

## **Around North America on \$90.**

By some miracle, and to the surprise of everyone, I had passed grade 11 and was about to start grade 12 in the Fall. In the meantime, there were 2½ months to pass before returning to higher learning. I had just read, "Around the World in 80 Days", so my thoughts turned to travel. I had never been farther from Toronto than Niagara Falls so if I was to go on a trip what would be a good destination?

After some deliberation a journey around North America seemed like a good idea. With the help of an atlas, borrowed from the library, I sketched out a route. Toronto to Vancouver, Vancouver to San Diego, San Diego to Miami and Miami back to Toronto. It seemed to be a worthwhile trip for a 17 year-old and it looked quite easy on paper. I gathered all of my wealth and found that I had a total of \$90. That would have to do. When I told friends of my plans they were full of encouragement. They would say things like, "I hope you make it as far as Hamilton", and "See you in a few days when you run out of money". I accepted all of these as well wishes on their part.

There was an advertisement in the newspaper looking for drivers to drive cars to Calgary. That would be a free ride to Calgary and a good start to the trip so I applied. I was given a brand new Ford and told that I leave on July 5 in a convoy of 4 other cars. We arrived in Calgary on July 9 and I slept at the YMCA that night. In order to save money I slept in a vacant field the second night. Early the next morning I was awakened by loud noises and a lot of activity in the field. The field was being prepared for the Calgary Stampede that started on July 11 that year. After gathering up my belongings it was time to travel.

I started to hitch-hike on a circle tour and spent a week visiting Banff, Lake Louise, Jasper, Columbia Ice Fields, Lake Edith, Edmonton, Red Deer and back to Calgary. When I returned to Calgary I spent a day at the Calgary Stampede. I then hitch-hiked to Vancouver the next day and spent that night sleeping in a car on a used car lot. After a breakfast of 3 eggs, ham, hash browns, toast and coffee I spent a day on a walking tour of Vancouver. I made a note in my diary of viewing the city from the roof of the Vancouver Hotel, one of the best hotels in Vancouver. I wondered how anyone could afford to stay there. Little did I know that 30 years later I would be staying at that same hotel for 4 nights every month for a number of years when I gave seminars. The next day I hopped on a freight train and ended up in Seattle on my way to Los Angeles.

I got a ride with 4 guys from Bakersfield, California. They were broke and thought I could buy some gas for them. What a disappointment they had. I spent 3 days with them driving to Bakersfield, California, a trip of about 800 miles. I had them drive behind supermarkets on the way and I would go to the loading dock with my palm out asking for any fruit they could spare. That's how we ate. I had them stop at a roadside restaurant one day and I went in and asked if I could do work for some food. The waitress served me a big meal and topped it off with apple pie and ice cream. I asked what I could do in return and she said, "That's O.K. Good luck to you". My 4 buddies were not so aggressively inclined and had waited outside in the car. At night we drained the remaining gas from gas pump hoses at closed gas stations. It's surprising how much gas is left in the hose. As we got close to Bakersfield the guys left the spare tire in their car as collateral for a tank of gas.

From Bakersfield it took 1 day to make it to Hollywood. That night I slept in a used car at a car lot by Hollywood and Vine. In the morning I had breakfast on Sunset Blvd. and then took some tours around Los Angeles. Spent 8 days in the Los Angeles area and then set out for San Diego. From San Diego I hitch-hiked to Tucson, Arizona. Distance traveled so far – 6,214 miles. In Tucson I went down to the railway yards and slept in an empty boxcar.

The next morning I wanted to hop a freight train to take me across New Mexico to Texas. A freight train was pulling out and going in the right direction but there were no empty boxcars to jump in. The only chance I had of getting a ride was to jump on one of the oil tankers. Oil tankers have a board running down each side and they are about 10" wide. I crossed New Mexico and entered Texas sitting on one of those boards with my arm looped through an iron bar so I wouldn't fall off. Slept that night in a deserted coal shed.

I spent the next week making my way to Florida and ended up in Sarasota. It was late at night and I was looking for a place to sleep. There was a hearse parked at the back of a closed gas station and the door wasn't locked. I got in, stretched out on the coffin slab and had a good night sleep. It would never have occurred to me at the time that I would one day own a condominium in Sarasota, not far from where the hearse was parked. From Sarasota I hitch-hiked across alligator alley to Miami.

Mileage so far – 8,143 miles. Spent 4 days in Miami and then started hitch-hiking my way home up the east coast and arrived home on August 20. That was my first taste of travel. The thrill has never left me.

**Trip Statistics:**

Time traveling: 46 days

Mileage covered: 10,000 miles

5 provinces

23 states

Rides in 83 cars, 9 trucks, 4 tractor trailers, 6 buses, 1 freight train



**Brad McInnes**

**YMASC President 1970 - 1971**

