

Hi Samantha,

December 4, 2019 (July letter)

As you can see from the dates above, I am way behind on my letter writing. Fortunately, we have had plenty of opportunity to communicate via our visit to the west coast.

Your questions and explorations about getting a car have inspired me to look back at our own history of car ownership so I thought I would pass on some of those experiences. Fran has helped a lot to recall this history and put things in place with a reasonable level of confidence that I have not distorted them.

Our first car was a small VW Beetle that we picked up second hand in Vancouver about 1967—when we were married. Fran had just started her job at First United Church so we were feeling financially flush and looking forward to the flexibility it would give her in her schedule. In those days, driving in Vancouver was not such a pain, but since Fran had to do some travelling in her job at First United (including going to the Oakalla Prison in New Westminster) we felt the car would be a useful addition.



As you can see from the photo, the Beetle allowed us to make a few long-distance trips as well. This photo was taken on our way to visit friends in San Francisco.

We also bought our first VW van in Vancouver. We bought it in 1971—a year before we moved to Montréal for my first teaching job at Sir George Williams University.

In the spring of 1971 Fran and I had papers accepted for a conference in St. John's, NL. We decided to make the trip home an opportunity to cross the country on land, so arranged with John to drive our van (with Samwise) to meet us in Montréal.

On June 10th we took a bus to Port aux Basques. Then we took a train from Sidney to Halifax where we stayed in a private house for bed and breakfast. From there we went to PEI and camped for one night - it was wet and we were the only ones in the campsite, but were well treated by the attendants. Our next night was spent in Campbellton (we got there by train). A CN policeman suggested we speak to his wife about a place to stay. She said it was fine, gave us a small room in the attic and breakfast in the morning.



We took a bus to Québec city the next day and overnighted in an old stone hotel with very high ceilings. I remember making my porridge on the tile floor of the bathroom by using a can of sterno and a coat hanger bent to hold a pot over the can.

We then headed to Montréal to meet John and Samwise. We met him on the 16th at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel. We stayed at a campsite just outside Montreal (Les Cascades, I think), then the next day headed to London to pick up his girlfriend Alison (on the 18th). On the way there we stopped for a picnic at Upper Canada Village, but we didn't have time to go inside the village (see photo). After picking up Alison, we headed west to Vancouver. I don't remember having any breakdowns during that trip.

In 1972 I accepted a job offer at Sir George Williams University. Fortunately, they were paying moving expenses, so we mostly focused on curating our stuff without having to worry too much about keeping the total amount small. It also helped that we were only a year or two into setting up our household. After sending off all our house stuff with the movers, we piled into the van with Daegan and Samwise, then headed east. We figured it might have been a bit traumatic for Daegan—to see all her stuff disappear.

On our way east, we stopped at Sicamous to celebrate Jim and Marilyn’s wedding before continuing on our cross-country drive.

When we moved to Ile Bigras in 1974, we heard of a friend of a friend who had a small VW Beetle for sale, so we bought it as a means of travel around the island. In those days, the train was not as frequent as it is today, so we felt the purchase could be justified since we were more dependent on car transportation than we were before—and Fran and I weren’t always going to the same place together. The photo shows both our vehicles at the time.



The Beetle was an easy car to work with in the winter. If it got stuck, it was easy to slide free since it was so light.

The two cars were easy to work on as well since the engines were very similar. They were the cars that taught me the basic auto repairs that I was to find very useful in the future.

...to be continued

Love,