

Danville News Column
Robert John Andrews
March 19, 2010 (submit March 15)
“On the Road Again”
Word Count: 750

This will be the second time I’ve traveled across our continent. First was when dad and mom packed up our family -- two brothers, two sisters, and me -- in a Dodge Motor Home. Who parked that gigantic salami in our driveway? Our Fox Terrier, Susie, came too. Dad exuded an eager enthusiasm about us needing to see America. Plus, we could visit our cousins in California. Who doesn’t have cousins in California? Unk took charge of the paint store. Off we motored west before school ended. We left before I got to see our sixth grade performance of “The Wizard of Oz,” which I had directed. I read a lot of Ray Bradbury while tucked up in a top bunk.

Other cousins now reside in California, whom I haven’t seen for nearly forty years. My uncle lives among them. I’d really like to see him. His recent letter told me how he drove across the USA four times in his life, but he admitted he never paid attention. He was too focused on his destination. Though he did write how he always traveled with his best friend, Johnny Walker. Must run in the family.

As kids, we traveled far and often. Our parents insisted. Twice more we squeezed into the aluminum casing of that same Motor Home: once down to the Shenandoah, another time north to Maine. With this same Unk, my brothers and I traveled to Egypt, Israel, Turkey, Greece. We’re a peripatetic bunch. Because I’ve been elsewhere, I can look at here from different perspectives.

My inspiration for this trans-continental road trip comes from my daughter who drove last September from Boston to her new home in San Francisco. If she can do it, so can I! Though sometimes she can be a terrible disappointment. She was merely an hour away from Roswell but failed to visit. She could have worn aluminum foil on her head! She could have toured the International UFO museum! She’s such an embarrassment, passing up Roswell for the Grand Canyon. Not me.

And I appreciate invitations from friends to visit, but, well, we’ll see. I don’t want the obligation. To paraphrase Lyle Lovett: we will see what we will see.

It’s again my bocce ball philosophy. You toss the palino out there and then try to figure out how to get there. It’s a ‘why not?’ approach to life, which sometimes has gotten me into a few funny fixes. Some not so funny.

Nor is there anything portentous about this trip, as if I am hoping to discover America or the American mind. No Jack Kerouac this. No Charles Kuralt “On the Road.” No

Simon and Garfunkel, all gone to look for America. There simply are times to get off the main highway. It's closer to quixotic John Steinbeck, who, a year older than I am now, headed across country with a hankering to wander.

Let's wander down to see Monroeville Alabama, especially this year. Monroeville is where Harper Lee wrote To Kill a Mockingbird, published 50 years ago this July. Let's wander to see Vasquez Rocks where Kirk battled the Gorn. Let's wander to see where Stan and Ollie heave-hoed the music box up that long flight of stairs. Perhaps those steps will remind me of nice messes I've gotten myself into. Let's wander to see the Salton Sea where the giant snail nearly destroyed humanity, or White Sands where THEM (giant ants) attacked the trailer. Let's wander to see Sallisaw, Oklahoma, where, in The Grapes of Wrath, the Joads are forced to begin their exodus to Salinas, California. Let's find the diner on Route 66 with penny candy and a waitress named Mae.

If all goes well, I'll take a few snapshots of this country and share them with you. By snapshots you might need to understand that I don't own a camera. These columns will offer my snapshots of both what I see and stories to be told. When you map an itinerary, that's when you enjoy the detours.

A few of scoffed when I first announced that I'm heading out, alleging mid-life crisis. Nonsense. My mid-life was 20 years ago. Nor are the rumors true that I'm going into rehab. Others have concluded it's my 'bucket list,' checking off those adventures, experiences, or activities I've always wanted to do. No again. I've always done them. This is nothing new. I've never dilly-dallied long enough to have to have a bucket list. Bucket lists are for those who delay.