ON OUR WAY

In mid-summer after the grain was all harvested, four of us prepared to make an auto trip to some place. We didn't know and we didn't care; all we were going to do was to drive and turn toward whichever town we thought might interest us most. We rented a one-wheeled platform trailer and attached it to our car. We loaded in a few gasoline cans and a can of oil, several suitcases, and quite a lot of food, some of which consisted of baked beans in tin cans. We covered the entire load with a good canvas and fastened a pole over the top. The end of the pole extended three feet beyond the back of the trailer. To the end of this pole we suspended a roll of "Waldorf" which dangled and bobbed at the end of the string.

The time came for us to embark upon our journey. The four of us got in the car, and amid good-bye kisses, hand-shaking, and much talking, we took off, waving good-bye as we turned out of the drive-way.

The first town we came to was Plain, which offered little excitement if not embarrassment, because everyone recognized us and gazed upon our queer looking outfit. We left Plain in double time and hit for the hills. We drove over town roads and through woods until we didn't know our exact location. We then came to a good concrete highway which we knew would take us north or south, depending upon our notion to turn when we got there. We turned left and went south and in a short time we were in Potosi. We wanted to cross the river, but the ferry toll was fifty cents so we decided to follow the river to Prairie du Chien. At Prairie du Chien the bridge toll was ninety cents, so we decided to drive on to Dubuque where we knew we could cross for less. At Dubuque we crossed the Continental divide, but not until we had paid our bridge toll which we had not given without much discussion and arguing. Why, the toll-taker had the impertinence to ask us to pay five cents toll for the trailer, when he charged five cents for a two-wheeled trailer, and our trailer had only one wheel; and then he wouldn't give us a receipt. Well, anyway, we succeeded in getting his goat and that is all we were interested in anyway. Then after discussion we decided to go to Des Moines. After about an hour on the road we stopped for lunch. It was almost two o'clock. John lifted the hood and took the can of beans off of the manifold. We opened them with great anticipation and promptly started to eat them with a definite and determined idea of emptying the can. We did empty it, and we also consumed about a pint of milk each.

This lunch put us in good condition to continue. We did continue but hilarious laughter and loud conversation died down and we began to discuss in earnest what we would do when we got to Des Moines, and whether we hadn't better stop before we got there and spend the night and then arrive in Des Moines in the morning. John suggested that we drive to Newton and find a place to fill our straw tick and then go to town and spend the evening. We did this and we arrived in Newton about eight-thirty o'clock.
The town was very much alive and we could see that there were many rural folks in to do their shopping, as we heard them discussing farm problems, and whether or not it was going to stay nice until the threshing was over. We were in a mood to start something so we walked up to an old gentleman and asked him if he thought that we were going to get there. He would promptly ask us where we wanted to go, and we would just as promptly tell him that we didn't know but we were on our way. As we walked off, he would stand and give us a puzzled look; perhaps trying to determine whether we were intoxicated or just mentally unbalanced. Next we met a policeman. We tried hard to think of a ridiculous question to ask him, and we succeeded.

"When do they carry in the sidewalks in this town?" we asked him.

"Say, if you fellows want to be funny you better try it on someone else", he said.

We considered this as a warning enough, as it came from a policeman. Our next victims were a group of three young ladies, apparently on their way to a show. We walked down the sidewalk in front of them, and every few rods we would stop, turn around and accuse them of following us. They would immediately deny the charge and then ignore us. I guess they were glad when they reached the theatre, and when I look back upon the situation I don't blame them in the least.

It was bed-time and we drove out into the country to the spot which we had located before supper, and we "threw up our bunk" as we called it. After one or two hours of conversation we went to sleep with the crickets chirping a restful lullaby to our tired minds.

When we awoke the next morning "Old Sol" was already started on his journey across the sky, and the farmer, in whose hay field we slept was on his way out to get a load of his second crop of alfalfa. We had an interesting chat with him on economic conditions and on our trip. He expressed an inward desire to be on a trip with us. After eating a cold, but tasty breakfast, we continued on our way to Des Moines. Our progress was only interrupted long enough to secure a supply of milk, free of course, from the Maytag Dairy Farm, and some ice to put in our refrigerator to keep it from souring.

We got to Des Moines in the middle of the forenoon and visited the thresher factory which proved to be very interesting and worthwhile. We visited the Iowa State Capitol and also took notice of the truly beautiful city of Des Moines. After dinner we drove toward Omaha, but changed our minds about Nebraska when we thought of endless prairies and hot dry winds; so we changed our course and went to Kansas City.

We approached Kansas City from the north about nine-thirty o'clock that night. As we descended down off of the hill into Kansas City we became aware of the magnitude of the city and its unsurpassed beauty from our vantage point on the hill.
In Kansas City we visited a night club. Not that we were in the habit of visiting night clubs, but we wanted the experience of having been in one of Kansas City's night clubs. Kansas City is noted for them. We found it quite interesting, but decided that night clubs were not all that is claimed for them. There was ample liquor there, dancing, and gambling, and of course a floor show. We were given to understand that we were not altogether welcome as we did not join in the frolic and did not buy enough beer or other liquor to make us valuable customers; but we behaved in such a manner and remained in our seats so as not to give the manager cause to oust us from the club. We soon tired of the performance and finally left about midnight, resolving that night clubs aren't made or maintained for fellows like us, and that we didn't care to go to another one anyway.

That night we slept in a grain field in Kansas, and we didn't awaken until a flock of about forty geese started honking around our tent the next morning.

Our journey then took us eastward, across Missouri, Illinois, then south to Kentucky, Tennessee, and into Mississippi and Alabama. We visited the newly started lumbering districts and in northern Alabama. The heat was so intense down there in the south, that we thought it would be wise to go northward again. We did and after slow but deliberate progress for three days we arrived in Cincinnati where we visited the world's most powerful radio station WLW. We did not see their five hundred thousand watt transmitter because it was under repair, but we did see some interesting things.

Time determined that our expedition was to end in two days, and we had to quit stopping to visit as much as we had done previous to this time, and hurry on to Toledo, Chicago, and then home.

At home again we were asked to relate our experiences to the family. We did to the best of our ability, but in our estimation the pleasure and experience which we enjoyed could never be told them in a manner which would portray a fraction of our experiences. The memories of those cornfields in Missouri and Illinois, the bluegrass and tobacco in Kentucky, the red wastelands and corn and cotton fields of Mississippi, the mountains of eastern Tennessee, and again the great blue grass pastures of Kentucky will live in our minds always. So will the incidents which are minute in detail and can be appreciated only by us who actually experienced them.

- Henry Ochsner - '38