

Epilogue:

On the Road in 1949

By Harold Crane
For the Beacon

On the Road in 1949 by Walter Walker, the series of articles written by my good friend and published by the Beacon over the past many months, has re-kindled memories and provoked a nostalgia of the events experienced during this so long ago adventure. My own diary has long been lost, but even with it I think that I could not have written the story as well as Walt.

With all due respect, though, I wish he had written more of our reactions to the things we saw, the changing topography of this great country, and to the wonderful people we met.

Someone dubbed our travels as "a great adventure" and once as "an epic trip," and I am amazed at the following story enjoyed over all those months. While it was in fact a great adventure to us, hardly an epic trip of any proportion to others today, especially in view of current global orientations, and quite trivial when compared to what our youths do so regularly today.

This trip, though, could only have been taken when it was, for so much has changed since then. Realize that we set out with basically no money, less than \$50 among the three of us. We slept in Army-surplus sleeping bags or jungle hammocks spread on open ground anywhere along the highway without fear of being mugged or shot or any other of the myriad of things that happen today.

We ate lots of peanut butter and canned goods, fruit we picked or purchased along the way, and cookies received when we picked up our mail at General Delivery windows in post offices. We had only an occasional restaurant meal when we felt flush.

We must have been a scruffy lot, too, for we traveled mostly shirtless and without socks to conserve clean clothing, for there were no laundromats. When clothing did get washed, it was in streams or on the sly in restaurant or gas station restrooms. We wore our sideburns long because they represented less to shave.

But we were not hippies: we were almost 20 years ahead of them. Nor were we the bums and hoboes who traveled the highways during the '30s and aftermath of the Great Depression.

There was a general feeling of euphoria in our country then, and we three were perhaps emblematic of the times. It had been only a short time before that our country had emerged from the Great Depression. We were

less than three years removed from the final victory of World War II, rationing was a thing of the past, and gasoline was only about 12¢ a gallon. We could completely fill our gas tank for much less than the cost we pay for just about half a gallon today.

As for us, we had all just turned 18, we were free, away from home and on our own for the first time, and we had just achieved the pinnacle of our young lives – we had just graduated from high school. We were like puppies out of the box for the first time.

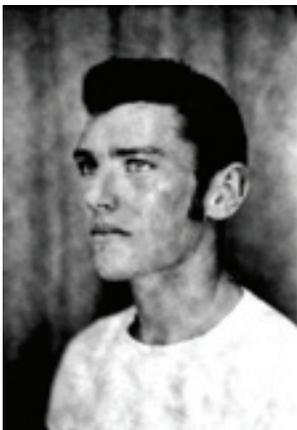
Everything was new, so big and so much different than the land we had grown up in. We marveled at the rolling wide-open fields we saw for the first time in upstate New York; the flatness of the western and plains states where there are no horizons and the land just evaporates into the sky; the grandeur of the great Rocky Mountains, higher than anything we had ever seen or imagined; and there was the exhilaration of seeing California and the Pacific Ocean for the first time.

We saw so much: Niagara Falls, the Great Lakes, the mighty Mississippi, whose headwaters we simply stepped across in Minnesota, the Black Hills, Mount Rushmore, the Platte River, the Little Big Horn, site of Custer's Last Stand, Yellowstone National Park, Glacier National Park, the Columbia River, Mount Hood, the Pacific Coast Highway, the golden hills of California, where no rain falls from April to October, the Grand Canyon, Carlsbad Caverns, the deserts of Arizona and New Mexico, mighty Texas, the bayous of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Florida, and finally the Smithsonian Institution and the wonders of our nation's capitol – all so very different in their own unique ways and each an indelible memory for us.

All the people we encountered, many with different accents and dialects, were good to us. Wherever we stopped, people wanted to know of our adventures and what they could do for us.

And then there were those who took us in: the Culvers in New York who got us our first work, then toured us through The Grand Canyon of the East; the Luebbens in Montana who often fed us, took us to local hot springs, and entertained us, then had us dig a room-sized cellar by hand just to keep us employed while we waited for the Olds to be repaired; the Clarks in Oregon, who went out of their way to take us to local landmarks and to find work for us;

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Hal Crane in Grand Island, Nebraska, 1949

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