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Going fishing in a Model "T" touring car

photo provided by Bob Warren

## A Trip in a Model "T"

By Bob Warren

**LET'S TAKE A TRIP TO ARKANSAS** – in a Model "T" Ford! A recent discussion about how travel has changed over the years triggered memories of a trip I made when I was five years old. Come along as we look back to see just how different, and difficult, it was to travel in those days.

My parents grew up in Arkansas, married and came to Frisco by train in 1917. Early visits to parents and other Arkansas relatives were by train. However, one of my earliest memories was of making the trip in my uncle's new Model "T" touring car. If you have never ridden in a Model "T," let me introduce you to the "Tin Lizzie" as they were known. They had few of the comforts of today's automobile – no electric starter (had to be hand cranked), no heater other than warm bricks and blankets, no air conditioner and no radio. With a top speed of about 40 mph, the accelerator was a hand-operated lever on the steering column and gears were shifted by foot pedals. Touring Cars had a cloth top but no windows, making wind and dust problems in dry weather. Cold

weather or a sudden shower called for quick installation of the side curtains, which afforded very little protection. From a kid's viewpoint those old cars outclassed today's, because they had fenders and running boards to ride on, an unsafe but fun thing to do.

Here's some of what I remember about my first long journey in an automobile. It was 1926, and highways were rough and dusty with lots of twists and turns. Before interstates, roads went through the middle of every town, so the scenery was never as boring as today. The trip to my grandparents' place, which can now be made in five hours, was a 10- to 12-hour drive. So, on the big day, one twist of the crank and we were on the road before sunup. Heading for eastern Oklahoma, our first stop was at a "filling station" in Denison. My uncle wanted to fill up with nine cent per gallon Texas gas, because he had heard it cost ten cents in Oklahoma. We were greeted by a smiling attendant who asked if he could "fill 'er up?" Getting a "Yes," he proceeded to pop the hood, check the oil, water and tires, clean the

windshield and even offered to sweep the floorboard. That kind of service was expected at every stop. While everyone else went to the outhouses, I stayed to study the attendant's every move. As he filled our tank, we both saw the gasoline drain from the 10-gallon glass container at the top of the pump. It took only five gallons, so my uncle counted out forty-five cents, and I watched closely as the attendant refilled the glass with a few strokes of the pump's handle.

On the road again, our adventure really began. Crossing the Red River on a long two-lane bridge, my aunt announced, "We're entering Oklahoma!" As I looked across at another state I was surprised and disappointed to see it looked just like Texas. My little United States map distinctly showed Oklahoma to be yellow, Texas tan, and Arkansas green. It took a lot of explaining to make me understand that the map was not a color snapshot from the sky.

As the flat lands turned to hills, the change in scenery kept me on my feet, (no seat belts) and before long I was hungry. Mother had packed a lunch,

so we started looking for a good shade tree to picnic under. Soon we found just the right one where it was obvious other travelers had picnicked. With a blanket spread on the ground for our table, the food, washed down with lemonade, was delicious. We even had my favorite dessert – peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

After a short rest, we were back on the road pretty much on schedule, averaging a good thirty miles per hour. The little towns ticked by with rest and refueling stops every hour or so. Then, in the late afternoon, my uncle said we were nearing the Arkansas border. That got my attention, so I started watching more closely, hoping to find that my little map was right after all and Arkansas was really green, but no such luck. When we crossed the border, everyone else cheered while I settled back, imagining the trees to be a little greener and the mountains a little taller.

It was almost dark when we finally arrived at my grandparents' place, a farm near Dardanelle. The large house stood well off the ground on bois d'arc blocks making a cool place to play. But now was a time for hugging and kissing, and lots of, "My, how you have grown!" Aunts, uncles and cousins, some whom I had never met, had gathered to welcome their Texas relatives. Inside, a big meal waited, giving us a great start to a week of visiting and sightseeing in Arkansas.

The week passed in a blur, and I was glad to get back to Texas to find its color was still tan – just like my map.

Yes, travel has changed in the last eighty years, but that's how things were in the early days.



Frisco native Bob Warren is a humorist, historian and former Frisco Mayor.



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