

A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON OUR WAY HOME FROM VACATION!

My mom and Dad spent much of their lives as hard-working Hoosier farmers, and really weren't too familiar with the idea of vacations, that is until my four older siblings were raised. In later years, while I was still of school age, they occasionally took a week or two off during the summer, which generally meant a road trip. They often loved to find and get reacquainted with distant relatives, or else to tour the mountainous beauty of southern states, especially their beloved Smokey Mountains.

I had accompanied mom and dad to the Smoky Mountains National Park at least two or three times in previous years, and this trip seemed no different than the others... that is, until we were on our way home to Indiana, driving through Knoxville. Dad was behind the wheel on this Friday morning, but it was mom who first noticed that we were being followed closely by a police car, which to our surprise pulled along side with lights and siren, as an officer motioned us to pull over.

Being pursued by cops wasn't exactly something that my country church-going parents were too familiar with, and were obviously nervous as the officer and a plainclothed man approached. But as the policemen looked in the driver's window, he had a friendly smile.

"Hello Folks, don't worry you've not broken any traffic laws," he said. "What brings you to Knoxville... are you on vacation?" Yes, my dad replied. "Well that's great. We've been looking at cars passing through with out-of-state license plates such as yours, and the city of Knoxville has decided to choose you as our Tourist of the Day!"

Mom and dad were visibly stunned, and didn't know how to respond, but complied with the officer's request to follow his car to a nearby business district. When we arrived, it was the parking area of a restaurant, where a group of persons appeared to be standing waiting, along with persons holding cameras. As we emerged from the car, several greeted us and took photos, as one gentleman took the lead and shook our hands.

"Hello Mr and Mrs Robbins," he said. "My name is Mayor Leonard Rogers, and I want to welcome you to the city of Knoxville. As a part of our recent campaign to promote tourism, we've been selecting a random car of visitors to our city each day, to honor as our Tourist of the Day. Today my staff and I have chosen you, and would like to honor you with a key to our city, treat you for lunch, a tour and put up overnight in one of our fine hotels. Would that be okay with you?" he asked.

Well, needless to say, mom and dad were overwhelmed as we sat and enjoyed the nice lunch and chatted with the mayor. Then as a newspaper reporter took photos (see attached), the mayor presented each of us a ceremonial "key" to the city, which was a decorative gold pin (see the photo of mine). After lunch, staff members took mom and dad on a tour of the city, while I was taken on a fun boat ride on the Tennessee River. And then that night, we were treated to accommodations in a suite atop the Andrew Johnson hotel, which was my first stay in an actual hotel.

Before we departed the next day, one of the mayor's staff came by to give us copies of photos taken on Friday, and gave us a copy of Saturday's Knoxville Journal newspaper, which featured our photo prominently on page 8.

What an amazing experience this was, to be plucked out at random and treated like dignitaries. It was the prime topic of conversation by mom and dad all the way home, and for weeks to come, until life's daily routine caught up with us again, and filed this moment into a treasured memory of the past.

One can never tell what might happen, on your way back home from vacation!



LUCK OF THE ROAD—Mr. and Mrs. Myron Robbins of Sheridan, Ind., and their son Dale, 14, were yesterday afternoon's lucky "Tourists of the Day," shown being treated to lunch at Jim Bradley's Steakhouse on West Cumberland Avenue, and receiving presents from local manufacturers presented by (standing, from left) Herb Mays, Tourist Bureau director; Jim Bradley, Steak

House proprietor; and Mayor Leonard Rogers. The Robbins had been to Gatlinburg and were en route home, but took this opportunity to see Knoxville sights as well. Last night they were guests of Hotel Andrew Johnson, after touring Blount Mansion, the Coliseum-Auditorium, UDC's Bleak House and other historic shrines courtesy of the Tourist Bureau.

