

Hitchhiking Weekend of October 12, 1958

Start of the Adventure - Friday October 10

Over the Columbus Day weekend in 1958 my longtime childhood friend, Peter Wall, and I decided to embark on an impromptu hitchhiking adventure. Both Pete and I were 19 and I had just started my junior year at Boston College, while Peter was in his sophomore year at Providence College. So on Friday, October 10, we rendezvoused at the entrance to the Mass Pike in Weston, MA and set out on a weekend trip ostensibly to visit Peter's sister, Anna, in Washington, DC. We didn't have a plan; we had no idea where we were going to stay along the way; our only means of travel would be with our thumb extended; and we had very little money.

New York City - Friday night

On Friday evening we made it to New York City, where in 1958 the legal drinking age was 18. and we spent a night out on the town. That evening we stayed at the Roosevelt Hotel near Grand Central Station in Manhattan. I don't recall how we got a room but I know we didn't have the money to pay for it. I also don't remember with whom we might have been, but I'm sure being good Catholic boys that nothing naughty happened.

Commander LaForge - Saturday October 11

Early Saturday morning Pete and I hitched a ride through the Holland Tunnel out to the entrance to the New Jersey Turnpike. Here we picked up a ride from a Navy officer on his way to Annapolis, MD. The officer introduced himself as Commander LaForge and that he was on the staff at the Naval Academy. He then asked us to drive because he had a rough night before and needed to get some sleep. So Commander LaForge crawled into the back seat to rest and sober up while Pete and I manned the wheel.

After a couple hours of driving we had to wake up the Commander because we were at the end of the Jersey Turnpike and we needed him to pay the toll. After we crossed into Delaware the Commander suggested that we take the backway into Annapolis by driving down the Maryland Eastern Shore and crossing over to Annapolis via the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. In addition to being a scenic and more interesting route, the Commander said he knew a good crab restaurant for lunch.

When we reached the restaurant in Maryland, there was a prominent sign hanging over the entrance, WHITES ONLY. Being a boy from Boston who wasn't well-traveled, it was the first time that I'd experienced segregation. Of course it didn't stop us from enjoying a delicious meal.

As we continued on our journey the Commander, Pete and I had become new best friends. When we arrived in Annapolis, the Commander gave us a private guided tour of the Naval Academy and invited us to have something to eat in the mess hall.

Annapolis

After we left the Naval Academy facilities we went for a stroll through downtown Annapolis. The town was bustling with midshipmen celebrating the football victory over the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor earlier in the day. One of the stars of that Navy team was sophomore Joe Bellino, who hailed from Winchester Massachusetts, a neighboring town of our hometown, Medford. Joe Bellino went on to win the Heisman Trophy in 1960.

Not long into our walk we ran into two midshipmen from Medford: Sal "Tory" Marinelli and Richie Trainor. Sal grew up in my old neighborhood, Haines Square, and was a regular ball player at Morrison Park. Tory's family lived at the corner of Grant Ave. and Salem St. above Knox Photo. I knew Richie Trainor from playing baseball against him. Richie was a star athlete at St. Clement High School in Somerville. I was personally in awe that they both had earned Congressional appointments to the Naval Academy. Both Tory and Richie were quality guys and I suspect that they both went on to have exemplary military careers.

When we met on the streets of Annapolis the greeting was joyous, like "holy cow, what are you guys doing here?" However, their demeanor quickly changed when they realized who we were with a naval officer. They were suddenly rigid and everything was "Yes, Sir" "No, Sir." And the Commander in turn no longer acted like our buddy but a military officer. Regardless, it was wonderful to meet Sal and Richie in that setting.

It was now early evening and Peter and I realized we needed to head to Washington. So we asked the Commander to give us a ride out to the highway where we could hitch a ride. The Commander agreed but first he wanted to stop by his home. As he started up the walkway, his wife came out screaming at him and he promptly jumped in the car and drove off. At the highway we said goodbyes and headed for Washington.

Washington DC

Peter and I had started our trip a day earlier with the single objective of visiting his older sister, Anna, in Washington. But for some reason we decided to head to Georgetown University instead of to Anna's home. Nothing eventful happened at Georgetown but it was already dark and we were tired. We didn't know anyone but we somehow were able to find a place to sleep in the dorms.

The next morning (Sunday) we decided to bypass visiting Anna and to strike out for Baltimore. We had met a couple of guys the previous summer at Hampton Beach that lived in Baltimore, so we knew we had a place to stay. In the process we were inconsiderate and never made contact with Anna, who was expecting us. As I recall, Peter got an earful later.

Baltimore - Sunday October 12

Sunday morning we headed out to Baltimore - Washington Parkway to continue our journey. It was a warm day and as he hitched we had our jackets slung over our small travel bags. A 1956 Buick convertible with the top down stopped down the road about 100 feet, so we picked up our possessions and ran to catch up with the car. We hopped in the backseat and the two Afro-American guys in the front seat promptly passed us an open quart of gin and offered us a drink. Interesting way to begin a Sunday morning!

After we got out of the car in Baltimore Pete realized that he had lost his wallet. It could be only one of two places: in the back seat of the convertible or on the highway back in Washington. So we crossed over the parkway and hitched back to Washington and crossed over to where we originally got a ride. Laying there on the ground amazingly was Peter's wallet, and our extra 100 mile round trip was not in vain.

Our hosts in Baltimore decided to show us the hot spots in town and brought us to a section on East Baltimore Street, called the Block. It was a rainy night and nothing more than an adult entertainment district filled with strip bars, and women were outside inviting you to come in and see the show. Pete asked a woman wearing a raincoat why we should come in and she flashed open her coat and she was completely nude. We will never forget Helen of Troy.

Heading Home - Monday October 13

From Baltimore we were able to get a ride over the Delaware Memorial Bridge to the entrance to the New Jersey Turnpike. The entrances to main roads were strategic locations when hitchhiking. In this instance cars would come to almost a complete stop to pick up a toll ticket and the driver could see that we were just a couple clean-cut college kids. Or so we thought? For the first time on the trip we were having difficulty getting a ride and after two hours we were starting to panic. Finally a husband and wife with kids picked us up.

The family was heading home to Rhode Island and they lived very close to the Providence College (PC) campus. I got out in New Haven CT and hitched the rest of the way home to Medford by myself. Pete not only had a ride all the way back to PC, he became so friendly with the family, and he would occasionally get invited to dinner over the next three years of college.

Friends Forever

When reading this tale of our 1000 mile weekend hitchhiking adventure, you are probably wondering how I can recall in such detail an event that happened 65 years ago? The answer is simple. Pete and I have reminisced about that weekend and our other adventures on many, many occasions. Happy times!

Bernie Gleason
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