

Hi Samantha,

January 18, 2020 (September 2019 letter)

This is a belated continuation of my letter about the cars we have owned. Now I begin to lose track of them since I'm not sure of the sequence as more of them came and went in our lives. The last one I spoke about was the van we drove from Vancouver and the Beetle we picked up when we got here. The van was the same one that John drove to meet us in Montréal that I wrote about in my last letter.

The van we drove from Vancouver continued to be a source of stories for several years to come. I set it up with a plywood structure that fit in behind the driver (after the middle seat was taken out). It had a side that could be opened up for sleeping. When not being used for sleeping, we stored our mats, sleeping bags, and other camping equipment under it.

I think this was a VW van from about the 1960s. It had swinging back doors, no pop-up, and front windshields that were flat. It served us well for many camping trips in addition to the cross-country one with John and our move to Québec. The photo to the right was taken during a visit to Upper Canada Village with John.

There was also a gasoline fueled heater that was part of the car, but I was always worried that it was rather dangerous having gasoline in the cab of the van, so I was reluctant to use it. As a result, the Eastern winters became a huge challenge for anyone travelling in the van on a cold day. In addition, the air blower for the windshield was rather weak so much of the driving time was spent wiping off the condensation.

In those days, seat belts were not used and baby seats were for the most part non-existent. One of JP's favorite spots was in the back part of the van over the engine. As you can see from the photo, a low bar was the only thing keeping him from the back of the seat and the front of the van.



Fran tells a story about stopping rather quickly at a stop light one day when JP was with her, listening to a tumbling sound from the back of the van and then peering down between the two front seats to see JP lying on his back smiling back at her!

After that, we used a harness for him when he rode in the back. He didn't like it, however, since it meant he had to ride on the seat. It was a flimsy thing that attached to the seat and left him with plenty of length to move around as he liked. I'm sure that it would have been little protection in an accident. Given the current attention to child safety in vehicles today, I guess we are lucky our kids survived.

It was about 1976 or so that we finally said goodbye to the old van. I'm not sure what led us to the final decision, but I expect that it had something to do with the rust and body work. The eastern salt and cold is hard on the metal and there were many places where rust forms on the old-style vans. It's inability to manage in the cold was an additional incentive.

In any case, we picked up another van since they were so attractive to our lifestyle of travelling and car-camping. It was a 1972 VW with a sliding side door, slat side windows, but still no pop-up. The photo includes Daegan and JP all packed up and ready to fly to Vancouver on their own. With the rope tied around the old suitcase, they look like refugees! They were very proud, though!



Love