

## 30 Days: To Alaska and Back

(One Couple's Drive From Pennsylvania to Alaska and Back in September 2009)



Dan and Donna Kohlhepp

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Cover Photo:

Taken by Donna Kohlhepp looking north on the Alaska Highway on September 21, 2009 (Day 19). A bull caribou blocks the road as it studies the “curves ahead” sign with Lake Muncho and the Canadian Rocky Mountains in the background.



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## Preface

The purpose of this travelogue or “Electronic Scrapbook Book” is to document our trip to Alaska so we can enjoy the memories and share our experiences with our family and friends. On every trip we’ve made, we have kept journals, taken pictures, and collected books, maps, and pictures. Unfortunately, these items are usually put into a box and never looked at again. Hopefully, a CD will replace the box as we transfer our “trip stuff” from folders, e-mails, blogs, and pictures in a semi-coherent travel log format.

We have organized our “trip stuff” in a chronological order so we can remember how we got there and how we got home again. Our daily recollections are presented in a “he said, she said” format to highlight how people can share the same events and have different experiences. Dan’s E-mail Comments are essentially e-mails that were sent to a large group of friends on a fairly regularly basis, and Donna’s Blog Comments were her journal notes that were entered daily into her blog: [Alcanorbust.blogspot.com](http://Alcanorbust.blogspot.com).

This book is also our attempt to report our first experiences with blogging, mass e-mails and Internet traveling. We enjoyed sharing our trip contemporaneously with our family and friends. The Internet also enabled us to receive advice, get directions, and make reservations as we drove along.

Finally, this book (or CD) is what our family and friends are getting instead of travel souvenirs.

## Chapter 1. Introduction

In the summer of 1967, my fraternity brothers, Pete Willard and Jon Patton, drove to Alaska and spent the summer as tour guides in Juneau. Their stories stayed with me and expanded into a deep-seeded desire to drive the Alcan Highway, as it was then called<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, life got in the way of my drive to Alaska even though I talked about it every time I bought a car, van, or truck. “How will it do on the Alaska Highway?” was the first criterion for each purchase.

Over the last 35 years, Donna and I have taken numerous car trips all over the United States and Canada: before children (BC), with children (WC) and after children (AC). These trips were always enjoyable, but there was usually some destination involved, except perhaps our trip to New England and the Canadian Maritime Provinces after I retired in 1992 from USF&G Realty Advisors. So after my retirement from Crescent Resources in 2008, I suggested that we drive the Alaska Highway now that our schedule was cleared. Only then did Donna admit, “I never thought you were really serious. I don’t want to drive to Alaska.” Clearly, although married for 35 years, we still had some communication issues.

However, Donna could see that I was crestfallen and depressed as the summer of 2009 began. Probably just to buck me up, she said that she had changed her mind and would agree to drive to Alaska provided that it would not be a rugged and physically demanding ordeal. That was all I need to hear, and I began to dig out my “Alaska Highway” files and books.

Checking our schedules, it looked like we could leave in early September as soon as Kim, our youngest daughter, went back to Ohio University for the Fall Term. We would miss family birthdays, home football games, reunions, and most of dove season, but this was our best chance to go. Like Goldilocks would say, “Not too hot, not too cold, just right.” Only ten weeks to plan and prepare for a trip of a lifetime. So much to do and so little time!

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<sup>1</sup> I realize now that it was impossible for them to drive the Alcan Highway to Juneau, but dreams are usually based more on myths than hard facts.

Chapter 2 describes our getting ready to go, and Chapter 3 reports our travels, adventures, and dining experiences on a daily basis. Each day's report starts with the Box Score (just the facts) then followed by Dan's E-Mail Notes and Donna's Blogged Comments. Photographs are next. Followed by any exhibits that we decided to include for that day.

My high school friend, Bill Kriner, asked me to complete a questionnaire about my life because he was writing a "cultural and economic history of the class of 1965" which he hopes to complete by our 45<sup>th</sup> high school reunion next summer. His questions were stimulating but not readily reducible to pithy answers. I shared these questions with my e-mail friends and eleven responded. I have included them as exhibits in the daily summaries in the order that they were received. Bill's questions and my friends' responses are further discussed in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5. attempts to wrap-up our trip.

Selected References are included for the inquisitive reader and because it's our nature.



## Chapter 2. Getting Ready

When Donna agreed to drive the Alaska Highway, my first challenge was to decide on which of our vehicles to take:

- a 1991 GMC pick-up,
- a 1998 Ford Expedition, or
- a 2000 Toyota Land Cruiser.

All of these vehicles were “fully amortized” and quite disposable so my plan was to drive from DuBois to Anchorage and then sell (or give away) the vehicle and fly back to DuBois. I quickly decided that the Ford Expedition was The Trip-mobile since the radio didn’t work on the GMC pick-up, and I had to special order parts from Stoltz Toyota for the Land Cruiser’s routine service. Also, I just put heavy-duty tires and shocks on the Expedition last fall. But then, everything changed.

On August 6<sup>th</sup>, Donna and I played golf with my brother Ben and nephew Daniel. Jamie, the local GMC dealer, and his father Sherm waited on the country club patio for us to finish and find out who won the big match. (We did, but who’s counting.) Jamie offered to buy the drinks so we all sat down to discuss life, liberty, and the sorry state of General Motors. Jamie said that the new “Cash for Clunkers” program was really a great deal since the federal subsidy was on top of a GM discount program. Generously, Jamie acknowledged that I had never bought a new car in my life so this really didn’t apply to me. We moved on to another subject, our trip to Alaska.

Jamie, Ben, and Sherm all went high order when I explained my plan to take the Ford Expedition to Alaska and then sell it or give it away. “That car won’t make it! That’s really dangerous! That’s unfair to Donna!” When I explained that the Expedition was really tight, Ben exploded, “you’ve never driven a ‘tight’ truck in your life!” We reviewed the cash for clunker program again, and I agreed to meet with Jamie in the morning.

At 8:00 am the next morning the TV news announced that the cash-for-clunker program was being cancelled; at 10:00 am, the cash-for-clunker program was being suspended; and by noon the cash-for-clunker program was being reviewed. Undaunted, Donna and I

went to Jamie's dealership to pick out a truck. There was only one truck left on the lot that qualified for the federal program, a fire-engine red club cab. We said we'd take it and agreed to trade in our 1991 GMC club cab pick-up as our designated "clunker." Unfortunately, Jamie couldn't make the deal then because the federal government's web site was jammed with requests. One week later the federal government responded to Jamie's 24/7 submission attempts with a contingent approval, the federal government wanted documentation from the Pennsylvania state government verifying that I had owned the truck for the last 12 months. Two weeks later, we were able to close the deal, and Donna and I finally owned A Red Truck (A.R.T.) for our Alaska adventure.

I reviewed with Jamie and "Joel-in-Parts" my research on the Alaska Highway. It indicated that the biggest vehicle problems encountered were flat tires, broken headlights, and damaged radiators and windshields. Their suggested solutions, with which I readily agreed, were:

- Ten-ply truck tires,
- Running lights,
- A custom grill with a screen behind,
- A left, front headlight assembly (they were newly designed for 2009),
- Extra windshield wipers, and
- Hazard flares and reflectors.

We also added a bed liner in case we need to sleep in the back.

My next stop was at the Tri-County Performance store to get a cap for the truck. The fiberglass top took three weeks to get, but the aluminum one could be ready in a week. The aluminum cap was initially cheaper, but it ended up much more when the minimum "extras" were included. As promised, the cap was custom-made and delivered to DuBois in a week. By August 27<sup>th</sup>, we had new wheels and were ready to go.

Our plan was to stay in hotels or motels along the way that had as a minimum: running water, flush toilets, and hot showers. But just in case, I bought a new tent and dug out our sleeping bags, sleeping mats, and camping pillows. We also planned to eat in restaurants, but again I dug out our old, but hardly used, cooking gear just in case. After reviewing our "gear," we bought a propane cooking stove at L.L. Bean along with six, one-pot, dehydrated meals and, of course, a camping table with matching folding canvas chairs. At my brothers' True Value Hardware Store, I gathered up batteries, gloves, a hat with LED lights in the visor, and six propane canisters.

Finally, I packed an outdoor gear bag with coats, hats, sweaters, and long underwear for the early snowstorms that everyone said that we should expect in the cold northern regions of Alaska and the Yukon. I also included a "boot bag" with assorted footwear to meet an array of terrain and climatic conditions.

The week before we left, we had a logistical semi-crisis as our accountant from Oklahoma, Mike Jones, came to DuBois to audit our companies; our daughter Kim came home from summer school for a one-week term break; and Gary Mitchell and his crew were completing a five-month remodeling job. Mike asked endless questions; Kim

wanted to play golf every day, and Gary had material delays and a mason who went fishing!

In preparation for the trip Donna took care of upgrading us to a Verizon Canadian calling plan for our cell phones and broadband card. She also bought an inverter for on-board power, arranged business communication protocols for paying bills and executing documents, and assembled a first aid kit with assorted vitamins and digestive enzymes.

At the last minute, I packed a tackle box and two fishing rod and reels, just in case.

Using the decision criteria of: "Better to have it and not need it, than to need it and not have it," I had filled up the bed of the pickup!





## Chapter 3. 30 Days

### DAY ONE: Thursday, September 3, 2009

#### Box Score:

Day One: Thursday	Date: September 3, 2009
From: DuBois, Pennsylvania	To: Athens, Ohio
Miles Driven: 235	Hours Driven: 5.75
Lodging: Ohio University Inn	Cost per Night: \$157.00
Dinner: Cutler's Restaurant (\$128)	

#### Dan's E-mail Notes:

I started loading the truck at 8:00 am and Kim started packing her car at 11:00 am so at 1:00 pm we were ready to head to Alaska by way of Athens, Ohio. The drive was rather uneventful except for a cookies-and-cream milkshake at the Sheetz gas station in Youngstown, Ohio. We checked in at the Ohio University Inn and had a pedestrian meal at its restaurant, Cutler's. The highlight was a saying on the bottom of the menu that read, "When given a choice between going to Regular Heaven or Pie Heaven, choose Pie Heaven. It might be a trick, but if it's not, mmmmmm boy!" Profound knowledge in the most unexpected places!

Through a series of phone calls and text messages, Kim made arrangements to move out of her summer apartment at 9:00 pm so we took the already loaded truck to downtown Athens and parked in front of the Pig Skin Bar. By 11:00 pm, we were on a first name basis with several bar patrons, directed two U-Haul truck drivers into parallel parking spaces, and dragged down a double bed and numerous bags of stuff from her second-story apartment over the bar.

## DAY TWO: Friday, September 4, 2009

### Box Score:

Day Two:	Date: September 4, 2009
From: Athens, Ohio	To: Merriville, Indiana
Miles Driven: 409	Hours Driven: 7.5
Lodging: Hampton Inn	Cost per Night: \$137.07
Dinner: Hooters Bar and Grill (\$37.00)	

### Dan's E-mail Notes:

The apartment management company had sent Kim instructions that she could not move into her apartment until 4:00 pm, but at 8:30 am Kim was literally processed through five, "move-in-day" stations at the management's office and by 9:30 am we were carrying boxes up three stories to her new apartment. We met one of Kim's roommates, Brittany, and her father, as well as, Kim's boy friend, Andrew. All things considered, this was a very constructive morning.

By noon we were driving northwest through Ohio toward Alaska. As the sun set, we checked into a Hampton Inn just south of Chicago and ate hot wings at the nearby Hooters. Tired and road-weary, we were on our way.

### Donna's Blog Comments:

#### WE ARE OFF

Well, we are off. We really are doing this! We dropped Kim (our youngest daughter) off in Athens, Ohio on Thursday. College move-in was easier than we thought. In fact, our part of the move-in was complete by 10:30 AM Friday morning. After a quick trip to Wal-Mart we said our goodbyes and hit the road. We ended up driving 7 hours and stopped for the night just south of Chicago.

Nothing exciting to report, just corn fields and fast foods. The "highlight" was "dinner" at Hooters: salads, hot wings, beer and Gallo red wine.

One strange observation: in Wisconsin we saw acres and acres of windmills, 100's, and not one was turning. What is that about?

## DAY THREE: Saturday, September 5, 2009

### Box Score:

Day Three	Date: September 5, 2009
From: Merriville, Indiana	To: Alexandria, Minnesota
Miles Driven: 603	Hours Driven: 11.5
Lodging: Holliday Inn	Cost per Night: \$137.00
Lunch: Moose Jaw Brewery	Dinner: Rudy's Red Eye Grill (\$78.00)

### Dan's E-mail Comments:

Today was dedicated to the wheat fields of America. We can verify that they are being harvested in Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota using the same techniques, same equipment, and the same people (as far as I can tell)! In Wisconsin, I remembered that two Kohlhepp brothers immigrated to the United State from Germany in 1852. After a winter in western Pennsylvania, both brothers traveled to Wisconsin; one brother stayed in Wisconsin to log; and one brother (John B.) returned to farming in western Pennsylvania and to become my great-great-grandfather. "Should we look up some of the Wisconsin Kohlhepp's?" I thought, "maybe on the return trip." We pressed on.

The highlight of the day was lunch and dinner. For lunch at the Moose Jaw Brewery and Pizza in Wisconsin Dells I enjoyed their "six-pack sampler" with cheese and beer soup and a beer bratwurst sandwich. Of course, Donna drove after lunch as I slept through more wheat harvesting. Dinner at the Rudy's Redeye Grill in Alexandria, Minnesota featured Minnesota walleye cakes as an appetizer followed by entrées of Minnesota wild rice stuffed chicken breasts and Minnesota walleye fillets. These were accompanied with hot popovers slathered with honey butter and a very nice cabernet sauvignon from the 14 Hands Winery.

### Donna's Blog Comments:

#### ANOTHER DAY OF DRIVING

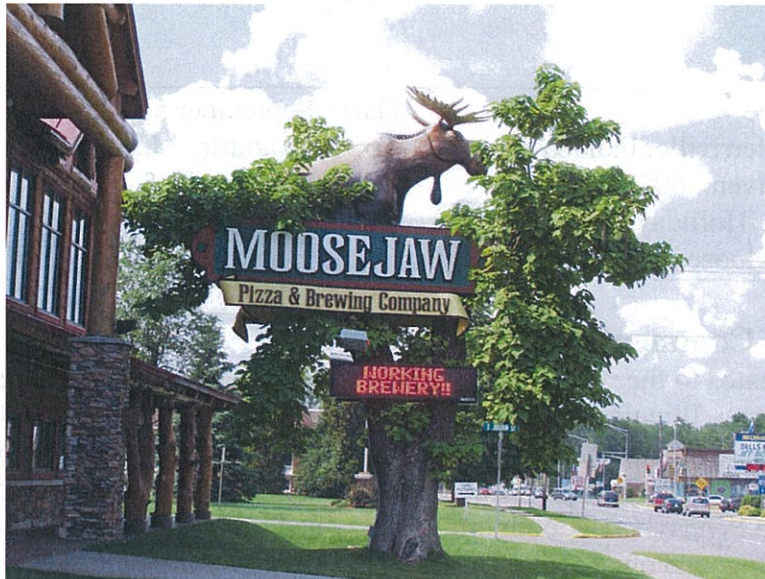
Another day of driving, driving, and driving, 10 hours in fact today. Again the "highlight" would have to be eating. We had beer-cheese-brat soup in Wisconsin for lunch and walleye cakes in Minnesota for dinner.

My observations about the US:

It is apparent that the US has been in a recent period of prosperity. There is a lot of new construction: new homes, new buildings, even the farms look prosperous with new paint and new out buildings.

Every town has a Wal-Mart and an extensive medical complex. What does this say about our economy?

**Pictures:**



Day 3 Picture 1. Wisconsin Dell street scene.



Day 3. Picture 2. Moose Jaw delivery truck.



## DAY FOUR: Sunday, September 6, 2009

### Box Score:

Day Four	Date: September 6, 2009
From: Alexandria, Minnesota	To: Regina, Saskatchewan
Miles Driven: 706	Hours Driven: 12
Lodging: Holliday Inn	Cost per Night: \$168.29
Dinner: Movado Sports Bar and Grill (\$45.00)	

### Dan's E-Mail Notes:

More wheat harvesting as we drove north to Winnipeg, Manitoba and then turned west to Regina, Saskatchewan. We arrived in Regina just as the Canadian Football League's Saskatchewan Riders beat the Winnipeg Blue Bombers 29 to 14 in Regina. The streets were full of green-and-white garbed happy-fans as well as blue-and-white garbed unhappy fans. The hotels and bars were full too!

We finally found a room at one of the three Holiday Inns and went down to the attached sports bar for dinner. Dinner was an assortment of appetizers including barbequed wings, ribs, spring roll, and potato skins. Donna sipped Lindeman's cabernet sauvignon and I quaffed Keith Stevenson's India Pale Ale as we were entertained by a table of 12 green-and-white, twenty-something, Rider fans (five women and seven men) who continuously argued about the rules for the drinking games they seemed to be spontaneously composing. The drinks kept coming to their table as we speculated about who was with whom. Green-hair guy with the green-face girl? Clearly, the life-of-the-party guy was having trouble explaining the changing rules of the constantly changing games as his friends drank with abandon regardless of his instructions. Everyone threw wads of money on the table as the big quiet guy attempted to reconcile the bill. The table-of-12 left through three different exits. Who knows?

### Donna's Blog Comments:

#### LAND OF THE LIVING SKY

Twelve more hours of driving today. The scenery is beautiful but doesn't change, "gently rolling prairie with vast sections devoted to grain, livestock and forage," says our AAA guide book<sup>2</sup>. The sky in Saskatchewan was spectacular. It was vast and seemed to come in around us. The Saskatchewan license plates read "Land of the living sky."

There hasn't been any "roughing it" yet. We have spent every night in a Holiday Inn, Hampton Inn, or Hilton Inn. Clean sheets, hot showers, and coffee! Meals have been a little less impressive relying on bar food a few times.

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<sup>2</sup> See citation 31. in Selected References

## DAY Five: Monday, September 7, 2009 Labor Day

### Box Score:

Day Five	Date: September 7, 2009
From: Regina, Saskatchewan	To: Edmonton, Alberta
Miles Driven: 528	Hours Driven: 8.5
Lodging: Hilton Garden Inn	Cost per Night: \$156.00
Dinner: Cactus Club Café (\$76.00)	

### Dan's E-mail Notes:

Today we arrived at Edmonton, Alberta driving 45.25 hours over five days, and covering 2,587 miles. After driving through North America's heartland, breadbasket, and corn belt, we can report that the weather is beautiful, the skies are alive, the harvest is abundant, and the people are happy on this Labor Day!

Meanwhile, our hotel was next to the super-sized Edmonton Mall so we became mall-walkers in one of the largest and emptiest malls in North America. As Wal-Marts mark the retail excesses of our small towns, enclosed malls mark the retail excesses of our suburbs. Real estate markets hate excesses, in the long run.

We ate dinner at Cactus Club Café where Chef Rob Feenie (Canada's only Iron Chef) featured a delicious sake-soy marinated sable fish, which I enjoyed with the Cactus Club's Udder Ale and Ugly Ale.

Today we finished listening to Peter Jenkins' book, *Looking for Alaska*<sup>3</sup>, and tomorrow, we will drive to Dawson Creek, British Columbia and officially begin our drive of the 1500-mile Alaska Highway. I can't wait.

### Donna's Blog Comments:

#### 2500-MILES, 6 STATES, AND 3 PROVINCES SO FAR

We stayed in Edmonton, Alberta. We got in earlier than usual so we decided to check out the local mall. It is reported to be one of the largest in North America. WOW, inside the mall there is a full size ice skating rink, a water park, amusement park, casino, theater, restaurants, as well as, every possible store. All of the stores were closed so there was no shopping for us, but we did manage to get in 40 minutes of walking (finally some exercise).

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<sup>3</sup> See citation 14. in Selected References.

## DAY Six: Tuesday, September 8, 2009

### Box Score:

Day Six	Date: September 8, 2009
From: Edmonton, Alberta	To: Dawson Creek, British Columbia
Miles Driven: 384	Hours Driven: 7
Lodging: Best Western	Cost per Night: \$187.51
Dinner: Tony Roma's (\$70.00)	

### Dan's E-mail Notes:

At 3:00 pm today, Donna read the following message on hotels.com: "There are no hotel rooms available in Dawson Creek, BC". This was bad news. I had been driving for six hours at 70 mph with a 50 mph cross wind. My neck ached from a bad pillow last night and every time the wind gusted there was a shrill, whining whistle that invaded our cab and gave me a splitting headache. If the whistle had been two notes higher, only dogs could have heard it. Clearly, I was tense. We were only thirty miles from beginning the Alaskan Highway in Dawson Creek, and it looked like we had to camp out. I had erected our tent in our backyard only once in ideal conditions<sup>4</sup>, but if I had to camp out tonight, I would be blown back to Alberta and probably severely injured as well. Donna intervened and found us a room at the Best Western in Dawson Creek. As I relaxed and drove on at a reduced speed since the road was under construction, a rock from a passing truck stuck our windshield, and began a broken windshield. What a way to start the Alaskan Highway!

As we pulled into Fort Dawson's Best Western, I noticed several trucks with Spectra Energy on their sides. (These were my kind of people since I own a lot of Spectra stock.) We ate at the adjacent Tony Roma's Restaurant which I thought was related to the Dallas Cowboys' quarterback<sup>5</sup>. The restaurant was 98% oil field workers and 2% tourists and others. Our waitress was a beautiful young woman who looked like Miki Ei0de's younger sister, but with ADD. Two hours later, we had lousy ribs, bad garlic bread, forgotten vegetables, and wine that would have been OK except it had already been served to someone else and needed to be evacuated from our table. I would have drunk it, but Donna reminded me about AIDS and the HIN1 Virus!

My brother Andy asked me what I was thinking about on our trip. Mostly I think about getting coffee and then getting rid of coffee; getting gas and then burning gas: and finding a hotel room that meets Donna's minimum standards. (I also think about the economic bases of the local economies, and how I could profit from various real estate market anomalies.) My high school classmate Bill Kriner is writing a "cultural and

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<sup>4</sup> Donna's best friend Molly Cressor Ingold, a very experienced camper, helped me set up our tent on our patio. It took us 45 minutes.

<sup>5</sup> My friend Gerry Curtin reported that Tony Roma started his restaurants long before Tony Romo ever picked up a football. This is an advantage of electronic communications. Thanks Gerry.

economic history of the class on 1965”, and he asked me to answer a series of questions for his book that he hopes to complete by our 45<sup>th</sup> high school reunion next summer.

Here are his questions:

1. What were the defining influences of your life before graduation from high school?
2. What have been the defining influences of your life since high school graduation?
3. What have been the defining experiences of your life since graduation from high school?
4. How have your beliefs about the purpose of your life changed since graduation from high school?
5. What is most important to you in living your life?
6. What do you see as the major changes in our culture [the shared mores, morals, ideals, standards and beliefs...the way we live] since your high school graduation?
7. In what ways have you changed as a person since high school graduation?

I have decided to think about these questions as I ponder the thermodynamics of coffee, and I would appreciate your thoughts on these questions. I am looking for some clever and pithy responses rather than the meandering philosophic musings that they suggest. Let me know what you think.

### **Donna's Comments:**

#### **ALMOST “THERE”**

More driving today. As well as driving, and looking out the window, I manage to keep occupied reading out loud the AAA books describing the areas we are passing through and looking for places to spend the night, playing around with the GPS trying to figure out how to use it, and listening to the book *Looking for Alaska* by Peter Jenkins<sup>6</sup> getting "prepared" for what is to come, and I have started my knitting project.

Tonight we should be in Dawson Creek, BC. The beginning of Alaska Highway!

Let the adventure begin.....

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<sup>6</sup> Citation 14. In Selected References



**Pictures:**



Day 6 Picture 1 Spectra Energy (formerly Duke Energy) is a major local employer



Day 6 Picture 2. Spectra's Gas Transmission Facility

## DAY Seven: Wednesday, September 9, 2009

### Box Score:

Day Seven	Date: September 9, 2009
From: Dawson Creek, BC	To: Fort Nelson, BC
Miles Driven: 304	Hours Driven: 6
Lodging: Lakeview Inn & Suites	Cost per Night: \$154.81
Dinner: Boston Pizza (\$50.00)	

### Dan's E-mail Notes:

Today was our first day actually driving the Alaska Highway that officially begins at Dawson Creek, British Columbia. Our guidebooks for this trip have been Ron Dalby's *Guide to the Alaska Highway*<sup>7</sup> and The 2009 *MILEPOST. 61st Edition*<sup>8</sup>. Unfortunately, our copy of *The MILEPOST* was next to my reading chair in DuBois, Pennsylvania, so our first stop was at Mike's Newspapers, Magazines and Book Store next to Milepost 0 where we met Lolita, the beautiful and friendly cashier. As she checked us out, Lolita gave us our first travel tip for the Alaska Highway ("Tumbler Ridge has great bird watching") and suggested that we check out her latest arrival, *Tent Sex, a Campers Guide*<sup>9</sup>. Donna explained that we would not be camping and therefore were not interested in the book. I suggested that the "Better-to-have-it-and-not-need-it-than-to-need-it-and-not-have-it" Rule should apply. Donna cut her eyes at me, and I immediately reversed my position and bought Scot and Tiffany Hagen's new book, *Cooking Big Game*<sup>10</sup>.

The Alaska Highway was in excellent condition, and we drove about 70 mph or around 110 kph. Fall came to the Alaska Highway today as the temperature dropped 20 degrees, and the leaves started to change. The beginning the Highway was a divided four-lane road with a 200-yard right-of-way that was beautifully mowed. As it became a two-lane highway, the vistas became more spectacular. All of the major bridges, except the Peace Bridge, were under construction. I thought that was a good sign. Donna spotted two really big deer along the side of the road that were not elk, not moose, not whitetails, and after several hours of discussion became caribou! Go figure.

My plan was to fill up with gas whenever the gauge indicated half-full. As the magic line was crossed, I pulled into the Bucking Horse River Restaurant, Resort and Campground for gas and read Donna the handwritten sign on the gas pump, "Sorry no gas. Closest gas is 126 kilometers north or 10 kilometers south." "What do you want to do?" I asked Donna. She simply pointed across the highway to the Bucking Horse River Gas and Food Store and said, "Why don't we go there?" Again, go figure. We crossed the

<sup>7</sup> See citation 9. in Selected References.

<sup>8</sup> See citation 27. in Selected References.

<sup>9</sup> See citation 29. In Selected References.

<sup>10</sup> See citation 12. In Selected References.

highway, filled up and drove on to Fort Nelson with beautiful mountains and valleys on both sides.

In Fort Nelson, we ate lunch at Dan's Neighborhood Pub where I had a Molson Canadian draft and a Philly cheese steak sandwich. After checking into the Lakeside Inn we checked out the Fort Nelson Heritage Museum, which was "closed for the season," and then I took A.R.T. (A Red Truck) to the Glass Doctor to have the windshield repaired. The Glass Doctor took less than 15 minutes.

I have received a lot of good advice from my friends as well as a few questions about this trip. Here are a few of my favorites:

- Dave: Don't pick up hitchhikers because they will be with you for a week or more.
- Jim: Drive through the Canadian Prairie at night. It will be more interesting!
- Rob: Hope you are toting some firearms; everyone in Alaska carries something; the bears are not that friendly!
- Linda: Have you looked at the weather maps? There's a reason that the tourist season only runs through mid-August.
- Whit: What if you lose your left front headlight?
- Bob: If you see Putin rearing his ugly head, call 911.
- Gerry: Mostly I am stuck on what really is the difference between questions #2 and 3, or are they trick questions?
- Tom: Drive safely and fill up at every opportunity.... beer and gas!

While Bill's questions are thought provoking, only one friend had the audacity to send me his responses. I won't give his name because I may use these as my own ideas! I put his responses in Exhibit 1. I'm interested in your thoughts and suggestions.

### **Donna's Comments:**

#### **PASSING THE TIME**

We have been struggling to learn to use the GPS. We keep saying that we are "such baby boomers" when it comes to all of this technology. Monday I thought I had the thing figured out but managed to drive us right to a nice home in a nice suburban neighborhood in SW Edmonton when I was actually trying to get us to our Best Western Hotel on the NW side of town. We never did find the hotel I was looking for, but we found a new Hilton instead. Today I was trying to find a gas station. The information read that the closest station was 39 miles behind us, or 59 mi ahead of us. This time it might have actually been right.

I thought this trip might be a good opportunity to loose some weight. I know it's hard to burn a lot of calories sitting riding in the car all day, but how hard can it be to cut back on caloric intake? Well it turns out not so easy. The day starts with the "free" breakfasts at the hotel that generally consists of all carbs, or a three-egg omelet in one case. Then there is the early stop for coffee at Horton's, and who can resist one small donut to go with it. We usually stop for a snack in the afternoon to keep our blood sugar and spirits up and

that usually means some kind of fast food. Then there is dinner that up to now has either been deep fried bar food and wings, or a nice restaurant dinner including meat potatoes and vegetable or salad. And then of course there is the wine. Maybe I will have to put off the diet until we get back.

So far the Alaska Highway hasn't looked much different than the rest of our trip. There was however, a billboard-sized sign cautioning us to "watch for wildlife" on the road. We are watching.



**Pictures:**



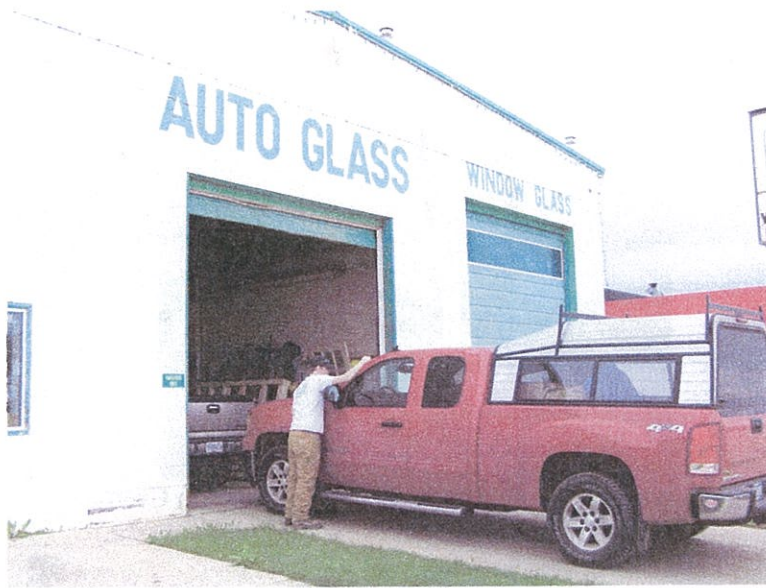
Day 7 Picture 1. Mile Marker 0 in Dawson Creek



Day 7 Picture 2. The Lovely Lolita recommends *Tent Sex, A Guide for Campers*



Day 7 Picture 3 In the Beginning .....



Day 7 Picture 4. A.R.T. visits the Glass Doctor



Day 7 Picture 5. Historical Pickup Truck



Day 7 Picture 6. Historical Panel Truck

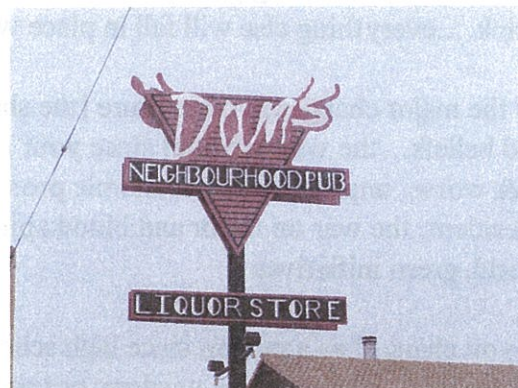




Day 7 Picture 7. Historical Tow Truck



Day 7 Picture 8. Historical Tanker



Day 7 Picture 9. A Great Name for a Pub!

**Exhibit:**

**Day 7 Exhibit 1  
Friend One's Responses to Bill's Questions**

1. What were the defining influences of your life before graduation from high school?  
Cheerleaders, Friday Night Football, Drive In Movies, Backseat Romance, Boones Farm Apple Wine + Pabst Blue Ribbon (aka...cheap wine & beer due to budget constraints), Rock n Roll + R&B....Music Loud & Proud, Bass Weejuns/Saddle Oxfords/Chuck Taylors...shoes are like the wheels on your car..they make a statement.
2. What have been the defining influences of your life since high school graduation?  
Family... old & new, Friends...bold and true, Hobbies....they say more of who you are, career(s).....it says what you think you want to be
3. What have been the defining experiences of your life since graduation from high school?  
Raisin kids, hell & money!!
4. How have your beliefs about the purpose of your life changed since graduation from high school?  
Live it long and live it fast.....go for the gusto.....moderation is not very becoming.....since you can't go back you might as well enjoy going forward!!
5. What is most important to you in living your life?  
Good health, food & drink....everything else will fall in place with these!
6. What do you see as the major changes in our culture [the shared mores, morals, ideals, standards and beliefs...the way we live] since your high school graduation?  
Technology, for better & worse, unprecedented economic prosperity until September 2008, our first black President, the war on terror and blood spilled on our own soil, immigration, smaller world, green initiatives
7. In what ways have you changed as a person since high school graduation?  
Weight, wrinkles and silver hair....it stands for wisdom, not age!



## DAY Eight: Thursday, September 10, 2009

### Box Score:

Day Eight	Date: September 10, 2009
From: Fort Nelson, BC	To: Watson Lake, Yukon Territory
Miles Driven: 472	Hours Driven: 10.5
Lodging: Big Horn Lodge	Cost per Night: \$113.40
Dinner: Belvedere Hotel Dining Room (\$41.60)	

### Dan's E-mail Notes:

Thursday, September 10<sup>th</sup> was a long yet rewarding day in a strange kind of way. Our guidebook said that today's trip (Fort Nelson, BC to Watson Lake, YK) was "the most spectacular drive on the Alaska Highway."<sup>11</sup> We started early and had our complimentary breakfast at the Lakeview Inn which was pre-packaged breakfast quesadillas with salsa sauce which we micro-waved to just the right temperature and consistency. Actually, they were pretty good.

My first stop was to get gas (as all the signs warned us: "Fill up now; next gas 150 kilometers!") where a cute, petite, funky, twenty-something gal who was bubbling with personality greeted me as I slipped out of the truck. "Hi, I'm Nicole. How can I help you? Regular? Fill-up? How's your day going?" She had short spiky hair, too much dark eye make-up, and a crooked yet sexy smile that stayed in place as she talked. She continued, "Have you had your coffee today? Where are you headed?" I liked her, stammered something, and just nodded back. I was in love! As I turned to go toward the front of the truck I ran into the side mirror, almost knocked it off, and knocked myself into the gas pump and trash barrel. This was like a scene out of American Vacation when Chevy Chase meets Margot Hemmingway. I collected myself as I tried to clean off the front headlights. She gave me my receipt, and I crawled in the truck and told Donna, "She was friendly."

Donna explained, "She was flirting with you."

I agreed, and a thought to myself, "I still got it."

Through the dense fog we headed north on the Alaska Highway, down, down, down into the Muskwa River Valley. I tried to stay at 40 mph as the road went from four lanes, to three lanes, to two lanes, to a gravel road with no lanes. A car behind me kept its distance, and no cars came southbound. A sow and a cub black bear scurried into the woods as we pushed on to the bottom on the river valley crossed the steel-grate bridge and started to climb up the other side. In the daylight, this highway would have been treacherous!

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<sup>11</sup> Citation 9.

As we reached the top of the valley we were treated to a 200-mile, crystal clear vista of the fogged-in river valley behind us and the snow-capped Canadian Rocky Mountains ahead of us. We stopped the car, took pictures and put on sunglasses.

On and on we pressed, as this was to be a long day. Finally, the sign at the Testa River Services and Campground stopped us. *MILEPOST* said they daily baked the best cinnamon rolls on the Alaska Highway. I liked the place immediately when I saw the handwritten sign on the gas pump, "Gas \$1.59 per liter. No Sniveling!" Inside we refilled our coffee mugs, got an eight-inch, freshly baked cinnamon roll, and a book of poetry, *The Best of Robert Service*<sup>12</sup>. As I went to pay the nice lady-baker, I realized that I couldn't find my credit card, my Cabela's VISA card that had a gazillion-dollar line-of-credit that was supposed to finance our entire trip. "No problem, I'll just pay cash," I told the lady-baker.

"You sure are taking this well." She replied.

"I'll just go to plan B," I said casually as I left the store and I walked toward the truck.

That was just the problem; I had no Plan B! I couldn't remember the 16-digit card number or the 800 numbers for VISA. Donna didn't bring her Cabela's VISA because I had mine. Anyway, where would Cabela's send a new card if I was able to call them and cancel the card? I must have left the card at the gas station this morning! To drive back to Fort Nelson would cost us 3-4 hours of prime driving time.

When we got in the truck, I said that I just wasn't used to full service gas stations anymore and that I must have left the card there with Nicole. Donna looked at me over her dark glasses, and slowly explained, "That girl wasn't flirty with you this morning. She was stealing your credit card. I'll bet she doesn't even work there." Oh my god, I could see everything so clearly now, she was right. I was played like a fine violin. I was a fool. That settled it; we were driving back to Fort Nelson and retrieve my card from that little floozy!

I now drove south as fast as I could. I ignored the signs that said, "Dangerous curves ahead, watch for rock slides, beware of wildlife in the road." I ignored the spectacular scenery and the solid rock mountains rising on my left. I was a man on a mission. My vanity was hurt, and I had to right this wrong to my male ego. I imagined that the little harlot had already left the country with my credit card, or worse yet, she had phoned in my numbers to a credit card ring in New York City that would ravish my identity and good reputation by buying drugs, booze and fine clothes with my card. I was now a man on a sacred quest to rescue myself and my family from a life of public humiliation and poverty. On and on I drove over the mountain pass and back down into the foggy river valley. Unable to see the road, I only imagined the oncoming traffic as little lights whizzed by us. Finally, we reached the Fort Nelson city limits.

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<sup>12</sup> See citation 25. In Selected References.

When we pulled into the gas station, Nicole was still there and said with a chipper voice, “ Oh hi. It’s you. I’ll get your card. I’m really sorry about that.”

I told her that I needed another fill-up again. As she gassed up my truck, she chatted-up the roughneck who was sitting on top of the diesel tank that was mounted on top of his flatbed dually. I could see her better now. Her hair wasn’t funky; it was clunky. She was in her late thirties at least, and I think that she was missing her left incisor tooth. With her pierced nose, she looked tired. No doubt she had children in school and was working this job to put food on their table and boots on their feet. When she finished up, she apologized to me again and gave me my VISA card with a sticky-note attached which read, “some guy forgot this card.” That would be me.

It was now 11:00 am, and we had a long drive ahead of us. Donna took over the steering wheel and started north; I started on the 8-inch cinnamon roll; and the fog started to lift.

As we passed the Tesa River Services and Campground with the best cinnamon rolls on the Alaska Highway around 12:30 pm, I wasn’t felling very good as the cinnamon roll (I can’t believe I ate the whole thing) sat heavy in my stomach. The Highway and mountains, and rivers were just amazing, and I started to take pictures of the road its own self. How this road was built in eight months through the winter of ’42 and ’43 is unimaginable.

We spotted a stone sheep along side of the road, and a little further on, two caribou were checking us out as they casually grazed roadside. Unbelievably, there was a small airplane next to Highway, which was using a rocky but level trail as a runway!

A hunting party was unloading 4X4’s and several trailers of gear for a hunting camp I imagined somewhere high in the mountains. As we approached Toad River, we saw two hunters in full camo sitting beside the road glassing the mountainsides with their guns across their lap. It looked liked hunting season had arrived on the Alaska Highway.

Just past the Toad River Lodge where we gassed-up again, we saw a large bull elk and three cows starring at us from the edge of the woods at the foot of Folded Mountain. Muncho Lake was now on our left as the road looked like it was chiseled into the mountains, which plunged straight in to the lake.

The Liard River Hot Springs Park was recommend by every guidebook as welcome respite for Highway Drivers. We pulled in to check it out since neither of us had ever seen real hot springs. The signs to the hot springs said “Bear Abatement Program in Effect; Campers May Hear Loud Noises.” We took our towels and suits, and as walked along the half-mile wooden trail to the springs, we suddenly heard a rifle shot 50 yards to our right and then another rifle shot 100 yards to our left. Was this the bear abatement program? Another sign said. “Upper Springs Closed Due to Nuisance Bear.” There was a certain authenticity to this hot springs experience!

The actual hot spring bubbles out of the ground about 20 yards to our right and a dam with an over-flow had been built down stream to create a little pool. There was a wooden deck and steps leading to the pool and a concrete bench that was 18 inches underwater. His and her changing rooms were adjacent to the deck with the compulsory “NO” sign (No eating, no drinking, no smoking, no running, no splashing, no laughing, no smiling). About a dozen other bathers joined us in the 110 degree Fahrenheit pool. The sulfur smell quickly became unnoticeable, as the water temperature seemed to soar to near boiling in some spots. Beavers had built another dam down stream from the man-made structure where the water was about 100 degrees. We sat in the beaver dam under the over flow and had one of the best back massages ever.

As I sat in the warm hot springs two thoughts occurred to me. First, travelers on the Alaska Highway, as a group, are not very fit, and secondly, Donna is the most beautiful woman in the world! I shared these thoughts with Donna who just nodded, suspicious of my intentions.

After the Liard Hot Springs, Donna agreed to drive the remaining two hours to Watson Lake, and I agreed to drink a cold Heineken’s. We saw a couple of bison along the road, and then a couple more, and then an entire herd of fifty or so.

Relaxed by the hot springs and the Heineken, I decided to read some of Robert Service’s best poetry to Donna. Using my booming baritone voice, I read “The Spell of the Yukon” (It’s the beauty that thrills me with wonder. It’s the stillness that fills me with peace.) Donna said, “Why are you talking like that?”

“Here’s another one,” I offered and using my poignant voice I read “The Shooting of Dan McGrew” (The woman who kissed –and pinched his poke—was the lady that’s known as Lou.) No comment from Donna. “One more,” I suggested, and using my most sincere voice, I read “My Madonna” (I painted her as she might have been, If the Worst had been the Best).

“Why don’t you read me something from one of the guide books,” was Donna’s only comment. So much for reading poetry on the Alaska Highway. Go figure.

We arrived late at Watson Lake and turned into the Big Horn Motel that fit snugly between “A Nice Motel” and the “Belvedere Hotel.” I asked Big Darlene where we could eat as she checked us in, and she said, “Only two places in town. Bee Jays Truck Stop is pretty good, but it’s closed by now and the place next door has a buffet I think.”

We’d prepared ourselves for a buffet at the Belvedere Hotel, but upon entering we found ourselves in twenty-table dining room full of people and in the middle of a Saturday Night Live routine. Bruno, the maitre d and head waiter, had a shaved head, stocky build, a foreign accent and John Belushi’s attitude as he took our order. “Two specials, two reds,” I said and pointed to the lighted grease pen sign over my head that announced that the special was baked macaroni and hamburger. Bruno took the towel out of his belt leaned across our table and wiped the “special” off of the sign. “You got last two,” he

grunted. Donna winked at me, and we hoped for the best. The special was especially hopeless.

The Loud Waitress Lady (4'10", 200 pounds) spoke so everyone could hear every order she took and every comment she made. After she dropped several dishes and glasses (a lazy man's load) she announced, "Is every one awake now?" She also was the cashier, who didn't know how to use the credit-card-swiper, and she gleefully told every exiting patron that their card didn't work, their out-of-town checks were not acceptable, and they should just pay in cash. I picked Gilda Radnor to play her character, but Donna thought Rachel Dratch would be better.

The diners were either men from the nearby oil and gas fields or quirky older couples driving the Alaska Highway (people like us). Every table had a story, but we'll save those for later.

When we returned to Big Horn Motel, Big Darlene was working with a crew foreman trying to assign the right men to the right rooms. I knew these guys, and hunted and fished with them in the oil and gas fields of Oklahoma's Osage County.

Our lightless room didn't encourage reading so I turned on the satellite TV and cruised through two hundred channels until I found the Steelers and Titans football game. As the game went into over time, the TV went blank and I sat staring at black screen. "What are you watching," Donna asked. "Nothing," I said, "the TV's broken." "Let me see the remote," which I readily turned over and in 30 seconds I was watching the Steelers win in over-time. What a woman; I am a lucky guy! Go figure.

### **Donna's Blog Comments:**

#### **A LITTLE LEERY: THINGS ARE GETTING MORE REMOTE**

Things have been easy. The weather has been sunny and warm. The roads have been dry with new pavement and only a little road construction. Finding food and coffee has been no problem and finding lodging was just a matter of searching the AAA book<sup>13</sup> or hotels.com.

But now I am a little more concerned. The town of Watson Lake, YT is our next planned stop for the night. No hotels are list in the AAA book. When searching on line, I was reading reviews like: "skip this town all together if possible. The food is awful and accommodations worse," "worst hotels of the entire trip," "hotel room small and noisy," "room smelled bad," "rooms are over priced," and "beds hard and lumpy". I was beginning to think our tent sounded pretty good.

I finally found a place called "A Nice Motel." (Really that is its name.) The reviews were good so I gave them a call. "No rooms available." We had read that it is important to book rooms in advance because there are so few rooms available they fill up,

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<sup>13</sup> Citation 31.

especially during high tourist season. However, we had been counting on things being less crowded since we are at the end of the tourist season.

Although the reviews were not good, I decided to try a place called the Big Horn Inn hoping to at least get a room. Their ad online says, “ We listen to your comments and are always trying to improve.” The negative review I read was over a year old. Hopefully they have improved or at least will be clean. Clean is my minimal requirement. I can take small or noisy but I prefer clean.

And as for the drive, it sounds like it could become more challenging too. The guidebook reads, “The Rockies are nothing if not rugged. Twisted roads with steep grades, hairpin turns, and minimal services!”<sup>14</sup> But on the positive side, we get breath-taking views and lots of wildlife! We will see.

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<sup>14</sup> Citation 27.

**Pictures:**



**Day 8 Picture 1. Fogged in Muskwa River Valley**



**Day 8 Picture 2. Snow Capped Canadian Rockies**



**Day 8 Picture 3. Lookout at Steamboat Mountain Summit (elevation 3500)**





Day 8 Picture 4. What a Highway!



Day 8 Picture 5. Again, What a Highway!



Day 8 Picture 6. Indian Head Mountain





Day 8 Picture 7. Summit Pass in Stone Mountain Provincial Park



Day 8 Picture 8. Caution: Watch for Caribou Along the Highway



Day 8 Picture 9. Caution: Watch for Elk along the Highway



Day 8 Picture 10. Summit Lake

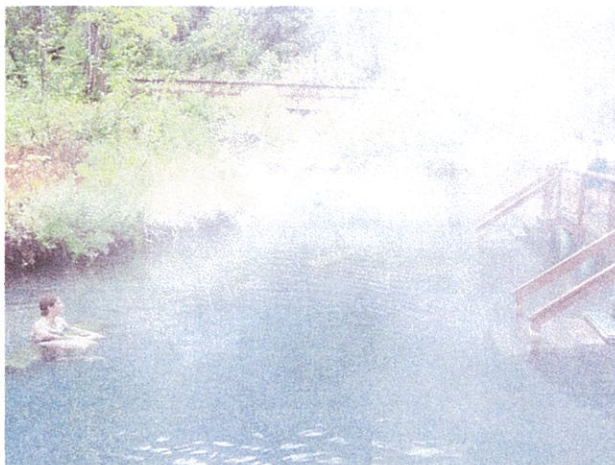


Day 8 Picture 11. Summit Lake and Mount St. George (elevation 7419)



Day 8 Picture 12. Liard River Hot Springs  
(Looking south toward spillway and beaver pond)





Day 8 Picture 13. Liard River Hot Springs  
(Looking north toward bubbling spring at 120° Fahrenheit)



Day 8 Picture 14. Liard River Hot Springs  
(Note blooming flowers in the shoreline)



Day 8 Picture 15. Caution: Watch for Buffalo along the Highway



Day 8 Picture 16. Big Horn Motel, Watson Lake, Yukon Territory



Day 8 Picture 17. BeeJays Café and Truck Services  
(Closed for Dinner; Open for Breakfast)



Day 8 Picture 18 Donna's Worst Fears!

## **DAY Nine: Friday, September 11, 2009**

### **Box Score:**

Day Nine	Date: September 11, 2009
From: Watson Lake, YT.	To: Whitehorse, Yukon Territory
Miles Driven: 388	Hours Driven: 6
Lodging: Gold Rush Inn (B.W.)	Cost per Night: \$138.34
Dinner: Klondike Rib and Salmon BBQ	(\$102.00)

### **Dan's E-mail Notes:**

I'm trying not to think about September 11, 2001, but I can't get it out of my mind. How can a just and merciful god create such beauty in nature and such hatred in the hearts of men?

In 1996, I went to a lecture at Penn State about terrorism where the professor said that the first thing we needed to do to have an intelligent discussion about terrorism was to define what we were talking about. I can't remember the details of his lecture, but I remember that his definition seem rather logical and reasonable, but then he said that according to this definition that the biggest terrorism group in the United State were the anti-abortionists. It all depends on your definition. Sometimes I wonder .....

Before we left Watson Lake, we visited the Sign Post Forest on the north end of town. Started by a lovesick soldier working on the highway who put up the first sign in 1942, the "Sign Forest" has grown to over 61,000 signs from all over the world. Travelers are encouraged to put up their signs so the forest continues to expand. We found lots of signs from Pennsylvania and Ohio including one from our neighbor who owns the Fullington Bus Company. I'll bring my own sign next time!

We're making good time on good roads in good weather. Once again, the scenery is mind-numbingly beautiful and awesome (although a little repetitive).

We got to Whitehorse, Yukon around 2:30 pm and checked into the best hotel, the Gold Rush Inn (a Best Western), and after a much needed nap we ate dinner at the best restaurant in town, the Klondike Ribs and Salmon BBQ, which closes on Sunday for the season because the walls are canvas. After waiting outside in-line for 30 minutes, Donna ordered wine by the color, red, and I ordered Klondike Brewery Pale Ale draft and a cup of Halibut Chowder. For entrees Donna ordered the Bison Rib Eye Steak with a wild berry and sage reduction sauce, and I ordered the Wild Muskoxen Stroganoff over rice. They were both absolutely delicious. This probably will be our best meal of the trip, but hope springs eternal in the human palette.

On the walk back to our hotel, we stopped at Mac's Firewood Books where I bought a



pictorial history of the Alcan Highway<sup>15</sup> and an Alaska romance novel. I have been reading Warren Buffet's biography, *Snowball*<sup>16</sup>, but it doesn't seem very relevant in the Yukon Territory. Instead, I started reading *Tisha*<sup>17</sup>, "the wonderful true love story of a young teacher in the Alaska wilderness" (circa 1927).

Our hotel had the "hottest bar in Whitehorse" in a 2008 survey, but we went back to bed. I may still be on Central Time.

Tomorrow, I'm taking A.R.T. in for an oil change and tire rotation although ONSTAR sent be an e-mail stating that I didn't need service for at least 6,500 more miles. Go figure.

Another friend has sent me his responses to Bill's Seven Questions. Friend Two's short but poignant answers are presented in the Exhibit to this day.

I still would like to know how you would answer these questions.  
Thanks to Friend One and Friend Two for sharing.

### **Donna's Comments:**

#### **STILL LEERY BUT LOOKING FORWARD TO TONIGHT IN THE BIG CITY**

Things turned out alright in Watson Lake. It was a very small town with few services but the services turned out to be homey, "totally adequate" as Dan would say. The room at the Big Horn Inn was large with 2 double beds each with a large headboard with shelves and mirror. There was also a dresser with large mirror and a chest of drawers. The furniture looked like it came out of someone's bedroom. The bathroom was small but clean with aqua blue toilet and aqua blue tub enclosure with wall mounted soap, shampoo, and conditioner dispenser. The fixtures looked new, but I didn't know that the color aqua blue was still available. The sink was outside of bathroom again with soap dispenser on the wall. The shower curtain was a pink with pretty little flowers; the towels were dark mauve as were the soft, faded bed linens. The room had satellite TV with 100's of channels, wifi, and coffee maker. All of the comforts of home!

The walls were paper-thin, and our room was next to the stairs, ice machine, and the outside wall to the parking area. No air-conditioning so we slept with the windows open. As you can imagine, it got to be a little noisy at times, but we both agreed that we slept great, at least until 5AM. And how could I forget, there were only two lights in the room both with low voltage energy saving light bulbs. No reading last night.

Dinner was homey too. We asked the women at the front desk for recommendations of where to eat. She mentioned the restaurant next door but recommended Bee Jays truck stop, "Good food." We went to BeeJays. Is was 7:15 PM by then and they closed at 7:30.

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<sup>15</sup> See citation 8. in Selected References.

<sup>16</sup> See citation 24. in Selected References.

<sup>17</sup> See citation 26. in Selected References.

We decided to save BeeJays for breakfast and went back to the restaurant next to our hotel. We both decided on the dinner special, "baked beef and macaroni." I was looking forward to a warm plate of what I think of as Johnny Marzetti. It had been a long day with only a snack for lunch. When dinner arrived, it was a bowl of beef and macaroni. That is all, just ground beef and macaroni, no cheese, no tomato sauce, in fact, no moisture. But, we were happy to be eating and "it didn't make us sick " (our definition of a good meal). Breakfast at BeeJays turned out to be okay too. All and all, Watson Lake exceeded my low expectations.

The drive yesterday was scenic, spectacular at times, and we finally saw some wild life including buffalo, caribou, elk right along the road. The weather was sunny with periods of fog and rain but we still managed to get in a 10-hour day of driving including a 3-hour detour to retrieve Dan's credit card that he left at a full service gas station and a 45 minute dip in the hot springs.

We will be spending tonight in the "big " city of Whitehorse, YT, pop. 19000. We have reservations at a Best Western, and we read that there are some good meals. Saturday night is a bit more iffy again. There are few hotels in Beaver Creek and at least one is closed for the season. I made a reservation at the 1202 Lodge and Motor Inn. The reviews are "average". The best I could do.

Still leery but looking forward to tonight's stop in a big city  
I am getting a little concerned about things like hotels and gas stations being closed for the season already. We still have several more weeks of this trip.

**Pictures:**



Day 9 Picture 1. Watson Lake Signpost Forest



Day 9, Picture 2. Old Friends from Lake Sabula



**Exhibit:**  
**Friend Two's Responses to Bills Questions**

1. What were the defining influences of your life before graduation from high school?

PARENTS, FRIENDS & A FEW TEACHERS ALL PROVIDED BOTH GOOD AND BAD INFLUENCES.

2. What have been the defining influences of your life since high school graduation?

FRIENDS, INEBRIATING SUBSTANCES AND WORK

3. What have been the defining experiences of your life since graduation from high school?

LEARNING THAT LIFE CAN BE A BITCH, BUT IT IS WORTH LIVING

4. How have your beliefs about the purpose of your life changed since graduation from high school?

STILL CONFUSED, ABOUT THIS BUT I THINK ABOUT IT MORE NOW THAN THEN

5. What is most important to you in living your life?

FREEDOM TO DO CRAZY THINGS LIKE DRIVING THE ALASKAN HIGHWAY WITHOUT A SPARE WINDSHIELD.

6. What do you see as the major changes in our culture [the shared mores, morals, ideals, standards and beliefs...the way we live] since your high school graduation?

THE PENDULUM CONTINUES TO SWING BOTH WAYS BUT NEVER REPLICATES.

7. In what ways have you changed as a person since high school graduation?

I GOT OLDER AND LEARNED THAT EACH DECADE IS BETTER THAN THE LAST UNTIL YOU HIT YOUR 60'S AND THEN THINGS START TO HURT.

## DAY TEN: Saturday, September 12, 2009

### Box Score:

Day Ten	Date: September 12, 2009
From: Whitehorse, Yukon Territory	To: Beaver Creek, Yukon Territory
Miles Driven: 308	Hours Driven: 5.5
Lodging: 1202 Motor Inn	Cost per Night: \$68.25
Dinner: Buckshot Betty's Café and Bakery (\$78.28)	

### Dan's E-mail Notes:

We got a late start today even though I got up early. I didn't sleep well last night as the combination of no air conditioning, Donna's hot flashes, and the "hottest bar in Whitehead" conspired against me. The routine went like this:

1. Donna got hot and opened the window.
2. Hot bar people started yelling on the street below as they left the bar.
3. Donna closed the window.

Repeat every 15 to 30 minutes as needed.

At 2:35 am, Donna said, "I think the bar closes at three." It didn't.

"Steve-in-Service" at Klondike Motors Buick (Pontiac) GMC Trucks said that if I got there early (8:00 am), he would service A.R.T. and change the tires first thing. The "hottest bar" was empty as I went it for breakfast at 7:00 am and ordered the Robert Service Breakfast Special, coffee and toast (dry rye please). As I walked past the hotel parking lot sign, "Hotel not responsible for Theft or Damages" in parking lot, I saw that A.R.T. had a rough night too. The passenger side panel just behind the door was dented in, and there was 15-inch gash in the sheet metal. "Just adds character," I rationalized.

Whitehorse is smaller than I figured so I was outside the Klondike Motors Service Door at 7:30. Luckily, Steve-in-Service was early too, and took care of A.R.T. as he promised. I thanked him as I checked out and said that I was glad to find him without using ONSTAR. "ONSTAR doesn't work in Whitehorse," he said, "Neither does XM Radio." I was relieved because I thought that I had inadvertently broken both the radio and phone systems.

Back at the hotel, I shared the miniature elevator cab and incredibly slow hydraulic lift system with a young, tall skinny guy who let me use his key to gain elevator access. "Are you going north or south?" I asked him. "Neither," he said, "I'm done. I finished last night. The race is over for me." I envied him a little.

As Donna and I got on the elevator on the fourth floor to go down to the Hottest Bar for brunch, we were joined on the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor by Long Tall Sally who had just gotten out of the shower judging from her wet hair and fresh soap smell. (The elevator cabs were very small.) She was a twenty-something, six-foot-two beauty with four-foot legs clothed in

loose sweat pants and a t-shirt. I judged her Body Mass Index (BMI) at five percent. Evidently, she acted like she knew what I was thinking and said, "I got in at five last night, and now I'm done for the day." "Really," was all I could say.

Finally Donna asked incredulously, "What are you talking about?"

"Our team finished around five am. I ran the 9-mile leg of the race through the Pass," she said.

"What kind of race?"

"We ran a two-day road race from Skagway to Whitehorse. It's 110 miles." She went on to explain that her team finished 6<sup>th</sup> and that the race ended right in front of our hotel. Teams crossed the finish line all night long.<sup>18</sup>

"So you were the ones screaming last night?" Donna accused.

"We only were cheering, I'm sorry." She left to meet her teammates, while Donna and I went into the "hottest bar" for brunch where 20-30 low-BMI people were chowing down yogurt, granola, flapjacks, bacon, and eggs. Donna and I, with our more mature BMI's, were obviously out of place, but we joined in with the flapjacks and bacon and eggs. (No yogurt or granola thank-you.)

Finally we hit the road with Donna doing the driving, and the Alaska Highway immediately turned to dust and gravel. At least Little-Miss-Know-It-All was not with us for the past two days. Little-Miss-Know-It-All is the lady who lives in our GPS that Donna attached to the windshield. I contended that we didn't need a GPS since there were only about six turns between DuBois, Pennsylvania and Fairbanks, Alaska. Donna explained that "attitude" was a guy-thing since men always think they aren't lost because they know where they are going, and women always think they are lost because they don't know where they are. Well, Little-Miss-Know-It-All always knows exactly where we are and doesn't really have clue where we are going. She speaks with a commanding voice that I have turned onto a one-way street the wrong way just because she said so, "Turn right now!" She is also a little pedantic. I turned off the Highway to get a cup of coffee at Tim Horton's and she goes on: "Recalculating ..... turn right in 20 feet ..... recalculating ..... turn left in 50 feet ..... recalculating .....turn right in 30 feet onto the Highway 1. Go 127 miles." All of this and I only wanted a cup of coffee. Give be a break Little-Miss-Know-It-All! At least Donna understood my agitation and turned her off.

Donna poked along until we hit Haines Junction where we stooped for coffee, and I took over. We headed out and started driving at a decent speed (finally). Donna got set-up with the guidebooks and started to read to me. "This junction can be confusing.

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<sup>18</sup> The Klondike Road Relay, September 11-12, 2009, is a 110-mile relay race that begins in Skagway in the evening and ends in Whitehorse the next afternoon. Teams are made up of ten members.

Whitehorse-bound travelers turn left at the stop sign for continuation of the Alaska Highway. Haines-bound travelers turn right for the Haines Highway.” She read on, “There are beautiful views of the Kluane Range west of the Highway. The Alaska Highway parallels the Kluane Range from ..”

“What did you say?” I semi-screamed. “Read that again.”

She did, and I realized that the beautiful views of the Kluane Range were on our right that would have been on the east side if we were going north. The sign said “Scenic Lookout 1500 meters” so I pulled off, checked the auto compass, and prepared myself for the worst. We had missed the important turn at Hanes Junction, and we were speeding in the wrong direction. I confessed my mistake, (like Little-Miss-Know-It-All, I may be wrong but I’m never in doubt), and Donna was incredibly gracious as we headed back the 15 miles to Haines Junction. Why do bad things happen to good people? I’m sure Little-Miss-Know-It-All was laughing up her sleeve.

After correcting my small navigational error, we started to make good time. I explained to Donna in my most manly voice how “A.R.T. (A Red Truck) seemed very comfortable cruising at 80 to 85 miles per hour unlike the old 1991 GMC pickup” when WHOA! The truck went airborne! We hit the Highway and Whoa! We hit another bump. I didn’t hit the breaks so I gradually got the truck under control as A.R.T. started to slowdown to 50 mph. Donna, in her gentlest voice, explained that the perma-frost caused the highway to heave up and cause these giant bumps. The perma-frost also causes the unique muskeg environment that had nothing but dwarf tress. (How did she know this stuff?) I continued to drive while exclaiming “Whoa!” every time I hit a perma-frost bump. Again very gently, Donna noted that the red flags on the side of the road indicated a bump. Good tip.

Clearly, this type of bumpy, rolling, guardrail-less driving was easier for females to handle so Donna took over and drove the rest of the way to Beaver Creek. I had the feeling that Little-Miss-Know-It-All was coming back into our lives.

When we arrived in Beaver Creek, only five buildings were not “closed for the season,” and two of them were closed for the night, the “Truck and Tire Repair” building and the “Palm Reading and Gifts” building (both of which were metal buildings). The open establishments included Buckshot Beatty’s Bakery and Café, Ida’s Motel and Café, and the 1202 Motor Inn. Luckily, Donna had called ahead and made reservations at the 1202 Motor Inn.

When we pulled into 1202 Motor Inn, we could see a strip of 20 decrepit motel units along the south side of the Lodge. I went in and Betty Ann was glad to see us, and said that she was only charging us \$68 rather than the \$78 she had told Donna. We had unit #20 on the north side of the lodge. When Donna and I walked around to unit #20, neither of us spoke. It was a two-unit mobile home, with rotten wooden steps leading to the door that was unlocked. Inside the tiny unit had several signs: “Furnishing by Acme Furniture

in Whitehorse,” No-smoking,” “Keep Dogs Off the Beds.” These signs raised several questions in my mind.

“At least we have lots of wine, I hope the TV works,” Donna suggested, trying to keep a good attitude. With that I went back to the lodge to get the some ice (free for guests), but when I came back Donna announced that the TV didn’t work. I went back to see Betty Ann, who said, “Yea, I know. That’s why I gave you \$10 off.”

“How about charging me \$10 more and giving me a room with a TV that works? I queried. “We’d like to watch the USC-OSU game.”

“Say no more,” she said, “but you’ll have to take Unit 17. I’ll show you.”

Unit 17 was a 10 by 14 foot windowless cell that was just off the front door to the lodge (aka store) and had 18-inch log walls and a working TV. “We’ll take it,” I agreed and asked, “What’s for dinner?”

“We don’t serve dinner here anymore. You need to go to Buckshot Beatty’s next door,” she answered.

I rescued Donna out of Unit 20, and when we came back to Unit 17, Betty Ann gleefully announced, “I’ve got good news. The game’s on Channel 403 and your WiFi will work in this room.” I thought to myself, “proof positive there is a merciful God.”

I had tried to avoid Buckshot Betty’s Bakery and Café since I read her advertisement in MILEPOSTS, “Fresh Baked Goods, Good Food, Clean Water.” What’s the deal about the “clean water?” However, at half-time, we walked the half-mile to Buckshot Betty’s and were relieved that there was a truck in front of the café until an old bearded guy came out with a bag, got in his truck, and left. “Just us,” I proffered, and we pressed on. Opening the door, we saw two eight-chair tables with a young woman and a middle-aged woman dressed in whites at the second table watching TV.

“Can we watch the Big Game? It’s on Channel 403,” I asked. The older lady took the remote, clicked it at the TV, got nothing, and gave to the younger gal. She had the game on in 10 seconds. “Are either of you Buckshot Betty?” I asked.

The young gal, Val, said, “No, she’s taking a break down in Calgary. She needed a rest.”

All around the restaurant-souvenir shop were pictures of Buckshot Betty including a poster of her advertising a CD, *The Ballad of Buckshot Beatty and Other Songs From the North* by Barbara Chamberlin.<sup>19</sup> I had to buy one.

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<sup>19</sup> See citation 6. In Selected References.

Val gave us the menu and said that fried chicken was the special for today, and we immediately agreed to it as a risk minimization strategy. How bad could the special be?

Val was a willowy beauty who had the same vulnerable look as our niece, Joy. She had interned at Beaver Creek the summer before as part of her college program in hospitality at the Georgian University in Ontario. Since graduating, she had moved back to Beaver Creek hoping to spend the winter working for Buckshot Betty. Go figure.

As we ate, a family unit came in that was as diversified as the United Nations. Four or five adults and three or four children (we didn't know how old the one person was) who were Caucasian, native North American, black-North American, and Hispanic. No wedding rings but lots of love. They out ordered us. No one got the Special, and it all looked good.

I asked for a second glass of "red wine", and when Val brought out the bottle we noticed that it was Pait D'Or, a nice French wine. My wine glass wasn't empty yet, but she just filled it up again saying, "We don't have many wine glasses."

We left Buckshot Betty's singing her ballad as we walked back to the 1202 Motor Lodge. There are six verses, and the first one goes like this:

Up near Alaska, there's a woman I know  
Owns her own bakery and makes her own dough  
She's rough and she's tough and always ready  
Goes by the name of Buckshot Beatty

Except for the final score of the USC-OSU game, I enjoyed Beaver Creek.

Friend Three has sent me his responses to Bill's Questions that are presented in today's Exhibit.

Tomorrow, we hope to arrive in Fairbanks!

### **Donna's Blog Comments:**

#### **WHITEHORSE YUKON TERRITORY: THE "REAL ALCAN"**

Whitehorse is a cute town with interesting local shops downtown and "suburban spread" including two McDonalds, two Starbucks, and of course, a Wal-Mart. We stayed at the Best Western downtown. It was very nice. Nothing memorable except the noise during the night, which we assume, was from either the "best bar in town" below us or from the runners coming in from a two day road relay through the Yukon. Having just driven the race route in our car we were impressed by the runners.

We had a great dinner at a small restaurant called the Klondike Ribs and Salmon BBQ. We would recommend it to everyone! We were lucky to have the experience. The place closes for the winter September 15th because they have no heat. The locals were there to get one last meal. We had to wait in line but it was well worth it. The restaurant

specializes in halibut fish and chips, but I couldn't face anymore fried-food so I had bison rib-eye with wild berries and sage reduction. It was fantastic! The owner, Dona, was a memorable character with lots of personality and energy. She is a Canadian ranger in the winter.

Dan decided to have the truck serviced while we were in a town with a GMC dealership. The truck is only a month old but we already have over 5000 miles on it so we had the oil changed and tires rotated. The truck also got its first dent in Whitehorse where someone hit it in the parking lot during the night. Must have been one of those noisy bar patrons.

I started the drive. We were not 5 miles out of Whitehorse YT when the road turned to gravel. The gravel road was rough and dusty. In fact, if there was a car ahead the dust was so thick I couldn't see. It was like driving through thick fog. Between the gravel patches were stretches of pavement often heaved from the permafrost. It was like riding on a roller coaster at times. The uneven pavement made typing, knitting, reading or anything else difficult so we listened to *Into the Wild*.<sup>20</sup> It was hard to make good time but we did manage another 500 kilometers.

The scenery was impressive: wide expanses edged by huge mountains some snow covered, and beautiful clear aqua-green mountain lakes. It is fall here. The rich golden color aspens are interspersed with green black-spruce trees. I love the different spruce trees up here. Any one would make a great Christmas tree.

Then there was the 1202 Motor Inn, our home for the night. I had read questionable reviews about "shared bathrooms," "old run down rooms", "not worth the money," but it seemed to be the best available in Beaver Creek. The reviews for the other places were worse. We pulled up to the 1202 Lodge. It seemed ok but very rustic. The lady at the desk, Betty Ann, who appeared to be missing her top teeth, was nice. She asked for \$68 and gave us our key to unit 20 around the corner and out back. From the outside it looked like a run down vintage 1950 duplex cottage, but perfectly "fine" (I had decided to keep an open mind on this trip with the minimal standard of clean. Now I can admit that it was a little depressing). The room was clean, just old. It even had a microwave, coffee maker, and small sofa. Again, there was little lighting and the bed although covered with a pretty bedspread and flowered sheets looked a little lopsided. I tried the TV while Dan went for ice. The OSU vs. USC game was supposed to be on. No reception on any channel.

I thought this was reason enough to cancel our reservation (and try Ida's across the street which looked like a relatively new motel that wasn't listed in any of our guide books) or at least move to a new room. Betty Ann was quite accommodating and gave us a key to room 17 just inside the lodge. The room looked recently added with log beam walls. It was small about 10 by 15 with separate bath, sink, toilet, and corner shower with even small packages of shampoo. The only window in the room was in the bathroom and it looked out to the entrance of the lodge. I thought it was cozy, and Betty Ann even found the OSU game on our satellite TV. We enjoyed a glass of wine and watched the game in

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<sup>20</sup> See citation 15. In Selected References.

our tiny room. We didn't however like the outcome of the game. OSU lost in the last minute.

We had the dinner special of fried chicken and mashed potatoes next door at Buckshot Betty's. Buckshot Betty's was again more of what I had expected of the Alaska Highway. It was tiny with 2 tables and a total of 16 chairs. It was really more of a souvenir shop and hotel check-in office than a restaurant. Authentic. We planned on returning to Buckshot Betty's in the morning or trying Ida's café for buffalo or caribou sausage for breakfast but both were closed so we bought a prepared egg and sausage sandwich from the 1202 and drove on.



**Pictures:**



Day 10 Picture 1. Dan points the way back to Haines Junction and the Alaska Highway (Kluane Mountain Range in the background)



Day 10 Picture 3. Units 21 and 20 at the 1202 Motor Inn and Lodge, Beaver Creek, YT



Day 10 Picture 3. Buckskin Betty's Café and Bakery, Beaver Creek, YT



**Exhibit:**

**Friend Three's Responses to Bill's Questions**

1. What were the defining influences of your life before graduation from high school?

Religion

2. What have been the defining influences of your life since high school graduation?

Everything but religion

3. What have been the defining experiences of your life since graduation from high school?

One event (Kent State); Two books (All Quiet on the Western Front); (Tent Sex, A Camper's Guide)

4. How have your beliefs about the purpose of your life changed since graduation from high school?

In high school, I thought the purpose of life was to find happiness; now, I believe the purpose in life is to redistribute happiness.

5. What is most important to you in living your life?

...to never disappoint my wife or children in terms of character or integrity

6. What do you see as the major changes in our culture [the shared mores, morals, ideals, standards and beliefs...the way we live] since your high school graduation?

Morals, ideals, standards and ideals seem to move in a circular route: yesterday's hippies have grown up to become their parents

7. In what ways have you changed as a person since high school graduation?

I used to keep my big mouth shut.

## DAY Eleven: Sunday, September 13, 2009

### Box Score:

Day Eleven	Date: September 13, 2009
From: Beaver Creek, Yukon	To: Fairbanks, Alaska
Miles Driven: 398	Hours Driven: 6.5
Lodging: Spring Hill Suites	Cost per Night: \$105.84
Dinner: Lavelle's Bistro (\$184.00)	

### Dan's E-mail Comments:

We were ready to leave Beaver Creek, YK at 8:00 am, but neither Buckshot Betty's Bakery and Café nor Ida's Motel and Café were open yet, so we got two aluminum-wrapped breakfast sandwiches at the 1202 Motor Inn, filled up our coffee mugs, and set off for the Alaska Border. Thirty minutes later, we were answering the Border Guard's question, "What's in the back of the Truck?" I tried to explain to him the "Better-to-have-it-and-not-need-it-than-to-need-it-and-not-have-it" Rule required a truck full of camping gear and finally He said, "Is it for sale?" "Not yet," I answered, and he let us through.

Entering the United States, we felt that something was different. Here's the list that we made during our first thirty minutes on the US portion of the Alaska Highway of "things that the US has and Canada didn't:"

- Green mileage markers every mile,
- White lines on the outside edge of the roads,
- Better roads,
- Handicap accessible rest areas,
- Roadside mail boxes,
- Electric lines in the narrower highway right-of-way,
- More driveway cuts off the highway, and
- Big, blue 'P' signs to indicate paved parking areas

While nothing changed really changed as we crossed the border that was marked by a 50-foot swath cut through the woods, the Alaska side seemed emptier and less vast than the Canadian side. Still Donna said it best, "just more unbelievably beautiful scenery!"

Delta Junctions was the "official" end of the Alaska Highway, so we stopped and took some photos at a Milestone 1422. We had driven the Highway, and now we could think about going home, but we didn't.

About 2:30 pm we entered the legendary Fairbanks, and I was struck by its similarity to DuBois. Perhaps, it would look better in the winter (covered with two feet of snow and 22-hours of darkness). After driving around the University of Alaska's beautiful campus, we checked into the SpringHill Suites which seemed to be in the middle of the downtown, such as it was.

We had a lovely suite, and the guests' laundry was right across from the hot tub/pool area. I soaked in the hot tub and thought about our stop at Liard Hot Springs, while Donna jumped in and out of the hot tub as she washed and dried our laundry. I love that woman.

We dined at Lavelle's Bistro (the hotel TV said it was the best in Fairbanks and it was conveniently attached to the hotel), and our waiter, Sheriff from Mount Vernon, NY, regaled us with stories of his 12 winters in Fairbanks. We ordered a dozen Alaska oysters on the half-shell and a bottle of "Killer Cab" from Whitman's Winery in Walla Walla, Washington. The soup du jour was broccoli ginger with too much ginger for me, but Donna thought it was great. As entrees, Donna had the Potato Encrusted Salmon (very good), and I had the Fresh Halibut Olympia which was "baked halibut topped off with a three-cheese blend and served with pan fried potatoes and vegetables." The cheese blend over-whelmed the halibut, but I ate the whole thing.

For dessert, we had Roederer Champaign. As we checked out and prepared to leave the restaurant, the hostess caught us at the door and said that because we had two full glasses of Champaign in our hands that she had to escort us to the elevators. "It's a state law," she explained. What a state.

Friend Four has sent me the thoughtful responses to Bill's Questions that are in today's Exhibit.

Donna's blog and feminine voice is at: [alcanorbust.blogspot.com](http://alcanorbust.blogspot.com)

### **Donna's Blog Comments:**

#### **WE MADE IT**

We made it all 1500 miles of the Alcan Highway. We arrived on Sunday afternoon so everything in Delta Junction was closed and very quiet. We took our pictures and drove on to Fairbanks.

Fairbanks was quiet too. We checked into Marriott Springhill suites. It wasn't easy but we found a place for lunch. It was more bar food because most places were "closed for the season" on Sundays. After lunch I did laundry, and we swam in the pool and took a hot tub at the hotel. We needed some down after 10 days of driving and the 1202 last night.

We had a great dinner at the restaurant in the hotel.

Summary thoughts:

The scenery was spectacular with wide vistas similar to driving the Skyline Drive in Virginia except for the huge mountains often seen in the distance.

Canada vs. US: Canada highway feels more remote with few signs of civilization. In Alaska there are green highway mile makers every mile, highway signs marking parking areas and scenic turnarounds. There are mailboxes and driveway entrance often, but at least no houses are visible. The lines are painted on both sides of the road as well as down the middle,

Broadband coverage is sketchy, and when we do have it on the road, it is very slowwwwwww. It is hardly worth using but glad to have it especially when looking for hotel rooms. We have had wireless every night no matter the quality of the room even at the 1202.

The food has been adequate except for the two great dinners in Whitehorse and Edmonton. Mostly we've had truck stop food: home cooking, fried chicken and fries, macaroni, pizza. It was impossible to avoid sugar and gluten, and impossible to get vegetables. Pastries are available everywhere, lots of cinnamon rolls. Maybe they need a lot of sugar to keep warm up here in Canada. The coffee is good, not too strong and there is alcohol available everywhere even whiskey, scotch and rum behind the desk of the 1202, although the wine selection usually isn't much more than red or white.

Still not much exercise. The only exercise I get is hoisting myself up and into the truck or lifting Dan's computer from his seatback while sitting in the passenger's seat. Good news though - nothing hurts!

Driving does not seem taxing, but we are tired at the end of the day.

Tripadvisor.com: my advisor for hotel selection



**Pictures:**



Day 11 Picture 1. Roller Coaster Roads ..... No Kidding!



Day 11 Picture 2. A.R.T. takes a break next to the Welcome Sign



Day 11 Picture 3. US – Canada Border  
(Longest, Peaceful National Border in the World)



Day 11 Picture 4. Still a Lot of Driving To Do



Day 11 Picture 5. Mile Marker 1422 the Official End of the Original Alcan Highway



Day 11 Picture 6. Three Pipelines Go Through Delta Junction  
(Top: Canola – 3”, Middle: Haines-Fairbanks – 8”, Bottom: Alyeska – 48’)



**Exhibit:**

Friend Four Responses to Bill's Questions

1. What were the defining influences of your life before graduation from high school?  
My two brothers: one's level of excellence and one's tenacity overcoming his car wreck. Wrestlers. My parents: pushing us and demanding civility, kindness, and politeness from three active boys.

2. What have been the defining influences of your life since high school graduation?  
My college wrestling coach who showed no mercy my first two years in college. Whispering in my ear on the wrestling mat as I was being controlled in the wrestling room by a kid who had no business doing such, "Friend Four, you better do a lot of thinking!!!". He took me from a cocky high school kid to a person with some maturity, growth and humility.

My wife: this beautiful and angelic girl who actually loved me in college, was a math major and kept showing up. She helped me overcome a huge math handicap.

3. What have been the defining experiences of your life since graduation from high school?  
Sobriety: realizing that alcohol was not my best friend but in fact was destroying me.

4. How have your beliefs about the purpose of your life changed since graduation from high school?  
Helping others.

5. What is most important to you in living your life?  
Not ever giving up, realizing that many are counting on your leadership, hope...my spirituality and faith that God is in control ..... not me.

6. What do you see as the major changes in our culture [the shared mores, morals, ideals, standards and beliefs...the way we live] since your high school graduation?  
I can't understand any of it and don't have answers to the anger I see: a lack of patience and tolerance of other's ideas.

7. In what ways have you changed as a person since high school graduation?  
Since high school I have gotten over 40 years older. Having gone to two high school reunions in the last month, I can see that none of us have changed much. Some seem more content; some seem beat up; some have had children die, but still are able to laugh, and to be light and playful.

## DAY 12: Monday, September 14, 2009

### Box Score:

Day Twelve	Date: September 14, 2009
From: Fairbanks, Alaska	To: Anchorage, Alaska
Miles Driven: 438	Hours Driven: 9.5
Lodging: Spring Hill Suites	Cost per Night: \$178.08
Dinner: Simon & Seafort's (\$140.00)	

### Dan's E-mail Notes:

Ironically we were traveling the same highway as Chris McCandless did in Jon Krakauer's book, *Into The Wild*,<sup>21</sup> as we headed south to Anchorage on the Park Highway. We had been listening to the recorded book version, which reported that Chris went off into the forests of Alaska to have a wilderness experience to discover the meaning of life. Chris had constructed rules for himself so his subsistence exercise would be real and meaningful. Unfortunately in this true-life story, Chris starved to death three months later. With this in mind, we both oomed and awed about the views on both sides of the ridge road that was also known as Alaska Route 3.

Taking a break from the gruesome McCandless story, we decided to play a game where neither one of us would use the words "beautiful, spectacular, awesome, or breath-taking" to describe what we were looking at. After sitting in silence for twenty minutes, I suggested we quit playing this game. Donna immediately agreed. "Beautiful," I said. "Spectacular!" she smiled.

As we approached the entrance to Denali National Park, there were new, giant, log structures on the right side that included a grand hotel, conference center, restaurant, and bar with liquor sales. In front of these buildings were parked 30-40 tour buses. On the left side of the highway were several hundred tourists visiting dozens of little gift shops, cafes, and offices for every imaginable kind of tour to discover the real Denali. I started to think of Chris again and became somewhat miffed as these people were impinging on my own private Alaska experience.

We took the Denali park road far enough to see Mount McKinley that glowed brightly on this clear and sunny afternoon. At the "permit required beyond this point" point, we turned around and drove south to Anchorage. Almost the entire way, we could see Mount McKinley shining in our rear view mirrors.

As we drove along, I told Donna that I was getting more comfortable with just why we are taking this trip. "Just why are we taking this trip," she asked backed. I told her I didn't know why, but I was getting more comfortable with it. There seemed to be a visceral and spiritual side to this verification tour. Quite frankly, the mountains, valleys,

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<sup>21</sup> Citation 15.

and roads looked just like they did in the Alaska Magazine pictures<sup>22</sup>, but somehow they felt different.

At the outskirts of Anchorage, Donna brought Little-Miss-Know-It-All back into our lives as she programmed the address of the SpringHill Suites into the GPS.

"Recalculating ..... Continue on for 35 miles," she said as we passed Wassila, and I waived to the memory of Sarah Palin.

I've got to give here credit though Little-Miss-Know-It-All delivered us right to the front door of the SpringHill Suites. Unfortunately we did not make reservations, and there were no vacancies. The nice young man at the desk checked with the other SpringHill Suites in Anchorage, and said "Lots of room there. Just go out here, go to 36<sup>th</sup> or 34th streets, turn this way, and you'll hit it in six miles." He also gave me a Map Quest printout and said, "This is wrong so just go the way I told you." In only 15 minutes of following my new friend's directions, I had us hopelessly lost in one of the few "bad neighborhoods" of Anchorage. "Who lives here" was Donna's only comment. Frustrated, I pulled out the Map Quest directions and in only ten more minutes, I had us passing the Anchorage International Airport and heading out of town. Meanwhile Little-Miss-Know-It-All has been continuously saying "recalculating..... turn left now."

Just before, she bit through her lip, Donna suggested, "I think she (referring to Little-Miss-Know-It-All) knows what she is talking about." So I pouted, followed her directions, and stopped one-block away from our original SpringHill Suites location." "She's crazy," I exclaimed and dug out the 2010 US Highway Atlas' map of downtown Anchorage. I studied the map intently, and then discovered the horrible truth. I was wrong, and Little-Miss-Know-It-All was right, again. Ten minutes later we were checking into SpringHill Suites at the University Lake Drive location (about 7:00 pm).

Donna found a great seafood restaurant, Simon & Seafoods, with great views of Cook Inlet at 420 L Street. Donna wanted to drive since I had consumed a cold alcoholic beverage in the hotel room. I readily agreed provided I could navigate with out the help of Little-Miss-Know-It-All. As we got in the truck, Donna said, "We really should get up early in the morning and get started so we arrive at our destination earlier." "What?" I asked in disbelief. I wondered who was posing as my wife. My real wife's idea of early was just after nine am. My real wife didn't like to talk for at least an hour after that, and she couldn't think about food until she had a pot of coffee. We have always been a perfect example of "owls marrying larks" and vice versa. This person beside me seemed oblivious to 35 years of our un-shared experiences in the morning. I like to get up early, eat a big breakfast, and attack the day going full throttle. In all fairness, I hit the wall earlier in the evening and fall asleep in mid-sentence during the 11:00 o'clock news. (That's why I don't drink red wine at night. Those nasty stains on my shirts are so hard to get out.) Donna repeated her suggestion of rising early and hitting the road at sunrise. "Whatever," was all I could say.

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<sup>22</sup> See citation 1. in Selected References.

Except for a couple “loop-d-loops” to adjust for one-way traffic and road construction, I expertly navigated us to 420 L Street that turned out to be a completely black and apparently closed office building. I had Donna double-park, as I went into the building to check out the situation. Could I be this wrong twice in two hours? No! At the back of the lobby was the entrance to Simon& Seaforts. I made a reservation for two, and went out to park the truck.

Our window table had “magnificent” view of Cooks Inlet and the western mountains below which we watched as the sun fell into a glowing sunset. Our waiter Eric, asked us where we were from, and then told us even though he was Seahawks fan; he really liked the Pittsburgh Steelers. He went on to give us a complete update on Palomalo’s injured knee. He brought over another waitress who he said was from Pittsburgh. She introduced herself as Ryan Plummer from Clarion, Pennsylvania (30 miles west of DuBois), a 1997 graduate of Clarion-Limestone, and the daughter of Dan Plummer a masonry contractor from Clarion. No doubt he was a customer of my brothers as the Kohlhepps have manufactured concrete blocks since 1925.

For dinner, we started with a Riesling from Chateau St. Michele’s in Washington and a seafood cocktail that had crab and shrimp in a bloody Mary mix on top of an avocado salsa. Donna had a New England clam chowder (which was really good even though geographically inappropriate), and I had a berry salad with crumbled Maytag bleu cheese and sweet berry vinaigrette. Donna’s entrée was silver salmon broiled with garlic and butter, and I had a hybrid meal that was one-half stuffed halibut and one-half halibut cheek, which was a unique sweet meet that had a stringy texture. We shared every part of this really great meal.

When we told Eric that we were going to Seward tomorrow, he lit up and told us that last summer he was a tour bus guide for the Anchorage to Seward trip. He brought out maps, and outlined a three-day itinerary for us. Both Eric and Ryan warned that the Seward Highway was the most treacherous road in Alaska. “Please be careful,” they said. (As though I was planning on being careless?)

### **Donna’s Blog Comments:**

#### **IT HAD TO HAPPEN**

We took our time getting out of Fairbanks so it was later than we hoped when we got into Anchorage. We tried to check into our chosen hotel but it was full. The young man behind the desk recommended another place and told us a short cut to get there. Well we quickly ran in to one-way streets and dead ends. We were all over the place, thru crowded neighborhoods, round in circles. I tried to hook up the GPS, but of course, according to Dan, “it was wrong but never in doubt” (turns out it was correct once I got it programmed right.) We finally arrived at the hotel and checked in. Now for dinner. We were starved. I found a place in one of the guidebooks that looked good. After driving another 15 minutes we arrived only to find it out of business. Second choice, a seafood place downtown. It was after 8 PM when we got there, but it was great. The seafood was tasty and the view of the mountains was beautiful.

Then at 4 AM it started. I had what I was hoping was food poisoning. It turned out to be a long night so we decided to stay in Anchorage for another day with my bottle of coke and Pepto-Bismol. After, all of the junk and unhealthy food we have eaten, and I get sick from a one good meal. Not fair. I guess this will be my weight loss program.

**Pictures:**



Day 12 Picture 1. Mount McKinley on a beautiful clear day.



Day 12 Picture 2. Dan at Denali National Park  
(Mount McKinley is just to the left of the red pole.)

**DAY 13: Tuesday, September 15, 2009**  
**(Official end of the tourist season)**

**Box Score:**

Day Thirteen	Date: September 15, 2009
From: Anchorage, AK To: Whittier, AK. Back To: Anchorage, AK	
Miles Driven: 137	Hours Driven: 5
Lodging: Spring Hill Suites	Cost per Night: \$110.88
Dinner: Ate in the hotel room (\$16.50)	

**Dan's E-mail Notes:**

About 4:00 am this morning, Donna got violently ill. My brother would call it a "touch of Salmonella." As I lay in bed listening to her retch, I regretted sharing her meal last night (I might be next) and not getting separate rooms. Several hours later, Donna was exhausted, and I went to the hotel restaurant to eat a hardy breakfast. When I returned, Donna lay inert, so in my best bedside manner, I asked if I could get her anything. She moaned, "A Coke and Pepto-Bismol." The Coke as no problem, but the Pepto-Bismol took an hour, as I once again got lost in Anchorage

Donna still hadn't moved when I returned, so after setting the Coke and Pepto on the bed stand, I decided to take a quick side trip to see Seward as that was the town where Peter Jenkins had headquartered when he researched *Looking For Alaska*.<sup>23</sup>

Carefully, driving south on the dangerous Seward Highway (thank-you Eric and Ryan), I realized the Seward wasn't a quick half-day side trip so I changed my destination to Whittier where the ferryboats landed. In an hour, I was paying a \$12.00 toll for the road to Whittier. It turns out that the toll was for a 2.5-mile, one-lane tunnel. The toll taker said, "Westbound cars at the top of the hour; eastbound cars at the bottom of the hour, and trains in between."

As I drove slowly through the tunnel, I missed my traveling companion. This little, narrow, dark tunnel would have freaked-out Donna. Without her to calm down, I realized how creepy this tunnel really was. At the end of the tunnel, Whittier suddenly appeared along with the sign, "Welcome to Prince William Sound." Whittier consisted of a railhead, a hotel, a marina, several small shops and cafes, and the Alaska Ferry Terminal.

As I entered the ferry terminal, I spotted the service desk with two Alaska-looking guys behind it so I inquired, "I just drove here from Pennsylvania, and I'd like to take the ferry back to Seattle."

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<sup>23</sup> Citation 14.

“Next ferry that can get you there through Prince Rupert comes on September 23<sup>rd</sup>”, said Guy One, and Guy Two announced, “There’s no room on it for cars. Been sold out for two months.” Guy One confirmed, “It’s the last ferry of the season since they’re putting it in dry dock for repairs at the end of the trip.”

“Looks like I’m driving back to Pennsylvania,” I proffered, and in one voice both guys said, “yup.”

Driving back to Anchorage, I reconciled myself to the fact that I was at the halfway point and heading home with a pick-up truck full of unused equipment that I inventoried in my mind:

- Sleeping bags and mattresses,
- Tent,
- Cooking stove and cooking equipment,
- Folding table,
- Freeze-dried food,
- Extra wiper blades,
- Front left headlight assembly,
- Flairs and emergency reflectors,
- Peak battery charger and tire inflator,
- AC coffee maker with an insulated pot,
- Bug shirts and bug repellant smoker,
- First aid kit,
- Tool box and ratchet set,
- Knee-high, water-proof boots,
- Winter coats and long underwear,
- One-gallon, plastic gas can,
- Two camo folding chairs,
- Bruce’s tent heater,
- Six bottles of propane gas, and
- Two spinning rods and a tackle box.

I may have over-done the “Better-To-Have-it-And-Not-Need-It-Than-To-Need-It-And – Not-Have-It” Rule in my contingency planning.

Back at the hotel room, Donna was still asleep in bed, but she was wearing my blue, Browning outdoor shirt and was running a high temperature.

For dinner, I got Donna another Coke, and I micro-waved a pasta dinner for myself, a Lean Cuisine Swedish meatballs (350 calories). I also enjoyed a bottle of cabernet sauvignon from the Jackson-Trigg Winery in British Columbia.

As I turned of the lights, I considered asking Donna if she wanted to get up early in the morning. I re-considered, and dismissed it. This was no the time for ironic humor ..... all things considered!



**Donna's Blog Comments:**

**ON OUR WAY BACK**

I spent the whole day Tuesday with a fever sleeping in our hotel room. Even housekeeping didn't come by. Dan went off to Seward but only made it as far as Whittier. Turned out to be a lot farther than he thought. I was still sleeping when he got back.

## DAY 14: Wednesday, September 16, 2009

### Box Score:

Day Fourteen	Date: September 16, 2009
From: Anchorage, AK To: Seward, AK. Back To: Sutton, AK	
Miles Driven: 392	Hours Driven: 10.25
Lodging: Sheep Mountain Lodge	Cost per Night: \$198.50
Dinner: Ate in the cabin (\$7.50)	

### Dan's E-mail Notes:

Today ended completely different than it started out. Donna's fever was gone, and she appeared to be game as she said, "I can sleep in the truck as easily as I can sleep in this bed." That's all I need to hear.

I loaded the truck, poured Donna in the passenger side, and did a quick loop of the campuses of the University of Alaska - Anchorage and the Alaska Pacific University. Heading west on 36<sup>th</sup> Street toward the Seward Highway, I asked Donna if she wanted to go north to Fairbanks or south to Seward. "I'm too tired to make a decision," she moaned.

"You just have to see the Kenai Peninsula. It's amazing," I said.

"It's Alaska's most dangerous highway," she smiled pitifully. I turned south on Seward Highway and left sunny and clear Anchorage for the cloudy, foggy and raining Kenai.

At the road to Whittier, I turned off to show Donna the "fish viewing area" that our waiter Eric, I had told us about and marked on our map. A wooden deck was cantilevered over a little, shallow stream about 15 feet wide that was just full of two to three foot spawning salmon (like a hundred or so!). I had read about this, but I had never seen it in real life.

Through the fog and drizzle, we saw mountains, glaciers, rushing streams, and bald eagles. Somehow this is what I thought Alaska would look like.

At Seward, we drove to Lowell Point that was to be the official "turn around" point for our trip. I checked our odometer and did the quick math. We had driven 3503 miles since we left DuBois on September 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Eric said, "Everybody eats at Ray's in Seward," so we did too. I had a salmon-halibut-and spinach cream soup (which was to die for) and a prime rib sandwich. Poor Donna just pushed some fried halibut around on her plate and ate a couple French fries. We walked one block in the historic downtown, and Donna was pooped.

Donna slept as I drive back north, but I woke her at the Alaskan Wildlife Conservation Center that Eric had said that we had to see. It was pretty neat as we viewed bison,

muskoxen, brown and black bears, elk, caribou, and moose from the comfort of our truck as the rain poured down. Mallard ducks were dive-bombing into the fields to eat the corn that had been put out for the moose, (and I started to think about mallards diving into JAKS Duck Farm's pond next month in Pennsylvania).

After her nap, Donna was a lot more chipper and suggested that we drive through Anchorage to Palmer since we were going to take the Glen Highway to Tok the next morning. When we got to Palmer, Donna wanted to press on to Glenallen which was only "an hour away" "Listen to this," she said reading out of the MILEPOST guide book, "'View the glacier and Dall sheep from your bed,' there are three great lodges there." I hesitated since I was beat, and it was a ready 5:30 pm.

"Here's the deal," she said, 'I'll drive and you can drink one of your beers in the cooler.' The woman knew my weak spot, and I readily agreed.

As Donna drove, the rode got bumpier, narrower, and twistier and climbed upward constantly. Her speed dropped to 35 miles per hour, and roadside signs said 125 miles to Glenallen. (Little-Miss-Know-It-All agreed too.) We had made a big mistake. We wouldn't get to Glenallen until 10:00 o'clock, nothing would be open, and I would have to pitch a tent along the road in the middle of the night. My anxiety turned to semi-panic as the coming ordeal played out in my mind.

Meanwhile, the setting sun and clear skies provided us with a spectacular light show. The aspen-covered valley far below had a brilliant golden glow while the Mantunuska Glacier and snow-capped mountains beamed bright white. It was the kind of scene that would speak to the heart of a poet or artist, but for me, it only confirmed that it was getting darker and colder outside. Finally, I got out the guidebook and started to look for Plan B.

I found the Sheep Mountain Lodge that was only 19 miles ahead, and then I found two more lodges that were 23 miles ahead. When I told Donna that we might be all right, she said, "That's what I was telling you about!" (I know she said Glenallen, but I didn't argue since I was grateful not to sleeping in a tent tonight.)

The Sheep Mountain Lodge was dark when we pulled in, but there was light on and a note below the Lodge Closed sign. "If you want a cabin, go in the door and take a key. It's the honor system." I went inside and sure enough there were two key and check-in forms, Cabin 2 was \$129 per night and Cabin 7 was \$189 per night. When I reported back to Donna who was waiting in the truck, she wanted to go to the next lodge just four miles ahead.

The Tundra Rose Guest Lodge was closed for the season, and the Majestic Valley Wilderness Lodge had "no vacancy" permanently screwed into its sign. I was starting to panic again. "Let's go back to the Sheep Mountain Lodge," Donna said optimistically, and I told her that it was probably sold-out by now as I prepared myself for the worst.

Luckily, Sheep Mountain's honor system still had Cabins 2 and 7 available. We checked out Cabin 2. When Donna said, "What do you think?" I thought of the old Henny Youngman joke, ("How's your wife? Compared to what!") when I replied, "Its better than camping." When we went down to the Lodge vestibule to complete our check-in form, Donna took the key to Cabin 7 just to check it out. As I wrote down our license plate number, Donna called out, "this is bee-you-tee-full!" I called out, "we don't need two bedrooms," and she yelled back it was "only one-bedroom and all brand new!" "We'll take it," I called, and again I thought of the Henny Youngman joke.

We unloaded our stuff into Cabin 7. It was clean, neat, and new, and I'm sure the view would be terrific in the morning when the sun came up again. There was no TV, no radio, and no food, but there was a kitchen and a coffee maker with one packet of coffee. We did have lots of beer and wine, and I remembered the Mountain Lodge dehydrated meals in the camping supplies.

Donna boiled the water, and I dug out the Chicken Stew and read the directions:

1. Boil two cups of water
2. Pour water in pouch
3. Reseal pouch and let sit 8-10 minutes
4. You can eat it right out of the pouch.

We followed steps 1, 2, and 3 and ate the stew out of the bowls that were in the fully furnished but foodless kitchen. We enjoyed a bottle of Jacob Creek Shiraz/Cabernet Blend from Australia with the stew and a bottle of Domain Ste Michelle's Brut Sparkling Wine for dessert. Life was good.

The owner Zack Steer knocked on our door, took my credit card and chatted us up. This was the last week of moose season, and he and his six-year old son had been out scouting a big moose for tomorrow. He was training 34 Alaskan huskies in his kennel. He'd run the Iditarod and the Yukon Quest two years ago and would run them both again this year.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, we were free to use the hot tub that was just on the other side of the Lodge. And yes, this might be a good night for the northern lights (clear and cold you know).

We went to bed.

### **Donna's Comments:**

#### **HOW THINGS CHANGE**

Wednesday morning I was feeling better but still a little weak and worn out. I did manage a shower but opted to skip breakfast and have Pepto-Bismol instead, just incase. We headed out to travel north but changed our minds agreeing that we should go to Seward, our furthest south destination. The drive again was spectacular (we keep saying we need a bigger descriptive vocabulary), grand mountains, beautiful water, colorful trees, a black wolf walking thru the water and an elk wandering among the trees. We also stopped at a conservation wildlife center and saw bison, elk, black and grizzly bears,

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<sup>24</sup> For a nice write-up on Zack go to [www.itidarod.com](http://www.itidarod.com) and [www.yukonquest.com](http://www.yukonquest.com).

muskoxen, and caribou. We also stopped along a stream to watch the salmon spawning. It was amazing, dozens and dozens of large fish looking almost still just below the surface of the water. Seward is a cute little town with gift shops, bars and even a yarn shop. We had lunch at Rays at the harbor. We drove all of the way to the end of the road, Lowell Point. We stopped, took pictures and reset our trip mileage odometer. We are now officially on our way back.

I thought we had made it, and it was just a matter of getting back. We even discussed whether we had over prepared with camping gear including dehydrated food. But, how things change. Because everything had gone so well and we had such good weather, we were ahead of Dan's schedule so he decided we should take a different route home by way of Dawson City, YT.

We took turns driving and sleeping on the way back to Anchorage from Seward. It was 5:45 PM when we got back and decided to drive on. An hour later we were in Palmer, AK a very, very small town. We decided not to even look for a hotel there but to keep driving. I kept reading the MILEPOST guide to check for accommodations along the way. I found three possibilities along the Glenn Highway that sounded very nice, "great views, romantic settings." The one ad read, "just a little over two hours from Anchorage on the road to Glenallen". The road was bumpy, scary at times with hairpin turns on the edge of the mountains. We couldn't make good time. We saw road signs giving mileage to Glenallen way beyond a two-hour drive. We, especially Dan, became concerned. I said not to worry; I could drive all night if I had to. Dan checked the Milepost Guide again and found that the three places I was looking at were not, in fact, in Glenallen but between mile makers 109 and 114, more like the two hour driving distance. We finally arrived at the mile markers. Two of the cabin accommodations were closed for the season. One was open on the "the honor system." Two keys were laid out with a note asking for identification and driver license information. Dan handed me the key to Cabin 7, the cheaper of the two, for me to check out. When I went in I had an uneasy feeling, old, worn out, and dark, more of what I had expected along the Alaska Highway. I asked Dan for the other key and he said, "It is \$60 more. Just bigger." I insisted. It looked a whole lot newer to me from the outside. I took the key and went in. It was lovely. Everything was brand new, two queen beds, built-in table with 4 chairs, full kitchen including pots and pans, dishes, even wine glasses, and yes, a coffee pot along with one package of coffee. I told Dan it was worth the extra money. We took Cabin 2. Just one more small problem. The restaurant was closed for the season. There was no food available in the area. We had to resort to our dehydrated chicken dinner! And, for the first time we had no cell phone, no Internet, no TV. Around 9:00 PM the lodge owner knocked on the door, welcomed us to the Sheep Mountain Lodge, and asked for a credit card. We thanked him and told him we were glad to be there.

**Pictures:**



Day 14 Picture 1. Lowell Point, AK, the halfway point on our trip.



Day 14 Picture 2. Housing at Lowell Point, AK  
(Great View of the Prince William Sound)



Day 14 Picture 3. From Glen Highway looking south at the Mantanuska Glacier

## DAY 15: Thursday, September 17, 2009

### Box Score:

Day Fifteen	Date: September 17, 2009
From: Sutton, AK	To: Dawson City, Yukon
Miles Driven: 407	Hours Driven: 10 hours
Lodging: Yukon Hotel	Cost per Night: \$114.45
Dinner: Eldorado Hotel (\$48.95)	

### Dan's E-mail Comments:

I made coffee in Cabin 7 at the Sheep Mountain Lodge very carefully because I knew it was the only "food" we would have for a couple hours, and I didn't want to screw it up. As we clutched our coffee mugs and looked out the window, the view of Sheep Mountain was amazing, but I could not find any sheep with my 12X40 Cabelas' Binoculars. However, we did glimpse a slice of Alaskan domesticity as Zack Steer walked his six-year old son to the bus stop for school. "What would a 'snow day' be like at Sheep Mountain be like," Donna wondered out loud.

I went down to the dog kennels early to find Jake, Zack's mushing partner, cleaning out the kennel with an Alaska-size pooper-scooper. The kennel was about an enclosed half-acre with each dog chained to a large metal pole next to a wooden doghouse. The dogs were leggy-looking Alaskan huskies that Zack, Jake, and their partner in Anchorage had bred especially for endurance races.

Donna joined me as Zack joined Jake in the kennel to assemble the dog teams for their morning run. It was pandemonium as the dogs barked "Pick-me! Pick-me" except for Ruby who sat quietly on top of her doghouse and held her head high like the Husky princess she was. Once assembled into a 17-dog team chained to a four-wheeler, Jake opened the eight-foot double doors on the kennel and told us, "Stay back. They'll be coming right though here." They did. As soon as he un-chained the lead dog, the surging team took off with Zack standing on the pegs of his four-wheeler.

Jake said that when Zack came back in an hour, he would take out the other dogs for their run. They were just starting the training for the season so the long-legged and lean dogs would be getting leaner as they got in shape for the winter dog sled season. He had run the Iditarod and the Yukon Quest last year so it was Zack's turn to race the dogs this year. Both races were over 1,000 miles. Jake said the Iditarod reached 140 degrees below zero and the longest he had raced the dogs non-stop was 15 hours. (I made a mental note to Goggle-up the Iditarod when I got home to verify these facts.)<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> It turns out that these guys are the real thing! Check out their impressive biographies at [www.iditarod.com](http://www.iditarod.com) and [www.yukonquest.com](http://www.yukonquest.com).



Jake also said that today was the last day of moose season, and they had located a “really big buck” last night to shoot today. “No problem if we don’t get one though, since we’re on the ‘moose road-kill’ list, we can have any moose that is hit by a car within a mile of the Lodge,” he explained. “Are one of these buildings a giant walk-in freezer?” I asked pointing to several outbuildings. “This is a giant freezer,” Jake said pointing to the all the land around us. When I asked about the bears eating the moose meat, Jake patiently explained, “They hibernate.” (I knew that.)

We left about 9:30 am, and I drove to toward Glenallen. But we had to stop in 30 miles to meet Matt and Sally Catskill who were field dressing a moose on the side of the road. “I’ve got the gun out (pointing to his 45 caliber pistol sitting on the tailgate of the truck) because the state trooper said that the mother moose was still in the area since it probably wouldn’t leave a little calf like this.”

“Little calf?” I thought. This animal was the size of a small horse! I’ve field dressed dozens of whitetail deer, but I had never seen a gut pile as big as the one that was coming out of this “little calf.” It must have been three cubic yards!

Matt went on, “this is sure a lot easier to get one like this than to drag one out of the woods.” At that point I realized that this was a road kill moose. No doubt, some poor guy had totaled his vehicle when he hit this “little calf.”

One moose hind leg was hooked to a bar in the back of the pick-up and Matt’s wife, Sally, was leaning into the other hind leg and casually said, “This sure saves a lot of bullets too!”

I congratulated them on their good fortune and assured them that I did not want to help. I took a couple of pictures so I wouldn’t forget this authentic Alaskan couple.

At Glenallen we stopped for breakfast at Caribou Hotel and had the misfortune to meet Sick Drama Waitress who came into the restaurant complaining loudly that her child was sick and that she shouldn’t have to work this shift because a co-worker didn’t show up. She was coughing and sneezing into her hand and then pulling my toast out of the toaster and arranging it neatly in my plate *without washing her hands!* Remembering that the Chicken Stew and Lean Cuisine were my last two meals, I ate everything I could and resolved not to get sick until I got back to DuBois.

Donna drove the rest of the way to Tok on a road that was both scenic and bumpy (darn that perma-frost anyway). At Tok, we refueled and I drove to Chicken, Alaska. Legend has it that the early gold rushers wanted to call it “ptarmigan,” because of all of the birds they found there, but no one could spell ptarmigan so they just called it “Chicken.”

The road sign said 65 miles to Chicken and 109 miles to the Canadian border. In 10 miles, the highway turned to gravel and then to mud as the rains enveloped us as we pressed on the Taylor Highway and then the Top-of-the-World Highway. If I had carefully read the map, I would have noticed that this unpaved *by-way* was “closed in the

winter.” On both sides of the by-way as far as we could see, the land was re-generating from a terrible forest fire in 2004.

At Chicken we stopped at the Chicken General Store and Gold Mining Company where we met Lou Busby, who with her husband had been operating the store and mine for 35 years. They lived in Homer, Alaska in the winter so their kids could go to school, and knew everyone’s favorite Alaskan comic, Tom Bodet.

She said that she had met Anne Hobbs Purdy who was the heroine in Robert Specht’s book *Tisha, The Story of a Young Teacher in the Alaska Wilderness*,<sup>26</sup> and that one of Anne’s granddaughters had stopped by last week. You see the book (which I just finished) is all about the people in Chicken, Alaska in 1927.

Lou’s store was quite nice, but she wanted to tell us all about her music festival, Chickenstock, that she has organized for the last three summers. This summer they had five live bands and over 200 spectators. This is amazing considering that the population of Chicken is 28 and the closest paved road is 40 miles away! (She also mentioned that her daughter Josey was making the arrangements for the Yukon Quest this year.)

Lou said that the Canadian Border Crossing (about 30 miles away) would not close until next Monday so we should be all right as long as we took it slow. That was an understatement. The Top-of-the-World Highway was muddy and slippery as the rain continued to fall. As we gained altitude the fog reduced visibility to 30 feet. At some points, the rain crossed the road like a stream. Did I mention that there were no guardrails, and that the road had 2000 foot drop-offs to the right and then to the left as we worked our way to the Border?

The Canadian border guard just asked us if we had any weapons and waived us on through. We were relieved that the Canadian road was paved, but our relief was tempered with the signs for “dangerous cross winds.” The pavement quickly turned to gravel, however, the road was much better than the US side, all things considered.

Navigator Donna realized that we had a small problem when she read that the only way to get to Dawson City was to cross the Yukon River in a ferryboat that only ran in the “Summer Months.” “What if it’s closed for the season?” she wondered. I assured her that it probably would not be closed since the border crossing was still open. If it were closed, it would only be for the night. Calmly, I explained that we would just sit in the truck drinking beer and wine until morning when I was sure the ferry would be back in operation. I wasn’t even going to try to pitch a tent in this weather.

Luckily, the ferryboat was running when we arrived in Dawson City at 8:30 Pacific Time with darkness falling and no hotel room. We stopped at Bombay Peggy’s (a former brothel), and got the bad news, no vacancy. Then we went to Aurora Hotel and saw the sign, “No vacancy,” and then we passed the Westmark Hotel, Klondike Kate’s, and the

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<sup>26</sup> Citation 26.

Downtown Hotels, which were all, closed for the season. Finally, I went into the Eldorado Hotel where the night clerk explained that the Eldorado owned a property two blocks away, the Yukon Hotel, that had a double room available, her last double. "We'll take it!" I exclaimed, without even checking with Donna. Remembering that Donna hadn't eaten for the past three days, I asked about the hotel restaurant. "It's open 'till 9:30 but you better hurry," was her advice.

The Yukon Hotel was built in 1898 and had been refurbished to accommodate modern conveniences. The room was adequate, not spacious, so we quickly unloaded and went for dinner. Donna had a plate of penne pasta with red sauce and a hint of chicken pieces, and I had a hamburger. The wine from Chile was a Concha y Tora "red". The food and wine were at least nourishing.

### **Donna's Blog Comments:**

#### **EXCITING DAY**

We started our day by watching our lodge owner, Zack, walk his son, who looked to be about six year old, down to the road to catch the school bus. Dan and I pondered about kids waiting for the bus and school closings out here when it gets to be 40 below.

Around 8:30 AM we went down to the dog kennels. Zack and his business partner Jake have 34 Alaskan huskies. They race in both the Iditarod and the Yukon Quest. It was 8:30 AM and the guys were hooking up 17 of the dogs to a cable that was attached to a 4 wheeler to take them out for training. It was exciting. There were 34 dogs yelping and howling, each dog wanting to be chosen.

By 9:30 we were on the road again off to drive the Taylor highway (without breakfast only coffee). There was more breath taking views with blindingly golden yellow trees framing the road and majestic mountains in the distance. We saw a lot of hunters on and long the side of the road. There were trucks and four wheelers everywhere. We also saw moose antlers strapped on to campers and trailers, and in one case there was a whole moose head.

By the time we got to Chicken it was raining steadily. Chicken is former gold mining town but is now a 3-business stop along the road. Only one of the businesses was still open. We stopped in for more coffee for Dan, and a coke for me. My stomach was still a little queasy and breakfast was hours ago and better just forgotten. The shop was very nice, very modern. Lots of upscale souvenirs, ice cream and healthy wraps and sandwiches. Not what one would expect in such a remote area. When Dan asked the shop owner about the road ahead she said it wouldn't be bad since most of the tourist traffic was gone so only hunters would be on the road. "There is some elevation so take it easy and you should be fine in a pickup truck," she added. "It is those big RVs that have problems." We briefly considered staying the night in one of her cabins but with her positive report about the road ahead and nothing to do there we decided to press on. Chicken is the beginning of the Top-of-the-World Highway. It quickly became obvious why it is called this. The views were spectacular almost overwhelming, but the road with hair pin turns, steep grades and quick drop offs with no guard rails made appreciating the views frightening. I had to cover my eyes at times. We finally made it

to the boarder crossing. Again we had misjudged how long the drive would take. I got out the MILEPOST guidebook to determine how much further we had. I began reading about the ferry to cross the Yukon River into Dawson. There is no bridge. "The ferry is a free boat ferry open in the summer." What did it mean by "summer"? The border crossing was still open and there is really nowhere else to go but Dawson City but we also knew that the last official day of the season was yesterday Sept 15. Also, it would be after 8 PM when we would get there at the rate we were going. What if it shut down early? Slight panic. We **had** to get to Dawson. It had the only gas available ahead. We might be able to make it back to Chicken but it was a treacherous drive and it would be getting dark. There were **no** facilities except a few rest stops and lookouts along the way. Camping along the side of the river in the rain and cold was looking like a real possibility, and not a pleasant one. Again, how things had changed. This was more of what we had expected of our Alcan trip but, in fact, the Alaska Highway was never this challenging. You can only imagine my relief when off in the distance we could see the Yukon River with a working ferry making the trip over to Dawson! We got on the ferry and got into Dawson around 8:30 PM.

The day wasn't over yet. We still had to find a room. We had not reserved a room ahead because we had had no phone or Internet service. Someone had recommended a place called Bombay Peggy's, a former brothel. We stopped there first but no vacancies. We drove by several other places but they were either closed for the season or full. We finally got the last room at the Yukon Hotel an annex of the Eldorado Hotel. The building looked like an old rooming house. It smelled like one too but the room was adequate. No ventilation but complete with a full kitchenette, TV and bathroom. We went back to the Eldorado dining room for another adequate dinner.

**Pictures:**



Day 15 Picture 1. Cabin 2 at the Sheep Mountain Lodge



Day 15 Picture 2. Zack and Jake attaching Dogs to 4-Wheeler



Day 15 Picture 3. Jake brings in the Big Dog to the Harness





Day 15 Picture 4. They're Off!



Day 15 Picture 5. They're Gone



Day 15 Picture 6. Matt and Sally field dress a moose calf road kill on the Glenn Highway





Day 15 Picture 7. Matt cuts and Sally supervises



Day 15 Picture 8. The Intersection of the Alaska Highway and the Taylor Highway (motel and restaurant in the background are "closed forever")



Day 15 Picture 9. Taylor Highway is open seasonally and beyond Milepost 64 is a gravel road. "Conditions range from good to poor."



Day 15 Picture 10. Beyond Milepost 64 going toward the border.



Day 15 Picture 11. Wildfires in '04 and '05 burned much of the spruce forest.

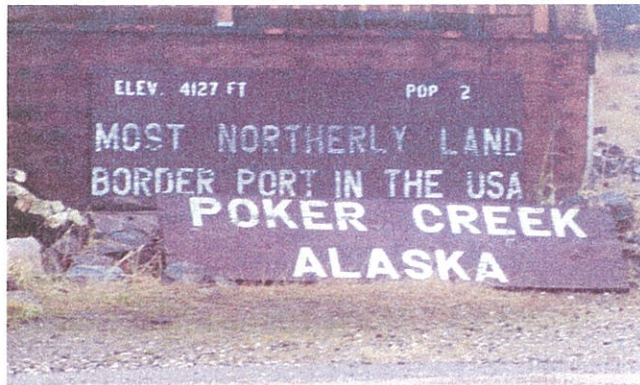


Day 15 Picture 12. Top of the World Highway between Chicken and the Canadian Border.

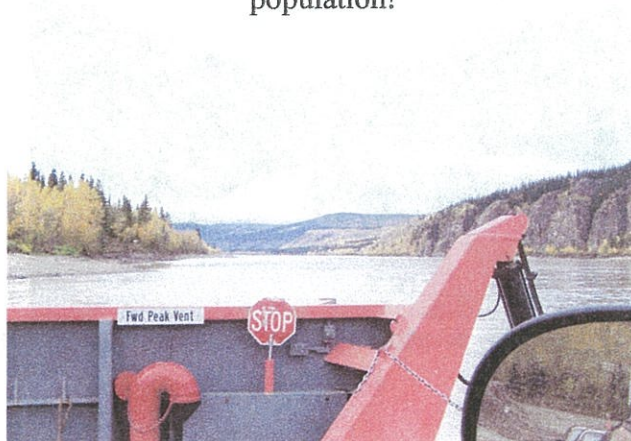




Day 15 Picture 13. Poker Creek border crossing “closed for the season” three days after this picture



Day 15 Picture 14. At Poker Creek we had a 15 second conversation with half of the population!



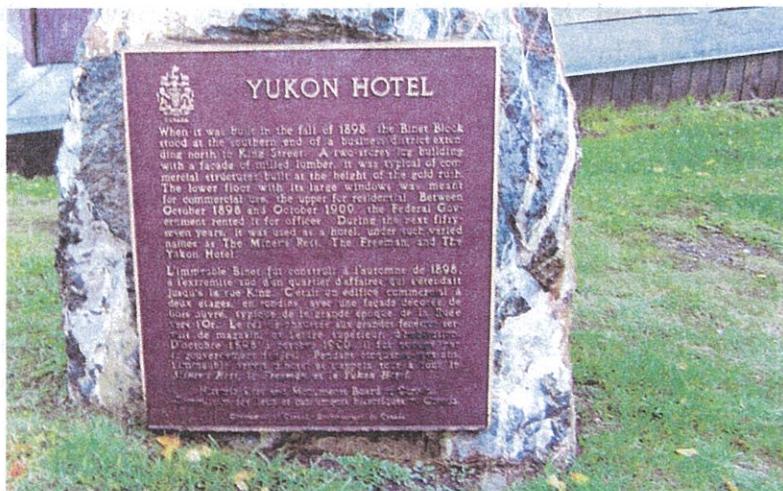
Day 15 Picture 15. Crossing the Yukon on the car ferry at Dawson City



Day 15 Picture 16. Dawson City at sunset as we cross the Yukon River.



Day 15. Picture 17. The Yukon Hotel was built in 1898, like the rest of Dawson City.



Day 15 Picture 18. The “historical marker” at the Yukon Hotel.

## DAY 16: Friday, September 18, 2009

### Box Score:

Day Sixteen	Date: September 18, 2009
From: Dawson City, Yukon	To: Whitehorse, Yukon
Miles Driven: 340	Hours Driven: 6
Lodging: Westmark Hotel	Cost per Night: \$177.45
Dinner: Edgewater Hotel's Cellar Steak House and Wine Bar (\$150.00)	

### Dan's E-mail Comments:

Today started out with a cold shower that started out as luke-warm shower in our cozy (tiny) double room in the Yukon Hotel in Dawson City, Yukon. Resolved to end today better than it started, we reserved the Queen Suite in the Westmark Hotel in Whitehorse (using the Internet since our cell phones haven't worked for five days). I promised Donna the best hotel and the best restaurant in Whitehorse.

Dawson City was like a movie set as the buildings were painted brightly in the 1898 style, although half of the buildings were already closed-up for the winter. The flood control project protecting the town from the Yukon River also eliminated any view of the river by pedestrians. The lady at the filling station wanted to tell me how well the Canadians and Alaskans got along. "We should form a country with Alaska, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories because we never fight and the we could keep all those mean people back East out. Where are you from?" she finally asked. "Back East" I said.

While driving the Yukon Highway to Whitehorse, I couldn't stop thinking about *Tisha*, "the true story of a young woman fighting for the children she loved and the man she wanted to marry." The entire story revolved around her refusal to keep "half-breed" children out of her one-room schoolhouse in Chicken, Alaska in 1927. The school was supposed to be for whites and "half-breeds" only (no Indians). However, the townspeople hated the half-breeds and wanted to send them to an Indian school in an Indian village. I know my Grandfather Kohlhepp had these kinds of prejudices, and I know my parents did not. Today, I don't know anyone who would verbalize the exclusion of American citizens of any race from our public schools, but there seems to be a lot of anxiety and personal hatred towards our President who would have been excluded categorically from the one-room schoolhouse in Chicken, Alaska in 1927. I'm looking forward to a post-racial America.

Meanwhile, the rain came and went as we sped along excellent roads to Whitehorse. I'm sure the first settlers and gold miners in the Yukon area could never conceive of today's roads, bridges, and trucks as well as America's bi-racial President!

I heard a national leader in the Green Building and Sustainable Development Movement give a speech in which he said that environmentalism, the rights of the indigenous peoples, and social justice were are the same issues. He said that you couldn't have one

without the other two. I'm not sure that I understand this, but I enjoy rolling these ideas around in my head as I drive along.

The Queen's suite was beautiful at the Westmark Hotel and Conference Center, and the first thing we did was sleep for several hours after we checked in.

It looked like the "best restaurant in town" was the Cellar Steakhouse and Wine Bar at the Edgewater Hotel. Our guess was confirmed as there were lots of dressed-up people celebrating birthdays, anniversaries, and getting rid of the tourists. Unfortunately the food was terrible. My salmon was tough and dry, and Donna's large prime rib was very forgettable. But today was ending better than it started since Donna's baked potato was good, and the Queen suite awaited us.

### **Donna's Blog Comments:**

#### **TAKING CLOSED FOR THE SEASON SERIOUSLY**

Dawson City looked like a Hollywood set for a cowboy movie about the gold rush days. There were freshly painted, perfect old storefronts with a few very, very old falling down original buildings. Our hotel was closer to the latter. We had breakfast at a new café with pastries and specialty coffees. We saw the whole town driving around in about 15 minutes before getting gas and hitting the road. The weather was cloudy and overcast, but the scenery still spectacular on our 6-hour drive back to Whitehorse.

We decided it was time again for a little R&R so we booked our room in Whitehorse at the Westmark Hotel and Conference Center and Steele Street Restaurant for two nights. We had dinner, nothing worth mentioning, at The Cellar down the block.



## DAY 17: Saturday, September 19, 2009

### Box Score:

Day Seventeen	Date: September 19, 2009
From: Whitehorse, Yukon	To: Skagway, AK Back To: Whitehorse, Yukon
Miles Driven: 225	Hours Driven: 8
Lodging: Westmark Hotel	Cost per Night: \$177.45
Lunch: Red Onion Saloon and Brothel, Skagway	(\$60.00)
Dinner: Westmark Cocktail Lounge	(\$63.00)

### Dan's E-mail Notes:

We decided to stay an extra day in the Queen Suite, and take a quick drive over to Skagway, Alaska which was only 112 miles away and was an important part of the construction of the Alaskan Highway in 1942 not to mention the Klondike Stampede in 1898. We lingered in our room long enough to be sure that Ohio State was beating Toledo and Penn State was beating Temple.

The South Klondike Highway was in great condition, but our trip was slowed by a "bear jam" as well as rain and heavy fog. The black bear on the side of the road entertained us for a while, but the fog reduced our uphill speed to 10 mph as we crossed the White Pass. We barely found the US Customs office at the border in the pea soup fog. Skagway was another movie set, as every other building was part of the Klondike Gold Rush National Park operated by the US National Parks Service. The non-park buildings were shops and restaurants that catered to the tourists that arrived daily on the cruise ships. Lucky for us, everything was on sale big time (50% to 70% off) since the last cruise ship was in port, and Sunday would be the end of the season for the town. The clerks were all talking about spending the winter in New York, Florida, San Francisco, Denver, or Anchorage, wherever they could get a job until next summer when they came back to Skagway.

We had lunch at the Red Onion Saloon and Brothel (established 1898) and then headed back over the mountain to Whitehorse and Pacific Time and the land of loonies. Just past the border crossing, a giant cow moose stood beside the road, up to her knees in water, and munching on something. She worked her way in front of us until she crossed the road, not 20 feet away.

In another 15 miles, we came upon a bear grazing cow-like on the side of the road. This was the biggest, fattest, and brownest black bear that I had ever seen. In only a few minutes, I convinced myself that this was in fact, an Alaskan Grizzly Bear and our lives were in mortal danger! The bear finally ambled into the woods, and I called out to an Alaskan-looking guy who had gotten out of his car. "What kind of bear was that?" I asked the longhaired, bearded, mountain man with crystal blue eyes.

"That was a black bear. Browns have a big ugly hump on top of their shoulders. Hey, are you from Ohio?" he said and pointed to my Ohio University tee shirt. "I'm from Euclid,

Ohio,” he announced and told us about his 32 years living in the Kenai Peninsula. Joe Hefley made a living installing solar water and septic systems at hunting and fishing lodges all over the Kenai. “I’ve enjoyed the best fishing the world,” he contended. “Better than Lake Erie?” I challenged. He rolled his eyes and wished us good luck on the rest of our trip.

Back at the Queen Suite, we toasted with a glass of wine, and put a load of laundry in the washer down the hall. When the laundry was dry, we went down to the Steele Street Grill and were told it closed at 9:00 pm. It was 9:03. The lounge was open so we ordered a couple of appetizers (teriyaki steak fingers and chicken quesadillas) and a carafe of “red” wine.

I’m starting to get into the Yukon way: lower expectations, start early, drink often, and go to bed early. We did.

My Friend Five just responded to “Bill’s Questions for the Class of ‘65”. As you can see in today’s Exhibit, she brings a different perspective to these questions.

### **Donna’s Blog Comments:**

#### **TAKING CLOSED FOR THE SEASON SERIOUSLY**

We slept in the next morning, caught up on our writing and calls before heading out on a day trip to Skagway. On the way we saw a black bear walking along the road. Our first stop in Skagway was the National Park Service center. We watched a filmstrip on the gold rush. It was very interesting. The hardships the people had to endure unbelievable, carrying 2000 pounds of supplies up ice stairways cut into the mountains. It is surprising that any one made it. However, many did but very few ever got rich.

Skagway is a tourist town for the cruise ships. There are a lot of souvenir and jewelry shops. All of the stores were having end of the season sales with 50% and 75% off signs in the windows. One shop owner told us the town would be closing tomorrow. “Closing” the whole town. Luckily we got there when we did. They are serious up here about closing for the season.

We stopped in one shop that carried musk ox yarn sweaters, and scarves, that were selling on sale for \$1000-2000, as well as, skeins of the yarn itself (not on sale). I bought a skein of the musk ox and silk blend and a pattern to make my own scarf. They say that musk ox is warmer and less irritating than wool. We had lunch at another old brothel, The Red Onion. On the way back we saw a huge cow moose on the side of the road. We stopped to take pictures, and it walked across the road right in front of us. A few miles later we saw another black bear grazing at the side of the road. We stopped along with several other cars. The guy in the car in front of us got out of his car, and Dan started a conversation with him. It turns out that although he has been in Alaska for 35 years, he was born and raised in Euclid Ohio.

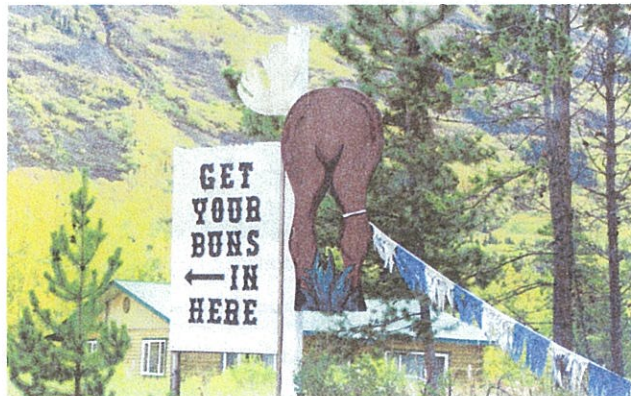
We weren't particularly hungry when we got back so I decide to take the time do you some laundry and work on my computer skills. Dan said no hurry the restaurant would be open until 9:30 PM. At 9:03 we went down to the dining room. When we got there, the sign read closed. The waitress told us that the restaurant closed at 9:00 PM now. The lounge was still open so we went in for a drink and appetizers. I am starting to really appreciate

***Closed for the Season.***

**Pictures:**



Day 17 Picture 1. Emerald Lake on the South Klondike Highway between Whitehorse, YT and Skagway, AK



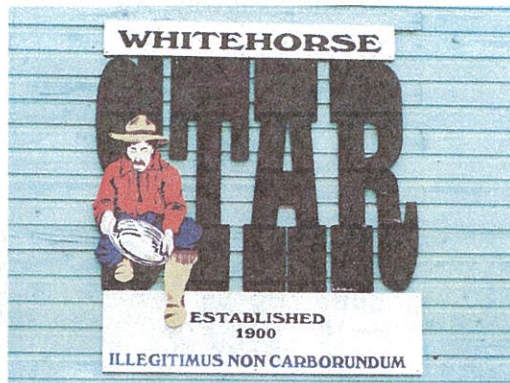
Day 17 Picture 2. A famous Dutch artist and his wife operate this café, campground, and horseback trail rides called Spirit Lake Wilderness Resort. We were the last customers of the season.



Day 17 Picture 3. Cow moose struts her stuff for our camera



Day 17 Picture 4. A black bear strikes a pose for us.



Day 17 Picture 5. A favorite bar with a favorite motto in Whitehorse, YT.

**Exhibit:**

**Friend Five Responses to Bill's Questions**

1. What were the defining influences of your life before graduation from high school?  
My church, my friendships, family
2. What have been the defining influences of your life since high school graduation?  
Primarily my spouse, and motherhood – both humbling and gratifying
3. What have been the defining experiences of your life since graduation from high school?  
Learning experiences– how to be a mom, wife, daughter, and businessperson, and cook.
4. How have your beliefs about the purpose of your life changed since graduation from high school?  
Pre graduation from h.s. I think it was all about what do I want and what will please me. Since, it evolves to what *should* I want and trying to make sure you stay on the right path.
5. What is most important to you in living your life?  
Sharing it with those I love, caring for them, and earning a place in next life
6. What do you see as the major changes in our culture [the shared mores, morals, ideals, standards and beliefs...the way we live] since your high school graduation?  
Greed has had too big a role; media attention is out of control on ridiculous people; hard to know now who to trust.
7. In what ways have you changed as a person since high school graduation?  
The western pa. girl is still there underneath the façade. But change does go on – fatter, smarter?, happier, fulfilled.



## DAY 18: Sunday, September 20, 2009

### Box Score:

Day Eighteen	Date: September 20, 2009
From: Whitehorse, Yukon	To: Watson Lake, Yukon
Miles Driven: 388	Hours Driven: 6
Lodging: A Nice Motel	Cost per Night: \$145.00
Dinner: Ate in the room (\$15.00)	

### Dan's E-mail Notes:

Last night I felt myself getting the cold that I vowed I wouldn't get until I got back to DuBois. We starting slowly and ate a hearty breakfast (feed a cold you know) at the Steele Street Grill at the Westmark Hotel. I started our drive to Watson Lake, YT, but my Sudafed and aspirin made me turn the driving over to Donna almost immediately. It was a cold, overcast, rainy, raw, and late October-like day that made me sleep for most of the trip.

This is the first time in the trip that we have actually covered the same road twice (except for 20 miles on the trip to Seward if you want to be technical). The traffic has been comparatively heavy since the Alaska Highway eastbound from Whitehorse collects all of the traffic to the Lower 48 from Fairbanks, Anchorage, and Skagway. Everyone is driving his/her rig back home since Alaska and the Yukon are rapidly becoming "closed for the season."

We stopped for gas and a late lunch at the Yukon Motel and Gift shop at the Teslin River Bridge. The owners, husband and wife, were a very engaging and delightful couple. She whistled as she served us our lunch. I commented that she seemed very happy, and Donna, always the public health nurse, said, "She's blowing on all of the food" I still enjoyed my Digby Bay clam chowder, and Donna said her bison burger "wasn't bad."

We have been debating what route to take back to Pennsylvania. Here are our options right now:

- A. Retrace our trip to Alaska, i.e. Edmonton to Saskatoon to Regina to Winnipeg to Minneapolis
- B. Go south to Montana and turn left on I-94, i.e. Edmonton to Calgary to Great Falls to Billings
- C. Stay in Canada and go to Thunder bay
  - a. Edmonton to Saskatoon to Winnipeg to Thunder Bay
  - b. Edmonton to Calgary to Regina to Winnipeg to Thunder Bay

I have never been to Montana or South Dakota so I'm biased toward Option B. I'd like to solicit your advice, comments, and suggestions. Let me know.

It may be my cold talking, but this leg of the trip seems to be most un-scenic!

We arrived in Watson Lake about 4:30 pm and checked into "A Nice Motel" which was ten rooms behind an old, run down, tacky gas station and convenience store where we checked in. The room was a "very nice" new room which was completely furnished with IKEA furniture. I wonder what it will look like in five years.

Since it was Sunday, the Belvedere Hotel next door was having a buffet that was not worth eating. We went to the convenience store and bought two frozen dinners! Eating is not much fun with a head cold.

Today's Exhibit has Friend Six's responses to Bill's Questions. I'm still looking for yours.

### **Donna's Comments:**

#### **A NICE HOTEL**

We left Whitehorse heading east back to Watson Lake. Dan was sleepy so I drove. Turns out I drove most of the day. Apparently Dan was coming down with a cold. The scenery was beautiful, and the trip uneventful. We arrived relatively early in Watson Lake. I had called ahead, and this time I did get us a room at The Nice Motel. It was nice. It had a large log picnic table that I thought would look good at our Sabula house. It had log benches and log flower containers out front.

The inside was totally decorated with one wall painted with an outdoor scene, pictures on the walls, and artificial plants in the hall. The room was small but again very decorated. There was even a corner fireplace, flat screen TV, and DVD player with surround sound. There was a complete kitchenette unit that I was admiring. Dan took a closer look. It was from IKEA. I started looking around the room. Everything was from Ikea including placemats, dishes, drapes and African wildlife picture. I happen to know that Ikea does not ship. How did they get all of that stuff to the Yukon?

Dan wasn't hungry for dinner, but we thought we should eat. We decided to try the same restaurant we had eaten at last week when we were in town (macaroni and beef.). The restaurant was closed. This time it was a buffet in a stark room with several tables filled with whom we assumed were hotels guests. On the serving table were two large plastic bowls of coleslaw and potato salad. There were three large chafing dishes one with BBQ chicken, one with roast beef, and one with mashed potatoes. Nothing looked very appetizing, and with all of the people we have been around lately coughing, I just couldn't face a buffet. Furthermore, I really didn't think it was worth the \$14.95 that they were asking.

We left and went back to the gas station at our hotel and bought frozen Swanson dinners. We micro-waved the frozen plates in our room and called them dinner.

It turned out to be a long night. Dan was up for hours coughing and suffering and I couldn't sleep because it was so warm. Dan finally came back to bed, and I opened the window as wide as I could and pulled back the drapes even though it was supposed to get down to freezing. We both finally got some sleep.

When I checked in the morning, it turns out that the mattress had a plastic mattress cover. Maybe protecting the mattress is good for the owners but it is tough on the guests. The Nice Motel was “nice” and probably the best option in town, but it seemed out of place and out of character in its location on the back of a gas station in the middle of the Alaska Highway catering to oil and gas workers. We were glad to pack up and leave the Nice Motel and Watson Lake.

**Pictures:**



Day 18 Picture 1. A Nice Motel in Watson Lake, Yukon Territory



Day 18 Picture 2. Special features of A Nice Motel

**Exhibit:**

**Friend Six's Responses to Bill's Questions**

1. What were the defining influences of your life before graduation from high school?  
Living with my family (parents and siblings); working in the family business;  
participating in sports; dating girls
2. What have been the defining influences of your life since high school graduation?  
Going to college; marrying my spouse and having children; traveling (for both business  
and pleasure); starting-up and winding-down businesses.
3. What have been the defining experiences of your life since graduation from high school?  
Getting married and raising kids; deaths of close friends, making and losing money, the  
governance of the Nixon and Bush II Administrations; and reunions of family and friends
4. How have your beliefs about the purpose of your life changed since graduation from  
high school?  
Changed from a devout Roman Catholic to a skeptical agnostic existentialist
5. What is most important to you in living your life?  
Enjoying the journey of life and preparing to die well (like the convict on death row)
6. What do you see as the major changes in our culture [the shared mores, morals, ideals,  
standards and beliefs...the way we live] since your high school graduation?  
We've expanded the American dream to include women, racial and religious minorities,  
physically disabled and economically disadvantaged persons, new immigrants and slowly  
but surely our gay and lesbian friends. Despite the noise from political extremists (on the  
right and left), we have a much more tolerant and diversified American culture since 1965.
7. In what ways have you changed as a person since high school graduation?  
Heavier, healthier, happier, and humbler

## DAY 19: Monday, September 21, 2009

### Box Score:

Day Nineteen	Date: September 21, 2009
From: Watson Lake, Yukon	To: Fort Nelson, Yukon
Miles Driven: 224	Hours Driven: 8
Lodging: Lakeview Inn	Cost per Night: \$154.81
Dinner: Dan's Neighborhood Pub and Restaurant	(\$47.00)

### Dan's E-mail Notes:

Steve Felix inspired me to write these e-mails because I really enjoyed his weekly newsletter, "Traveling with Steve"(sent via e-mail), in which he reports his insights on real estate markets that he has gleaned from his investor-clients whom he visits all over the United States and the world for that matter. Steve also shares his opinions on restaurants, rock bands, and vocabulary words. (He's my kind of guy.) I'd encourage you to sign up for his newsletter at his e-mail above.

All of this background on Steve is to respond to Steve's question about the political attitude of the Alaskans relative to those of the citizens of the lower 48 states. Clearly, I can't answer his question, but I have been observing a highly stressed real state market from A.R.T.'s front seat. The only sign that is more popular than "Closed for the Season" is the "For Sale" sign. While there is a seasonality factor here, it appears that Alaska real estate is up for sale. There are also the telltale evidence of a busted boom market such as empty office buildings, unfinished retail centers and apartments, and house-less subdivisions. The Alaskan economy is greatly affected by the oil and gas markets as well as the tourism markets that have both taken a dive in the last 24 months.

The newspapers and magazines also seem to feature articles on the triple-headed conundrum of environmental concerns, the rights of the indigenous people, and social justice. While "all politics are local," the role that the Native American tribes and their investment corporations add a new factor to the local issues for me.<sup>27</sup> I also read about the skepticism (and contempt for) of the wisdom of the Federal Government who owns over 90% of the land in Alaska. But I think that at the individual level, the real concern is all about the uncertainty of our global economic recovery.

This morning I was talking to the owner of "A Nice Motel" who was very concerned about the economic viability of their expansion of 16 more rooms that was currently under construction. "I only have 10 rooms, and I can't take care of my regular customers now, so I hope it will work." I heard her singing grand opera in Italian before I saw her this morning in the Tacky Convenience Store that I mention earlier. She was a beautiful, dark-skinned, young woman wearing a high-school letter jacket and a scarlet tam.

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<sup>27</sup> See citation 19. In Selected References.



When we stopped for lunch at the Toad River Lodge, the waitress/hostess/cashier said that she hoped that she could keep her job past the end of the month. "If I loose my job, I'll have to go back home to Alberta where things are really tough." Did I mention that she too was a beautiful young woman? [My father once told me "as you get older, you'll find women become younger and more beautiful." I think he was making an accurate statistical observation.]

Legend has it that Toad River got it's name because it was the last stream to get a bridge when the Alaska Highway was being built so all of the vehicles had to be "towed" across the stream with a winch. Toad River Crossing, population 75, has a one-room school house for two teachers and 25 students in grades 1-12 who come from a 50-mile radius on snow shoes, skis, atv's, snow mobiles, cars, trucks, and airplanes. The Toad River Lodge has a dramatic setting with water, mountains, and wild game all around and an airstrip to bring in hunters. The outfitters drive the Alaskan Highway like us.

It rained last night, but today was sunny and clear. The wild animals were everywhere. We had a great time photographing caribou, bison, black bear, and stone sheep as we drove through river canyons and over bare rock mountains.

In Watson Lake, we enjoyed a hot tub at the hotel where I definitively announced that we were dining at Dan's Neighborhood Pub tonight. Donna asked, "Why are you so positive?" I smiled assuredly, "I like the name!" Donna had the pork loin cutlet special, and I had the beef vegetable soup. Both were good.

Friend Seven has responded to Bill questions. See what he says in today's Exhibit:

### **Donna's Blog Comments:**

#### **DRIVING THE HIGHWAY BACK**

We are now driving the Alaska Highway back. I was actually looking forward to the drive between Watson Lake and Ft. Nelson again. It is my favorite drive of the Alaska Highway. It makes staying in Watson Lake worth it. The scenery is spectacular unlike any I have ever seen. The mountains are "folded" layers and layers of stone. The mountain lakes are beautiful. They are crystal clear and an intense bright emerald-aqua green. Each lake is deeper in color. We saw even more wildlife this time including bears, bison, and caribou along the side and on the road, just like in the pictures. We even saw goats on the side of the mountain. The goat watching was difficult since I was driving at the time on a hairpin turn with no guardrails and steep drop offs.

We were surprised to see more traffic this week. Last week we saw very few cars on the highway. The lack of traffic added to the feeling of remoteness of the drive. It also added to my concern about impending bad weather. Did the locals know something we didn't? But, the weather this week is again beautiful in fact record-breaking high temperatures! We have seen a lot of campers of all sizes. We agree that our pickup truck is the best vehicle for this trip. The road conditions are tough on shocks and make maneuvering those large RV's difficult.

We ended up staying at the same hotel where we stayed last week in Ft. Nelson, the Lakeview Inn. We enjoyed the hot tub again and had a surprisingly good dinner at Dan's Neighborhood Pub.

Considering again that it is the end of the season, we weren't concerned about getting places to stay for the rest of the trip, but I thought I would just go ahead and check on lodging for our next stop in Dawson Creek. I tried all of my favorite websites and found NO Vacancies, again. Camping.....?

I continued my search and found a Best Western in Grande Prairie, 90 miles south of Dawson Creek. I booked it!

**Pictures:**



Day 19 Picture 1. Two-tiered Smith River Fall at Historic Milepost 514 of Alaska Highway



Day 19 Picture 2. "Watch for Buffalo on the Road"



Day 19 Picture 3. Northern Rockies Lodge on Muncho Lake, Mile 462  
(Highest gas price in Canada -- \$1.59 per liter)





Day 19 Picture 4. Immature caribou cow that Donna swore was a goat



Day 19 Picture 5. A very mature caribou bull!



Day 19 Picture 6. Lake Muncho, Alaska Highway, and the Canadian Rockies  
Donna's Favorite Picture

**Exhibit:**

**Friend Seven's Responses to Bill's Questions**

1. What were the defining influences of your life before graduation from high school?  
Living overseas for 2 years as a boy, sports coaches and a strong father figure, religious conversion at 18
2. What have been the defining influences of your life since high school graduation?  
College and graduate school study of theology and history, starting a small business and struggling to make it work
3. What have been the defining experiences of your life since graduation from high school?  
An early divorce, trying to write fiction, remarriage and a starting a family
4. How have your beliefs about the purpose of your life changed since graduation from high school?  
Fell out of faith after divorce - but returned with a healthy dose of skepticism.
5. What is most important to you in living your life?  
Family and the family "place." Continuing to set goals and work toward achieving them - but accepting failure as part of that process.
6. What do you see as the major changes in our culture [the shared mores, morals, ideals, standards and beliefs...the way we live] since your high school graduation?  
Rise of alternate worlds of right and left wing, with their own media to reinforce their world-views.
7. In what ways have you changed as a person since high school graduation?  
Less judgmental of the faults of others, seeing many of them present in myself.

## DAY 20: Tuesday, September 22, 2009

### Box Score:

Day Twenty	Date: September 22, 2009
From: Fort Nelson, Yukon	To: Grand Prairie, Alberta
Miles Driven: 379	Hours Driven: 8
Lodging: Best Western	Cost per Night: 135.00
Dinner: Padrino's Italian Restorante	(\$66.00)

### Dan's E-mail Notes:

To begin our last day on the Alaska Highway (Fort Nelson to Dawson Creek), I stopped at the Shell station across the street to fill up and visit with Nicole, the petite, pump girl. Nicole was having a bad day, but worked hard to be chipper. No hairdo, no eye make-up, no lipstick, no quirky smile, no facial jewelry so as she pumped the gas, I asked her, "How're you doing, Nicole." Surprised that I remembered her name, she brightened up as she chatted about the weather and said, "I've been in Fort Nelson since August 7<sup>th</sup>. I've lived here before, but ....." and she stopped mid-sentence and looked away as she seemed to remember why or what happened when she lived in Fort Nelson before. Without smiling she changed subjects and said, "How about this weather?" We both knew that she had a cold, long winter ahead of her.

The bright, sunny day seemed happy to see us on our way southward on the Alaskan Highway. There were several routes suggested for the Highway in 1942, but the "prairie route" was chosen as the most strategic route (connecting five airbases) and the easiest to build (only one major mountain pass and no elevation over 4500 feet). The first cut at the Highway was called the Pioneer Road, and the first vehicle drove from Dawson Creek to Fairbanks just eight months after the work was started. (It wasn't pretty, but it had to be done.) They made box culverts out of logs, and pipe culverts out of barrels.

Feeling both historic and retrospective, we stopped at the historic Buckingham River Lodge (great coffee, but no gas) and then at the Sikanni River Bridge where we could see the steel stanchions which were all that remained of the historic wooden bridge that burned down in 1992 (arson no doubt, but why?) We also turned off the new Alaskan Highway to drive on a portion of the Old Alaskan Highway and to see the 531-foot Kiskatinawa River Bridge that was the only original wooden bridge that is still in use today. The sign said that it was built in the winter of '42-'43 and then rebuilt in the spring of '43 when river raged from the spring snow melt and severely damaged the wooden structure.

At Dawson Creek, we drove by the Mile 0 marker and parked in front of the Alaska Highway Pub for lunch, a fitting end I presumed. Unfortunately, the "Pub" didn't serve food. We walked outside, waved at the Mile 0 Marker (just 50 paces away), got in A.R.T. and headed south. It's funny how anticlimactic finishes can be! (Remember the locker-room poem that ends, "the thrill is in the winning and not the victory won!")



Donna had already received the messages on hotels.com that “there are no hotel rooms in Dawson Creek” so we drove onto Grand Prairie. We’re still not sure yet which way to return home, but no matter what we were going on to Edmonton and then south to Calgary.

I’m bringing home a “wrapped roasted caribou” recipe from the boreal chef, Miche Genest, that features a shoulder roast wrapped in a phyllo pastry; a sauce using oven-roasted bones, celery, carrots, fennel bulbs, and red wine; and a “rowan jelly” that uses rowan berries (mountain ash berries), and apples.<sup>28</sup> My plan is to use a venison roast and deer bones, and then find out what rowanberries are, but all of this assumes that I shoot a deer next week in archery season since our freezer is currently empty. I’ll send you the recipe after I have field-tested my adaptation.

We had dinner in Grande Prairie at Padrino’s Italian Restorante. Donna had the Penne pasta with hot sausage and red tomato sauce, and I had cannelloni stuffed with veal and cheese (one covered with a creamy mushroom sauce and one covered with a red tomato sauce). We both drank the house red wine. Not bad, all things considered.

Friend Eight’s responses to Bill’s questions are in today’s Exhibit.

### **Donna’s Comments:**

#### **END OF THE HIGHWAY**

We did it. We drove the Alcan Highway and back!

Officially the highway is now called the Alaska Highway even though most of it is in Canada. I always refer to it as the Alcan because when Dan’s dream of driving the highway began in 1965 it was called the “Alcan.”

The highway is indeed an engineering feat. Driving it makes one appreciate the difficulties and hardships endured in the building of the road in 1942. Just outside of Dawson Creek we stopped to see one of the original timber construction bridges. It is very impressive.

It was about 3PM when we arrived in Dawson Creek completing the highway. We stopped to check out the beginning-of-the-highway signpost one more time. We tried to have lunch at the Alaska Highway Hotel but only the bar was open so we grabbed a sandwich at the A&W and drove on to Grande Prairie. We both felt that it was bit anticlimactic.

Questions I’ve been asked about our trip:

*Would I do it again?*

It was a great trip to do once. I don’t think I will do it another time. It is a long drive, and there are too many other drives to make.

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<sup>28</sup> See citation 11. in Selected References.

*Was it fun?*

Fun doesn't seem like the word I would use to describe the trip, but ultimately yes it was fun. The words I would use include: scenic, spectacular, unique, interesting, and intense. It is intense driving 80 mph 6-8 hours a day, day after day.

*Would I recommend the trip to others?*

Yes with the following recommendations. It is a lot of miles. One has to enjoy or at least not dislike driving and riding in the car. One must be comfortable with a little uncertainty and lack of routine. One must be alright with sleeping in a different bed every night and using whatever facilities are available along the way. One must enjoy spending time with their traveling partner!

*Is it what I expected?*

No. It was a lot less challenging than I thought. The roads were in better shape than I expected and services, such as they were, were available most of the time. I was expecting a road trip of the 1950's when roadside rests were few and far between and literally outhouses with wood toilet seats and no toilet paper. I was expecting the lodgings to be limited to 'Mom and Pop' motels with no frills like hair dryers, just a bed and bathroom.

*What would we do different?*

Nothing really. This was what we call a verification tour. However, it would be nice to have had more time to stop and appreciate the sites, take a hike, or take advantage of the fishing however. If I were a little more adventurous and a little more sociable, I would try staying at some of the lodges and B&B's along the way for a more unique experience. But the way we did it, we were tired at night and not ready for a new experience just a good bed. One of our favorite sayings became, "Sometimes the best surprise is no surprise at all."

*Would we still pack all of our emergency camping gear?*

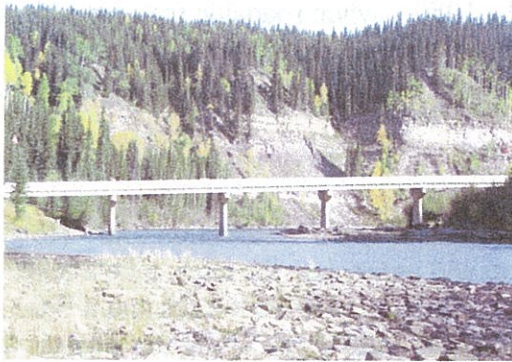
Yes. We were lucky to have great weather and good road conditions so were always able to make to our next destination. But, I am not sure that it will always be the case.

Now just 2,000 more miles and we will be home.

**Pictures:**



Day 20 Picture 1. Remaining steel stanchions of the historic wooden Sikanni Chief River Bridge



Day 20 Picture 2. Modern concrete Sikanni Chief River Bridge, Milepost 168



Day 20 Picture 3. 531-foot Kiskatinaw River wooden bridge on Old Alaska Highway  
(It's still in use today.)





Day 20 Picture 4. Kiskatina River Bridge view from the river bottom



Day 20 Picture 5. 50 paces south of Mile Marker 0, the Alaska Hotel and Pub doesn't serve food!

**Exhibit:**

**Friend Eight's Responses to Bill's Questions.**

1. What were the defining influences of your life before graduation from high school?
  - Operating a chicken farm (1,200 smelly little rascals) starting in 7th grade.
  - Interstate 80 running over the farm in 9th grade...luckily ending the chicken operation.
  - Discovering business ownership in 9th grade as a wholesale marketer of earthworms.
  - Breaking a leg the first night of wrestling practice my senior year and destroying the dream of a wrestling scholarship. So I went to college and not to Southeast Asia. Two examples of doing the right thing for the wrong reasons.

2. What have been the defining influences of your life since high school graduation?  
Caring for my elderly Grandmother (deceased at age 102) and not realizing how much she was caring for me.

3. What have been the defining experiences of your life since graduation from high school?

College, living and working in a funeral home to obtain the degrees, marriage, fatherhood, and my profession. As Guy Noir says, "The search for the answers to life's persistent questions."

4. How have your beliefs about the purpose of your life changed since graduation from high school?

It was all about me, and now it seems to be about a myriad of others and other issues.

5. What is most important to you in living your life?

Most important is living and enjoying it. I quit a profession I dearly loved to take up a new one at age 57, finding new joys and frustrations.

6. What do you see as the major changes in our culture [the shared mores, morals, ideals, standards and beliefs...the way we live] since your high school graduation?

I am quite amazed that the generation that inculcated a taboo on premarital sex on my generation has blithely taken up living together to keep their social security checks intact....

Is that post-post marital sex...is there even sex?

Having attempted to raise 4 children as "critical thinkers" I am pretty sure they are just critical, and mostly of me.

7. In what ways have you changed as a person since high school graduation?

I set out to "conquer the world" to "be somebody" and as life squeezed and molded me, I gradually have come to be relaxed in it. Perhaps a truce has been declared and peace has broken out. So at age 60, I am still learning to be learning!

## DAY 21: Wednesday, September 23, 2009 Ben's Birthday

### Box Score:

Day Twenty-one	Date: September 23, 2009
From: Grand Prairie, Alberta	To: Red Deer, Alberta
Miles Driven: 310	Hours Driven: 7
Lodging: Red Deer Lodge	Cost per Night: \$147.14
Dinner: Botanica Restaurant	(\$60.00)

### Dan's E-mails Notes:

We're going to Montana! I asked for your advice; you gave it; we took it. Your responses were overwhelming and unanimous: "Take Option B and go to Montana." It looks like we are:

- going south to Calgary and then,
- going west through Banff National Park and then,
- going south on Route 93 to the US Border and to Glacier National Park and then,
- going east through the Park and on to Great Falls, Montana and then
- going southeast to Mount Rushmore in South Dakota.

At least, this is our new Plan A as we know it.

Driving south, Route 43 seems incredibly congested, but that's because our roads have been relatively vacant for the last two weeks. We drove into downtown Edmonton for the "urban experience" and then picked up Route 2 and drove to Red Deer, Alberta where we stayed at the "newly refurbished" Red Deer Lodge.

Donna and her friends came up with a set of questions to summarize our experiences on the Alaska Highway. Here's how I answered them:

Would I do it again? Yes but. The next time I drive the Alaskan Highway, I'd like to start in Seattle, and then drive to the towns of Unuvik, Eagle and Prudhoe Bay. However, before I make this drive, I would like to visit Alaska's seaport communities by boat and by plane. My next auto trip will probably be around Iceland or from San Jose, Costa Rica to Panama City, Panama over the Pan Am highway.

Was it fun? Yes, of course. It was fun in the same way that wrestling practice was fun or taking final exams in college was fun. It was fun to see everything that I already knew existed with my own eyes. This was a "verification trip" to make sure that I hadn't been misled for the last 60 years. It wasn't a fishing trip, or a hunting trip, or a bird-watching trip or a hiking trip. It was an old fashion "sightseeing trip" or as we say in real estate a "site-seeing trip."

Would I recommend the trip to others? Maybe. My friend Bob says that he "likes to go on vacations to relax. Traveling is not a vacation." I don't recommend this trip to Bob because this was not a restful vacation. However, many of my friends have said that this is the trip that they have always dreamed of. To those friends, I whole-heartedly



recommend the trip. The caveat, of course, is to choose your traveling companion carefully

Is it what I expected? Yes and No. The vastness and emptiness and natural beauty were just like the pictures and stories that I have read in the *Alaska Magazine*<sup>29</sup> for the last forty years. The friendliness of the people was just as I expected as the Alaskans and Canadians are natural and gracious hosts. I did not expect my Blackberry *World Edition* **to not work** in the Yukon and Alaska, nor did I expect my GM ONSTAR and my XM Radio **to not work** in the Yukon and Alaska. (There's a confusing double negative here, but you get the idea.)

What would I do differently? My original Plan A was to drive my old Ford Expedition to Anchorage and then sell it and fly back. That wasn't a bad plan, as the drive back to the lower 48 gets a little long. The next time, I would try to drive up to Alaska, and then have some one (like by brothers Ben or Andy) meet me there and drive the truck back to Pennsylvania so I could enjoy Air Alaska on the way home.

Would I still pack all of the emergency camping gear? Like Hilary Clinton said about her senate vote "for" the Iraq War, "If I knew then what I knew now, of course I would have voted differently." If I knew that we were going to have perfect weather, plenty of hotels, and no mechanical problems, I certainly would have packed very differently. However, I am a compulsive planner and I have studied decision-making under uncertainty for decades so I would still have packed a lot of the stuff especially the warm clothes and sleeping bags. Perhaps the left, front, head light assembly was over the top, but like "Joel in Parts" said, "since you have the room ....."

Today is my brother Ben's sixtieth birthday. We had a surprise party for him last month since I knew that I wouldn't be there today. Probably the biggest surprise at the surprise party was that the special 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday tee shirts we had made had the wrong birth date on them. Without missing a beat, Ben said, "That was my due date." Brother Andy had a nice write-up about Ben and his party on his blog at: [stonesonblogger.blogspot.com](http://stonesonblogger.blogspot.com).

Friend Nine's responses to Bill's Questions are in today's Exhibit.

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<sup>29</sup> Citation 1.

Exhibit:

**Friend Nine Responses to Bill's Questions**

1. What were the defining influences of your life before graduation from high school?  
Loving parents and family. Mrs. George Lee, my fifth grade history teacher taught me to eat white chicken and not dark because it had veins. She also was emphatic that lettuce be torn and not cut with a knife so it would not turn brown.
2. What have been the defining influences of your life since high school graduation?  
Loving parents and family. Alan Greenberg a Hebrew Christian who once asked me why I never told him about Jesus Christ.
3. What have been the defining experiences of your life since graduation from high school?  
Marrying my beautiful wife, the birth of three children and moving to Texas. A career that afforded the opportunity to travel the world and made it possible for me to retire at 54.
4. How have your beliefs about the purpose of your life changed since graduation from high school?  
My purpose now is to nurture my grandchildren much in the same way as my grandparents nurtured me.
5. What is most important to you in living your life?  
To be fair and open minded with others and to realize that each of us is but a speck of ant dung in the big scheme of life no matter how important we think we may be.
6. What do you see as the major changes in our culture [the shared mores, morals, ideals, standards and beliefs...the way we live] since your high school graduation?  
The speed and volume with which information is available.
7. In what ways have you changed as a person since high school graduation?  
I have realized that when my cynicism becomes cynical its time to move onward.

## DAY 22: Thursday, September 24, 2009 Kim's Birthday

### Box Score:

Day Twenty-two	Date: September 24, 2009
From: Red Deer, Alberta	To: Banff, Alberta
Miles Driven: 257	Hours Driven: 3
Lodging: Banff Park Lodge	Cost per Night: \$176.78
Lunch: Muk-A-Muk Bistro & Lounge	(\$55.00)
Dinner: The Bison Restaurant and Lodge	(\$168)

### Dan's E-mail Notes:

Today was an easy drive from Red Deer to Calgary where we turned west on Route 1 to Banff National Park and then we checked into Banff Park Lodge at noon. Initially, I thought that we staying at the magnificent Banff Castle, aka Banff Springs Fairmont Lodge, but instead we were staying at a two-story motor lodge in downtown Banff with a view of the "Miss Steak's Breakfast" neon sign and restaurant just across the street.

We checked-in and immediately headed to the Banff Springs Lodge for lunch. This 15-story, all-masonry structure had buttressed corners, and pilastered walls that sloped inward as the castle rose above the pines and dominated Banff Valley. The beautiful Terrace Restaurant was closed on this 80-degree afternoon, and the historic Oak Dining Room had already closed at 12:55 pm (and smelled like an "old-folks home," Donna thought).

Outside the Castle we were bewildered that we couldn't eat lunch at the grandest hotel in Canada when we noticed that we were next to the Golf Shuttle Stop. The shuttle driver, Sheldon, said that we could eat lunch at the clubhouse or the Alpine Terrace Pub, "I'm leaving right, now." The golf shuttle passed Bow Falls and most of the fairways of the 27-hole course. Starved for conversation on the empty shuttle, Sheldon explained what brought him to Banff 21 years ago, the yardage of each hole we passed, and how he now ran the ski school at Banff as a professional skier (or was he a ski professional?).

"I like the Alpine Terrace Pub better, but you can check out the clubhouse since I have to stay here for five minutes." Sheldon advised. The clubhouse grill was serving a luncheon buffet that was being broken down and didn't look very appetizing so we joined Sheldon on the shuttle and opted for the Alpine Terrace Pub. The driveway to the Alpine Terrace Pub was almost 45 degrees uphill, and the Pub was a fairytale stone cottage with beautiful blooming flowers on each terrace. However, the Pub was closed. We were 0 for 4.

"What exactly are you looking for?" Sheldon sincerely asked.

"FOOD!" Donna blurted out and surprised both Sheldon and me, and I added, "We'd like a nice view too."

Sheldon delivered us back to A.R.T. at the Banff Springs castle and said, "I've got just the place for you, the Muk-a-Muk Restaurant at the Juniper Lodge." We thanked Sheldon for the tour, followed his directions, and sat down at the Muk-a-Muk restaurant for lunch at 3:00 pm.

Perched on the side of the mountain overlooking Banff Valley, we had the "Banff Sampler: "elk pastrami, bison sausage, candied salmon, assorted cheeses, strange pickles and olives, and tomato soup with "organic green juniper gin." Accompanied with a cold draft, the meal was perfect.

After lunch we took the 4-lane, limited-access highway 48 miles west to Lake Louise where another enormous Fairmont Hotel structure sat on the edge of the lake, but it was totally dominated by the mountain range on the other side of the lake where six glaciers fed into the lake. There were hundreds of people enjoying the walkways (as did we), and an Asian lady offered to take out picture. In my mind, I had been stereotyping the busload of Asian tourists taking pictures of each other, and now one of their number was taking our picture. Seventy-five percent of the tourists had English as a second language, and I felt kindly toward them all.

The natural beauty of Banff National Park was every bit as spectacular as anything we had seen so far except that Banff National Park was more inviting, more accessible, and less threatening. It made me want to get out of ART, and start climbing mountains. The vast beauty of the Yukon and Alaska were scary and uninviting so I was glad to stay in our truck, and I appreciated all of the hunters in with their ATV's. Bikers and hikers looked appropriate in Banff, but the same people would have looked totally mad in Alaska and the Yukon.

We had dinner at the Bison Restaurant in the Village of Banff which was chosen as one of the "top ten restaurants on earth worth traveling to" by an Ottawa newspaper several years ago. I had a big hunk of venison sliced-up and served on a parsnip puree and topped with a brown mushroom sauce, and Donna had a big hunk of bison strip loin grilled with whiskey and onions. The "melt-in-your-mouth," seven-grain bread was baked locally and served in an aspen-bark bowl. The cold pilsner draft was provided by the local Grizzly Bear Paw Brewery, and Donna's "house red wine" was fermented somewhere in Canada. Our cute and charming waitress was a dead-ringer for our niece Lisa. We ate everything as we sat on the open deck. "What could be better than red meat, fresh bread, and fine wine," Donna said, and "pretty girls and cold beer too," I added as we toasted to our good fortune and our daughter Kimberly's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.

In 1988, because of the incredible traffic problems in Northern Virginia, two girls in elementary school, and Donna's history of fast labor, we decided to have Kimberly at our home on South Lake Drive in Reston, Virginia. We had a mid-wife to deliver Kimberly, a mid-wife assistant to help Donna, a cousin Kathy to take care of Kaydee and Joanne, and me to serve refreshments and entertain. After the 4:12 AM birth, we had an ice cream birthday cake and champagne to celebrate. Finally about 7:00 am, everyone had either left or gone to bed, and Donna and I were alone to contemplate the moment when

the doorbell rang. Evidently my partner Mike Jones didn't get the birthday memo, as he was there ready to go fishing. "What's happening compadre?" he asked.

"You won't believe it," I replied, and got our new baby from bedroom and introduced Mike to his new fishing partner. Twenty-one years later, I still smile at the memories.

Friend Ten's responses to Bill's Questions are in today Exhibit.

**Pictures:**



Day 22 Picture 1. Donna on a manicured path around Lake Louise with the Fairmont Hotel in the background



Day 22 Picture 2. Donna, Dan and the Glaciered Mountains around Lake Louise



fixed smile took our passports, and asked where we were lived. She quickly asked Donna where she was born, hoping to trick her no doubt, but Donna only hesitated slightly and answered, "Columbus, Ohio?" She then turned here frozen smile on me and asked me a series of questions to which I answered "no." Apparently not convinced by the "Better-To-Have-It-And-Not-Need-It" Rule as the explanation for our truck full of stuff, she asked for the keys to the cap cover. "Stay in the truck!" she ordered.

Through the rear view mirror, Donna and I watched in amazement as she opened the cap cover and climbed over the tailgate and rummaged through our "contingency equipment" which had not been touched by human hands for over 10,000 miles! A little disappointed, she pulled her uniform back together and came to my window and said, "Welcome home!"

We stopped at the Best Western Motel in Whitefish, Montana, a very smart looking ski-town that a recently renovated three-block downtown area. At the stylish Tupelo's Restaurant, Donna had the halibut, and I had the duck-chicken-Andouille sausage gumbo. The real estate looked better than the food tasted.

**Pictures:**



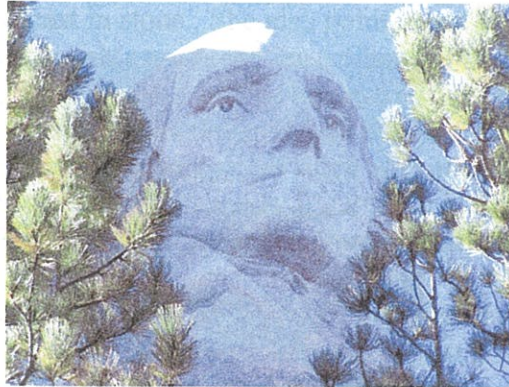
Day 23 Picture 1. Stone sheep are perfectly camouflaged in Sinclair Canyon.



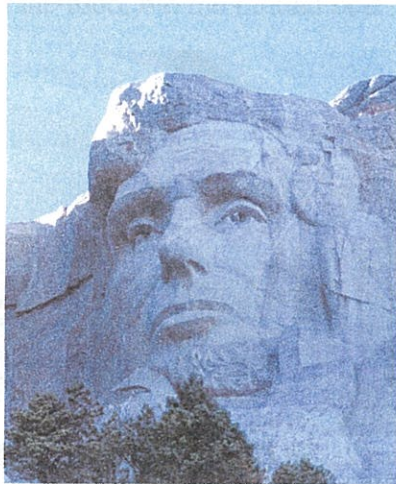
Day 23 Picture 2. A stone sheep ewe and a lamb share a narrow ledge in Sinclair Canyon.



Day 23 Picture 3. A stone sheep ewe nurses her lamb!



Day 26 Picture 4. "I did not defeat King George the Third to become King George the First!"



Day 26 Picture 5. Where is Abe's left ear?



Day 26 Picture 6. Does Teddy's mustache look a little rough?

## DAY 27: Tuesday, September 29, 2009

### Box Score:

Day Twenty-seven	Date: September 29, 2009
From: Custer, SD	To: Mitchell, SD
Miles Driven: 324	Hours Driven: 7
Lodging: Hampton Inn	Cost per Night: \$106.48
Dinner: Ruby Tuesday's	(\$56.00)

### Dan's Notes:

Our plan for the day was to visit the Crazy Horse Memorial and Indian Museum of North America and then to get on Interstate 90 and drive east. But the Crazy Horse Memorial spoke to me, and we spent several hours walking about and pondering Red Cloud's prophecy:

They made us many promises,  
More than I can remember.  
They never kept but one:  
They promised to take our land,  
And they took it!

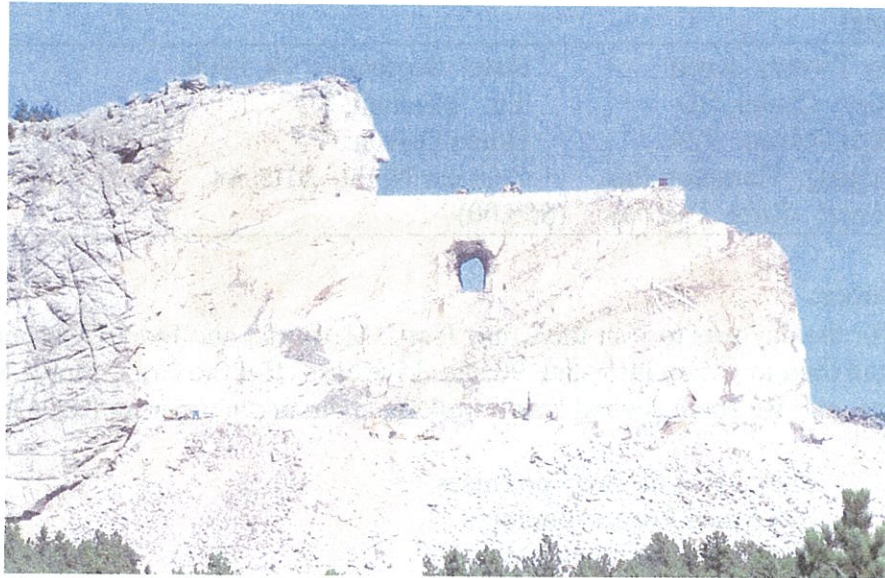
Sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski had worked on the Mount Rushmore project so when he accepted the invitation of Henry Standing Bear to carve the Crazy Horse Memorial he stipulated that no government funds would be used to support this project. Ziolkowski died in 1982 but his wife and eight of his ten children are continuing the carving of this 563 feet high and 641 foot long statue of Crazy Horse sitting on his horse and pointing to his lands, "My lands are where my dead lie buried."

The Crazy Horse Memorial and Indian Museum of North America was an exciting and dynamic place to visit. It's an active construction site with heavy equipment operating high on the mountain moving the rock after it has been dynamited. I was impressed.

We drove until dark and checked into the Hampton Inn just across the parking lot from Cabela's Hunting and Fishing Store in Mitchell, South Dakota. We ate at the Ruby Tuesday restaurant that shared the parking lot. It had the same menu as the Ruby Tuesday Restaurant in DuBois. Enough said.



**Pictures:**



Day 27 Picture 1. A Work in Progress. Note the bulldozers on top of Crazy Horse's Arm and at the base of sculpture.



Day 27 Picture 2. Crazy Horse Memorial in marble. The mountain sculpture will be in three dimensions just like the marble statue.

## **DAY 28: Wednesday, September 30, 2009**

### **Box Score:**

Day Twenty-eight	Date: September 30, 2009
From: Mitchell, SD	To: Iowa City, Iowa
Miles Driven: 482	Hours Driven: 9
Lodging: Hampton Inn	Cost per Night: \$130.04
Dinner: River City Beefstro	(\$88.00)

### **Dan's E-mail Notes:**

After our complimentary breakfast at the Hampton Inn, we went directly to the Cabela's where I had to come face-to-face with an ugly truth: "I don't need anything at Cabela's. Through my weekly catalog orders over the last ten years, I've bought the entire store!"

Donna had been reading the billboards for the "Corn Palace" for most of yesterday so we had to make the pilgrimage to the famous Corn Palace in Mitchell, South Dakota. We were so impressed that we had to get out of A.R.T. and walk around this one-block building that was totally covered with parts of the corn plant! Murals on the building depicted all of the scenes of Americana. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it.

Back in A.R.T., we suffered extremely high winds as we drove east on I-90, then southeast to Omaha on I-29 and then east on I-80 to Iowa City, the home of the dreaded Hawkeye's and another Hampton Inn. We ate the Beefstro Restaurant where I had a small filet and Donna had a 6-ounce sirloin and bacon wrapped shrimp.



**Pictures:**



Day 28 Picture 1. The Corn Palace in Michell, South Dakota



Day 28 Picture 2. Washington, D.C. landscape "painted" in corn.



Day 28 Picture 3. Crazy Horse Memorial in corn.



Day 28 Picture 4. Corn art in process.



Day 28 Picture 5. Dan and Donna after too much time on the road.

**DAY 29: Thursday, October 1, 2009**

**Box Score:**

Day Twenty-nine	Date: October 1, 2009
From: Iowa City, Iowa	To: Hilliard, Ohio
Miles Driven: 546	Hours Driven: 8.5
Lodging: Best Western	Cost per Night: \$94.57
Dinner: Lunchables in the room (\$3.50)	

**Dan's E-mail Notes:**

Today was a miserable drive in pounding rain, high winds, and fog. The traffic was very heavy, and Donna slept most of the time. I agree with Michael Polin that America is awash in corn!

Taking I-80 east to I-74, we headed southeast to Indianapolis where we picked up I-70 and pressed onto Hilliard, Ohio. We bought some "lunchables" at the gas station, and ate in the room. I was tired and ready to be home!

## DAY 30: Friday, October 2, 2009

### Box Score:

Day Thirty	Date: October 2, 2009
From: Hilliard, Ohio	To: Athens, OH To: DuBois Pennsylvania
Miles Driven: 440	Hours Driven: 10
Lodging: Lake Sabula Lodge	Cost per Night: Priceless
Dinner: Take-out pizza from Snappy's	(13.50)

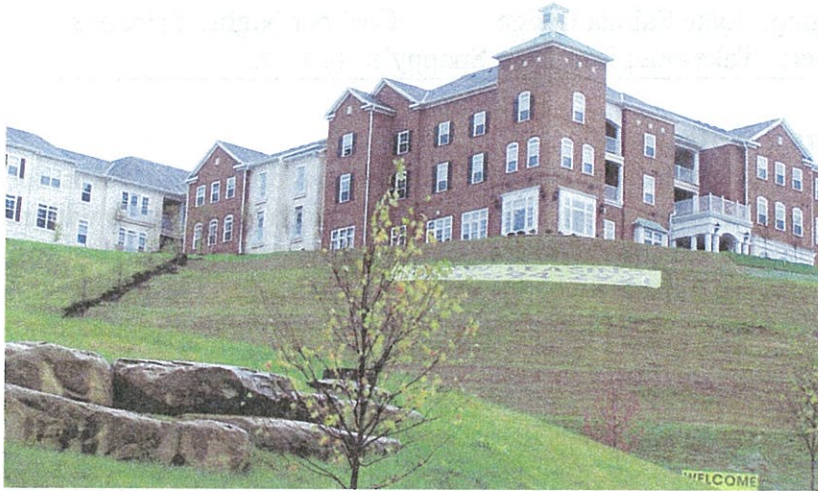
### Dan's E-mail Notes:

More rain today as we drove to Athens, Ohio to meet our daughter Kim for lunch. (Ruby Tuesday still had the same menu.) Unbelievably, lunch didn't agree with me so Donna had to drive most of the way back to DuBois. I agreed to drive the last two hours that ironically turned out to be the worst two hours of our trip. The heavy rains and darkness combined with road construction and orange barrels to create the road from hell.

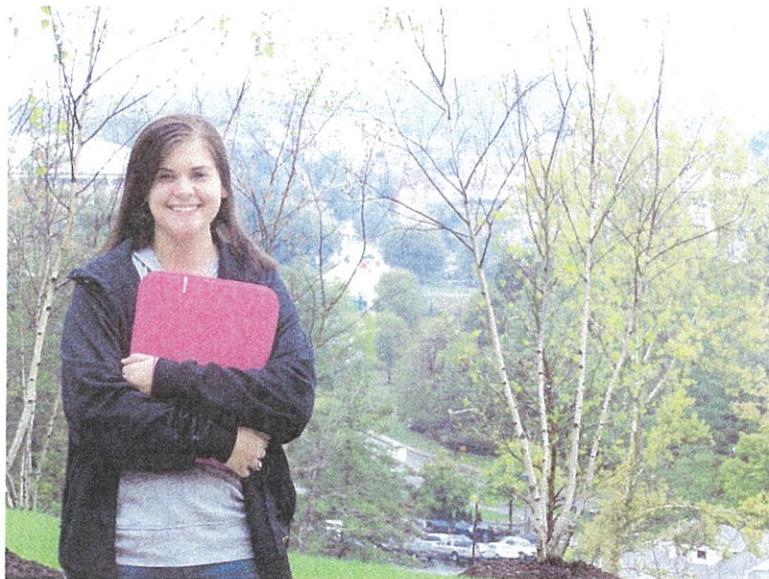
When we reached the 101 Exit on I-80, we heaved a joint sigh of relief, picked up a pizza at Snappy's, and drove two miles to our house on Lake Sabula. We did it.



**Pictures:**



Day 30 Picture 1. Summit Ridge Apartments in Athens, Ohio



Day 30 Picture 2. Kim at Summit Ridge over-looking Ohio University

## **Chapter 4. What About Bill's Questions?**

As I mentioned in my Day Six Notes, my high school classmate, Bill Kriner, is preparing a social and cultural history of the high school class of 1965. As part of his research, Bill has been asking classmates to answer the following questions:

1. What were the defining influences of your life before graduation from high school?
2. What have been the defining influences of your life since high school graduation?
3. What have been the defining experiences of your life since graduation from high school?
4. How have your beliefs about the purpose of your life changed since graduation from high school?
5. What is most important to you in living your life?
6. What do you see as the major changes in our culture [the shared mores, morals, ideals, standards and beliefs...the way we live] since your high school graduation?
7. In what ways have you changed as a person since high school graduation?

Throughout our trip, I have asked (or challenged) my friends to respond to these questions with short, pithy answers, and eleven friends responded to these very personal questions. To respect their anonymity I have referred to them as Friend One, Friend Two, ...etc., and then I shared their responses in my e-mails with all of our readers. Many friends did not respond but told me that they were "working" on their responses, but could not reduce them to brief and clever statements as most of the eleven responder-friends did. Nevertheless they were thinking about the questions. And most friends said that they found reading other people's responses to be very interesting. Consequently, I think that Bill's questions have provided us with way to share and to think about ourselves as we attempt to resolve our adolescent high school lives with our more mature adult lives. To Bill I express my thanks and appreciation.



My father always would say, "The unexamined life is not worth living." Of course he was quoting Thoreau who was quoting Plato who was quoting Socrates. Along those lines, Bill has help us examine ourselves and "to make them worth living" in this great philosophical tradition. I think that the key verb here is "to examine," not to justify or to resolve or to figure out our lives, but to examine our lives. Thus, I suggest that the act of *examining* our lives make them richer and more interesting, and helps us see the folly and humor in our lives as we attempt to grow up, raise children, make a living, foster relationships, and deal with increasing and then diminishing physical and intellectual capabilities. What a deal.

Bill's questions asked us answer the "what's" in lives, but most us really struggle to answer with the "how's" and "why's" in our lives. A friend suggested that the "how" was domain of science, and the "why" was the domain of religion. I like this simple dichotomy, but the science and religion in our lives always seem to be overlapping and conflicting with each other. Still I like this division of labor to help me examine "life's pesky questions."

My father also liked to quote Shakespeare, "This above all to thine own self be true." Of course Shakespeare was quoting the ancient Greek sophists who carved on Apollo's Temple "Know Thyself." I suggest that "knowing oneself" can only come from an "examined life," but I have a very good friend, who carefully explained to me,

"I know what I know, and  
I like what I know, and  
I don't care why I know what I know."

Go figure.

Donna and I enjoyed discussing these questions on our trip, but we had to be careful to let each other have our own what's, how's, and why's of our life and not explain why one was right or wrong or confused or intellectually challenged, or a congenital idiot! You can see how easily these discussions can run amok and escalate to major name-calling, accusations, and bruised feelings.

So my take-aways from Bill's questions are to:

- Enjoy the examination process,
- Be gentle with yourself,
- Be more gentle with those with whom you discuss these questions, and
- Keep your sense of humor, at all times, no matter what.

## **Chapter 5. Summary and Reflections**

### **Box Score Summaries:**

The daily Box Scores gave a brief summary of our trip that would appeal to those readers who just want the facts. For those readers we tabulated the daily statistics and calculated the sum, mean, median, and range for each measure and presented them in the Exhibit to this chapter. We didn't differentiate between US dollars and Canadian dollars since they were essentially trading at par during our trip.

Over our 30-day trip to Alaska and back we drive a total of 11,402 miles in 233 hours and spent a total of \$4,094 for lodging and \$2,082 for dinners. That means that on an average day we drove 380 miles and were in the truck for 7.7 hours (say 8 hours). On average, each day we spent \$136 for lodging and ate dinner for \$69.

I quit calculating gas consumption and mileage after I inadvertently left my VISA card in Watson Lake because I wasn't paying attention to the transaction even though Nicole may have distracted me more than the statistics. Our highest gas price in the United States was \$3.99 per gallon at the Denali National Park, while the lowest US gas price was \$2.29 in Brooklyn, Iowa. In Canada, the highest gas was \$1.60 per liter (\$ 6.76 per gallon) at the Northern Rockies Lodge on Lake Muncho, and the lowest gas was \$.91 per liter (\$3.84 per gallon) at Gunn, Alberta.

Our cheapest lodging was at the 1202 Motor Inn (\$68.25) in Beaver Creek, Yukon where we watched the OSU game in a 10 by 14 foot windowless room. Our most expensive stay was at the Sheep Mountain Lodge (\$198.50) on the Glenn Highway in Alaska where we checked ourselves in using the honor system and ate de-hydrated chicken stew in the cabin. Donna's favorite hotel was the Spring Hill Suites Inn in Anchorage where we stayed for two nights as she recovered from food poisoning. Ironically, the first night was \$178 since it was "in season" and the second night was \$111 since it was "off season." My favorite was the Queen Suite at the Westmark Hotel (\$177) in Whitehorse where we spent two nights to recover from Dawson City, YT and Skagway, AK.

Our favorite and most memorable restaurants were the Klondike Rib and Salmon BBQ (\$102) in Whitehorse where we ate in a canvas walled dining room (and met “Dona” the owner) and Simon & Seaforts (\$140) in Anchorage where we watched the sunset over Cook’s Inlet (and met Eric the tour guide and Ryan Plummer the girl from Clarion, PA.) Other restaurants that we would “go back to” include the Cactus Club Café (\$76) in Edmonton; Lavelles (\$184) in Fairbanks; the Bison Restaurant (\$168) in Banff; and of course Buckshot Betty’s (\$78) in Beaver Creek.

Our strategy of staying hotels with “running water, flush toilets, and hot showers” and eating all of our meals in restaurants allowed us to drive more and to see more scenery each day than if we were camping and cooking our meals in a tent or motor home. Most of the meals and hotels were forgettable, but the scenery we witnessed, the people we met, and the places that we verified were truly unforgettable. Sometimes it felt like the Yukon and Alaska Tourist Bureaus presented us with characters just to entertain us each day. Most were gracious, sincere, and somehow committed to a “lifestyle” that was much different than ours. They were great!

As we reflected on our trip, we tried to remember the “best places that we visited” or “points of interest” as the Canadian signs said. Donna and I would throw places and events back and forth as we flashed back and re-lived our trip again. This exercise was repeated several time, always with different results, until it became clear that we had too many “best places,” “special places,” and “great places” to make a coherent rank-ordered list.

We can however share with you: “Things we knew, but didn’t realize until we took this trip.”

- We knew that most hotels had workout rooms, but we didn’t realize until we made this trip how easy they were to ignore.
- We knew that Alaska became a state in 1959, but we didn’t realize until we made this trip what a big deal it was for Alaska to celebrate its fiftieth anniversary of statehood.
- We knew that the Winter Olympics are to held in Vancouver this winter, but we didn’t realize until we made this trip what a big deal it was in Canada, especially British Columbia.
- We knew that the Yukon River flowed north, but we didn’t realize until we made this trip that Dawson City was down stream from Whitehorse even though it was 340 miles north.
- We knew that Skagway was in Alaska, but we didn’t realize until we made this trip that it was only 110 miles from Whitehorse, Yukon with a different government, a different currency, and a different time zone.
- We knew we would cross several time zones, but we didn’t realize until we made this trip that we would cross and re-cross six time zones: Eastern daylight savings, Central daylight savings, Central standard time (Saskatchewan), Rocky Mountain daylight savings, Pacific daylight savings, and Alaska daylight savings.

- We knew that General Motors made good trucks, but we didn't realize until we made this trip that we could drive a truck off the showroom floor and go to Alaska and back with out a single electrical malfunction, mechanical glitch, or even a rattle.
- We knew that the Northern Lights were beautiful, but we didn't realize until we made this trip how difficult they were to see on a cold, cloudless night. We never did see them.
- We knew that Alaska was geographically big with a small population (690,000), but we didn't realize until we made this trip that there were hundred and hundreds or square miles where no one lived.
- We knew that Fairbanks was 4900 miles from DuBois, but we didn't realize until we made this trip how far that was to drive in a truck.
- We knew that the Alaska winters were cold, but we didn't realize until we made this trip they didn't need freezers to keep their moose meat frozen, just put it on the back porch.
- We knew that the Iditarod and Yukon Quest dog sled races were over 1,000 miles long, but we didn't realize until we made this trip how much time, energy and hard work it took to prepare to run these races as well as to stage these races.
- We knew that there were antelope in Wyoming, but we didn't realize until we made this trip that Wyoming was over-run with antelope. They were everywhere.
- We knew that AAA had good hotel rates, but we didn't realize until we made this trip how lousy their web site was to use to make reservations.

Finally, I knew that Donna was a good sport, but I didn't know until I made this trip that she was a truly great traveling companion. She is my kindred spirit, soul mate, and best friend. Go figure. *And Dan is mine.*

**Exhibit:**

<b>Box Score Tabulations</b>				
Day	Miles Driven	Hours Driven	Lodging Rate	Dinner Cost
1	235	5.75	157.00	128.00
2	409	7.5	137.00	37.00
3	603	11.5	137.00	78.00
4	706	12	168.29	45.00
5	528	8.5	156.00	76.00
6	384	7	187.51	70.00
7	304	6	154.81	50.00
8	472	10.5	113.40	41.60
9	388	6	138.34	102.00
10	308	5.5	68.25	78.28
11	398	6.5	105.84	184.00
12	438	9.5	178.08	140.00
13	137	5	110.88	16.50
14	392	10.25	198.50	7.50
15	407	10	114.45	48.95
16	340	6	177.45	150.00
17	225	8	177.45	63.00
18	388	6	145.00	15.00
19	224	8	154.81	47.00
20	379	8	135.00	66.00
21	310	7	147.14	60.00
22	257	3	176.78	168.10
23	292	7	121.76	100.00
24	290	7	144.49	54.00
25	322	8	126.55	46.00
26	474	9	132.19	49.00
27	324	7	106.48	56.00
28	482	9	130.04	88.00
29	546	8.5	94.57	3.50
30	440	10		13.50
Sum	11402	233	4095.	2,081.
Mean	380.	7.77	136.	69.
Median	386	7.75	138.	58.
High	706	12	198.	184.00
Low	137	3	68.	3.50



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