

[UPDATE: February, 2008—As I gradually go back over my old travelogues, I'll be leaving the original text intact but adding additional comments in boldfaced enclosed in brackets to expand on what was originally said. I'll also add some additional scanned photos to enhance the original travelogues.



LEFT: Margaret Sullivan at Alma Beach at the Bay of Fundy
RIGHT: Camping near Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island

Amherst [1987]

On Monday, June 29, I set off with my sister Margaret, her husband Brian, and their son Paul, on what we hoped would be a pleasant camping trip. Nineteen days, 6051 miles, and a vehicle and a half later, we returned, dead tired, from a trip that wasn't exactly unpleasant—but was far from what you would call a dream vacation.

We had planned to head northeast—to New England and Canada's Maritime Provinces, hoping eventually to make it all the way to the island of Newfoundland. Somehow our plans had not taken into account just how large a distance that is. The route we traveled would have been well over 3000 miles one-way. I just checked my atlas and found that Fairbanks, Alaska, is closer to Iowa than Newfoundland is. **[Indeed, St. John's, the Newfie capital, is quite a bit closer to Ireland than it is to Iowa.]** We soon realized that our plans were far too broad, and we gradually limited the scope of our trip. A host of other factors limited it far more. We never did make it to Newfoundland—we made it to Amherst, just inside the province of Nova Scotia, Canada—where we spent all or part of six days. That is why I have entitled the summary of this vacation "Amherst".

MONDAY, 29 JUNE – Algona, Iowa to North Shore, Minnesota (Odometer reads 61254)

Margaret and Brian drove up to my place from Galva last night. We got to bed fairly early, but I don't think any of us slept particularly well. This morning we had bagels with cheese and jam for breakfast. **[That may well have been the last time I ever bought bagels; today I basically think of them as "hotel food".]** Shortly after 7:00, Margaret drove away in her little red Toyota pickup, towing the tiny trailer she and my brother Paul jointly own. Brian and I dawdled a bit more. We had arranged to pick up Brian's son, also named Paul, at his mother's home in Lake Mills. We had scheduled to meet him after 8:30, so we timed our departure accordingly.

After picking Paul up we drove north on Interstate 35 and into Minnesota. We stopped at a rest area on the border and were surprised to find Margaret there. She had started driving well before us, but because her pickup had very little power when towing the trailer, we had already caught up with her. We exchanged greetings and then drove on northward.

We stopped for lunch at Burnsville, Minnesota, at the south end of the place that everyone up here properly calls "the Cities" (short for Twin Cities), but that I grew up calling Minneapolis. After a long lunch and some time out to shop for some supplies, we set off again. We drove eastward around the beltway, in and around the city of Saint Paul—and I must say that is a far easier way of getting through the area than going west, through Minneapolis. Traffic is far lighter in St. Paul, and the lanes on the freeway are continuous.

[This is one of the things that has changed a bit in the last twenty years. While traffic is still lighter in St. Paul than in Minneapolis (except at the moment, when the I-35W bridge in Minneapolis is out of service), it's a lot heavier than it used to be. Moreover I-35E is so antiquated in design that it doesn't handle traffic well at all. There's really no good way through the Cities. The best route these days is probably the eastern beltway (494/694) that comes within a few miles of Wisconsin east of St. Paul. Even that can get clogged with traffic and come to a standstill for no apparent reason, though.]

We drove northeast all afternoon. Brian and Margaret rode in the pickup, and I had the pleasure (read that word sarcastically) of chauffeuring Paul. It didn't take long into the trip for all of us who were driving to agree that Paul did not make a good travel companion. Why?—he never talks. For a while I tried to make conversation. Paul had just returned from a choral camp, and I asked a few questions about it. He gave one-word answers or nothing at all, and I soon simply gave up asking. We sat in silence the rest of the trip. He sometimes slept, sometimes listened to music through headphones, and sometimes looked blankly down the road—as if he were entirely bored. His behavior certainly isn't abnormal—lots of teenagers act that way. That doesn't make him any more interesting to be with, though. It may sound awful, but it really is far more fun to drive alone than to drive with him.

[Paul was really a pretty typical teenager—and a better traveler than some. This was well before the trips I'd make with the quiz bowl teams, though, so I really wasn't aware of what traveling with a teenager was like. Many parents think silence is good, which is why these days they invariably pack lots of DVDs and video games when they travel with their kids. To me the lack of communication made for a very dull trip, though.]



Willow River Mercantile, just north of Sandstone, Minnesota

areas for over fifteen miles to get out of town again. Margaret and I had both driven in Duluth before, and neither of us cared to repeat the experience. We had come into the information center on a road called "Skyline Parkway", which seemed to be a pleasant scenic drive that followed the top of the cliff above the city. The maps showed this drive continuing all the way to the north end of Duluth, thus avoiding the mess downtown. We decided to follow Skyline Parkway, figuring it couldn't be any worse than the through-city route.

[I don't think they've really changed things much, but my perception today is that Duluth really isn't all that difficult to get through. Perhaps that's because in the intervening years I've been to numerous places that are far worse. I-35 does indeed end just past downtown Duluth, but the continuing route on highway 61 is not at all difficult. Traffic is also really quite light in Duluth (which is smaller than Cedar Rapids), so it doesn't take that long to get through on the main roads. I'm sure part of our decision came from the fact that Margaret and Brian both absolutely abhorred city driving. Margaret still will drive far out of her way to avoid driving in a city.]

We were wrong. Skyline Parkway follows at least a dozen city streets, going up and down various hills on the west side of the city. There are at least three different kinds of signs marking the route, and turns are not well marked. I was following Brian through the city, turning wherever he did. At one corner there was no indication whatsoever of which way Skyline Parkway went. Brian decided to go straight ahead. We were soon out of town, but on county roads—far from the main highway.

Unlike in Iowa, Minnesota's county roads follow no regular pattern. In all but the hilliest places in Iowa there is a grid of county roads every mile, running mostly straight in north-south or east-west directions. It's hard to get totally lost in Iowa, because these farm-to-market roads will always dump out onto the main highways—and there will almost always be a sign at the intersection indicating what highway it is. Minnesota, especially in the north, is not nearly so agricultural, so there is no need for such frequent service roads. There are also far fewer signs along the roads in Minnesota, so it is much easier to get lost. We drove around north of Duluth for forty-five minutes before finally coming out on Highway 61.

We drove silently through the Minnesota forest, stopping only briefly to buy gas—at the Willow River Mercantile, an old general store that is straight out of a frontier movie set. **[This area has since changed quite a bit. The "north woods" have filled in quite a bit and become much more of a resort area. Today almost every little town has a modern convenience store and fast food.]** We met Brian and Margaret again at an information center at the south end of Duluth. There were seagulls all around there, and Paul had fun feeding bread crumbs to them—sometimes throwing the crumbs in the air and watching the birds dive and catch the crumbs in their beaks.

Duluth is not an easy city to get through. Interstate 35 ends right in the middle of downtown, and you have to drive on U.S. 61 through business and residential

We camped for the night at a private park called the Wagon Wheel, right on the shore of Lake Superior. Margaret and I made dinner, and later we hiked on the rocky beach. Paul blew up an inflatable raft he had brought and played in the water—which was extremely gentle for this lake. The mosquitoes soon came out, and we went to bed.

Margaret's trailer is small, and there really wasn't sufficient sleeping room for four grown people (even though the manufacturer claims there is). Margaret and Brian had a topper on their pickup, and it was decided that Paul and I should sleep in the bed of the truck while Margaret and Brian took the double bed in the camper. I, who am used to sleeping alone in a double bed in a large room, felt extremely cramped in the pickup. It seemed like the only possible arrangement, though. I certainly didn't sleep well—it seemed to take forever to get to sleep. I did wake up somewhat rested, though.

TUESDAY, 30 JUNE – North Shore, Minnesota to Beardsmore, Ontario (Odometer reads 61645)

It was neither early nor late when we got off this morning. We drove along the North Shore, through endless resort towns and mining towns, with occasional glimpses of Lake Superior en route. Margaret was riding with me this morning, and we stopped briefly in Grand Marais to buy some groceries and mail some letters. We then drove on to Grand Portage National Monument, just south of the Canadian border.

Grand Portage is where the Voyageurs (explorers and fur traders sometimes lumped together as the "Northwest Company") portaged their canoes from the Great Lakes to the Quetico Lakes (known in the U.S. as the Boundary Waters). For years the border between Minnesota and Canada was officially defined simply as "the common route of the Voyageurs".

[It really surprises me that we didn't stop at Grant Portage National Monument, which is just south of the highway 61 customs facilities. The place offers wonderful hiking and a restored voyageurs' fort. It's a fascinating monument, and at the time it likely would have been free. Even today it's one of the cheapest National Park Service properties. I suppose our destination was Canada, though, so we didn't really consider seeing anything in Minnesota.]

We waited at Grand Portage for Brian and Paul to catch up with us, and then proceeded to the border. We waited a long time at Canada Customs while the woman in charge gave a very thorough inspection to the car in front of us. We began to expect the worst, but eventually a young man came out, asked us a few brief questions, gave us a pamphlet, and told us to have a good trip. He made Brian open the trailer, but otherwise there was no trouble at all.

Just inside Canada, we stopped at the Ontario Information Centre, where a TOO-helpful girl gave us far more information on the province than we wanted. She was really very nice, but it's sad so much money gets wasted on printing and distributing unwanted travel literature. All we really wanted was a provincial map—instead we got an armload of paper.

The travel centre hostess was originally from New Brunswick, and she was happy to hear we were planning to go there. She mentioned that she, like a lot of New Brunswickers, had left the province because there were no jobs there. Canada has a much higher unemployment rate than the U.S., and the Maritime Provinces are especially bad off. Ontario has always been the economic center of Canada, and Canadians seem to be moving there in the same way Americans are flocking to the Sun Belt.

The road got somewhat worse in Canada. Still called Highway 61, it suddenly carried more traffic and was in worse repair. The speed limit was 80 kilometers per hour, roughly 50 mph. Try driving 50 when you're used to 55—it's almost impossible. **[Today most of rural Canada has a 90 km/h speed limit, or essentially 55mph.]**

Before long we arrived in the city of Thunder Bay. We stopped at a mall, found a bank, and changed money. This was especially important because tomorrow was Canada Day (the equivalent of our Independence Day, it used to be called Dominion Day), when all banks and most businesses would be closed. **[These days, of course, we wouldn't have bothered with the bank; any money we wanted could be had at an ATM—which are plentiful even in small towns.]** There was an enormous line at the bank, and Margaret and I waited more than a half hour before being served. When we finally were served, we waited again. Margaret and I had different tellers, but both of them had problems with their computer terminals. (Mine had lost a very large deposit from the previous customer.) Eventually we got our money—at the not-so-good exchange rate of 75 U.S. cents = 1 Canadian dollar, minus a \$2 commission for the service. **[That "bad" exchange is a whole lot better than the dead-even exchange rate these days.]**

While waiting in line I read a most interesting sign. Canada Post, the national mail company, had been on strike for nearly a month. The sign told Visa customers how to pay their bills during "this time of inconvenience". It suggested that during "the disruption" customers should estimate their credit card purchases and pay their bills at the bank.

Canada Post always seems to be on strike. On at least three different occasions when I have been in Canada the post office either was or had just been on strike. The demands of the letter carriers are reflected by high costs. It costs 42 Canadian cents to send a postcard from Canada to the U.S.A.—that's about 32 U.S. cents. To send a card the other way, the US Postal Service charges just 14 cents. It's expensive to send mail inside Canada, too. It costs 36 Canadian cents (27 US cents) to send a letter within Canada, a full nickel more than it does in the States. For all that expense, Canada Post doesn't seem to be terribly efficient. Canadians make more jokes about the mail service than Americans do, and on the whole it seems to take longer for mail to reach its destination in Canada than in the U.S.A.

At the bank there were pamphlets entitled “Let’s Sing ‘O Canada’”, urging Canadians to sing their National Anthem on Canada Day. The leaflets featured the words to ‘O Canada’ in English and French. It seems there are fewer Canadians who know ‘O Canada’ than there are Americans who can sing “The Star-Spangled Banner” all the way through. I picked up one of the leaflets. Here are the words:

O Canada! Our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North, strong and free!

From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The words are nothing special, but then unless you know the history of Ft. McHenry, our national anthem makes very little sense. The music to “O Canada” really is quite lovely. It is gentle, but strong—really beautiful for a national anthem. Unfortunately, it is every bit as unsingable as “The Star-Spangled Banner”. The final “Canada” and “guard” hit that same high note as “the rockets red glare”.

[While “O Canada” only became Canada’s national anthem in 1980, it has since become very popular. In the 21st Century most Canadians do know the words to their National Anthem, and they sing it frequently and proudly.]

Before I get off the topic of the bank, I suppose I should comment a bit on Canadian money. Canada, like the U.S.A., uses the dollar as its currency, but Canadian and American dollars are worth entirely different amounts. Canada prints currency in different colors, with bills slightly fatter and shorter than their American counterparts. One-dollar bills are forest green, while \$2 bills (which are VERY common in Canada) are maroon. Both feature portraits of Queen Elizabeth on them. The \$5 bill is blue, the \$10 is purple, and the \$20 is olive green. The \$50 is red, and the \$100 (which no one really uses) is brown. The \$20 bill also has Queen Elizabeth on it, while the other bills feature famous prime ministers of Canada. On the back of most bills are illustrations of various Canadian industries—forestry, whaling, chemicals, farming, etc. The government is in the process of changing to new designs on its money. Currently the \$5 and \$2 bills are available in new designs—with different illustrations on them. The new \$2 has a much more recent portrait of Queen Elizabeth—the old one shows her at her coronation, over 30 years ago. **[That \$2 bill had to be in circulation for less than ten years, and probably only five or so. It was discontinued shortly after this trip.]**

Most of Canada’s coins are the same size as the corresponding American coins. Except for the nickel, though, they weigh less than their American counterparts because they are made of cheaper metals. The Canadian penny is also different from America’s, because instead of being truly round it has 12 sides. This makes it possible for blind people to easily tell the difference between a penny and other coins that are nearly the same size.

This summer Canada introduced a new dollar coin to replace the \$1 bill, which is no longer printed. The coin is gold colored, with nine sides, and larger than a quarter. Basically it is the same size and shape as the Susan B. Anthony dollar that bombed in America a few years back. There are two main differences, though. First, the gold color makes it possible to tell the dollar apart from a quarter easily. Secondly, Canadians seem to like the coin—which the newspapers call “loonies” because they have a picture of a loon (bird) on the back. Because the government is not printing any more dollar bills, Canadians will have to use the coins—like it or not, and even in the first month of circulation I got them as change twice. **[Today “loonie” is Canadians’ own universal nickname for their currency, the equivalent of “buck” in the States. Not long after this trip, Canada introduced a bi-metal \$2 coin (the “twonie”), so today the smallest bill in circulation is the five.]**

It was after lunchtime when we left the bank, and we were quite hungry. The only place to eat in the mall we had stopped at was the K-Mart grill, which was overpriced and not terribly good. For Can\$5.78 (US\$4.35) I had a meat pie, dessert, and coffee. **[K-Mart, by the way, no longer exists in Canada. The company sold all its stores to the Hudson’s Bay Company around 1990, and today most are Zeller’s, HBC’s answer to Target.]**

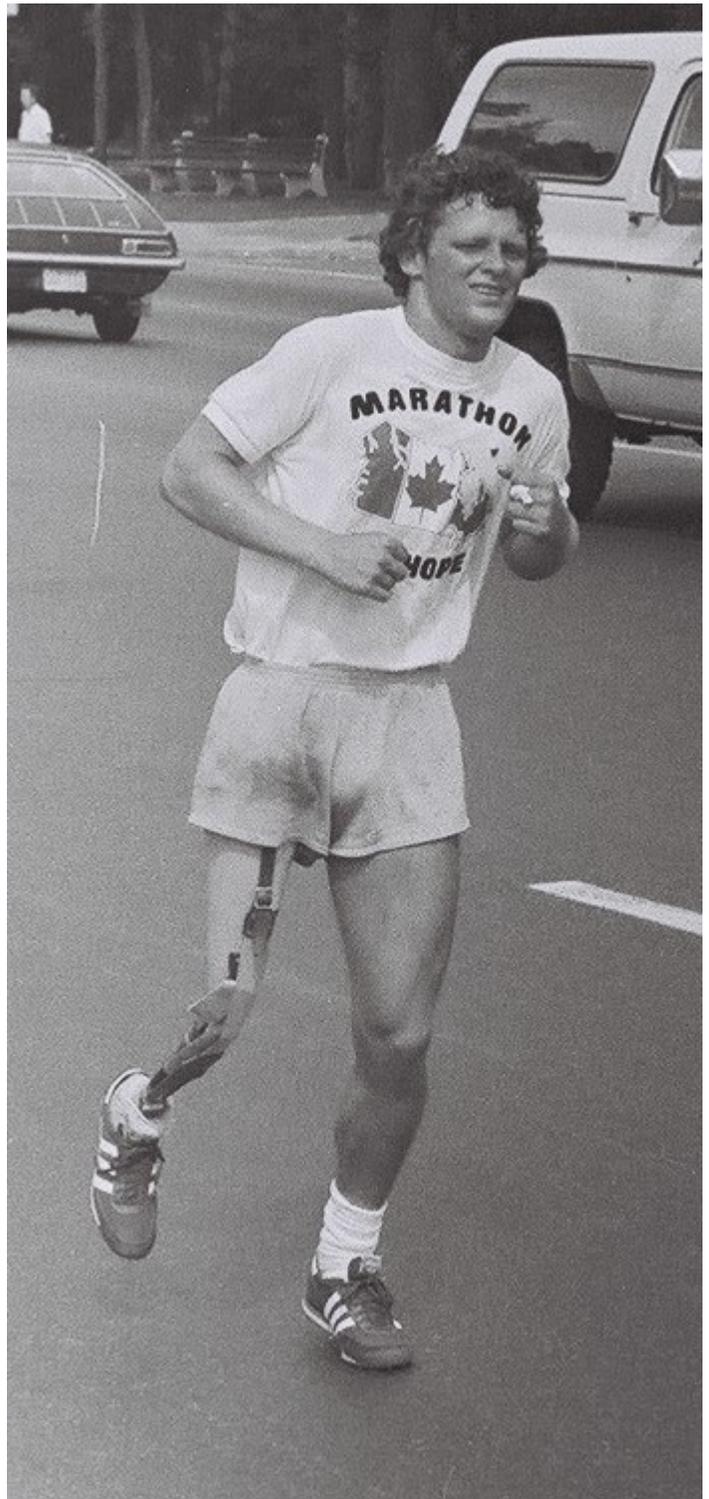
I bought gas in Thunder Bay, paying 48.3 Canadian cents per liter. That works out to about US\$1.37 per gallon—extremely cheap by world standards, but very expensive compared to American prices. **[It’s weird to think that gas was ever sold by the imperial gallon these days.]** Canada has used the Metric system for about ten years now, and the gas stations seem to have adjusted easily. It certainly sounds better to have gas advertised for 48 cents than for over a dollar—no matter what the measure.

We drove around Thunder Bay on a beltway—a four-lane street really, with no median and stoplights at inconvenient intervals, passing the Terry Fox monument on our way out of town. Terry Fox was a paraplegic who tried to walk across Canada on crutches to raise money for the handicapped. He began at St. John’s, Newfoundland, and walked more than 2700 miles before medical complications stopped him at Thunder Bay—roughly halfway across Canada. He died soon after that. The people of Thunder Bay are very proud of Fox, and a long stretch of the Trans-Canada Highway has been re-named after him. (Just two years ago another paraplegic completed his route, walking the rest of the distance and dipping his crutches in the Pacific Ocean at Victoria, British Columbia.) **[Today the Canadian equivalent of “Relay for Life” is named in honor of Terry Fox. Fox has also been honored in many other ways. At the turn of the millennium, the CBC sponsored *The Greatest Canadian* program. Canadians voted Terry Fox the second most important person in their country’s history. He beat out people like Alexander Graham Bell and Wayne Gretzky and trailed only Tommy Douglas, who created Canada’s national health care program. Then in 2005 he became the first Canadian citizen to be honored on a coin, with a likeness of him running gracing the front of the loonie.]**



ABOVE: Terry Fox dollar coin

RIGHT: News photo of Terry Fox on his "Marathon of Hope"



From Thunder Bay we drove east on the Trans-Canada Highway. This road, Canada's only nationwide highway, runs over 5000 miles from St. John's, Newfoundland to Victoria, British Columbia. It was completed just twenty-five years ago, and parts of it weren't paved until the 1980s. For a 30-mile stretch between Thunder Bay and Nipagon, Ontario—where we were—it is literally the only road in Canada. Every car, truck, or camper that wants to cross between the eastern and western parts of the country has to travel on this road, which makes it EXTREMELY busy. It carries at least as much traffic as Interstate 80, yet it is only a two-lane road.

The traffic would be manageable, except that people seem to drive like maniacs in Ontario—especially when they pass. Yellow lines are used to indicate no passing zones, just like in the United States, but it often seems as if the government needn't have wasted the paint. Drivers pass when they feel like it, regardless of the stripes in the middle and (it often seems) regardless of any oncoming traffic. I don't know how many times people zipped in front of me, barely missing an oncoming car. One motorcycle rode down the center of the road, passing between me and a car in the other lane, with inches on either side. I was very glad when we got to Nipagon and turned north on a less-traveled road.

We drove north for another hour and camped for the night at Lake Nipagon Provincial Park, a pleasant place in the middle of the wilderness. The bugs were bad, but it really was a nice park. Brian drove into the next town to buy fuel for their pickup. Since tomorrow was a holiday, we weren't sure we could get diesel fuel for the truck. We had dinner, showered, and went to bed in good time.

WEDNESDAY, 1 JULY (Canada Day) – Beardsmore to Timmins, Ontario (Odometer reads 61940)

We didn't get up particularly early this morning, but we were up far before the rest of the people in the campground. Canadians seem to sleep quite late by American standards. We drove east on Highway 11, through beautiful, if monotonous, forest areas. This is the northern loop of the Trans-Canada—much less traveled than its southern counterpart. Ontarians call this entire

highway “Yonge Street”, after the street in downtown Toronto which it eventually becomes. It also has various touristic names, rather like the “Great River Road” and the “Hiawatha Pioneer Trail” we have in Iowa.

Traffic was light, partly because the road is so far north and partly because it was a holiday. The most common sight were buses carrying the Canadian Forces. A few years ago Canada merged all the branches of its military into one unit—getting rid of duplication and saving a lot of money. After pondering for a while why there were so many Canadian Forces buses out today, in a country that gets along well with virtually every country in the world, I finally considered the possibility that many of them could be participating in parades in the towns along the road. Canada Day is, after all, the equivalent of the Fourth of July.

I stopped in the town of Longlac to buy gas, paying 50.9¢/liter at the only gas station that was open. It was a full-service station, and I think this was the first time in my life I had bought full-service gas. (I normally buy self-service gasohol at convenience stores.) The bugs had done quite a number on my windshield, so it was nice to have the attendant clean it. It certainly is strange to just stand around and watch your gas being pumped, though.



**Moose sign near Timmins, Ontario
(This would be a foreshadowing of later events.)**

As we drove eastward the road signs gradually changed from English only to bilingual, in English and French. The towns we passed through, places like Hearst and Kapuskasing, were made up mostly of French-speaking people. In this region the forest became scrubby and the population density increased. The towns seemed to stretch on forever along the road, and most of them were really quite ugly—strings of grubby houses with unkempt lawns. For some reason Canadians have a passion for multicolored, striped houses, and we saw some of the most unlikely color combinations along this road. Picture any two colors that DON'T go together, and we probably saw a house in those hues. The houses themselves weren't all that ugly—some were just odd—but almost all the lawns were unmowed and junk was often scattered through them. It's not that the people seemed poor, though. Many people were building additions to their homes, while at the same time paying no attention to their yards. I'd imagine this area really looks its best during the bitter winters—when the grass is covered with snow and the colorful houses stand out against the white background. In summer, though, it really is unattractive.

Eventually we drove into the boundaries of the city of Timmins, the largest city in AREA in all of Canada. The place has less than 50,000 people, but its city limits include an area thirty miles long and fifteen miles wide—most of it scrubby forest and farmland. We never did make it into the REAL city, but we camped within the city limits—at Kettle Lakes Provincial Park. We hiked a most interesting trail over an ancient river bed, across peat bogs, and among little round “kettles” of water left by glaciers. After returning to the campground, I passed on a shower—as the building was probably half a mile from our trailer. We just tried to get to sleep. Unfortunately it was hot and steamy, and the bugs were worse than before. I lay awake until after 1am, watching Paul toss and turn in the pickup. Finally I went out to my car (which the bugs had not invaded, since the windows were closed), reclined in the passenger seat, and got some sleep.

THURSDAY, 2 JULY – Timmins, Ontario to Sainte-Veronique, Quebec (Odometer reads 62352)

From Timmins we headed east to the town of Iroquois Falls, another city with relatively few people that in area is huge. We then went southeast to Kirkland Lake, a dirty, crowded mining town with traffic jams I wasn't quite awake enough to deal with.

We followed Ontario highway #66 east of Kirkland Lake. Quite suddenly the land became very rugged and mountainous, with pine trees, creeks, and waterfalls making for very beautiful scenery. This is mining country. It is straight north of western Pennsylvania and West Virginia, and it looks a lot like those states—far more beautiful than the scrub forest to the west. It reminded me a lot of British Columbia and Montana, too. The mountains really aren't high at all, but they are rugged and beautiful.

[It's really amazing just how diverse of a place Ontario is. Though just a small fraction of Canada, the province is larger than almost every nation on earth. Canadians think of Ontario as the industrial heartland of the country, but the province encompasses farms, forests, both salt and fresh water coasts, swamps, mountains, and just about every other landscape imaginable.]

There's one last thing I should mention before leaving Ontario. For some reason Ontarians have a habit of driving with their headlights on—even in the daytime and in perfectly good weather. Perhaps it helps them to be seen when people pass so

dangerously. The only time I put my headlights on in the daytime I did what I knew I would do—I forgot to turn them off. **[It's weird to think of daytime running lights as a new and "strange" idea. The majority of cars have them these days, and they have been mandatory in Canada since about the time of this trip. In Ontario it is now required that lights be on at all times, day or night. If a car doesn't have daytime running lights, the headlights must be turned on. That law may well have gone into effect around 1987, causing the "strange" habit I saw.]**

In the middle of these mountains we entered the province of Quebec, the center of French Canada. There really is nowhere else on earth quite like Quebec. In some ways it is old and European, more genteel and civilized than the rest of Canada. In other ways it is the newest and most American of all the provinces—except that it speaks French. **[I'd later visit old France and be surprised to find that it also came across as very modern, complete with very American-style suburbs.]** Finally it is by far the largest of the provinces **["by far" is an exaggeration; it's only slightly larger than Ontario]**, with a more vast and remote frontier than any other part of Canada. The three lifestyles—traditional, modern, and frontier—come together in Quebec ... and EVERYBODY speaks French.

French is the only official language in Quebec. The national government of Canada speaks both English and French, but the Quebec government speaks only French. Most of the Quebecois people also speak mainly French, and by law all business transactions are supposed to be made in French and EVERY traffic sign and business sign (except trademarks) must be in French. **[They've apparently since repealed this law with regards to business signs, as it was ruled to go against the Canadian constitution.]** That makes things rather difficult for an American tourist, but really no more difficult than it is for the Quebecois when they travel to western Canada—where EVERYTHING is in English only **[though by tradition, not by law]**.

Margaret and I stopped at a supermarket in the town of Rouyn (I think it is probably pronounced roo-ANN, with that nasal French sound at the end.) Of course, the entire store was labeled with French signs ("viande", "legumes", and "pain" instead of "meat", "produce", and "bread"). We walked the aisles and found what we wanted—including some delicious pastries we snacked on as we drove. I carefully tallied my purchases in my head, so I didn't have to pay much attention to the amount the cashier announced in French at the check-out. This store had those new laser scanners, and I must say it is interesting to see the detailed receipt those things print out written in French.

On our way out of Rouyn we saw two interesting things. First there was a sign saying "Danger: Zone de Dynamitage"—it doesn't take too much imagination to translate that one. Secondly we saw a truck hauling guard dogs. It too said "danger", and it showed a picture of the most ferocious dog you can imagine, with true fangs sticking out. You wonder how the driver feels hauling that rig.

Quebec is developed much further north than Ontario is, but nevertheless we were entering a very remote part of the province. The area probably wouldn't be settled at all, except that it is the site of some of Canada's largest gold deposits. The cities of Noranda-Rouyn, Malartic, and Val-d'Or (in English, "Golden Valley") are huge, sprawling, modern towns that rely on gold for their existence. Gold mines are almost always deep underground, so except for the cities the lovely landscape is largely intact.

Since we were traveling in two vehicles, we arranged to meet at set locations every few hours. Usually we would meet at rest areas along the road, but these were narrowly scattered in this region of Quebec. Instead we decided to meet at the tourist information center in Val-d'Or. That was a mistake that made all of us far more acquainted with Val-d'Or than we ever had cared to be. Val-d'Or is a city of 30,000 people, and while our maps indicated that there was indeed an information center there, we had no indication as to what part of town it was in. Normally these tourist centers are well marked along the highway, so we were assuming this one would be, too.

We ended up on what appeared to be the only through street in downtown, an awful two-lane path with the most congested mess of traffic I have seen in years. To make things worse there was construction that made the street only one lane wide in places. As we drove people backed out of parking spaces in front of us without giving any thought as to who might be in the way. Pedestrians crossed in the middle of the road, away from marked crosswalks or corners. Bicycles weaved among the traffic on both sides of the street. Cars and trucks from cross streets kept coming even after their traffic lights were red. There are Spanish towns that are a lot like this, and I gather this must be the way people drive in France, too. **[It is.]** Certainly it made the maniacs in Ontario seem tame.

We finally did find the information center, and eventually we all met there. We had cheese and crackers for lunch (how very European in this most European province), and then drove on southward. Just a few miles southeast of Val-d'Or is an enormous provincial park called "Reserve La Verendrye", named (I found out later) after a family who explored western Canada. The atlas calls the road through the park scenic, but it really is nothing special. The forest is scrubby again, like in northern Ontario, and it was really a very boring drive.

Boring at least until we hit **CONSTRUCTION!!!!** The road through the north end of the park was not good; it was a fairly narrow blacktop in less than excellent repair that wound among hills and lakes. It was fairly heavily traveled, and perhaps it needed work—but it wasn't THAT bad. The speed limit was 90 km/h (55mph), and it wasn't too difficult to drive the speed limit. Suddenly, about halfway through this park we were warned of construction ahead. We weren't particularly worried, though, since through the trees we could see equipment (though no workers) in the process of building an entirely new road, wider and straighter than the one we were on. It appeared that the new road would basically avoid the old one and we had nothing to worry about.

... Again we were wrong. For some reason none of us has yet figured out the construction workers had torn up the blacktop on our road, leaving us with a BAD rock surface (not a good gravel surface, like an Iowa county road—we're talking bad, hard rock and dirt). This didn't cause the Quebecois to slow down, of course. They raced through it all at the same speed as everywhere else in the

province (pushing 100 km/h). Dust rose everywhere, making it almost impossible to see. We drove for miles through this mess, all the while looking at the new road being constructed off in the distance.

Eventually we made it past the construction and onto a much better road. It was late in the afternoon when we finally left the park and headed east toward Mont-Laurier. (In case you haven't guessed, for some reason two-word French place names seem always to be hyphenated. **[That's true in France, too, and I still don't know why.]**) We were very tired and very hungry when we got to Mont-Laurier. There was construction in that town, and again they had entirely torn up the blacktop, leaving us to drive on rock and dirt. We made it through that mess and stopped at a rest area to decide what to do about dinner and camping.

We all piled into my car and drove back into Mont-Laurier to find a place for dinner. We decided to stop at a mall, figuring there should be a variety of food in there. The parking lot at the mall was entirely full, and I ended up parking in front of an apartment building two blocks up a side street. When we got into the mall we found out why the parking lot was so full. It was (you'll never guess) country music day, featuring bad musicians singing American country songs in French far too loudly (there are rock concerts that are quieter) and salespeople in ten-gallon hats and leather jackets. It all seemed terribly out of place in Quebec, but as I said before this is very much a place where cultures meet.

There were two choices for food in the mall—either a hot dog stand in the hallway where we couldn't have been heard to order over the music or the Pignon-Rouge, a quaint European-style bar (which also seemed entirely out of place in a mall). We opted for the bar. Looking over the menu we figured we would have the least difficulty ordering if we all had omelettes, an item which is both easy to pronounce and doesn't require a lot of extra questions. We were surprised when the omelettes came with potatoes, coleslaw, and peas on the side—making a much more complete meal. Four omelettes with coffee or soft drinks came to Can\$25.75. We left a better than average tip for our waitress, who obviously spoke no English but was very understanding with us.

We drove on another half hour, to the town of Sainte-Veronique, which is named (like most towns in Quebec) for its parish church. We camped at a very pleasant park run by the town, which was mercifully free of mosquitoes. I again slept in the car; I really felt much more comfortable there than in the pickup.

FRIDAY, 3 JULY – Sainte-Veronique, Quebec to Quebec (City) (Odometer reads 62785)

We left Ste-Veronique fairly early this morning, again getting up well before the other campers. I stopped on the highway just outside town to buy some gas. It was an "Ultramar" station, a brand that is very big in Quebec (and I found out from my credit card invoice is affiliated with the American Gulf chain, which in turn is affiliated with Canada's national oil company, Petro-Canada). **[Ultramar today has no connection with Pet-Can. It has, however, bought out a number of American chain—most notably Union 76. Today the Quebec company is the biggest gas distributor on most of the West Coast of the USA.]** I was intrigued by the name, which in Spanish would mean something like "across the sea". I don't know what it means in French, but its garish blue and yellow signs are everywhere in Quebec. Gas is extremely expensive in Quebec. I paid 54.5 Canadian cents per liter in Ste-Veronique, which works out to US\$1.55, still far lower than they pay in Europe, but by far the most I had ever paid for gas. **[If only that were still true today!]**

Sainte-Veronique is just about the edge of the settled part of Quebec. Whereas yesterday we traveled through uninhabited mountains and scrub forest, with only occasional mining towns, today it was settled all along the route. First we drove through very pretty mountain scenery, an area filled with ski resorts. With town names like L'Annonciation, La Conception, and a variety of Notre Dames, it's not hard to tell the religious heritage of the region.

We stopped for breakfast in Sainte-Agathe-des-Monts (St. Agatha of the Mountains). It's a strange town, very modern and American, very French and European, and all nestled high in the mountains. Strangest of all, every corner in Sainte-Agathe seems to have a car dealer—for the strangest brands of cars. You can buy every kind of expensive car (Porsche, BMW, etc.) as well as cheap cars from all over the Communist world (Yugos, Soviet Ladas, etc.). What we didn't see were North American cars; it would appear that Fords and Chevys aren't good enough for the French skiers. We pulled into a McDonalds (they are in every big town in Canada). I rehearsed the words for what I wanted to order many times while waiting in line. The strangest item is the "Oeuf McMuffin"—if you know the American breakfast menu it doesn't take much translation to figure out what an "oeuf" is. Everything went very smoothly; it was really no different from ordering in Spain—where I really knew the language.

After breakfast we drove south on Highway #15, the Laurentides Autoroute ("Autoroute" is the French word for "interstate" or "expressway") toward Montreal. Margaret had had unpleasant experiences driving in Montreal years ago, so we decided to avoid the city itself and cut across the countryside north of there. We turned east at the twin towns of Saint-Antoine and Saint-Jerome **[suburbs near Mirabel airport that are to date the closest I've been to Canada's second city].**

At Saint-Antoine Margaret and I stopped at another mall to find a bank. With the weekend coming we wanted to be certain we had sufficient Canadian funds to get by. Again we waited in an unending line at the bank, but this time there was nothing we could read as we waited. Eventually I went up to the teller, mumbled something about "changer" in pseudo-French and proceeded to sign my traveler's cheques. The very friendly woman hesitantly, but correctly, counted my money back to me in English. Margaret's teller was quite a bit less helpful. Worst of all she gave Margaret her exchange in \$100 bills, which are virtually unspendable. **[They continue to be unspendable twenty years later. In fact when I went to Vancouver in 2007 I never saw anyone using any bill larger than a twenty.]**

It was raining as we drove eastward from Saint-Antoine, but it was a very pretty drive nonetheless. We were in farm country once again; the Laurentides region **[the St. Lawrence river valley]** is home to Quebec's dairy industry. We passed beautiful old farmhouses, much better kept up than the houses in Ontario, and quaint little towns with narrow streets that could have been shipped straight from Europe. The church is the center of every one of these little towns, and you would be hard-pressed to find more beautiful churches anywhere. All of them are huge stone masses that tower above the countryside. Their towers and spires make them seem more like great cathedrals than small-town parish churches. Each one is different, but they all have the same grand style. There is no such thing as a Protestant church in these towns. In Canada as a whole most people are Protestant, but Quebec is solidly Catholic.

Rather oddly, these churches don't seem to hold very frequent masses. Most of them don't have daily mass, and there is never more than one weekend service. I wonder if there may not be a shortage of priests; the masses from one town to another seem to be scheduled so a priest could travel through the towns—much like the old Methodist circuit riders. **[These days that's typical pretty much everywhere. With the exception of St. Cecelia's, which is a very large church, all the Catholic churches around Algona share priests these days. Most also have no daily masses, and normally just one mass each weekend.]**

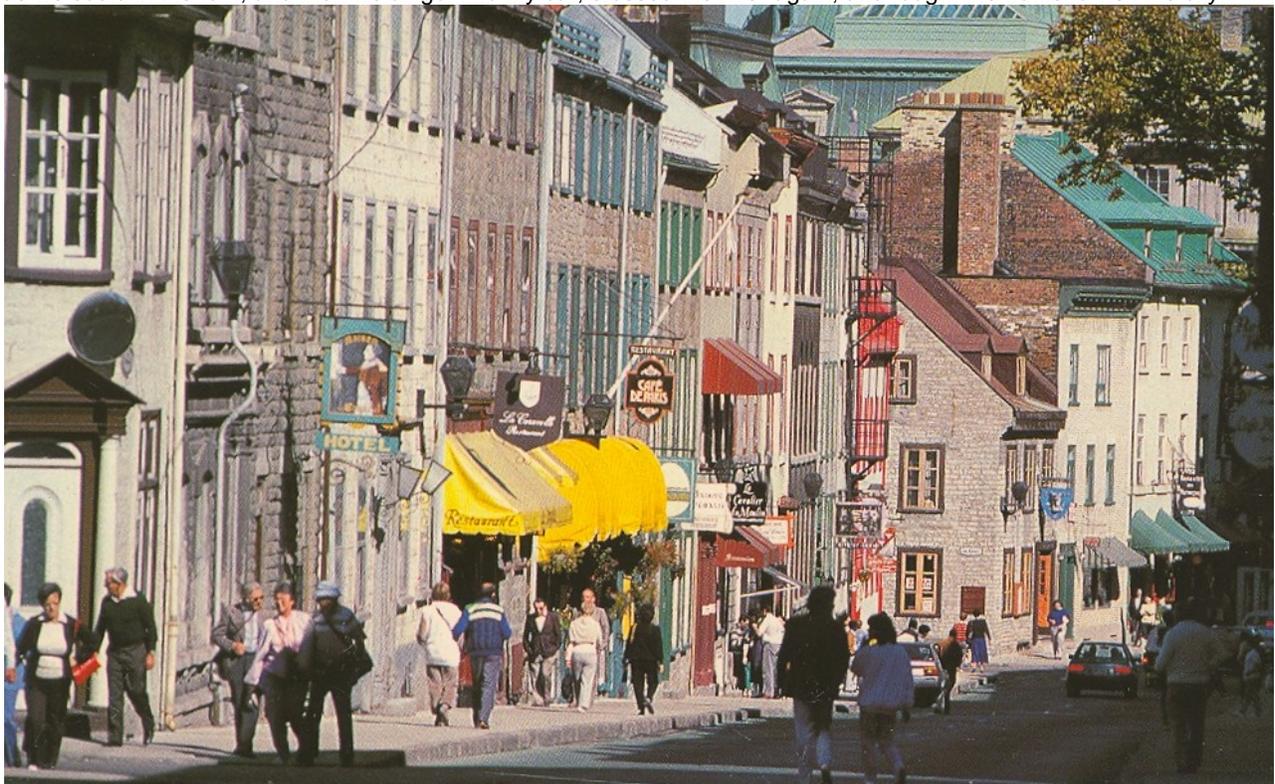
We drove eastward to the town of Joliette and then south to the "Fleuve Saint-Laurent" (the St. Lawrence River). I drove on the old North Shore Highway, which passes through beautiful little fishing and farming villages. The homes in many of these towns are row houses, and they are usually right next to the highway. There are no lawns or sidewalks, and their front stairs go straight down to the road. Many of the homes are whitewashed; others are painted in the multi-color stripes so common everywhere in Canada. The towns aren't exactly pretty, but they are interesting and really rather fun.

At Berthierville we got onto another autoroute which we took to Trois Rivieres (3 Rivers), where we crossed the Saint Lawrence. This river is the first part of the massive St. Lawrence Seaway, which carries ocean-going ships as far inland as Chicago and Duluth. At Trois Rivieres the St. Lawrence is at least as wide as the Mississippi, and since the bridge has to be high enough to let ocean-going ships pass, it is a massive structure indeed. It is almost scary to drive across so big a bridge; I really was glad to be on the opposite shore.

South of the river we got on Autoroute 20, Quebec's leg of the Trans-Canada Highway, which we took northeastward. We stopped briefly at a most interesting rest area. In addition to the requisite picnic tables and restrooms, there were salesmen hawking food and beverages from the sides of trucks. **[It was basically like a little farmers' market set up at the rest area.]** Almost everyone else at the rest area was from Quebec, and they seemed to appreciate the vendors.

The drive from the rest area on to Quebec City was short, but unpleasant. Traffic was VERY heavy, and it was raining harder. At times it was difficult to see, but that didn't stop the Quebecois drivers from zipping past us at well over the speed limit (which was now 100 km/h—a little over 60 mph). I was very glad to find the exit for our campground and be able to leave the freeway.

We camped early at the town of Saint-Nicolas (yes, like Santa Claus), just outside Quebec City. We got the trailer set up as quickly as we could in the rain, and then we all got into my car, crossed the river again, and fought the traffic to visit the city.



Postcard of the old quarter of Quebec City

Quebec was founded by the French in 1608, one year after the British founded Jamestown, Virginia. It is far older than Boston or New York, and it has been a major city for well over three centuries. Of the cities in Canada, only Saint John's, Newfoundland (which was founded in the 1500s) is older. However, the first thing a traveler sees after crossing the river to Quebec is certainly not ancient. Sainte-Foy, which bills itself as "Canada's insurance centre" is as modern and bustling a suburb as anything you'd find in Los Angeles or Chicago. It's a string of malls, apartments, and office buildings, with some of the heaviest traffic in Canada.

East of Sainte-Foy is the town of Sillery, a VERY wealthy residential community with wide boulevards lined by beautiful stone row houses. All along the way were banners proclaiming "Salut Sillery – 350 ans", saluting the town's 350th anniversary. If you do your subtraction, that means it was founded in 1637. Nothing in Sillery today looks more than 100 years old, though. Many of the buildings are from the Art Deco era of the early 20th Century—a few just a bit older. It's a pretty town, though, and it reeks of money.

Beyond Sillery is the city limit of Quebec. This part of the city is not overly nice. It is row houses, just like Sillery, but they have been "gentrified" beyond all recognition. There are exclusive restaurants and clubs along here, pricey boutiques—but no REAL business. Most American cities have this section, too; it's always beautiful, but I always feel very out of place there.

As you drive along Chemin Saint-Louis you very suddenly see the walls of the ancient city ahead of you. Like old European cities, Quebec had massive stone walls to keep out invaders (both English and Indian). Only a small fraction of the modern city lies within the walls, but that is the only part that has much touristic interest.

The highway passes through a narrow gate in the wall, and suddenly you are in the old quarter—a place that tries its hardest to look like the "typical" section of a small European city. The streets are very narrow, but cars zip along them anyway (just as they do in Europe). The buildings are brick and stone, and while fire destroyed much of the city in this century, the buildings were rebuilt to look like the originals. The streets wander aimlessly, following old trails and the lay of the land—like most European streets do—rather than in the straight grid for which America is famous. There are plazas (in French "places") at major intersections, featuring traffic circles with old statues in them. The place even smells like a European city—the old part of town in much of Europe carries a not terribly healthy smell that's a cross between sewage and smog. This probably isn't intentional in Quebec, but it does add to the atmosphere.

The only thing that keeps Quebec from seeming truly European is that it is first and foremost a tourist trap. The old quarter of European cities have REAL businesses—department stores, clothing stores, office supply stores, doctors, lawyers, business offices, fast food, cafes, bars, etc. In short, people live and work in old European cities. Quebec is a city of souvenir shops and expensive restaurants. Local people do roam the streets, but they seem out of place in a locale that caters primarily to visitors. I would imagine they either work for the provincial government or in the tourist trade. There are rooms for rent all over the city. I would bet the rooms are popular with students, artists, and the like—but not with the middle class. The metropolitan population of Quebec is around 600,000. Less than 50,000 live within the walls.

[I have a feeling that if I'd had more time in Quebec, I'd probably have liked the place better. It really is quite historic, with the newest buildings over a century old and some dating back nearly to the city's founding. As it was, though, Quebec was definitely not one of my favorite places.]

We drove around for a while and eventually parked in a massive underground garage beneath the "Hotel de Ville" (city hall). It was pouring rain, but since this was our chance to see Quebec, we walked around the old city—wet or not. The most interesting part of the walk was the Cote-de-la-Montagne, a long, steep, curving street that leads from "Upper Town" to "Lower Town". Quebec is built on a cliff, with part of the town on top of the cliff and the rest down on the river. Cote-de-la-Montagne (which means "next to the mountain") is the one street that connects the two parts. We took a shortcut going down to lower town, walking down an "Escalier" or staircase that was named as if it were a street. We were fully soaked by this time and more or less decided that one part of town looks a lot like another in the rain, so we headed back to the car.

[I was too prudish to mention it here, but to this day I distinctly remember old Quebec for its sex shops. They were everywhere! The only other place I'd seen similar emporiums before was Barcelona, and it was tame compared to Quebec. I remember Paul gawking at the stuff in the windows, which led to a fascinating (and carefully worded) discussion between him and his father. I thought then and I still think today that it must be both strange and awkward to raise a child in such an environment.]

Parking was surprisingly cheap for a tourist trap—only Can\$1.50 (US\$1.10). We paid the cashier, found our highway again, and re-traced our steps through Sillery and Sainte-Foy. I stopped at a Petro-Canada station in Sainte-Foy for gas and was surprised and confused by their computerized credit card system. For some reason (I still don't know why), I didn't need to sign any document to charge my gas. The computer just printed me a receipt, and I was on my way. (Needless to say, it showed up right away on my next statement.) **[There's another "way back when" statement. Today, of course, pretty much every gas pump works like the one in Sainte-Foy, and they never require a signature for credit card sales.]**

We needed to buy some Kleenex, so we stopped at a mall next to the Petro-Canada station. It was definitely not a place to buy so common an item as Kleenex. Place Sainte-Foy was, without question, the most elegant mall I have ever set foot in. It was enormous and pretentious and unpleasant to be in. We eventually found the one cheap store in the mall, a place called "Miracle Mart" (named in English). Unfortunately between the French signs and the confusing layout of the store we never did find any Kleenex. We soon gave up and ran through the rain back to the car.

Ste-Foy is home to what has to be the world's largest McDonalds. Just a block east of the freeway is a huge three-story structure that looks like an office building. The entire building is **ONE** McDonalds restaurant. We stopped here for dinner, both for the

novelty of the place and to avoid the ridiculous prices the real restaurants were charging. Inside the entire décor is dull pink. Tables are arranged on all the floors, and there is an indoor McDonaldland in the basement. Half of the main floor is taken up by the kitchen and a huge order counter. Again I rehearsed my order ahead of time (un filet de poisson, un lait frappe au chocolat, patates frites grand, et un café grand—fish, shake, fries, and coffee). I needn't have been so careful; in this tourist center we heard the waitresses speaking English to other customers. We did order in French, though—without incident, and we then returned to the campground for the night.

SATURDAY, 4 JULY (Independence Day) – Quebec City to Bathurst, New Brunswick (Odometer reads 63110)

It rained all night, and it was still raining when we left the campground this morning. We drove northeastward along the St. Lawrence, stopping briefly at Montmagny for breakfast and Trois Pistoles to buy some groceries. We were all amused by the name of that second town—I'm sure it must mean something other than "three pistols", but we had fun calling it that, anyhow.

The autoroute gives way to a two-lane road about an hour east of Quebec City, and we drove right next to the St. Lawrence for at least another hour. I was here a few years back with Paul and Nancy, and I remember the area being very beautiful then. We could see the pretty countryside near the river and the different shades of blue and green where salt and fresh water came together. Today the entire river was a wall of grey. The rain was sometimes hard and sometimes light, but the fog over the river made it impossible to see more than a few feet in the water.

Before long we came to the city of Rimouski, a pleasant place that was destroyed by a hurricane twenty years ago and rebuilt as a beautiful modern city. I bought the most expensive gas of the trip here—paying 57.9 Canadian cents per liter, self-serve. That's US\$1.65 per gallon. I think Quebec must have a particularly high gas tax, since prices were much higher there than in any other province.

We drove on a few miles beyond Rimouski, with the road right next to the river. At this point the St. Lawrence is more than thirty miles wide, and a ferry ride across it would take two hours and forty-five minutes. It was too bad the fog was so thick over the river; I remember looking out at large islands when I was here before with Paul and Nancy.

Rimouski marks the beginning of Quebec's Gaspé (gas-PAY) Peninsula, a beautiful resort area that mixes seaside and forest in the southeast corner of the province. We cut across the edge of the peninsula, following the Matapedia River valley. The road winds through beautiful, gentle mountains with the river always at the side. The surface is good, and I thought it was a very pleasant drive. Brian, towing the trailer with the pickup, was much more bothered by the rain than I was, and didn't have as much of a chance to enjoy the beautiful countryside.

Paul was riding with me at this point, and we had arranged to meet up with Margaret and Brian again at the information center in Campbellton, just beyond the border inside the province of New Brunswick. Margaret and Brian had passed us while I was buying gas in Rimouski, and since we hadn't passed them on the road, I figured they would get to the place before us. As it turned out, we found the information center (at a ski lodge out in the middle of nowhere, far from our road)—with no sign of Margaret and Brian anywhere. We ended up waiting more than an hour before they finally showed up. Apparently we had passed them without knowing it while they were buying gas in a little town in Quebec. The rain and mountains had slowed them down, and they had gotten lost trying to find the information center. The worst thoughts go through your head when you are waiting a long time for someone; I was very glad to see them, and I was certainly glad they were safe.

[The previous paragraph is another clue to how much things have changed in the past twenty years. I'm not a big fan of cell phones (and am certainly not someone who has mine on all the time), but they are wonderful for preventing problems just like this.]

We drove on from the information center on what appeared to be a two-lane freeway. It had regular exits, like an American interstate, but it was only two lanes wide, with lines marked to indicate where people could pass. The speed limit was 100 km/h, the same as on the four-lane autoroutes in Quebec.

Also like Quebec, this part of New Brunswick is very French. The Acadian people, the original French settlers in North America, seem very proud of their heritage and language. They make up about a third of New Brunswick's population, and they are concentrated in the northeast part of the province. Because they are such a large minority, New Brunswick has taken the step of becoming the only province in Canada to be officially bilingual. EVERY road sign in New Brunswick is written in both French and English, the government is bilingual, and almost all the people speak both languages well. It's the only place in Canada where bilingualism has really worked.

We camped for the night at Younghall Trailer Park, just north of the city of Bathurst. The owner of the campground spoke to us in English (with a very Scottish accent) as we made our arrangements; she then spoke to the next customer in very fluent French. We were right next to Bathurst Bay, an inlet of the Atlantic Ocean, and we had a beautiful view of the water from our camper. The weather was still untrustworthy, but it was no longer raining steadily. We walked along the beach, and then Margaret and I did the laundry that had accumulated over the past week. Most of the people in the laundromat spoke French—including one most entertaining couple. The husband carefully folded each piece of clothing as he took them out of the dryer. As he put them down, his wife would pick them up and refold them—not really any differently—and then stack them again. It amazed both of us that he put up with it and continued helping. It was spitting rain again as we took the clothes back to the trailer and got ready for bed.

SUNDAY, 5 JULY – Bathurst, New Brunswick to Prince Edward Island (Odometer reads 63516)

We got off fairly early this morning, again before the rest of the campground was up. I stopped at a convenience store in the town of Richibucto to buy gas and some food to snack on. This town was almost entirely French-speaking, but without really pausing the salesclerk went from speaking to the previous customer in French to speaking to me in English. The brand of gas was called “Irving”, a brand we would see over and over in this part of Canada. These stations are literally everywhere—you see them even more frequently than you see Casey’s stores in Iowa. Some are convenience stores, some are true service stations, and some are motels or restaurants where gas is really a sideline. All of them, though, are in garish red and white buildings with the name “IRVING” displayed prominently in bold blue letters.

We drove south from Richibucto to the town of Shediac and then eastward to Port Elgin. We then went north a short distance to Cape Tormentine, where ferries depart for the province of Prince Edward Island. We arrived just as a ferry was leaving, so we paid the fare (Can\$6.00 for car and driver) and waited in the huge parking lot for the next boat. Since the departures are an hour apart, we decided to kill some time in the cafeteria building at one end of the parking lot. I had just ordered some food when the announcement was made that we should return to our cars, as boarding would commence shortly. I went to the car holding a slice of pizza on a plate, and soon people were directing cars onto the ship. (They start boarding about twenty minutes before departure.) Before long we were ready to sail.



Bathurst Bay, New Brunswick



View on leaving the ferry at Borden, PEI

(Note that while “welcome” is bilingual, the name of the province is in English only.)

crowded big cities. That same almanac will tell you it is the most rural province—with a bigger percentage of people on farms than anywhere else in Canada. Both of those statistics are true.

The reason they can both be correct is that Prince Edward Island (usually called just “P.E.I.” by Canadians) is the only province in Canada without a vast undeveloped forest area. Ontario and Quebec have huge populations, but their density seems lower on paper because of the vast north woods. Even the other Maritime provinces (New Brunswick and Nova Scotia) have huge, unsettled

The crossing from Cape Tormentine to Borden, on Prince Edward Island is twelve miles over the Northumberland Strait, and it takes about 45 minutes. The sea was somewhat rough today, and between the rocking of the ship and the thick cigarette smoke inside the cabin, we decided it was more pleasant to walk around on deck. I didn’t feel too bad, but I was glad when we docked again.

[Today this ferry has been entirely replaced by the Confederation Bridge. Finished in 1997, the so-called “fixed link” is the longest bridge over ice-covered waters on earth. The crossing has been shortened to about ten minutes, but it now costs \$20.75—one way—to cross. Actually, the bridge is free entering Prince Edward Island, but it costs \$41.50 to get back to the mainland.]

Prince Edward Island is Canada’s smallest province, and it is in many ways its own little world. Former Prime Minister Trudeau described it as having “a unique cultural heritage”, and it certainly is different from every other province. An almanac will tell you it is the most densely populated of Canada’s provinces—which might make you think it is full of

interior regions. P.E.I. is all settled, but the settlers are almost all farmers and fishermen. It looks, in many ways, like southern New Jersey—full of tiny farms growing lettuce, potatoes, and berries. New Jersey got the name “garden state” for its truck farming, and P.E.I. could warrant the name “garden province” for the same reason.

There are only two places of any real size on the island. Charlottetown, the capital, has about 25,000 people—it might push a little higher with its suburbs. Charlottetown was the place where the British North America Act, confederating the provinces into the Dominion of Canada, was written. (Rather oddly, P.E.I. was NOT one of the original four provinces, though.) The other “big” place, Summerside, is an industrial town of about 8,000 that reminded me in some ways of my hometown of Mt. Pleasant.

The rest of the province is full of farms growing salad vegetables and potatoes in the bright RED soil. The soil is very sandy and full of iron, which literally “rusts”, giving the whole countryside a red color. Every few miles there is a “town” consisting of a general store/post office, a few houses, and occasionally a Protestant church. The United Church of Canada (a combination of Methodists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists) is big on the island, as are the so-called United Baptists. The little white wood church buildings would fit in just as well in the Iowa countryside as they do on Prince Edward Island. The place is very hilly, but the roads (which are universally BAD) run straight up and down the hills. All along the roads there are beautiful wildflowers. Especially prominent are lupines, in white and pink and especially deep purple. They cover the ditches, and sometimes there are whole fields of flowers pouring down the hills. It really is lovely. For no reason I can figure out, the place reminds me of eastern Iowa. It really doesn't look that much like Iowa, but I got the feeling just the same. Perhaps it's the hilly countryside; perhaps it's just that it's the only real farm country we had seen in days—whatever the reason, I felt very much at home here.

The pace of life is slower here than elsewhere in Canada. Take driving, for instance. The roads in P.E.I. are in pitiful shape (!!!), but that doesn't really matter. The local people drive slowly and carefully. In fact, they are some of the most polite drivers I have seen anywhere. Unlike the maniac passers and speed demons in Ontario and Quebec, the Islanders are content to follow at safe speeds and distances. In the towns they will pause to let people out of parking spaces, without immediately pulling into those same spaces. Perhaps this is because there is really no reason to drive fast. The island is quite small (about the size of Delaware), and even at very slow speeds, you can get most anywhere within an hour. Driving, though, is just one aspect of a slower pace of life.

The people in P.E.I. seemed pleasant, but not overly friendly. They get more than their share of tourists (this is, after all, the best beach resort in Canada), but it's quite clear that life would go on perfectly well without the tourist trade. Only in one small stretch (next to the island's best beach) are there the souvenir shops, wax museums, and other tourist traps that are so common everywhere else. Most of the island just ignores the tourists—they are polite, but nothing more—and that's fine with me.

Prince Edward Island did away with billboards a few years ago. In place of them the province erected tiny little signs with green letters on a black background. These are supposed to be more scenic than the billboards, but there are certainly more than enough of them cluttering the landscape. I suppose it is a good idea, though.

Of all the places we went on this trip, Prince Edward Island was my favorite. It's hard to say exactly why, but I think it's because more than anywhere else we went it's a place where I felt right at home—a place where I could enjoy living. I'm no farm boy, and I don't pretend to be one, but I think I could fit in quite nicely in Charlottetown or Summerside. **[I still have pleasant memories of P.E.I. all these years later.]**

The first place we went on the island was to the Acadian region, in the southwest part of the province. Here we toured a museum that tried to re-create the pioneer buildings of Mont-Carmel, an early French town in P.E.I. It was somewhat less than overwhelming—all the furnishings had been donated by local people, and only a few of them were actually from the era the village tried to recreate. Much more enjoyable was the modern-day Mont-Carmel. The modern town, a tiny fishing village, fits snugly between two beautiful red sand beaches. Its huge, colorful wood houses where fishermen live and the massive brick church (with twin spires) are really far more interesting than the fake history next door. In place of lawns, many of the houses had wildflowers growing right up to the doors. All the sidewalks (except the one leading to the church) were wood, and the people seem to walk barefoot around town most of the summer. This is definitely NOT a resort area, though. The beaches are beautiful, but they are not considered so great as the ones on the north end of the island. For this reason they are virtually deserted—only a few people, all locals, play on them.



View of Northumberland Strait from Mont-Carmel

From Mont-Carmel we drove north to the only real resort on the island. Paul, who had seemed so bored for so much of the trip, wanted to see the “Marine Aquarium” at Stanley Bridge on the North Coast. We obliged, and I hope he liked the place—I certainly

didn't. It wasn't TOO awful, as tourist traps go, but it certainly wasn't worth the \$3.00 admission to see tank after tank of fish and then rooms of stuffed birds. I went through it very quickly and read a newspaper in the car. It really didn't take Paul and Brian much longer, though. **[Today, of course, a \$3 admission would be truly nominal; it's hard to imagine what wouldn't be worth that.]**

We ate out tonight at an extremely expensive restaurant, also in this tourist trap region. "Chez Yvonne" in the town of Cavendish featured steak and seafood with all the quiet ambience of a truck stop (plastic chairs and paper placemats with advertising). For that charm I paid Can\$15.20 (about US\$11.50), plus tip, for a small steak I had to send back because it wasn't cooked properly the first time, together with soggy fries, and peas and carrots. That price wouldn't be high at a place with any pretension to atmosphere whatsoever, but it was a rip-off at this place.

The sun was just starting to set as we left Cavendish, and only a mile or so south we left the tourist trap behind and were again in the "real" Prince Edward Island. We drove south and then east to the suburbs of Charlottetown (with quaint names like "West Royalty"), where I bought gas, and then we wound through the city itself on a two-lane road.

Charlottetown is a most peculiar little city. Half of it is old, wood homes painted in conservative colors (but never white) with properly tended yards and gardens—it looks like New England, only more so. The other half is ultramodern: malls, fast food, apartment complexes, and glass office parks. For a long stretch along the highway the old town is to the east and the modern city to the west, with the highway being the dividing line between the two. There is no transition zone at all. The two parts of the city really don't go together at all, but the people go continuously from one part to the other and back without seeming to notice the difference.

Margaret and Brian stopped at an Irving station southeast of Charlottetown, where they bought travel mugs of coffee. Like Casey's, Irving has a deal where you can buy a travel mug and get cheap refills of coffee. The refills cost 19 Canadian cents (about 14 US cents) all over the Maritime provinces. In addition to the cheap coffee, they thought it would be an interesting (and inexpensive) souvenir. **[Margaret still has at least one of the Irving mugs two decades later.]**

We camped for the night in a provincial park southeast of Charlottetown. The park was right on the coast, but it was dark when we camped, so we didn't bother walking along the water. Margaret and I phoned Marine Atlantic, the company that runs ferry service to Newfoundland to try to arrange reservations for the following night. We found that there was no space available until Tuesday night at one minute before midnight—to arrive in Newfoundland on Wednesday morning. Since we wanted to go to Newfoundland, we reserved space on that ferry and thought of ways we could dawdle to kill the time until then. (As it turned out, we dawdled a bit more than we had planned on.) The lady from the ferry company gave me a confirmation number. I had nothing to write it down with, but I figured I could memorize it. When she started spewing out a long list of letters and numbers I didn't know what to do. In the end we scratched the number with my pocket knife into the back cover of the phone book. I couldn't tell you the number today if you paid me, but you could probably still find it there, at a phone booth somewhere on Prince Edward Island.

[It's strange to think that we hadn't made any sort of reservations until this point. I remember Margaret thinking it was strange that the ferry was booked up. I suppose we thought it would be like the (much shorter) ferry to Vancouver Island in British Columbia or the ferry we'd taken to P.E.I. It's a seven-hour boat ride to Newfoundland, though, so it's no surprise that the sailings are less frequent and tend to fill up fast.]

MONDAY, 6 JULY – Prince Edward Island to Amherst, Nova Scotia (Odometer reads 63836)

This morning we explored a bit more of Prince Edward Island. P.E.I. has three counties named Kings, Queens, and Prince. We figured that, as long as we were here, we should at least say we had seen all three of them. So we made a brief detour eastward into Prince County.

After a half hour or so, we stopped at a tiny little provincial park that is home to a small herd of buffalo. Buffalo are not native to eastern Canada; these were imported from northern Alberta about twenty years ago. They don't really fit into this seaside setting, but they seem to be prospering nonetheless—the herd has doubled since they were brought here. Margaret and I caught a glimpse of some of them, but they ran into the woods before Brian and Paul got there. **[This whole trip was strange because we were doing it in two vehicles. The experiences part of our group had were different than those of the others.]**

We drove back through Charlottetown and then back to the ferry terminal at Borden. It was precisely 10:30 when we arrived, and the ferry workers directed us right up to the dock. They stopped the traffic two cars in front of Brian, and we made a circle around the terminal and parked for an hour. We were among the first to board the 11:30 ferry, which seemed less crowded than the one over to the island. The crossing was more smooth, too.

Back in New Brunswick, we drove southeastward to Shediac, where Brian and I exchanged some more money. The people at the bank spoke mostly French, but the tellers spoke excellent English to us. We got some of the new Canadian dollar coins with the money we exchanged. They really are quite pretty—shiny and gold. The U.S. mint might have been more successful with the "Suzies" if they had made them a different color. **[The U.S. mint did switch to "golden dollars" a few years ago, though. However, in both the U.S. and Canada, the shiny new gold coins quickly tarnish and become dull brass. What's more, since we have yet to eliminate dollar bills in America, golden dollars are still little more than collectors items here.]**

From Shediac we went on westward to Moncton, a city we would get to know only too well in the next few days. Moncton has only 55,934 people (I just checked my atlas), but it acts as if it had half a million. There are no less than eleven exits for the place along

the Trans-Canada Highway, plus eight more along provincial highway 15 (the route we took into town). It seems to stretch on forever along all the highways that lead into it, and downtown it is a maze of skyscrapers entirely unlike what I would have expected in a place of its size. Moncton is the smallest of the three places of any size in New Brunswick (Saint John and Fredericton are larger), yet it seems by far the largest. **[I checked Wikipedia while revising this and found that the Moncton “census unit” (six neighboring cities) has 126,424 people and the “trade area” (three counties) is just shy of 200,000. While the central city isn’t all that big, it turns out that greater Moncton actually is the largest urban area in the province.]**

Brian wanted to buy a souvenir T-shirt from each of the provinces we visited, so we stopped at a mall in Moncton to try to find a place where he could buy one. It was enormous—not exactly a challenge for the one in Edmonton I saw last year (the world’s largest **[at least until Mall of America was completed]**), but extremely large and confusing. We walked every hallway, pausing at each clothing, sporting goods, or gift shop to scout it for T-shirts. We never did find anything appropriate, but we certainly killed plenty of time. We were in that mall nearly an hour without really accomplishing anything.

From the mall we drove into downtown, and then we crossed away from the city on a frightening little bridge. It was an ancient rusted green structure with a metal floor and all its support rising above the bridge. It pretended to be two lanes wide, but the lanes were not much wider than my tiny car. The speed limit on the bridge was 20 km/h (10 mph), but needless to say the stream of traffic in the other lane went far faster than that.

The bridge dumped out on a pathetic little road (highway 114) that we followed south from Moncton. All the highway markers in New Brunswick are shaped like that province, and the color of the sign tells you how good the road is. Green highway signs mean relatively good highways; any other color means horrible. Highway 114 was marked with blue signs, which supposedly meant it was of “intermediate” quality. If our road was intermediate, I’d hate to see what New Brunswick calls bad. The road had a terrible surface, it went around tight blind curves and up and down steep hills, it seemed to wind through every little town in the province, and it had places with road construction that came up without advance warning.

In one of the construction zones we saw two sign-turners (why they call them “flagmen”, I’ll never know) who obviously had no idea what they were doing. When we got there one of them had his sign turned so neither the “SLOW” nor “STOP” side showed toward us. After a time he turned his “SLOW” sign toward us, while the other still had his “STOP” sign out. When the two of them realized their signs disagreed, they finally got things together and gave us the definite “SLOW” signal. I had just taken my foot of the brake when a piece of construction equipment immediately started backing up into our lane. I slammed on the brake again, and the sign-turners just shrugged. After the construction equipment was out of the way I proceeded with extreme caution, figuring the sign boys really had no idea of what was safe.

For as bad as it was, this really wasn’t a particularly pretty road. Most of the time it paralleled a tidal river—a river that rises and falls as the tide comes in and out. We saw it at low tide, and it was mostly an ugly red mudflat with some rocks at the side and a trickle of water down the middle of it. At high tide the whole area fills in, from the coast all the way up the river to well beyond Moncton—over 40 miles in all. That must be spectacular, but the land is really quite ugly at low tide—and for the most part the road was in sad shape.

We raced down this awful road at record speed. While we paused in the mall, Margaret and Paul continued driving with the camper. We assumed they had gotten well ahead of us, and we hated to have them wait too long for us to catch up. It turned out when we met that they had thought we were ahead of them and had also sped down that horrible road trying to catch up. Fortunately they didn’t have to wait quite as long as we did at that information center two days earlier.



We met at Alma Beach in Fundy National Park. The Bay of Fundy is famous for being home to the highest tides in the world. The water level can rise 50 feet between high and low tide, and that makes a difference of thousands of feet (and even miles) along beaches and the coast. Seawater backs up in the rivers and at one point causes what is called “Reversing Falls”, where the tidewater backs up beyond a major waterfall, making the falls seem to flow uphill. It’s difficult to explain exactly why the tides are so high—somehow the shape of the bay constricts the water and forces it up very far very fast. Whatever the reason, it really is spectacular.

Alma Beach doesn’t have the highest tides in Fundy (they are across the bay in Nova Scotia), but it was quite a sight nonetheless. We hadn’t planned to arrive at any particular time, but we couldn’t have arrived at a better one—we got there just as the tide was coming in. When we arrived Alma Beach was a huge mass of rocks and sand, with the ocean far beyond the road. The sand near the road was wet, though. We walked to the beach, and it took us quite a while to actually reach the water. Once we did, we had to keep retreating as the tide kept coming in fast. Within minutes acres of land were swallowed up by the tide. At one point I stood

LEFT: Paul Sullivan on an island formed by the incoming tide at Alma Beach, Bay of Fundy, New Brunswick

on dry land, well above the water, and within three minutes my feet were wet. Paul waded into the water and reported that only a few feet beyond the shoreline, the water started getting deep. We kept retreating from the ever-rising tide, gathering shells and snapping pictures as we went. By the time we were back in the parking lot, the tide had gotten very close to the road.

We had dinner in the trailer at Fundy and then drove on through the park. There is a short, but beautiful road through the park, and Brian and I saw a deer beside the road as we drove up the hill out of Fundy Park. We looped around on a much better road that went northwest from Fundy and followed the Trans-Canada back eastward into Moncton. Along the road we saw forests in various stages of growth. Green and white signs marking the forests stated when they were planted and when they were to be harvested. The owner of the forests: good old Irving, which this time called itself “the tree-growing company”.

[Irving is the largest privately-owned corporation in Canada and one of the largest companies in the world. At the time this was written its founder was Canada’s wealthiest citizen. For their size, they seem to be a remarkably responsible company, though.]

Southeast of Moncton the forest turns to marsh. The Trans-Canada then runs past the community of Sackville, a lovely old college town that is one of the most pleasant communities I have seen anywhere. Sackville happens to be the home of Radio Canada International, the short-wave service of the CBC, beaming news of Canada around the world. I drove past the place seven times on this trip, and it’s definitely a landmark. Right next to the highway there is a true forest of wires and transmitters—I counted at least fifty transmitters, and I’m sure I missed some. I wonder what their electric bill is.

It was getting rather late when we crossed the border into Nova Scotia (Latin for “New Scotland”). We arranged to meet at an information center right on the border, and this time the information center was quite obvious. Brian and I briefly walked through a museum about the province’s blueberry industry, and we picked up some rather awkward maps and travel literature (the maps illustrated in detail what every interchange in the province looked like).

Coming into Nova Scotia there is a string of rather amusing signs. One of the strangest announces “ALL SPEED LIMITS AND DISTANCES ARE METRIC”—a rather silly announcement, considering that all speed limits and distances EVERYWHERE in Canada are Metric, and you have to go through at least one Canadian province to get to Nova Scotia from anywhere. To make things more amusing, right after that is another sign that gives the distance to various cities in Nova Scotia—in BOTH kilometers and miles. Another funny sign says “THIS MEANS SCHOOL ZONE” and has an illustration of the pentagonal sign with children on it that has been the universal signal for school for over a decade. Those signs are found not only all over Canada, but also all over the U.S.A. and in Europe. They happen to be blue in Canada, rather than America’s yellow, but that doesn’t make them any less recognizable. Why Nova Scotia feels the need to tell us the obvious, I don’t know.

After Margaret caught up with us, we drove on about five miles to the city of Amherst, where we found a campground—if you could call it a campground. The place was called “The Barrel”, and it was located right on the strip, with K-Mart in one direction, car dealers in another, and an oil refinery down a side street. (What a beautiful, scenic park!!!) Like most urban parks, the place packed in as many campers as possible in the smallest conceivable space. There were no trees, and the buildings at the place looked rather run down. To make things worse, the place seemed unsafe to me. It might not have seemed so bad, but the bathrooms were kept locked, and we had to use a special key to get in them. (It would seem they wouldn’t bother with the precaution if there weren’t a reason for it.) For all that precaution, the toilets and showers didn’t seem to be cared for very well; they weren’t at all nice. There was a long list of rules posted in various locations around the park, which appeared to give the owners the right to kick us out if they didn’t like us for any reason. (Owners of any park have that right, but most don’t feel obliged to mention it.) Being right in the middle of a city, it was well lit all night long, and I didn’t sleep very well in the car that night—but it was a place to camp, and at least we were there only one night.

TUESDAY, 7 JULY – Amherst, Nova Scotia (Odometer reads 64159)

We left camp a little later than usual this morning, figuring there was no particular hurry, since our ferry to Newfoundland didn’t leave until a minute before midnight. The drive across Nova Scotia was about five hours, and we figured we would kill a little time in a national park near the ferry terminal.

Brian and Paul got a head start on Margaret and me; we stopped at a McDonalds and bought some coffee and danish. It was amusing to hear the waitress who was attending the drive-through ask us, in a VERY Scottish accent, “ ‘n’ will you be ‘aving some ‘ash browns with that, now?” This is, after all, Nova SCOTIA. Canadian coffee is always very strong by American standards, and it is always served with LOTS of real cream (two large tubs of cream per cup). The cream is real, and it is loaded with dairy fat. Brian once got some cream that was 18% butterfat, more than is found in some whipping cream. I drink my coffee black, and over the course of the trip Margaret had collected lots of extra creams from me.

I was sipping my coffee as we drove back to Exit 4 and onto the Trans-Canada Highway. We had driven east just a few miles when Margaret noticed the trailer stopped ahead on the road. We assumed there was road construction, even though there were no signs, and I started to slow down. As we got closer, though, we saw Brian standing on the road, and it was clear something was wrong. Brian had had an accident, and the pickup would not move.

The Trans-Canada at this point is one of those silly two-lane interstates I had described earlier. It is rather hilly and cuts through a forest area. The speed limit is 100 km/h (over 60 mph), and there are good, wide shoulders on both sides of the road. Apparently, shortly before Brian got to this spot there was a moose at the side of the road. Several cars had stopped to take pictures of

the moose—most of them parked on the shoulder, but at last one van was stopped dead right in the middle of the highway. Another car (a Nissan driven by the local Ford dealer) stopped behind the van, also parked right on the highway. Brian could not stop in time, and he rear-ended the car. Very quickly the rest of the cars, including the van that seemed most to blame, disappeared from the scene, and the moose (who seems quite innocent) went back into the woods. Fortunately no one was injured. Paul and Brian had both been wearing their seatbelts (as is required by law all over Canada), and this was definitely an accident where seat belts deserve some credit for keeping them safe.



LEFT: Brian's wrecked Toyota pick-up
RIGHT: Constable Stewart's RCMP car

We were left waiting, with Brian's entirely wrecked pickup and the Ford dealer's slightly bent-up Nissan. The front of the pickup was smashed in to where Paul described it (not inaccurately) as half its normal size. The rear bumper also absorbed much of the crash, being twisted and bent far out of shape. Mercifully the trailer seemed to be in good shape. Things inside it were no more jostled than they normally got in riding down the road. Only the crank used to level it was broken. The position on the road could have been worse, too. Brian had pushed the car more toward the middle of the road, so there was at least room for cars in both directions to pass the wreck on the shoulders. Doug (DOOG), the mechanic who would tow everything away (who happened to work at the local Irving station) arrived. He took one look at the truck and described it as "a write-off". He got his chains out, but he had to wait with us until the cops got there.

The police in rural Nova Scotia are the Mounties—the Royal Canadian Mounted Police—though it's probably been forty years since any of them mounted a horse in this area. The Mounties are the equivalent of the highway patrol, and they dress and drive cars like any highway patrol officers in the States. They are spread pretty thin, too. It took over half an hour for our Mountie to arrive.

Constable Stewart (the proper name for any Mountie is "constable") was a tall man with reddish brown hair and a moustache. His hair (about the same length as mine) would be long by American standards, but it was quite typical for Canada. EVERYBODY in Amherst seemed to know him, and we hear from "everybody" that he used to work on the drug squad. Supposedly he was happy to be reassigned to traffic duty because it gave him a chance to shave his beard. He wore a blue uniform, like a city cop, and he had no partner with him. Constable Stewart didn't seem to have a first name, so in honor of the old Mountie cartoons I'll just call him Dudley.

Dudley was appropriately frowning and serious at first. He checked to be sure no one needed medical attention and then proceeded to take photographs of the scene. Margaret and I, feeling slightly out of place, also got snapshots with which to remember this bad spot in our vacation. After looking around closely, Dudley asked the parties involved (which, now that the REAL cause was gone, amounted to Brian and the Ford dealer) what happened. Brian started explaining the accident in great detail, but the Mountie interrupted him saying, "so you rear-ended him, eh?" That seemed to be the only fact that mattered at the moment, and we were expecting the worst—perhaps Nova Scotia was one of those places where anyone who rear-ends another car is at fault, regardless of any other factors involved. Dudley looked around some more and spoke with Doug, the mechanic, to make arrangements for getting rid of the mess. He seemed to know Doug and have the utmost respect for him.

With time the constable got more friendly. It was decided that Doug should tow the truck to his home, where it would be safer than at the service station. The trailer would be towed to a trailer park in Amherst (NOT the Barrel, thank goodness), since we would have to stay in town until everything was cleared up. Brian would have to go to the police station to fill out various forms, and after that was taken care of the Ford dealer offered to let Brian use his phone to see about insurance arrangements.

After what seemed forever those involved in the accident got into the police car and Dudley drove them off toward Amherst. We followed, since we had to pick Brian up when he was done and we had no idea where the Mounties had their headquarters in town. On the way the Ford dealer's passengers insisted on stopping by the hospital—even though they were in no way injured. They were cooking up an insurance scheme, if you ask me. All the way to the station, on the highway and in town, the Mountie drove FAR above the speed limit. It seemed peculiar behavior right after an accident, but I followed close behind him. I figured he could hardly ticket me since he was the one driving so fast.

The Mounties' post looks like a modern brick house in a residential district on the northeast edge of Amherst. I read a newspaper as we waited for Brian to finish with the constable. In the end Dudley decided to declare no fault in the accident—to place the blame on nature, presumably the moose everyone was photographing. That was good news for us, since God knows how long things would have taken to clear the court if Brian were charged with a crime. At any rate, he was free from the Mounties' point of view, so one problem was out of the way.

We next went over to the Ford dealership, where Brian made some phone calls. While we waited I walked next door to see if the local Dodge garage could fix my muffler, which had been noisy ever since the beginning of the trip. They were booked up all day, so I went back and just waited some more.

After Brian had finished with his phone calls, we went to a little mall where we had lunch at a place called "Pizza Delight". Each of us had mini-pizzas, which were good and quite reasonably priced. We went back to our new campground (Loch Lomond Park, MUCH nicer than the Barrel) and killed some time before Margaret and Brian had to meet with an insurance representative.

I drove everybody into Amherst in the middle of the afternoon. There was no State Farm insurance agent in Amherst (in fact, State Farm seems to have only one office in all of Canada—in Kingston, Ontario), but a local businessman was contacted to make the proper arrangements. The nameplate on his office read "Atlantic Combustibles", but I don't think that was the only company he worked for. The secretary in that office did work for Atlantic Combustibles, and she said she only answered the phone for the man with whom Margaret and Brian were concerned. Whatever company the man DID work for, it had offices all over Iowa, in some of the strangest little towns. This man dropped the names of Iowa towns none of us had heard of until we moved out to the western part of the state.

Margaret and Brian met with the man in private while Paul and I waited in the outer office. Paul seemed extremely bored (with good reason—there weren't even magazines to read), but I entertained myself watching the secretary NOT work. When we came in the secretary was explaining to her boss what she didn't like about the new computer system they had installed. The boss left, and she shuffled a few disks around in the computer but never did type anything. Soon a delivery boy came in, and she had a long chat with him. Before she could get back to work, another secretary stopped by. Again they spoke at length. Next the woman's daughter dropped in—a valley girl "to the max". She wanted to return a top she had bought that was "just totally gruesome" (actually it was totally pink). Unfortunately she didn't have the sales slip, and what's more, she had washed it. She wanted mom to re-assure her that she could con the salespeople into believing it had never been worn. Her conversation was in the hurried pace that is so typical of teenage girls, and mom wasn't able to get much of anything in. After a short while the girl was off to the store. Mom turned to me and said, "Well, she's like that, eh?" I've taught a hundred girls who are "like that", and I knew exactly what the mother meant.

While the daughter was gone, the phone rang a couple of times. It was for the man who was talking with Margaret and Brian, and the secretary did a good job of explaining that he was "in", but he wasn't "available". Before she could really get back to work, the mail lady came. They gossiped, though not at quite so much length as some of the earlier people. Then the daughter was back again. She had indeed exchanged the top (I'd hate to be the poor soul who ended up buying it), and she had bought another top, which seemed even more "gruesome" to me. The daughter wanted to send her daughter on an errand to the supermarket. There was a warehouse store nearby, but the daughter said, "I'm just sure you're sending me to the 'No Frills'! Like, how can I be seen THERE?" She punctuated her sentence with a small gasp—also very typical of girls her age. It must be totally gruesome for others to think she saves money on her groceries. She wanted to borrow the car and drive out to the mall where her friends could see her shopping at a nice supermarket. Unfortunately she did not have her permanent driver's license yet, and mom was not about to let her have the car until she did. They argued some more, and finally the girl trudged off to "No Frills".

After that the secretary talked to me for a few minutes. She never did get back to her computer. I found the whole situation very entertaining, but Paul looked more and more bored. Margaret and Brian had been talking to the man for nearly two hours. Eventually I offered to drive him back to the campground.

Driving Paul back to Loch Lomond was a guarantee that Margaret and Brian would finish with the man. Sure enough, they were waiting on the street when I got back downtown. Things turned out to be rather complicated, and the moral of this whole story is: Don't wreck a car in Canada. Here are the various problems:

1. This man had to contact an insurance agent in Sioux City to find out what Brian's truck would have been worth there in its age and condition at the time of the crash. Needless to say, the agent in Sioux City wasn't in when the Amherst man called, and vice versa.
2. There was some question as to whether the truck was actually a total loss. Since parts of the frame and parts of the engine were still intact, there was a possibility that State Farm could insist we have it repaired. Just imagine the likelihood that parts would be available in Amherst, Nova Scotia, for a particular model of Toyota diesel pickup. (We didn't even see a Toyota dealer in town.)

3. Even if a money settlement could be worked out, there was a question about where we could pick up the money. Since State Farm's Canadian office was 2,000 miles away in Ontario, we obviously couldn't go there. Most likely we would have to pick it up somewhere in the U.S.A., but that would require even more phone calls to even more people.
4. Somehow we had to get the trailer back to Iowa. My car certainly couldn't handle the load, so Brian and Margaret had to buy another vehicle. The new car had to be bought in the U.S. (NOT in Canada), because Canadian cars don't meet the standards needed to register a car in America.
5. Since we had to buy the new vehicle in America, somehow we had to get the trailer to the border. The nearest border was at Calais, Maine, about 150 miles away. Most likely we would have someone tow the trailer there for us—at great expense.
6. All the contents of the pickup had to be transferred somewhere else. Neither my car nor the trailer was really large enough to hold them, but they had to go somewhere.
7. When a vehicle is wrecked in Canada, one must make arrangements with Canada Customs about what to do with it. In Amherst this means dealing with an elderly woman about who everyone advised us “be nice to that lady”. In theory she could require that we remove the pickup from Canada, in other words have it towed to Maine. Alternately she could require that duty be paid to “import” the wreck into Canada. At one point we heard that she was asking for \$2,000 in duty for this worthless truck.

We pondered all these problems, and then we entertained ourselves with all the ways in which things could have been worse:

1. Most importantly, no one was hurt in our accident. Things would have been far worse if someone was hurt.
2. The trailer was okay, even if we couldn't level it without the crank. At least we had somewhere to live—we didn't have to stay in a motel.
3. Brian was not charged with any crime. Who knows what would have happened if there were charges filed?
4. It happened about as close to the U.S. border as we were anywhere on the trip. Yes, it was 150 miles to Maine, but at some stages on our trip we were much further away. It could have happened while we were in Newfoundland—500 miles and a ferry ride from anywhere.
5. It happened while we still had time to spare. We were forfeiting our trip to Newfoundland, but at least we didn't have to rush back—yet.
6. It happened in a developed region where people spoke English. Our worst nightmare would have been to have an accident in that remote park in Quebec. I may be able to order a meal in French, but there's no way I'd want to deal with an accident in French. The man Margaret and Brian spoke to said many Canadians, including himself, will not drive in Quebec for that very reason. (In fact, when we were in Quebec, we noticed that almost every car on the road was from that province—very few people were from elsewhere.)
7. Everyone in Amherst (the Mountie, the mechanic, the insurance man, etc.) mentioned to us the worst things that might have happened—we could still be staying at the Barrel.

So we counted our blessings and tried to accept reality. We didn't trust the stove in the camper before having it checked out, for fear the propane connections might have been damaged. So we had dinner at a Chinese restaurant, apparently the best place in Amherst—though nothing too special. Like all nice restaurants in Canada (including Pizza Delight) it was “fully licensed”, meaning they serve booze too.

With the pickup gone it was vital that I sleep in the car now, as there was absolutely no room in the trailer. It was pleasantly cool sleeping at Loch Lomond, and I got a good night's rest.

WEDNESDAY, 8 JULY – Amherst, Nova Scotia (Odometer reads 64199)

If you look carefully, you will notice that the odometer reads exactly forty miles more than yesterday—that's really moving!

There's not a great deal to say about the day. We got up relatively late (about the same time as the rest of the campers), and I drove into McDonalds to buy coffee and rolls for everyone. The McDonalds restaurants all over Canada were promoting Chicken McNuggets Shanghai—a special gimmick that offered Oriental sauces and chopsticks with the chicken chunks. At the Amherst outlet, even at breakfast time, the employees were wearing pointed Oriental hats. None of them seemed to enjoy it, and they all looked stupid in them, but it certainly did set them apart from the other fast food in town. I felt a bit strange ordering three large coffees, a hot chocolate, and four danishes when I was the only person in the car—but not nearly so strange as the employees must have felt in those silly hats.

Brian had set up a screen tent behind the trailer, and as we sat there and had our coffee, we entertained ourselves watching a young couple striking their camp down the hill from us. They were either newlyweds or a couple living together, and they were overly romantic. Margaret commented at one point that it took them so long to take down their tent and roll up their sleeping bags because they had at most two free hands between them. Eventually they did get on their way, and we decided to get out a bit ourselves. So we saw what there was to see around Amherst.

The only thing that comes close to a tourist attraction in the area is Fort Beausejour (BOWS-zhure, pronounced with two and a half syllables), back in Sackville, New Brunswick. This is the ruins of an old fort on the border between French and English Canada (New Brunswick was French and Nova Scotia was English). There is a small museum there, and you can walk around the ruins, but it's not really anything special. It certainly wouldn't have been anything for us to go out of our way to see, but since we were a captive audience we spent some time there.

After touring the fort we bought some souvenirs and had lunch at that same Pizza Delight (this time we all had pasta). We then killed some time in the two small malls in Amherst. Most interesting in the malls was the Zeller's store. Zeller's is a discount store found all over eastern Canada, and the one in Amherst is nothing special. What was interesting about it was a series of posters and loudspeaker announcements for "Club Zed". Club Zed is a gimmick where shoppers earn points for each of their purchases. The points accumulate like trading stamps, and they can use them to buy merchandise or vacations. The peculiar name Club Zed (obviously a take-off on the Club Med resorts) comes from the British (and Canadian) name for the letter "Z"—zed. You apparently have to fill out an application to become a member of Club Zed, and we didn't bother with the paperwork.



Margaret Sullivan at Fort Beausejour – Sackville, New Brunswick

Another interesting store was the Singer sewing machine shop, located next to Zeller's and across from Pizza Delight. We got a clear view of Singer while we ate. The manager had just gotten a new cardboard sign that said "SUPER SUMMER SALE". Unfortunately the only place he had to put this sign was on a tiny bulletin board in front of his shop—the bulletin board already said "Singer" on it. The sign was far too big to fit on the bulletin board, no matter how he tried to squeeze it. First he chopped off the word "SUPER" all together. "SUMMER SALE" was still too big to fit. He tried it diagonally and up and down, but nothing seemed to work. Finally he chopped the words "SUMMER" and "SALE" apart and cropped them so they had no border. Putting the words diagonally, one under the other, he managed to get them on the board, just barely obliterating "Singer". I have no idea what was on sale, but it was entertaining watching him set up everything.

My nose had been stuffed up all during this trip, so at Zeller's I bought an over-the-counter product called "Histimal", which advertised itself as "the decongestant that lets you stay awake". **[I use the American term "over the counter" here, but actually in Canada it would correctly be called an "off the shelf" drug. "Over the counter" drugs in Canada are regulated drugs that don't require prescription but must be requested from a pharmacist—like pseudoephedrine is in the USA these days.]** The package explained that it was perfectly safe to drive or operate equipment while taking Histimal. Like every other drug in the store, it was terribly expensive. Ten tablets of the substance cost Can\$6.99 (US\$5.25). When I have similar problems at home, I buy a product called "Congestac" which also says it doesn't put you to sleep. Thirty-six tablets of it cost just \$3.50 in Algona. **[Having just mentioned pseudoephedrine, that's probably what I should actually have bought; it would have been both cheaper and more effective.]**

We had dinner at an A&W in the mall and then went back to the campground, where we read newspapers and watched television (Paul had brought along a tiny little black and white TV). One paper from Montreal reported plans among Reagan's aides to suspend the Constitution and declare martial law in case people disagreed with the contra aid program. Other papers were reporting how America was "falling in love" with Oliver North, considering him a patriot. The Canadian newspapers and television seemed to think this was strange, and I must say I agree with them. Dishonest people make me angry, not proud, and the last thing I would want to do is praise them.

I took one of the Histimal before watching the CBC's late news. Regardless of what the package might have said, I was asleep in no time. **[By the way, the product, called Hismanal in the States, was a prescription drug at home at the time. A competitor to "anti-drowsy" antihistamines like Claritin, it's only in the past ten years or so that it has become an over-the-counter drug in the USA.]**

THURSDAY, 9 JULY – Amherst, Nova Scotia to Calais, Maine (Odometer reads 64249)

We dawdled around the campground again this morning. There was certainly no motivation to get up early, as the business day begins LATE in Amherst—even grocery stores don't open until 10am, and many businesses don't open until 10:30. Part of this lateness may be the peculiar time zone Amherst is in. The Atlantic Time Zone is an hour ahead of Eastern Time, so everything is an hour later in the Maritimes—for example the morning news programs don't come on until 8am. That MIGHT explain why everything opens so late, but then again everything closes right at 4:30 or 5:00. It's like the entire city works on banker's hours—they must all be salaried; they'd go broke if they were paid hourly.

Each morning in Amherst I had gone into McDonalds to buy breakfast for everyone. It was not only expensive, but also a bit embarrassing to buy massive amounts of coffee when I was the only person in the car. Since it didn't look too promising that we would be leaving Amherst terribly soon, today I decided to stop at K-Mart when they opened to buy a coffeemaker. After a lot of looking I was able to find a Proctor-Silex automatic drip model (made in Canada) for 35 Canadian dollars, which works out to about the same price a cheap model would be here (US\$26.25). **[In contrast to other prices mentioned in this travelogue, that one seems horribly expensive today. This was before the era of cheap Chinese imports, though, and it was really quite a good price for the time.]** We heated hot water and made instant coffee and hot chocolate later in the morning.

It was mid-afternoon when we had lunch, really quite a normal lunch time in Amherst. Again we ate at Pizza Delight. We were really becoming regular customers, since there wasn't much of anywhere else to eat in town. At lunch it was decided that we could save time if Margaret and I could drive to Maine and buy a truck while Brian stayed in Amherst to finish the insurance and customs arrangements. Shortly after lunch we got everything together, and Margaret and I headed back west.

We drove across New Brunswick, past Sackville and Moncton, and then southwest to Saint John, the province's largest city. Traffic seemed extremely busy both east and west of Saint John, but in the city itself the highway was four-laned, and it made traffic seem quite light. We drove on westward to the town of St. Stephen, where we crossed a little bridge and went through customs at Calais, Maine. It was one of the easiest experiences I have ever had at U.S. customs—the only question of substance was how much I had bought in Canada. We were then waved on into Maine.

The first thing to know about Calais is that it is pronounced KAL-iss, like a hard spot on your foot. Forget the images of Cal-lay in France. "Down East" in Maine they say things their own way. Calais is a town of about 3,000 people that anywhere else on earth wouldn't amount to much. Even together with its larger twin, St. Stephen, there isn't much of anything there. Calais is the busiest border crossing on the east coast, though. We found out later that six million cars a year cross the international bridge there; that would make it rank as a border town with the likes of Niagara Falls and Detroit. Both Calais and St. Stephen are heavily touristed, and they have the restaurants and motels to prove it.

The first thing we did in Calais was to scout the place for car dealers. There were two: one sold everything General Motors makes, while the other was a combination Ford—Chrysler place. (Combining two competing makes of American car has always seemed strange to me, but that also happens to be the combination we have here in Algona.) Both places had loads of pickups, but most of them were much larger than the size Margaret wanted to buy. Also none of them had sticker prices displayed—the prices were conveniently cut off of the stickers. At least Margaret was able to get an idea of what was available.



Calais Motor Inn
663 Main Street
Calais, Maine 04619

Reservations 24 hours a day
1-800-439-5531
Fax: 207-454-8017

*If it's happening in Calais
it's happening at the Calais Motor Inn*

Advertisement for Calais Motor Inn – Calais, Maine

Next we found a motel. In St. Stephen we had seen a whole strip of motels, with prices as low as Can\$19 (US\$14.25) for a single. That was across the border, though, and while there were plenty of motels on the Maine side of the border, they all appeared to be overpriced. The place we settled on, the Calais Motor Inn, charged us \$35.00 each for two single rooms. It was a nice place, but it went out of its way to make us feel unsafe. They locked the outside doors after 11pm, there were cameras in the hallways, and the room windows were supposed to lock, but didn't work properly.

Next on the agenda was dinner, as it was now getting quite late. After surveying the phone book, we decided on a place called "The Cracker Barrel" (no relation to that campground in Amherst **[or to the Nashville-based chain of the same name]**). This place was mainly a deli, but we were attracted to it because they advertised that they "specialize in Mexican food". Mexican food sounded good after all the pizza and pasta, so we decided to give it a try. We both ordered nachos, and Margaret ordered an enchilada. The nachos came with an unsliced white cheese on top of them—interesting, but hardly what you would get in a Mexican restaurant. (I almost said "authentic", but American nachos are hardly authentic Mexican food.) Margaret's "enchilada" was not an enchilada at all—whatever it was, it was frozen and microwaved, with no sauce on it. I had somewhat more success in ordering a ham sandwich—that was very good. We both had "soda" as well. Two college-age boys were in charge of the place, and they almost forgot to charge us for our meal.

While we were eating a family that spoke no English entered the place. I'm not at all sure what language they did speak—perhaps it was Portuguese. **[Actually, it likely was; there are a lot of Portuguese immigrants, both old and new, in New England.]** It was both amusing and sad to watch them order and eat. We make no concessions at all in America for people who don't speak English, which must make things very difficult for tourists in this country.

After that strange meal we returned to the motel. I went next door to an Irving station (yes, Irving has expanded into Maine too) and bought some snacks and a *Newsweek* to read. Then I went to my room, took another Histimal, and fell asleep before I had read much of anything in the magazine.

FRIDAY, 10 JULY – Calais, Maine to Amherst, Nova Scotia (Odometer reads 64690)

Today was car deal day.

I woke up quite early, since my body was well adjusted to Atlantic Time. Margaret and I had arranged to meet around 8am Eastern Time for breakfast, and I had plenty of time to read my magazine and watch the TV news before that. We went to a McDonalds, and we had just settled down to eat our danishes when two buses from "Champagne Tours" stopped, and hordes of senior citizens flooded the place. Most of them seemed far more interested in using the bathroom than in getting anything to eat, but we decided to get out of their way anyhow. It did amuse me that a company named "Champagne Tours" should stop at McDonalds.

Maine keeps much more normal hours than eastern Canada. It was around 8:30 when we arrived at Border Motors, the Ford—Chrysler place. We had just started looking over some pickups when a dealer named Jim Stawartz came outside to help us. Car salesmen are among my least favorite people on the planet, but as these people go, Mr. Stawartz could have been far more offensive. He was middle-aged, overweight, and only a little bit too friendly. He smoked too much, and he played with his glasses and mustache. We gathered he was widowed, as he frequently referred to his wife in the past tense; he often spoke of his daughters—who obviously lived with him, and once he talked about "the lady I go out with on occasion". He enjoyed hunting and fishing, and he assumed that must have been the reason for our vacation in the region. All in all we got to know this character much better than we would have wanted to, but as I said he could have been far worse.

Margaret quickly explained what our situation was, and we started looking at trucks. After seeing almost every small pickup on the lot, we decided on a black long-bed truck made by Mitsubishi for Dodge. For the most part it was a bare-bones truck, but it did have such extras as cloth seats. We were not really in a position to bargain (just as well, since I think that is the single worst part about buying a car—why you can't just buy them out of a catalogue I'll never know), but the quoted price (just over \$8,000) seemed reasonable. Margaret test-drove it around Calais, and we returned to make arrangements for buying it.

[My opinion about bargaining has certainly not changed with time. It's what led me to become one of the first people to buy a new car on the internet—where the prices are indeed firm—in 1998.]

Margaret had several proposals for paying for this truck. She was considering making a down payment on her credit card and financing the rest at the dealer's discretion. We found out that this method would have required approval by Detroit, though. Much faster was arranging a transfer of funds from her bank in Cresco, Iowa. She and Brian were saving for a payment on the house they are building, so they had sufficient funds to pay for the car. It was, however, still early morning Iowa time, so we had to wait around for the Cresco bank to open.

Shortly after 10am (9:00 Central Time), Mr. Stawartz drove us into downtown Calais, where we stopped at the local office of the Merrill Trust. The Merrill Trust is the Maine equivalent of Hawkeye Bancorp or Norwest, the massive holding company that gobbled up every small-town bank in the state. (We found out that the Merrill Trust itself had been swallowed up; it was a member of "the Fleet Financial Group".) **[It's interesting that Hawkeye, Norwest, and Fleet no longer exist either. They've all been swallowed up by even larger companies like Bank of America, Wells-Fargo, and Citicorp.]** No one important was at the bank on Friday morning, but we did eventually get in contact with a very pleasant young woman who appeared to be in the third string of management at that

branch. She explained to Margaret the procedures involved in making an electronic transfer, and then Margaret herself called the bank in Cresco to arrange things.

As it turned out, the Cresco bank first had to transfer sufficient funds from Margaret's savings account to her checking account. Then that money was to be sent via the FDIC wires to Merrill Trust's home office in Bangor (locally pronounced either BAHN-gow-uh or BANG-uh—take your pick), as close to a big city as Maine gets. Merrill then would place the funds in an account for the Calais branch, where the woman, on proper identification and authorization, would make them available to Margaret. It takes three hours to do all that, but Margaret and I were nonetheless marveling at how we could accomplish more in a day in the States than we had all week in Canada.

We explored the Calais region to kill time while we waited. Parts of Calais are truly beautiful—there are some enormous old homes with gorgeous gardens in front of them. Other parts of town are really ugly—run-down trailer homes with dead pickups beside them. All morning we saw a beautiful church which we kept trying to drive closer to until we realized it was across the river in St. Stephen.

We stopped at the local tourist information center, where we picked up Maine maps. The place SOLD the maps for a dollar each. I was quite willing to pay for the maps, but they turned out to be mostly advertising. Among other things, they indicated the location of every Burger King in the state. They didn't show such important information as the location of rest areas along the roads, though. **[These days almost every state has advertising on its maps; Iowa is one of the very few exceptions. I don't have much problem with the ads, but both charging and having advertising seems a bit excessive.]**

It was interesting to observe the elderly ladies who ran the information center. As they sat quilting and knitting they were discussing the Iran-contra scandal. While they were obviously staunch Republicans, they were also obviously upset by this whole affair. One remarked it was "much, much worse than Watergate", while another said, "I just don't see how they can condone those liars." Another made this comment, all too true: "I don't know where it matters which side kills them—they're still just as dead."

We had lunch at a fun little place called the Bottling Plant. This seems to be a collection of little restaurants and bars, all in the same building. The one we ate in was called Sebastian's, a bar that catered mostly to young children and their parents. Kids' meals were free, and there were games and other entertainment to keep the little ones occupied while Mom and Dad had their dinner and drinks. The place was busy and quite understaffed, and the service was rather slow. It was worth the wait, though—the food was simply superb. It was certainly among the best meals I have ever eaten.

Toward mid-afternoon the money finally came in. The woman at the bank called Bangor to ask that they make the money available "down in Calais". (Look at a map, and you'll see why only a Mainer could describe Calais as "down"—it's northeast of Bangor, but that's the way things are "Down East".) Margaret got the check, filled out the final paperwork with the dealer, and became the owner of a black pickup with a temporary Maine license. I'm sure she will be the only person in Ida County with a truck from Border Motors of Calais, Maine. Soon we were on our way back through Canada.

The dealer had to explain all the switches and so forth to Margaret, so I went through customs before her. There was a long line on the bridge, but it was moving quickly. The officer was friendly enough—"traveling all alone, eh?" he said. He asked me where I was going and if I had been over this road before, and I said "yes" without explanation. He tried to give me a "Welcome to Canada" booklet, which I politely refused. He wished me a happy trip, and I was yet again in New Brunswick. It was 35 degrees in St. Stephen; that's over 90 for us old-fashioned Fahrenheit people. The humidity matched the heat, and I quickly downed a can of pop while waiting for Margaret.

Margaret had the same customs officer as I had. He greeted her by saying, "Hmmm, new one, eh?" He then asked where she was taking it. When she said "up to Amherst to get my husband who had an encounter with a moose" he waved her on without any further remark.

We drove back through Saint John and over to Moncton and down to Sackville. Once again the traffic was horrible everywhere except in Saint John, where the four lanes made it seem as if no one was on the road. It was evening when we entered Nova Scotia and arrived at the campground once more. Margaret and I were hungry, so we trotted off to Pizza Delight yet again to have our last taste of Amherst's best Italian food. Then it was off to bed.

SATURDAY, 11 JULY – Amherst, Nova Scotia to Bangor, Maine (Odometer reads 64774)

Brian had worked out the final details with customs and with the insurance people, and at last we were leaving Amherst today. First, though, we had to have the lights on the trailer wired to the new pickup. We decided to have, Doug, the mechanic who had towed the trailer in the first place, do the wiring. Everyone in Amherst seemed to know Doug, and he had the best of reputations. We hitched the trailer and in the middle of the morning we pulled into the Irving station where Doug worked. It was packed with people—people buying gas, people getting air for their tires, people wanting oil, people doing anything you might do at a service station. The place was understaffed, so we had a couple of hours to sit and wait before Doug was available to help us.

Before leaving, let me quickly describe Amherst, since it is the place we spent the most time on this vacation. My atlas lists its population as 10,263, and it is one of those places that isn't quite sure whether to be a city or a town. It reminds me a lot of Oskaloosa, where my brother Paul and his family live. It's not a very prosperous place; in fact, it's the only town I've ever seen in Canada with

empty buildings downtown. It's a port city, located on the Bay of Fundy, but most of the people seem to work in industry. Among other things they make Life Savers candy there. It's also the northwest Nova Scotia headquarters for everything. There are four exits for Amherst along the Trans-Canada Highway, and the town stretches out to meet all those exits. Only one of them is really important, though. It's a place that would fit right in anywhere in America, but it seemed rougher than a lot of Canadian towns of a similar size. Overall I can't say I really liked Amherst much, but there are far worse places we could have been stranded.



Irving, THE gas of the Maritimes

Calais. This is where Interstate 95 begins, and there is an enormous new concrete customs building stretching across the road. They could accommodate about eight lanes of traffic, but only one lane was open (and that's all that was needed). The officer was friendly, and we were quickly back in the States.

We drove south along I-95 to East Millinocket, where we had decided to camp. Unfortunately the campground we had decided on was full, and the woman who managed the place informed us that we would be lucky to find an empty campground anywhere north of Bangor on a weekend. We looked in our campground guide and found a large campground at Bangor, which we decided to head for. As we continued southward it got darker and darker, later and later. Eventually we decided it was just stupid to camp so late, and we decided to try for motel rooms instead. We exited on a suburban strip north of Bangor and found a Comfort Inn. Brian and I walked in and were promptly told that they, too, were full. We were able to use their phone to check other places in the area and eventually found a room at the Riverside Inn.

The Riverside Inn was at one time the nurses' residence for the Eastern Maine State Medical Center (the equivalent of Westlawn in Iowa City). It is an old building that looks exactly like what it is—a cross between a hospital and a dorm. A few years ago it was remodeled to be a pleasant inn, with modern plumbing, beds, and other amenities. We had two double rooms, at a cost of \$54 each. Only once have I stayed in a more expensive room—when John and I stayed at Chicago's Holiday Inn Lake Shore Drive when my parents flew back from England. Chicago is a major city where you expect such prices; Bangor (with 30,000 people) is smaller than Iowa City. The rate did seem fairly typical locally, though. The Comfort Inn was charging \$46.50.

[My have times changed from when a \$54 hotel room would be among the most expensive places I'd ever stayed! You'd could easily pay more than that for a Motel 6 these days, and there's no way \$54 would get you a "nice" hotel. What used to be the Holiday Inn Lake Shore Drive is now a Days Inn, and they offer a "best value" rate of \$179 a night. The Calais Motor Inn now charges \$75 a night. Bangor's Riverside Inn still exists and has a website, but they don't advertise their rates or take online reservations. I did check, though, and as of 2007 the Bangor Comfort Inn is charging \$89.96 (AAA rate—off season) for a standard double room. After all the traveling I've done, I'm not positive what the most expensive place I've stayed is. I do know, though, that I've paid over \$100 (especially when tax is included) on more than one occasion. When I've paid that much, I've felt the places I stayed were bargains compared to their competition. I've also redeemed hotel points to get free rooms where the rack rate was as high as \$300.]

For dinner we sent out for, of all things, pizza. It had a papery crust, a bland sauce, and it was not nearly as good as Pizza Delight. **[This is one of two times in my life I recall having pizza delivered in a hotel. It's something I just don't do. I never get pizza delivered at home either. I'll eat frozen pizza, and I'll buy pizza at a restaurant, but I pretty much never get delivery.]** Paul and I then went back to our room and went to bed.

SUNDAY, 12 JULY – Bangor, Maine to Concord, Vermont (Odometer reads 65163)

I woke up fairly early this morning—my body still adjusted to the time zone, if not the sleeping habits, of the Maritimes. Since no one else was up, I had a pleasant Sunday joy ride around Bangor, a stately little city that looks a lot like Burlington, Iowa—where we used to go shopping when I was growing up. (The buildings are about the same age, but Bangor is better preserved.) **[I still**

remember this drive, and I still remember Bangor rather fondly.] I bought three different Sunday newspapers and read through almost all of them, all before anyone else was awake. We had a late breakfast (well, let's call it "brunch") at a pancake house in Bangor. Then we set off west across Maine.

Maine strikes me as a place that should be prettier than it is. It is the "Pine Tree State", and most of the place is covered with forest. The people have a very libertarian attitude, though—they think a person should be able to do what he wants to do when and where he wants to do it. One way this is expressed is the fact that here are no zoning laws in Maine. Because of this much of the natural beauty of the state is spoiled by junky homes. All over the state there are clearings in the forests where you see shells of mobile homes with laundry hanging in front of them. Junk is often piled in the yards of these homes. Most of them also have a beat-up pickup truck or station wagon and a TV antenna. There are farmers in Iowa filing for bankruptcy who would be ashamed to live in such conditions, yet it seems very commonplace in Maine. **[This trip was made right at the height of the farm crisis, when lots of Iowa farmers were filing for bankruptcy and when the enrollment at Garrigan plummeted by nearly half in about five years.]** Maine is officially the second poorest state in the country. I have read, though, that if the cost of living is considered, Mainers live a lifestyle that makes them worse off than the residents of Mississippi. The car dealer said the average income in Calais was less than \$15,000. That's more than I make, but far less than the average income in Iowa. I don't know how much money the people in these trailers have to live on, but it certainly can't be much.

There is also litter all over Maine. Like Iowa, most of New England has a bottle law, so you don't see bottles and cans at the side of the road. You do see paper trash, though. All along the road there was fast food garbage, empty cigarette packs, and crumpled newspaper. The fine for littering in Maine is only \$50, compared to \$2,500 in New Brunswick, and it would seem that it might be time to bring their fine in line with current prices.

I don't want to make it sound like I disliked Maine. Really I had no particular feelings about it one way or another. It's just that I expected Maine to be nicer than it was, and I was disappointed.

In the middle of the afternoon we entered New Hampshire. We drove across the panhandle of New Hampshire on U.S. 2, a grand total of 35 miles. It was some of the worst driving on the trip, though. Highway 2 runs through the middle of the famous White Mountains, right in the center of New Hampshire's biggest resort area. There are only two real towns along the way, Gorham and Lancaster, but both are full of tourists in the summer. The road was packed with traffic all the way across New Hampshire—we never did more than 45mph.

My car was having problems, too. The muffler was getting noisier, and it was making new unfamiliar sounds—like metal grating—when I accelerated. Going up a hill west of Gorham it bucked as if it had a vapor lock. The road in New Hampshire had no real shoulders, so I couldn't easily pull off. Even if I could have, I wouldn't have had the slightest idea what was wrong. I nursed it on through New Hampshire and then into Vermont. We camped for the night near the town of Concord, ten miles east of St. Johnsbury. We loaded in my car to try to get to St. Johnsbury for supper, but it bucked again, and I didn't make it more than a mile from the campground. Brian and Paul took the pickup into town and brought us back a strange variety of sandwiches from McDonalds. **[I remember this quite distinctly too, and I wonder why they didn't just take orders and get things people might actually want.]**

Rustic Haven Campground was also rather strange. Although it seemed to be in the middle of nowhere, a lot of tourists passed through here. It was run by a wicked old lady who kept a close watch over everything that went on around the place. When we arrived it was extremely hot, and she was standing in the campground office with the door open and an air conditioner running. A fat shirtless man on a golf cart who called himself "the sheriff" directed people to their campsites and gave children rides around the place. All the gravel roads at the campground were "streets" named after the owner's grandchildren. This place also locked its restrooms. There was a four-digit combination we had to remember every time we wanted to use the toilet or shower.

It was extremely hot in Vermont; it only got down to the 70s at night. There was no wind at all. It was stuffy, and there were biting flies all over the campground. Sleeping wasn't pleasant, but somehow I did manage to get some rest.

MONDAY, 13 JULY – Concord and St. Johnsbury, Vermont (Odometer reads 65382)

We got up today so we could get into St. Johnsbury right at 8am. My car still made awful noises, but I did get it safely into town. We found Wayne Ford—Chrysler (I wonder why Chevy never combines with the other two), and I explained the problems I was having and dumped the car there. We were told to check again in the middle of the afternoon, so we explored the town.

The only real tourist attraction in St. Johnsbury is the Maple Grove Factory and Museum. Maple Grove makes maple syrup, sugar, and candy. We saw their little museum and saw a film explaining how the stuff is made. We also bought some sweet souvenirs at their gift shop. After that we drove all over the town to kill some more time. I had lunch at the local McDonalds, which killed the most time of all. Never have I seen such an inefficient place. It took over a half hour for me to even be waited on. The place seemed to be out of half of their menu, and the other half was only available if you waited. The people were surly, and it wasn't very clean. (They left salads sitting out uncovered next to the fryer.) How they keep their franchise, I'll never know.

In the middle of the afternoon we returned to claim my car. My receipt lists sixteen different things they did to it, for a total cost of \$266.57. I'm not really sure what exactly they did do (the exhaust system, of course, and apparently some work with the timing), but whatever they did seemed to fix it. I made a point of putting it on a credit card, in case there was any reason to suspect fraud, but so far everything seems to work fine. (Knock on wood.)

[While \$266 wouldn't be too horrible of a repair bill today, it was outrageous in the '80s. It really wasn't unexpected, though. The Dodge Omni I drove on this trip was—like almost every other Omni I've heard about—a lemon. It had endless repairs while under warranty (which lasted until 50,000 miles) and continued to have just about everything imaginable go wrong after that. I'd get rid of the car the following year, replacing it with a Japanese-made Dodge Colt that is my favorite of all the cars I've owned.]

We had dinner at Anthony's, an unpleasant, overpriced café in downtown St. Johnsbury. The food was bad, the waitress was unpleasant, and the booths were awkward to sit in. For a small slice of ham and iced tea I paid \$7.84—and that's American dollars, too. We noticed a sign at the check-out telling about "Green Mountain Cards". Apparently the prices on the menu are jacked up for unsuspecting tourists. The locals present their Green Mountain Cards and get a discount, which would bring the prices more in line with any other café.

[If I were traveling on my own, I would never have set foot in this place. Margaret and Brian, though, had a thing for diners and cafes. They've always had a snobbish attitude toward fast food, and they both felt that any place that pretended to be "down home" must have good food. My personal attitude is that, except for breakfast, diners and cafes tend to have some of the worst food around. Just because it's "homemade" doesn't mean the bland, greasy fare has to be good.]

It was still horribly hot when we returned to the campground, but I showered and got to sleep as best I could.

TUESDAY, 14 JULY – Concord, Vermont to Morrisville, New York (Odometer reads 65424)

With my car finally working again, we set off fairly early this morning. We drove northwest from St. Johnsbury, through Montpelier and Burlington, two of Vermont's major "cities"—places that many Iowa towns could easily rival. North of Burlington we followed a causeway onto Grand Isle, in Lake Champlain. There we caught a ferry across the lake to Plattsburgh, New York.

It was good to be in New York. The New England states are beautiful, but they seem overly touristed and rather artificial. New York is a place real people live. I've been to the state three times now, and each time I've had exactly that impression. We had lunch today in Keenesville, at a simple little café with a pleasant waitress and REAL prices. **[I've been to New York four or five more times since writing this, and I definitely still agree. While a lot of people put down New York—both the city and the state—it's one of my favorite places anywhere.]**

It rained all afternoon. We drove down Interstate 87, locally called the Adirondack Northway. A sign along the highway bills it as "America's most scenic highway". Perhaps it is, though I tend to doubt such self-proclaimed superlatives. There are forested mountains there, but mostly we saw rain, fog, and mist. At times there were severe thundershowers, and it was difficult to see along the highway. I was just glad we had chosen the interstate through these mountains, rather than a two-lane road.



Lake Champlain – Plattsburgh, New York

Driving along I-87 it's easy to tell just how populated New York is. Most of our route was through Adirondack State Preserve, an enormous park covering most of the north end of the state—you may have heard of places like Lake Placid in that part of New York. While we were still in the park, about seventy miles north of Albany, the state capital and first real city on the road, the interstate suddenly grew to six lanes, which it stayed all the way to Albany. It needed the extra lanes, too. Traffic was heavy, but the wider highway handled it well.

We drove down to Albany, where we picked up U.S. 20, which we followed west across New York. I had badly needed to use a restroom, but every roadside park we found had "parking only" and many of the little towns along our route didn't even have real gas stations. Eventually I did stop at an ancient Mobil station and dashed through the rain to use the toilet.

We continued west along highway 20 through hilly farm country (lots of corn in upstate New York), stopping for the night at Buck's Woods Campground, a beautiful park west of Morrisville. We had supper at a quaint diner in Morrisville and then got to sleep relatively early. The front had passed, and it was cooler and drier sleeping that night.

WEDNESDAY, 15 JULY – Morrisville, New York to Long Beach, Ontario (Odometer reads 65806)

We had breakfast at that same diner at which we had eaten last night. Then we set off west again on highway 20. Upstate New York is really beautiful—not spectacular, but very pretty. It's rolling hills and farm country, with grapes mixed in among the corn and beans. The people are friendly, and they seem to drive more safely than elsewhere. One is never far from a big city (Utica, Syracuse, Rochester, Buffalo, etc.), but most of the area is very rural. The towns are small and well-separated, and they are very old and established. In many ways the place reminds me of eastern Iowa.

Margaret and I stopped briefly for coffee in the city of Auburn, at an UGLY mall that looked like an above-ground bomb shelter. We then drove on to the Finger Lakes region. This is a series of long, narrow lakes running the length of central New York State. We drove down Cayuga Lake and up Seneca Lake—the two largest lakes in the region.

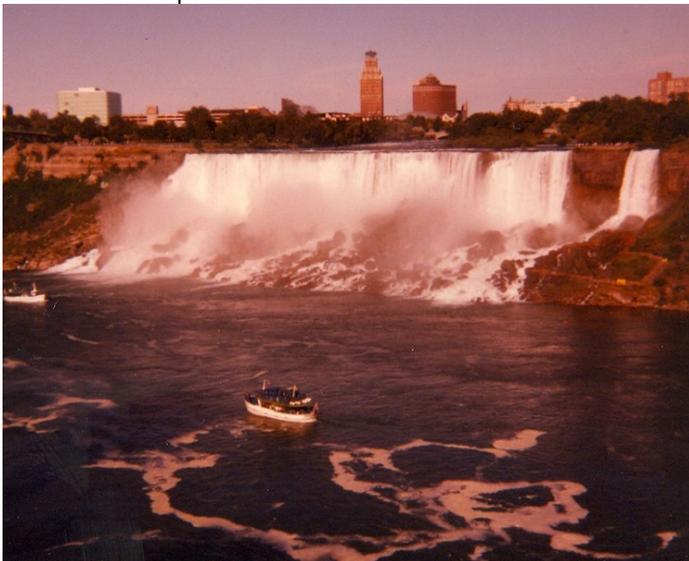
I stopped to buy gas in the city of Ithaca, at the bottom of Cayuga Lake. I used my Mastercard, which was a time-consuming mistake. The convenience store where I stopped had a telephone equipped to read the magnetic strip on the back of the credit card and then have the charge approved. The attendant (who acted as if he were high on something—seriously) first put the card in the phone incorrectly, so it couldn't read the magnetic strip. When he finally figured out which way was up, he couldn't get the phone to dial the bank number for approval. Eventually the owner came out from an office. She was very upset when she said, "You should have told me you were doing a charge. I was on the other phone, and you can't do a charge when someone is on the phone." After she got off the phone, the attendant tried again, but he still couldn't get it to work.

The manager came out again; she seemed quite a bit closer to earth than the clerk, but she couldn't get the phone to do its thing either. She then attempted to do the charge manually, but she couldn't get her credit card machine to work either. Finally she just wrote my card number and the price on a charge slip and had me sign that. (All that effort for \$6.75!) I've gotten one bill since the trip, and it wasn't on that. I'll be amazed if it ever does go through.

We drove west from Ithaca to Seneca Lake, where Margaret stopped briefly at a winery. She and Brian had been through this area shortly after they were married, and they particularly enjoyed the wine of the region. New York isn't particularly renowned for its wine, but the Finger Lakes do warm the temperature enough to allow grapes to grow. Margaret sampled some of the product and then bought two bottles of a white wine. I passed; when I drink something alcoholic, it tends to be a mixed drink rather than wine. (We found out later that Brian had stopped at the same winery. He bought four more bottles of the same wine.)

[The previous paragraph shows how little I knew about wine at the time I wrote this travelogue. New York wines are actually considered some of the best North American wines, and the Finger Lakes region is the heart of the New York wine country. At the time I'd drunk no more than a couple of sips of wine in my life, and I figured all "good" American wine must come from California. I'm still not a great wine fan, but Margaret and Janet have taught me a few things.]

We drove on north and west through Geneva, Batavia, and Medina until we finally got to Lockport, at the edge of the Buffalo/Niagara Falls urban area. We crossed back into Canada (which fortunately wasn't a problem, even with all the wine) and re-joined Brian and Paul at a rather obscure monument at the north end of the city of Niagara Falls. Then we all piled into my car to go into town and explore the falls themselves.



LEFT: The American Falls at Niagara, viewed from Canada

RIGHT: View from the top of the Horseshoe Falls – Niagara Falls, Ontario

There are far more beautiful places on earth than Niagara Falls. They sit in the heart of a dirty, old, unpleasant industrial area, and the water that flows over the falls is likely toxic. (Ever hear of Love Canal? -- That's the water that flows over Niagara Falls. **[and I'd go there twenty years later]**) The area by the water is a tourist trap if there ever was one, and the falls themselves aren't all that

spectacular—they're really rather overrated. (Go ANYWHERE in the West and you'll see higher falls.) **[That's overstating it. Niagara is a major waterfall; it's as much the width as the height of the falls that is impressive.]**

Having said all that, though, I must say it is fun to visit Niagara Falls. It's the very fact that they are such a tourist trap that makes them fun. Like everyone else we paid an outrageous price for parking, strolled the Niagara Parkway, and browsed through the endless souvenir shops for "authentic Canadian" items that were made in Asia. We passed on having our pictures taken in a barrel or riding the "Maid of the Mist" beneath the falls, but we did enjoy ourselves nonetheless.

Niagara Falls is very much an international place. Without question the majority of the tourists there were NOT from North America. I would hate to even guess how many different languages I heard just walking along the river bank. The Japanese were by far the largest group of tourists. Some stores had signs in Japanese to lure them, and we saw people with souvenir pennants and T-shirts printed in Japanese. I also saw large groups from all over Europe, from other Asian nations, from the Caribbean, and from Latin America. The Canadian dollar has been falling in value along with American money. That makes both the U.S. and Canada inexpensive places for foreigners to visit. (That's the exact opposite of how it was just two years ago—when the high exchange rate made it very cheap for me to visit Spain.) It was fun to walk among people from around the world, and it added to the feeling of the place.

We spent about three hours seeing the falls and then set off again. Margaret checked the campground guide and found a provincial park on Lake Erie, about 60 miles from Niagara Falls. It was the longest 60 miles we drove on the trip. At Niagara Falls we got on the "Q.E.W." (short for "Queen Elizabeth Way"), the first freeway in Canada. It is also just about the only concrete (as opposed to blacktop) road in Canada, and it is in awful condition. From the condition it is in, it would seem as if it hadn't been repaired since it was built—which was not long after its namesake's coronation. We bounced among its potholes, looking into the sun, through the city of St. Catherine's (population 150,000), from which we took another expressway south to Welland (100,000). I was driving with Paul at the time, and I thought we missed our exit when we saw a sign with the highway number we were looking for. I just kept driving along the freeway and eventually re-joined that highway—no problem. Unfortunately Margaret took the exit, which gave her a tour of beautiful downtown Welland. Welland is home to the famous Welland Canal, which ships on the St. Lawrence Seaway take to avoid Niagara Falls. While driving through the city Margaret had to wait while a bridge was raised to let a ship through. She, too, eventually got back to the highway—but well behind Paul and me.

From Welland we continued south to Port Colbourne (30,000), where we followed a tiny little road through a solid resort along Lake Erie. Finally we did find the park, just as the ranger was leaving for the night. We waited about forty-five minutes before Margaret and Brian arrived, and it was after 10pm when we scouted the campground looking for a site. Margaret and Brian wanted a space with electricity, and they stopped to look for plug-ins at several different places—all to no avail. I was getting very impatient, and I kept wondering why electricity was so important at this hour of the night. Finally they did settle on a site—without electricity—and we got to bed.

THURSDAY, 16 JULY – Long Beach, Ontario to Albion, Indiana (Odometer reads 66212)

While we got up rather late today (having gotten to bed late the night before), we pushed to put on some miles today. We stopped in the town of Dunnville for breakfast. **[I'd find when I got back to Iowa that Sr. Janet Goetz, one of the secretaries at our school was in Dunnville at this same time. She was there at a conference with other Sisters of the Presentation, an order of nuns that has a lot of members in eastern Canada.]** The place we stopped called itself a coffee shop, but it really was nothing more than a bakery. They didn't even have any chairs. We did have some doughnuts, though, and then we got on our way again. We drove across the tobacco fields of southern Ontario, past the city of London, and on to Sarnia, which is at the south end of Lake Huron. Those of us in the two cars met again at the information center in Sarnia, and we had lunch at a shopping mall there. We then crossed into the state of Michigan, clearing customs for the sixth time on this vacation **[though just the fourth for Brian and Paul].**

We drove west across Michigan to the city of Flint, and then southwestward to Lansing. I stopped briefly in Charlotte (shar-LOT)—a rough little city—to buy gas (at 86.9, the cheapest on the trip) and then drove into Olivet, where we used to live. We met Margaret again and then headed southward into Indiana.

I can't say exactly why, but every time I have been in Michigan I have felt UNDERwhelmed **[... and I've been there a couple of times since, and the feeling hasn't changed].** To begin with, it is one of the flattest places in America. People who think Iowa is flat should head for the Great Lakes; Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois all make Iowa look mountainous. From the highway Michigan looks rather rural (mixed farms and forest), but it is really VERY urban. **[Actually, most of the East looks like that; the problem is Michigan thinks of itself as a Midwestern state, when in fact it's much more like Pennsylvania or New York than Illinois or Iowa.]** There are large cities all over the state (I count 27 orange spots on the map in my atlas), which makes traffic a mess. It's not an unattractive state, but here's nothing particularly beautiful about it either. Overall it's just a place that leaves me unimpressed.

We drove about a hundred miles into Indiana and camped at Chain-O-Lakes State Park, south of Albion. The park rules did not permit two cars per site, but after some polite bargaining we managed to take both in. After all, I needed a place to sleep. **[At this time all of us had a fair amount of money, thanks to our father's estate. Why we didn't just pay for two sites and avoid the argument, I have no clue.]**

At about 9pm we drove back to Albion to try to find a place to eat. The place was crawling with bars, but it seemed at a loss for any REAL place to eat. Eventually we did find a place that called itself a "family restaurant", and we walked in. The salad bar was

empty, which I thought was strange, but we seated ourselves anyhow. Just as we were sitting down, the waitress informed us that they had been closed since 8:30. Can you imagine a restaurant that closes at 8:30?—the sun hadn't even set yet. When I worked at the Iris, we served dinner until 10:30 at night, 11:30 on weekends. I guess they go to bed early in Indiana—or they go to all those bars. We drove about ten miles further out of our way to the town of Kendalville, a much larger place where things stay open when it's dark. Then we drove back to the campground and got to bed early.

FRIDAY, 17 JULY – Albion, Indiana to Algona, Iowa (Odometer reads 66706)

We got up VERY early this morning and were on our way before six. This was going to be our last day of travel—no matter what—Brian had to preach Sunday. [... **And I gather, given that this was a Friday, that he hadn't yet prepared anything for the weekend's service—unlike Paul, who has his sermons done months in advance.**] We were still a long way from home, so we drove and drove and drove some more.

We drove south to Columbia City and then followed U.S. 30 past Valparaiso and into the Chicago area. Every other time I have been through Chicagoland I was on Interstate 80, a highway that always seems to be under construction and which runs through some of America's worst traffic around Gary, Indiana. This time we followed highway 30 across the southern suburbs—a much wiser move. While it probably took more time getting through Chicago this way, it was much less tense driving. Traffic was heavy, but it moved at a steady 40 to 45 miles per hour, instead of alternating between 65 and 35, as they do on the freeway. **[I've taken highway 30 a number of other times since this. Unfortunately, suburban Indiana has rapidly filled in, making the route just about as unappealing as I-80. Adding additional lanes has also made the interstate better. However, there's still a huge bottleneck right by the border where I-80 briefly joins the Tri-State Tollway. They desperately need a true beltway bypassing Chicagoland.]**

It's interesting how a few blocks can make a dramatic difference in the neighborhood in Chicago. The suburbs we went through included Black, Italian, Polish, Asian, and Irish neighborhoods—some rich and some poor among all the ethnic groups. None of the neighborhoods seemed integrated; there were very sharp dividing lines between one ethnic group and another. **[This has changed a lot in recent years. As the Hispanic population has exploded throughout the metro area, their presence has integrated formerly white-only or black-only neighborhoods. While there may still be a majority of one race or another, there's almost nowhere (except in the distant suburbs) that isn't somewhat mixed these days.]**

It's also interesting how the make-up of some suburbs has changed over the years. In Chicago Heights we drove past an enormous Catholic hospital with massive statues of assorted saints in front. We saw no Catholic church; instead across the street was a storefront Baptist church, the choice of the Blacks who currently live in Chicago Heights.

The last suburb we went through on highway 30 was New Lenox, a town where my parents lived long before I was born (and back when it seemed further from Chicago than it does today). Margaret had gone to school there, and she noticed that the same school (**Lincoln Way Elementary**) still exists, although it appears to have had many additions since the 1950s.

We got on Interstate 80 at Joliet, quite literally the end of Chicago. I remember back when we lived in Michigan and we came back to Iowa for the holidays, we would stop in Joliet **[at one of the first McDonalds franchises]** to eat. We didn't eat there today—after all, it was just past morning rush hour. We got on the freeway and drove all the way across the state. Illinois is not a large state, but it still seems to take forever to get across it **[something that has gotten better as speed limits have risen]**. The signs to "Moline—Rock Island" kept counting down, but I wished were still in Canada, where the kilometers count down twice as quickly as our miles do.

We got to the Quad Cities shortly after noon. Almost immediately at the Mississippi traffic picked up; I-80 is a much more important highway in Iowa than it is in Illinois **[mostly because it splits into two interstates (I-80 and I-88) between Chicago and Moline—something I'm not sure I realized when I wrote this]**. We had lunch at a truck stop in Wilton, where I paid less than \$5 for more food than I could eat. Iowans can complain about prices, but I've never been anywhere else in North America where prices are cheaper than they are here.

The drive through eastern Iowa was HOT, but familiar and pretty. I've lived out west for four years now, but I don't think I'll ever really feel at home there—it's so flat and dry and remote. HOME will always be in eastern Iowa. There is just the right combination of urban and rural there for me, and the hilly scenery is just lovely. It was an Iowa summer day, but fortunately I had air conditioning. (Not so fortunate were Margaret and Brian, who alternated driving the bare-bones pickup.) After all the troubles we'd already had on this trip, I was just waiting for the car to overheat or something—but nothing of the sort happened.

[After twenty-five years, I can definitely say that Algona has become my home—though I still wouldn't say the area around here is particularly scenic. These days, though, I gripe at all the traffic I encounter east of I-35. The Omni was the last car I owned with air conditioning, and I can't say I really miss it too much. There's only a few days when the weather in northern Iowa is hot enough that it's really a problem, and I've even managed to get through parts of at least four different summers in the South without it. The Omni's air conditioner malfunctioned time and time again, and I really don't miss all the hassle I went through to get a bit of cool air.]

We drove west to Iowa City and then north to Cedar Rapids, where I stopped to buy gas and a cold drink. We continued north on Interstate 380 to Waterloo. I remember my parents saying they would never live to see that highway open—they were right. The new interstate isn't much to look at, but then again it's less than an hour from Cedar Rapids to Waterloo these days.

[It's really strange to think of I-380 being new; even the northern extension of Avenue of the Saints has been complete for a decade now. These days with a 70 mph speed limit, it's not much more than hour from Waterloo all the way down to Cedar Rapids.]

Margaret left us shortly beyond Waterloo. She took Paul back to his mother's home. Brian and I stopped in Mason City for a bite to eat and then followed highway 18 back to Algona. Highway 18 is a perfect example of everything I said I didn't like about western Iowa (which, I must explain to local people who read this, for those of us from the "East" means everything west of Interstate 35—and sometimes everything west of highway 63). You'd be hard pressed to find a hill along the whole route; the only curves in the road are there to avoid towns. It's not stark or rugged, though—not like Montana or North Dakota. It's just corn and beans and beans and corn, with a few occasional pigs. I don't mind living here, but it does make a most unpleasant "welcome" after a 600-mile drive.

[Actually, as roads go, US 18 is a whole lot more interesting than highway 3, which runs straight as an arrow twenty-five miles to the south. To this day I think highway 3 is just about the most boring highway I've driven on anywhere.]

My apartment was an oven when we arrived; the INSIDE thermometer read 87 degrees. I turned on the air conditioner, but it was far overworked. Brian and I sat and sweltered. Margaret arrived before too long, and we sat around a while to cool down. Some people in another apartment were having a party (as they always seem to do on weekends), and Margaret and Brian had to sift through some girls who I seriously doubt were of legal age to get to their car. They still had another two hours in the heat before they got home.

[The previous paragraph makes me recollect all the different neighbors I've had at 316 West North Street over the years. Right now the place is about as stable as it's ever been, with three out of four apartments filled by long-term tenants. The place directly below me (which is where the party was) seems to turn over about every six months, though. Fortunately it's been a while since I've had to worry about parties or drug dealers in the building, though.]

Shortly after they left my brother Paul called. I had sent him a card from Amherst mentioning the accident. Canada Post is notoriously slow, and with the strike just over I figured we would beat the card home. Need I say it—Paul had gotten the card on Wednesday and had been trying to call me ever since then. We had a pleasant chat, and then I collapsed into bed.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

(Final Odometer Reading: 67305)

With apologies to Margaret and Brian, I must say that overall I enjoyed this trip. **[Actually, in retrospect, I think both of them did too.]** I doubt the vacation was worth the thousands of dollars (including truck) they spent on it, but it was well worth the hundreds I spent. And, for better or worse, I've had a travel experience not everyone has had. Most trips are ones that are never to be forgotten, but somehow I imagine this one will stick in my mind in a different way than the others. **[That's not really true. Over time we invariably remember the good and blur the bad. Given that just a couple of years later both Margaret and I would have a much more negative travel memory—when Brian died in Mexico—this trip was pretty tame by comparison.]** I enjoyed this trip, and I'm sure it won't be long before I return to "the true north, strong and free". I do hope, though, that my future journeys are a bit less eventful.