



3-15-1993

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Recommended Citation

Stanislaus, Carl (1993) "You Can Get There from Here," *Westview*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 3 , Article 16.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/westview/vol12/iss3/16>

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You Can Get There From Here

BY CARL STANISLAUS

I was born in Vinita, Oklahoma just a few blocks from the "Main Street of America," so it was natural for me to develop a kinship to the grand old road known as US Highway 66.

The revolution of the automobile and motorized trucking necessitated a paved surface from the Great Lakes to the west coast. Cyrus Avery of Tulsa promoted the old wagon trails from Chicago through Oklahoma, to Santa Monica,

California as the best route. In 1926 he created the United States Highway System, and the road became official. One third had already been paved, but it took until 1937 to complete the job. From the onset many referred to the slab as "The Mother Road."

The Oklahoma section begins in the northeast at Quapaw, runs through Mickey Mantle's home town of Commerce, on to Miami, and the Will Rogers Memorial at Claremore, and to Tulsa. There in the "Oil Capital of the World" you can still hear the ghostly strains of "San Antonio Rose" on a steel guitar and fiddles reverberating from the Crystal Ballroom, where Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys once played.

The old road rambles through the present Turner Turnpike towns to Oklahoma City where it combines with Interstate 40 through Cheyenne-Arapaho country. This follows the old Gold Trail and Marcy's California Road near the historic Rock Mary landmark. The original route went through Weatherford, Clinton, Elk City, and Texola.

All along the road were tourist attractions of every sort: zoos, reptile gardens, buffalo ranches, pecan candy stores, and Indian blanket stands. At the end of the historic highway was the ocean, the natural attraction that lured, parched dry, the Okie Dust Bowl refugees to the cool waters of the Pacific.



Fifty years ago my parents, my brother Gene, and I began trips on Route 66 to visit Mother's side of the family in California. Thirty-one years ago my wife Margie, daughter Terra, and I moved to Chickasha, and used US. 62 and US. 66 to visit our parents back in Pryor. I remember, on one of our trips to the coast, getting into one of the worst rainstorms there ever was. When the flood abated we were able to make out the town marker. It read "HYDRO." The little town near El

Reno certainly lived up to its name that dark night!

Nature is at its best along the old road, and there was easy access to caves, caverns, lakes, rivers, the Painted Desert, the Grand Canyon, the Petrified Forest, and many more. When they said Route 66 had character, they could only be referring to the people who worked in the cafes, motels, service stations, and attractions. Those who owned houses nearby were fortunate to be able to sit on their porches and watch America on the move. They all seemed to have something to say, whether it was the universal greeting, "Sure is a hot (or cold) one today" or a story they had to tell because they needed companionship.

It those days it was possible to get turned around; Dad stopped to ask directions. The farmer gave him several wrong ways to get there; then grinned and said, "Well sir, you just can't get there from here." We drove on in disgust, and finally ran onto 66 again.

There was the waitress we overheard talking to a truck driver: "My ex-boyfriend treated me like a phone book." The driver stretched and asked, "How's that?" She answered, "Well, he was only interested in my numbers, 36-24-36, and when he was through with me he just cast me aside. Boy! Did I get a wrong number!"

On another trip, Mom, Dad, Brother Gene and I got as far as Elk City, had car trouble, and decided to turn back to Pryor for a fresh start. There was the '39 Chevy which used an enormous amount of oil all the way out and back; we found when we arrived home a rock had put a small hole in the oil pan.

In 1952 we put a frame over the bed of our '49 Chevy pickup, covered it with canvas; then Gene and I pretended we were in a prairie schooner on the way to discover gold in California—that is, until we sideswiped a car on a narrow mountain road. No one was hurt, and neither auto sustained much damage, thank goodness! I was bounced out on my bottom, but I was well padded there.

Everyone bought souvenirs on their first few trips out; then it became old hat. There were thermometers mounted on little mother-of-pearl oil wells, miniatures of the Mormon Temple, redwood trees, sailboats, jackrabbits, and just about anything else indigenous to the region. The picture postcards were kept for memories rather than mailed. There were bumper stickers declaring, "Binger, Home of Johnny Bench," or "Wave if You Love Jesus." I always did (love Jesus) and wave, but the person in the car ahead of me looked at me as if I was crazy.

It seemed as though every business on the Main Street of America was named '66' something or other. I wonder how many changed their signs when they relocated up on the Interstate. I-40, I-44, the Turner, the Will Rogers and other turnpikes and free roads have replaced the two-lane glory road. Oh, you still see parts of it here and there. Most cities have kept the national road signs through their business districts, and in the last year or so there has been a resurgence of interest to restore or redesignate other highways as Historic Route 66.

It won't ever be the same because on old 66 you had time to stop and enjoy our native land. One Yankee asked, "Say, son, where can you find any real Indians around here?" The boy answered, "I'm about as real as you will find, mister, only I left my blanket and scalping knife at home today."

Remember: IT CAN'T BE BEAT KIND TO YOUR FACE. GIVE YOUR WIFE A TREAT! BURMA SHAVE. I think it was near Chandler where the retired Highway patrol car sat on a hill as a safety reminder. The signs were great. '100 miles to...', '50 miles to...', '10 miles to...', and then, YOU HAVE JUST PASSED SNAKES ALIVE.

Going to one of our Pryor Christmas reunions, we stopped at a roadside church to watch their Living Manger scene. The actors were mostly six and seven years old. It was inspirational, but then two of the three wise men began to fight about who should stand closer to Baby Jesus; then it reminded us that despite all the peace and good will in the world, there are still those who fight over holy ground.

Two beautiful three year old twin girls sat watching the pageant. Margie asked one, "What is your name, sweetheart?"

"Clara," she replied. Then to the other, "And what is your name, baby?" Her answer was, "Unclara." Margie hesitated and

asked, "Did you say 'Unclara'? Oh, that is pretty, too." Well, it was. Who are we to question a mother's love?

Speaking of mothers, we always liked to take our folks out for a drive when we were in Pryor. On one occasion we all went to the big city of Tulsa to see the sights. We stopped, after a while, to use the bathrooms at a Phillips 66 station. The attendant informed me that Phillips had the finest restrooms, but no baths! After we used their sparkling conveniences, we hopped in the car and headed down Route 66. Margie turned to speak to her mother in the back seat and exclaimed, "Stop, stop, we left Mother and Terra back at the station!"

The ultimate attractions were built at the west end of the highway: Disneyland, Knott's Berry Farm, and Sea World. Yes, beautiful beaches, fishing, and well, let me warn you boys and girls about fishing. Don't go out expecting to catch Snipe. Oklahoma kids don't know about those fictional creatures. I waited on the beach, burlap bag in hand, till after dark to get them when they were running. Don't fall for that Snipe story, because I know one kid who wet his pants before he could get back to the house.

Once beautiful and modern, The Mother Road was the foundation for the future and the welding of a nation. It has surrendered to the demands of our times, but will live on in legend, movies, television, and song.

Gene moved his family to Long Beach years ago, and Dad died in 1988, but Margie, Mother and I made the pilgrimage back to California last summer. We took the latest trail, American Airlines. I drove the freeways in a rental car, and saw new monorails that will probably replace urban highway travel.

The Main Street of America, The Mother Road, the Will Rogers Highway, US. Route 66, whose path was taken by native Americans, explorers, immigrants, railroaders, Forty-niners, the Eighty-niner Sooners and Boomers, the rich and the refugee, the famous and infamous, princes and paupers, presidents and kings was the better way, and once, the only way to go.

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