

A ROAD TRIP

By Constance Williams

The year is 1952 and I'm 12 years old. I have three siblings, the youngest is still a baby and is riding in mom's arms up front with she and dad. The rest of us are piled in the back of the old Chevrolet. Mom had packed fried chicken, peanut butter sandwiches, apples and water to make sure we had enough to eat on the way. It was a road trip from Oklahoma City to Tyler, Texas to visit my grandmother, mom's brothers and sisters and my cousins.

We had no idea of the worries and concerns our parents had in traveling. It wasn't until a few days ago that I became aware of this trip in a very different way when, in trying to come up with something to write about green, I googled green and several things appeared.

The most interesting thing I found was something called *The Green Book*. Victor H. Green, a post office employee and activist in Harlem, published the first Green Book in 1936 for the New York area. The next year, it expanded to cover the whole country. This book listed "hotels, boarding houses, restaurants, beauty shops, gas stations and various other services" where Black people would be served. 15,000 copies were produced each year and sold to market Black-owned businesses and more friendly White ones like Esso, one of the few gas stations that would sell to Black people. The last edition was published in 1967, three years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, when the gains of the civil rights movement made it less necessary.

By 1949, this travel guide had been renamed *The Negro Motorist Green Book*. Then, many hotels, restaurants, and shops, even outside the South, refused to serve Black people. The edition was created "to save the travelers of his (Victor Green's) race as many difficulties and embarrassments as possible..." The publisher added, "The many requests we receive for information about it convinces us that he (Green) has done much to ease the anxieties of the average Negro traveler.

The Hildreth Hotel at 2352 Arapahoe Street was the only hotel I found listed in Denver that served Blacks at that time. There were three Tourist Homes, ten restaurants and three service stations.

A 2017 Newsweek article, "How The Green Book Saved Black Lives On The Road" states that the "travel guide from the Jim Crow era often meant the difference between a hot meal and a vicious beating." Candace Taylor was interviewed for her work trying to identify and catalogue every Green Book site across the United States. She created 4,964 sites from 22 editions. She is writing a book on the Green Book with the help of the Smithsonian Institution.

All of this piqued my interest so much that I called my mom to ask her what she remembered. From her I learned that she was not aware of the Green Book but she was very aware that there were only certain service stations where she could stop in Tyler and Oklahoma City. It was about a 4½ hour trip from Oklahoma City to Tyler so we would gas up and use the bathroom just before leaving Oklahoma and not stop until we reached Tyler. In addition to the packed lunch, she would also pack a bucket with a lid in case one of the kids could not hold it and had to use a bathroom on the way.

As I look back, I think about that road trip to Texas and realize it was indeed an adventure.