globe away. I have subscribed to the belief that travel is a far better teacher than any classroom ever can be, and am appalled when I see fellow travelers wanting to duplicate what they do at home even when in totally different cultures, from meals they eat to things they do. I always wondered why bother to spend the treasure and time to travel, only to duplicate what you can experience daily at home?

Have ALL travels been great? No. The Disney World experience pretty much covered the spectrum of responses from me. But it never made me lose the enthusiasm for the next opportunity, and proved it with things like the East Berlin German man who could not POSSIBLY have been more gracious in thinking that my merely being an American made me a wonderful person, because HE had been the fortunate recipient of goodies from the "Candy Bombers" who during the Berlin Airlift saved so many lives, even as those same pilots had a mere few years earlier been trying to kill him. Or the kids from Australia I met on a train coming back from Schenectady, and when I learned they had no place to stay, offered them housing with my family. Or the Aussie couple I met in a museum in Taipei, Taiwan, who subsequently offered MY daughter assistance during her semester as an exchange student in Oz. The travel and travails list continues to expand to this day ;-)

Joe Holzer 1/15/2021