

THE BIG TRIP OF '75

By Fred Hobbs

Our family has always loved to travel. When our kids were little, the trips were mostly for Sunday picnics in the mountains, a yearly cross-town outing spent at Elitch's, or the annual visit to Grandma and Grandpa in Illinois, unless they decided to come west. As the children grew a bit older, we extended the scope, taking them to places such as Disneyland, Mesa Verde and even Mexico.

But in 1975, my wife and I decided it was our turn. We had not been on a trip with just the two of us since our honeymoon twelve years earlier. So, this time the grandparents came to our house not for just a visit, but to "mind the store" and care for our three youngsters, agreeing to stay for a whole month.

For the previous two years, I had been working seven days a week, a 9 to 5 full timer and a weekend TV gig for talent fees. We decided to take the TV money and "do Europe". We planned the trip using the Arthur Frommer travel book, "Europe on \$10 a Day" (Remember, this was 1975.) Ten bucks wouldn't quite make it, but the book was a good guide for reasonably priced hotels, restaurants and attractions.

We coupled the book's information with the purchase of a Eurorail pass which enabled us to visit any western European destination, stop anytime we wished and get back on the train when we were ready for the next adventure.

As to adventure, that began even before we boarded our first train. We decided to begin with a week-long visit in Ireland to my mother-in-law's ancestral village in County Mayo, to hook up with some of the Irish relatives. This involved renting a car. Fresh (or maybe not so fresh) off the plane at Shannon Airport, we hopped into a small English Ford and took off. I navigated down a narrow thoroughfare which linked virtually all of Ireland's towns.

The road was lined with stone fences seemingly built in horse and buggy days. Several of the stones were loose and had tumbled onto the road. Still groggy with jet lag and driving in a foreign country on the left hand side of the road with the steering wheel on "the wrong side", I tried to dodge the stones. But I hit one nearly "dead-on." Result: flat tire, front wheel. Fortunately, two young men (who, ironically turned out to be Americans) stopped and helped me change the tire. (I noted ruefully that both tire and spare were almost totally bald...I should have checked before leaving the airport.)

We drove another mile or so and (you guessed it), the tire on the rear wheel was flat, too. Out in the middle of the historic Irish countryside, I invoked a 20th century American custom (possibly worldwide). I put my thumb out. Again fortune smiled upon me. A lorry (truck) stopped and just happened to be driven by the owner of a garage up the road. But the good garage-man emphatically informed me he couldn't help. Seems it was half-day, the afternoon of an Irish religious holiday on which work was prohibited. Before my half-angry, half-desperate emotions boiled over, he quickly added that his son was a heathen and if I rode with him up to the garage, his son would fix the tire and drive me back. He did. Always a good sport, my wife agreed to stay in the car lest Irish tinkers (gypsies) tried to steal something. Though I was concerned about her safety, she insisted.

The adventure had a happy ending. Tire fixed. Irish relatives hospitable and fun; train trip to destinations such as Brussels, Bruges, Salzburg, Amsterdam, Zurich, Berlin and Paris: Fabulous! Kids said they really enjoyed their month-long stay with grandma and grandpa who obviously spoiled them as grandparents are supposed to do.

Through the years, the trip in the Spring of '75 has remained one of the most outstanding in the bank of our family memories