

## The Trip

The story of "The Trip" is excerpted from my autobiography, presently unfinished, as a separate tale of adventure and learning as a seven year old of the day. The reasons for the trip were several fold hinging on my grandmother's health and a desire to see a lot of the country in the process of visiting relatives in the Bitterroot valley of Montana.

My grandmother had chronic intestinal trouble which had not been helped a lot by local doctors. Dr. Kellogg's sanitarium in Battle Creek, Michigan had gained a wide reputation in the medical community, much like Mayo Brothers today and she decided to give them a shot at relieving her problems which accounts for the three week stay in Battle Creek. One of my memories of the Battle Creek sanitarium was of the solarium we were waiting in one morning and a phonograph there was playing "Valencia," which I had never heard before but when heard since then evokes memories of that particular morning.

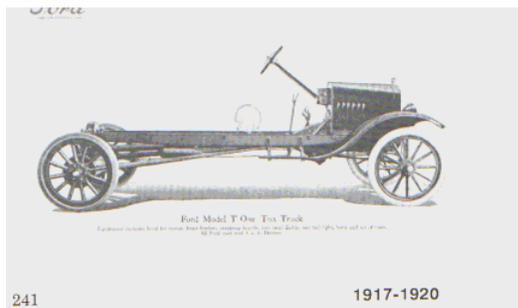
There were other points of interest along the way to Montana's Bitterroot valley where a cousin, Jim Phelps and his family lived on a ranch and through Wyoming, where an "Aunt Harriet" had a sheep ranch, on the way back to Cape Girardeau, Missouri.

Preparations for the trip were made in early 1925 by scrounging Ford dealers in our area for availability and best prices for a model T ford two door sedan (Tudor) and a model TT truck chassis with a ruckstell axle. This truck chassis was much like a school bus chassis of today without the body. The only parts above the frame level were the radiator, hood, firewall, steering column and gas tank. The gas tank was mounted crosswise on top of the frame at the point the driver's seat would cover but there was no seat with a bare chassis. Driving at this point was while seated on the gas tank mounted above the frame to provide gravity gas flow to the up draft carburetor as no fuel pumps were used on these engines. Since our family pictures were stolen in a burglary. This picture is the closest I have come to a representative look of the house car we had. The one on the right is quite similar.

∨  
TT house car



TT ford chassis



∧  
The truck chassis was to be used as a "house car", as they were called in those days. Nowadays they are known as "motor homes." A retired pullman car builder at Mount Vernon, Il. was hired to build the body which was the "home" part of this venture. When he finished the body my mother and dad drove this empty TT ford chassis sitting on a box over the gas tank to Mount Vernon to have the body installed, crossing the Mississippi river at Cape Girardeau, Mo. on the ferryboat, "Gladys," as no bridge existed here at the time. The builder, whose name I never knew, had acquired a lot of good ideas of efficient space use from his pullman car work and put together a compact unit. The body was flat across the front where it attached to the firewall and had a windshield all the way across the front. The sides and rear were also flat and the roof was slightly curved laterally something like a railroad passenger car roof. The entry door was at the right front corner with a window in the upper half. A matching window was located in the opposite left front corner and a window was made in the rear panel for a view in that direction. A long seat was built over the gas tank extending most of the way across the front and seating four people. All the floorboards lifted out to expose about a 10" deep storage space below. On each side there was a

sofa like arrangement leaving an aisle in the center and having the seat backs fold outward through the sides of the body and covered by a snap down canvas weather cover making a full sized bed on each side. Also featured was a pressurized water supply, a kitchen sink, a commode, six volt and 110 volt lights for en route or parked interior lighting. There were scattered places, even then, similar to KOA of today to park and avail hookups. There was always a place to be found to park the house car when needed. We would leave it sit and take side trips in the ford coach which was more maneuverable, faster and used less gas. Towing a car behind a motor home was not so much an option at that time so the ford coach was the solution to going places not reachable by the house car. This ford coach was driven by a local Cape Girardeau man who went along for the trip and his meals-no pay. He stayed with the house car while we went on exploratory trips. Some of these forays included money making episodes to help finance the trip. My dad was an ace salesman and would set up curbside pitches in a handy town and sell whatever was in or novel at the time. He would buy things from wholesale houses and sell them on the street which any one could do in those days as no permit was required in most places. I have seen him sell raincoats, sliding shutter winter fronts for model T ford radiators, improved after market model T ford timers, which roughly equate to high tension ignition distributors, and were a sore trouble point causing the engine to miss fire. His demonstrations were so convincing the timers sold like the proverbial hot cakes for \$5.00 which was not an insignificant amount at that time.

After laying in supplies our trip to Montana started by crossing the river here by ferry and going up through Illinois with it's better roads at that time. Highway 25 from here to ST. Louis was gravel at the time. Anyhow, while going up through Illinois I saw an advertising sign of the Shell Oil Company along side the road and was trying to read it and called it sheel and was corrected by my parents. I guess the reason I remembered this is because I had never seen a shell sign in Missouri and it was new to me. The first night out I was feeling bad and was taken to a doctor in Okawville, Il. He examined me and determined a treatment of medication and said I would be fine in the morning, which I was. This from an old doctor's expertise-no cat scan, ultra sound, blood test or any of a myriad of tests one would be put through today. And probably with no definite conclusion or diagnosis.

The next day we went through the prison at Joliet, Il. and I experienced sights and smells that have stayed with me to the present, especially the smells. On very infrequent occasions an errant smell will take me back to that day. On to Chicago where we visited friends of the family and business associates of my dad. This was not my initial trip to Chicago as we had visited these people before when I was four years old and got my first haircut there. I raised a fuss because I thought it would bleed when cut but I calmed down when the barber snipped off a curl when I wasn't looking and showed me there was no blood on it. I can't imagine myself at that age with curly hair down to my shoulders. Although I do remember being in downtown Cape Girardeau, Mo. with my mother on main street in front of the First National Bank and some man saying "hello there, little girl." That went over like a lead balloon and on that score I didn't mind getting my hair cut. The husband of the couple we visited in Chicago must have been a "life of the party" type of guy as he had a horn that played a tune on his 1928 Chevrolet when they visited us later in Cape Girardeau.

I don't remember our complete itinerary in the proper sequence but next we went to the sanitarium of Dr. Kellogg in Battle Creek, Michigan where we spent three weeks pursuing a cure for my grandmother's physical ills. While there we joined tours through the cereal plants of Kellogg and Post and saw breakfast cereals being made like Post Toasties, corn flakes, shredded wheat, puffed wheat, puffed rice, and grape nuts. The grape nuts made the biggest impression on me because it was the biggest surprise how they were made. A bread dough of several dark grain flours and husks was baked in loaves of about 6" diameter and 4' long. They were baked five separate times because the proper hardness could not be obtained at

one baking without burning the loaves. After the fifth baking and cooling the loaves were hard as an oak log and were run through a grinder producing the granules we know as 'grape nuts.' The manufacturing processes of the other cereals were also shown and explained to us. Also the making of Postum, a coffee substitute made from cereal grains, was shown. It was a good learning experience as was the tour through a sugar mill farther up in Michigan where we saw sugar made from sugar beets. The sugar came out a light tan color and was bleached using copper sulfate which can be poisonous to humans but somehow the process turns out harmless to us.

Then at Detroit we took a tour through the Ford Motor Co. plant where we saw the manufacturing of Ford autos and Fordson farm tractors. At that time Ford produced everything used in his products. He made his own frames, engines, transmissions, wheels, batteries, tires, etc. He had his own rubber plantations, forest lands, lead production, cotton production for upholstery and headliners, soy beans for plastics and gears and ignition parts. In house steel mills were used for all his steel production and his introduction of molybdenum and vanadium steels permitted a very light but strong vehicle. The building process could be followed from the molten steel to the bare frame to where every component had been added from overhead conveyors and on to a big electric crank to start the engine before starters were available and the car, truck, or tractor was driven out to a marshalling yard for shipment to the dealers. Such items as nuts and bolts which could be bought at a price and quality suitable to Ford were required to be crated in specific sized wooden boxes fastened together at specific places by bolts so that by removing a few bolts the wooden slats became the floor boards for the model T cars and the bolts were used in some of the other assembly process.

While in the Detroit area we took a ferry across the Detroit river to Windsor, Ontario, Canada which was like going to a European country as for architecture, people, businesses, etc. At that time, about 1925, a majority of people there rode bicycles and there were huge parking areas full of bicycles and few automobiles.

We went up through Wisconsin and Minnesota after leaving Michigan and went fishing on some of the 10000 crystal clear lakes where you could see fish ten or fifteen feet down. We went up to the headwater of the Mississippi river to a point where you could step across it. We visited Minneapolis and St. Paul and saw the statue of Minnehaha and Hiawatha, her husband, according to Longfellow.

Fargo, North Dakota was visited. I don't know why unless it was to see where the Wells-Fargo company started. The route then headed across North Dakota and into Montana. In connection with this stretch of desolation and beauty we stopped at a roadside clump of bushes with red berries so my mother could get a few sprigs. This was about 20 miles east of Billings and we had left the house car behind at this point because of the mountains and so went to a hotel in Billings for the night and when my dad put his left hand on the register to steady it while signing in and noticed the two carat diamond was gone from his ring and there was consternation galore. He searched his vest pockets, pants cuffs, pockets and the car floor and decided we would have to backtrack so we drove the twenty or so miles back to the red bush location and my parents searched the area where they got the berries and actually found the diamond to their great relief. I had heard them mention that this was a fairly expensive item and I figured if something worth so much could be so easily lost that I didn't care about having any diamonds. Besides, to me diamonds seemed too showy for common people to have. Anyhow, after the diamond recovery it was back to Billings for the night.

Before descending on the Montana relatives I suppose my folks thought my appearance needed improvement so while in Butte, an expensive mining town, I got a haircut costing a surprising three dollars. It would have been about fifty cents at home. Butte was a long thin town with a railroad running down the center of the main street.

Somewhere on this leg of the trip crossing the Rocky Mountains on one lane dirt roads which developed ruts you couldn't get out of the brakes failed on a car behind us on a downgrade and we were hit in the rear resulting in damage that took three days to repair before we could go on. These dirt roads had a passing place about every eighth mile and when you met someone one of you had to back up to the nearest passing point.

One of the principal objects of this trip was to visit Jim Phelps, a cousin of my grandmother, and his family. Jim Phelps had a ranch in an area known as Bitterroot Valley which, naturally, was located by the Bitterroot Mountains region of western Montana. They had a nice comfortable house with a unique feature of a cold storage area adjacent to the kitchen like a pantry. What was called a trout stream fed by cold water from melting snow high up in the mountains ran through the ranch acreage close enough to the house that it was diverted to run through this pantry area to form a quiet pool like a cistern tank in which crocks were kept to hold butter, milk and other perishables at a temperature not much above freezing. I had never seen anything like that before.

In those days in the evenings people would sit around talking or listening to the radio which was just getting a good start across the country. This was before the days of loud speakers and everyone listening had to wear a set of head phones of which they had a half dozen pairs. Another diversion while there was a wild horse round up conducted by the cowboys of the cattle ranch. They brought these horses to their corral and went through the "breaking" process which could get pretty rough. After this the horses were sold in mostly the central and eastern parts of the country. That was a cash crop entailing only physical effort and talent and wasn't dependent on the weather like farming. A further experience while there was a trip up on a nearby mountain to find a set of deer horns we took back home and to search out and fell a "bee tree." This was a hollow tree about two and a half feet in diameter that wild bees had used to store honey in. I would guess there was about five hundred pounds of honey and comb that they hauled away in wash tubs. All told the visit to that ranch was a great learning experience for me.

On the way back across the country we went by "Aunt Harriet's" sheep ranch where sheep shearing was in progress and Aunt Harriet gave us a quantity of raw wool which we had processed in a woolen mill in Wisconsin. We brought the resulting battings home and made comforters out of them. On the way home we spent some time in the badlands of South Dakota where we gathered samples of seven different colors of sand in glass vials like test tubes. It was a wild and beautiful area to explore. We thought our poodle dog was lost there but when my dad sounded the old model T horn the dog came running from behind a distant sand dune and all was well.

While in Wisconsin we visited a pickle factory and a cheese factory and brought home with us a wheel of cheese about 8" high and 24" in diameter. We were headed south in the early fall in Wisconsin one afternoon about 3:30 when a farmer coming from a pickle factory on the east side of the road was blinded by the afternoon sun and drove out into the side of our house car as we passed and it broke off both of his wooden spoked front wheels leaving him helpless but unhurt otherwise and left only some scratches on the side of the house car. Both drivers chalked it up to experience and went their ways, although one was hampered for a while. Nothing like the lawsuit you would probably encounter today.

I didn't get to see much of Paul Meacham, the driver of the extra ford, as he was either driving alone or staying behind with the house car while we made side trips. I don't remember ever seeing him again after we got back home but I imagine he had enough gratifying experiences from the trip to make it worth his time.

We made a couple of short local trips with the house car after returning from Montana. Nothing memorable. Having no further use for the house car we put the body up on blocks and made a

*This is a good example of the wooden flat bed after the house car duty except for the solid tires.*

v



^

*The above is a fair example of the TT as converted for the beer business except painted red.*

wooden flat bed with low sideboards and used the truck to haul corn and garbage for our hogs. Then, about 1933 my dad and two other guys went into the beer business. They had the agency for Cook's Goldbloom bottled and keg beer. We then built a stake body for the truck and found a cab from an old lumber truck for it and painted the whole thing red with Cook's signs on it. At about 14 years of age I helped my dad deliver beer locally and to the surrounding small towns to their bars and pool halls and later I went on delivery trips alone. The beer business lasted only a couple of years as the competition got stiffer and there were differences between the partners. I was left with a truck I drove to school often and hauled garbage after school. I practically inherited the old truck as my own. Then, about 1935 in looking for something a little more posh I found a model T coupe with no tires or rims for \$4.00. Then I located a guy having four tires and rims for \$4.00. I got a rebuilt battery from a battery repairman for \$2.50. That was a total of \$10.50. Then it was a crushing blow to have to pay \$12.50 for my Missouri license plates. I drove the old coupe to S. E. M. O. state teacher's college and to work at a dairy processing plant 'til I swapped it in on a 1930 Chrysler coupe about 1937 for \$15.00 credit on the purchase of an \$85.00 car. That was a wire wheeled model with a spare wheel mounted in each front fender and a rumble seat behind. I thought it was pretty snazzy looking. In the days of three brush generators it was hard to keep a battery charged above 20 miles per hour, especially with a radio and heater, so I rigged up a bracket and extra generator and put an extra battery in the rumble seat area to serve my auxiliary electrical needs and had no more run down primary battery.



1925 Model T coupe



1930 Chrysler sport coupe

In 1938 I traded the Chrysler in on a 1934 two door Plymouth with 42000 miles on it costing \$325.00 This is the car I traded in on a 1940 new Pontiac two door six cylinder. Cost-\$885.00



*1934 Plymouth two door sedan.*



*1940 Pontiac two door*

*1934 Plymouth 2 door*

As I said, this is an unfinished work as of now but it gives an idea of what was novel at the time and has become common place since then. Thanks again for the pictures and information. (I sent this to the guy who furnished me the house car pictures.) Henry Phelps.