My first road trip “out West”

SAUGATUCK, Mich. - One of the most indelible memories of my childhood was a trip “out West”, as my parents liked to refer to it, via the famous Route 66.

I remember it vividly even to this day, perhaps because my parents took me out of school to accompany them on what my teachers agreed would be an important “educational journey”. My first road trip.

I was very young, but I can recall almost every detail of that adventure. I remember my parents encouraging me to feel the silky texture of a piece of wood from the Petrified Forest in Arizona. I remember the intense heat of the Mojave Desert and my mother dipping cotton towels in melted ice and wrapping them around our heads to keep us cool during that endless drive through that relentless desert. I remember the ghost towns and gold mines that captured my imagination, the Cherokee trading post, my first and only auto court chamber pot and, of course, Stuckey’s pecans. There were some sobering moments as well.

I remember clinging to my parents’ hands in fear and amazement as I took my first glimpse over the edge of the Grand Canyon, I was awestruck by its magnificence, but terrified by the possibility that my parents might consider descending those canyon walls on the backs of “poor little mules”.

It was there that I discovered my fear of heights and what would become my lifelong love and empathy for animals. I also saw my first serious car accident along a windy mountain road and watched my father – the only doctor to come upon the scene – grab his black leather medical bag and scramble down the mountain side to try to save the family of five that had been thrown from their overturned automobile.

That was the first time I was aware of my father’s profession as a physician and surgeon, and it was my first encounter with death. I clearly remember my mother trying to shield me from the scene and my resistance to her efforts. I was mesmerized by my father’s command of the situation and the respect shown by the onlookers. I was so proud of him. I think it was the first time I had observed leadership.

That trip was a journey that held many “firsts” for me, I believe it played a major role in molding my future, building my character and binding my love of travel with the intellectual aspects of art, history, culture and education.

[...]

Felicia Fairchild

Looking over the edge of the Grand Canyon

At the Petrified Forest, Arizona

Stuckey’s pecans

The Cherokee Trading Post, Oklahoma