

ML.90.What the Kids Saw

It all sounds too familiar. Our dad went TDY to Japan for 6 months in 1956. Mom had to do EVERYTHING to get us over there. I have letters from Dad advising her about the car, sell or ship it, buy an air conditioner, hire movers, rent storage, etc. Then we four piled into the plane for a 24-hour trip to Tokyo. Flying was special then, so we had to dress up and behave. Poor Mom.

Later we were in Topeka, and Dad disappeared to AK for three months. We packed up the little we could take, and pulled a trailer to CA, then AK. We camped, and then had base housing for a month or so.

I don't know how many times we drove Route 66 without air conditioning. Burma Shave signs were our entertainment, along with reading license plates and counting train cars. If we caught up to the engineer, we signaled for him to honk.



Mom told me about going to Silver City, NV (or maybe Carson City?) enroute to somewhere. It was some holiday or something, and there was no room at the inn. Dad drove into the boonies and put some blankets on the ground for us to sleep on. In the morning we woke up to find we were at the dump.

I remember begging Dad to get a motel with a swimming pool, as we were so hot from being crammed into the car with suitcases at our feet. Occasionally, we'd get our wish. The begging that didn't go so well for me was stopping at a Dairy Queen for ice cream. I was, and still am, susceptible to motion sickness, especially with parents smoking, and can't stand the thought of soft ice cream to this day.

As an extra salute to Mom: On at least one cross-country car trip, when my younger sister was little, Mom would wash out her diapers at gas stations, I guess, then roll the window up with a diaper flapping dry on the outside. She also recounted heating the baby bottle in the radiator--just remove the cap and it fit right in.

We had a bomb shelter in our front yard in Japan. We wore dog tags, and knew why. We brats have such shared experiences: lots of loss, lots of gain. And it was sure character-building!

I honor my dad for his service, and I honor my mom for her contributions. We kids had no choice but to tag along. It was quite a ride...

- *Elise Mattison*

Elise, great story! That's the way it was, especially for our moms.

And yes, those cross-country drives with the car filled with cigarette smoke. It's no wonder I never have had any desire to smoke.

It was an adventure for sure!

I had to chuckle remembering Dad's return from his long deployment in the RB-50 to Japan in the early 50s. We had gone back to Springfield Mass and lived with our grandmother. My brother Tim would have been about 3 when Dad left. When Pop returned about 9 months later and told me and my brother to do something Tim said "My Nana is the boss around here".

I remember riding across country to March AFB in our '49 Chevrolet, long before the days of 4 lane highways and Holiday Inns. Motels were about \$12 a night. Flat tires, overheating engines, and other breakdowns were not unheard of. Burma Shave and Chew Red Pouch signs along the way. Staying in the Base guest house with other kids whose fathers



were in the 55th until we all got settled in new developments like Beck Utah and later Likens Foster and Countryside. Beske, Hoffman, Davis, Bove and Britton were some of the 55th kids in the early 50s at Forbes.

Dad was gone on project what seemed like at least 3 months and sometimes longer every year. Families took care of each other but it had to be hard for Mom. We went to the base pool almost every day in the summer before we had air conditioning. We spent several nights with the neighbors in their tornado shelter with sirens blaring and hail the size of golf balls coming down when Dad was away.

When I had to fill out that AF/DOD form asking for previous places I'd lived, it took an additional page.

- *Tom Dawes*

[In case you were ever wondering, this explains why the 55th Spouse holds a place of honor in the 55th Hall of Fame. – ed]