

July 18, 2018
(June Letter)

Dear Samantha,

We are currently sitting in a train near Oshawa on our way to Toronto. The conductor just announced that we would be delayed because the train ahead of us has broken down and can't move so we will hook up to it and push it in to Toronto for repairs. Both Fran and I immediately thought of the children's book titled *The Little Engine That Could* and its search for a way to get over the mountain from Hither to Yon.

It was enough to turn our mood from annoyance to pleasure as we thought about the way in which we were helping the train traffic keep moving. It helped that they also announced we would all be eligible for a reduction of 50% of the ticket price on our Montréal – Toronto trip for our next VIA trip. This wasn't such great news for the two people we were chatting with who were on their way back to Switzerland from a Canadian trip. They are unlikely to be using VIA in the time frame allowed by the reduction (I think it is 6 or so months).

It also recalled for me the joke that the VIA agent told me on one of my trips: that VIA stands for "Varies In Arrival". I hope he wasn't fired.

I still prefer the train over the airplane – and driving, for that matter. It is less stressful, allows me to do something (like write a letter to my granddaughter) or just nap. It also has the advantage of being more dependable in Canadian winters.

I appreciate all the information you are passing on about your Florida situation and the options available via the many parks and event locations of the Disney empire. I did not know that it was a constellation of many regions with different themes. I guess my image was coloured by my experience at Disneyland when I was 15 (1959).

It was the summer that my father was so excited because he finally got 2 weeks off work for a holiday. Up to that time he had at most a week a year. For the year leading up to the holiday, he and Mum would spend hours making plans collecting maps and making plans for the trip. In those days there was no internet of course, so it took some work and time to accumulate information. Since the roads weren't as good and cars were more uncertain in their reliability (at least ours was) this added an extra element to the adventure with which you are now familiar (after our Westy trip).

Their plans included a trip down the Oregon coast, Disneyland, the San Diego Zoo, a visit to the Mojave Desert, and explorations of the Carlsbad Caverns. We were camping all the way.

The first delightful surprise for us was when we came across the sand dunes along the Oregon Coast. I had never heard of them so the dunes were simply exciting since they looked like photos I had seen in *National Geographic*, but the greatest thrill was when we discovered the Dune Buggies for rent.

The Dune Buggies were old cars that had been stripped of most of their exterior body, outfitted with roll bars, wide tires, and set up with backward-facing seats at the back (see photo). For a fee, the owners would take us roaring over the sand hills with wind blowing in our hair and sand spurring up from the back like a rooster-tail on a boat. It was great fun.



I was also thrilled by the ocean beaches when we got farther south into California. I remember how warm the water was (compared to BC) and how the waves invited us to body surf. Many of the beaches were only accessible at the bottom of high sand cliffs, but we didn't mind the hike down and up too much.

Disneyland was in its infancy in those years. It had some of the classical rides (like the one that went down some mountain) but a lot of those were only a bit fancier than the kind we would have found at the PNE.



I remember that the activities that attracted us the most were not the rides, but a section of the park identified as "Treasure Island". It was a fancy playground for us – set up with a Peter Pan theme including a tree house, caves, hidden grottos, and rickety bridges. My recollection is that we spent hours there just making up our own games without the need for anything mechanized, electronic, or specially designed.

Some of the features that were later to become an important element of the Disney approach (like the African river cruise – with mechanical hippos and crocs) were constructed by that time, but I was not particularly impressed with the quality of the machines in those days. Perhaps they have improved by now. I do remember the paddle-wheeler, however, mostly because it provided many places to explore.

It remained tied up at the dock in those days.

It will be interesting to see how things have changed since then. I expect that the technology, features, and crowds mean that the

experience will be very different – not to mention my age – but I expect to enjoy the memories stimulated in any case.



After our time at Disneyland, we went to San Diego and Dad then took us to Tijuana (just across the Mexican border) so that we could all say we had been to Mexico. We also spent some time at the San Diego zoo since it was known as one of the most interesting and diverse ones in the world.



As planned, our trip back to Canada included a visit to the desert and a guided tour of some underground caverns near Carlesbad. I remember being impressed when the tour guide turned out the lights after we had walked down deep into the caverns. I couldn't even see my hand when I held it close to my face.

I don't know how Mum and Dad managed during that trip since I expect there was plenty of poking and fighting in the back seat among us 3 boys. It must have not been so bad that they cancelled touring, however, since they not only continued planning trips in BC, but included another memorable one to Yellowstone National Park a few years later.

Love,