

Marion Avenue Housing Project

Our rented house at 401 Bedford Road was sold on May 10, 1950, so we had to find a place to live until our house on Vly Road in Niskayuna could be finished. About this time we abandoned "Old Betsy," whose radiator had become so leaky that we would drive for a while and then find a stream and fill up the radiator again. We carried a bucket for just that emergency. I still smile every time I think of that car. Oh, the places we went in that old wreck. We became quite fond of her. We found, not to our surprise, that she had no trade-in value, so we parked her on the back of our new lot and bought a new car—a 1950 Ford two-door sedan. It was a gray-white car. We had no choice of color at that time—if you could get a car at all you took what came with it and weren't at all choosy about color.

It seemed for a while that I would have to take the children and go to Ogden, Utah, and stay with my parents until our new house was finished. But just before we were ready to do this, the Marion Street Housing Project called and said that we could have an apartment on an emergency basis until the house was finished. They took us in, so to speak, because Tracy was a veteran, but for a limited time only, because he made too much salary per month to be eligible for permanent housing in the project.

We moved our belongings into Apt. 407, Marion Avenue, and left for a three-week trip to Ogden to visit our parents, secure in the knowledge that we had a place to lay our heads when we returned.

Our finances were tight at the time (that seemed to be the status quo most of our lives). We had about \$100 a month to pay on the car, and we had committed to our savings a set amount toward the down payment on our home, which was almost as much as the car payment. We decided that we would buy one hot meal a day, but we soon found out that this was a waste of time, effort, and money, because the children seldom ate what was on their plates. We found that if we bought plenty of fresh vegetables and fruits along the way and just pieced, everyone was happier.

I took Elizabeth's bottles filled with sterilized water, and then opened small cans of canned milk to add to the sterile water as she needed to be fed, so that her formula would always be fresh. We decided to make a bed of the back seat of the car and have the children sleep there at night. We would park the car and spend the night at a roadside park.

The first night we stopped, Tracy got out and made a bed for himself in the grass outside the car. I joined him for about five minutes, but the thoughts of creepy-crawlies bothered me so much that starlight or not, I went back inside the car.

Elizabeth slept on a blanket on the shelf under the back window. Sherlene and Tracy, then six and four years of age, slept on the bed made into the back of the car, and David slept on a bed made up between the front and back seat of the car on the floor.

That left the front seat to Tracy and me. Poor Tracy. He suffered more than I because all the burden of the driving was on his shoulders, as I had not yet learned to drive a car. By the time we got back to Schenectady from that trip, I had determined that I would never want to go home so badly again that we would travel on such limited funds. The children enjoyed it, however, and slept like logs, and had fun during the day. They were good little travelers. And we did get to see our folks again after a two-year absence from Utah.

We enjoyed our visit in Ogden and most of the trip back. We found that the best way to spend the night, usually, was to wait until just dusk and then find our place for the night,

stretch our legs, straighten up the car, have supper, and then retire for the night, starting on our way east at sun-up, which was early the next day. The best places were off the main highway on a broad shoulder of a side road where the lights of traffic would not bother us, and we could enjoy the peace and quiet of the country air—at least when there weren't too many mosquitoes.

Returning through Iowa, we had just missed a very heavy rainfall, which had fallen the previous night. However, the shoulders of the road were muddy and the farms were washed and gullied from the rain.

It was about June 20, and we were near Atlantic, Iowa. Tracy had turned into a side road to try to find a place for the night. The road was deeply rutted and muddy. Tracy drove down the road and then turned around. He was afraid that he was going to get stuck if he didn't get off that road. As he drove along, he hugged the side of the road, trying to avoid the deep, muddy ruts in the center of the road. I was extremely tense for some reason, and kept wanting to tell Tracy to move over more into the center of the road, but for once I decided to mind my own business. My husband is a very good, responsible driver, and I had been back-seat driving considerably, and I couldn't even drive a car. Later I would regret holding my silence.

There were some trees up ahead and if we stayed in our present position, we would brush them as we went by. Tracy was just going to pull out into the road in spite of the mud, when the side of the road gave way and the car rolled into a fifteen-foot deep culvert.

I will never forget that sensation if I live to be a hundred. A person's life is supposed to flash through their minds in a second in such a situation, but I did not think of anything except the horror of the situation. Tracy said that all he thought about was how he was going to get the children out of the car under water. The car rolled over twice and came to rest, right side up, at the bottom of the culvert. When we came to rest we were both shaken and frightened.

"Are you all right?" we both asked simultaneously. We were. The children, who had been asleep and tucked in for the night, started to cry. We had a little trouble picking children from baggage, and as soon as we had quieted the children, and made certain everyone was safe, Tracy took me in his arms, and we had a prayer and thanked our Heavenly Father that we were all safe. The mud and water in the culvert was deep—and the car was buried in it up to the bottom of the car, but the soft mud had cushioned our fall. Tracy had a stiff neck the next day, and I had a sore elbow where I had tried unsuccessfully to put it through a car window. The car lights were still shining brightly and we could see about us. There was a small trickle of water running away from us—probably still drainage from the road. Tracy found a flashlight and worked his way up to the road from the accident location and used his white handkerchiefs to try to flag down passing traffic which was very light on that country road that night. The first car passed him, and the second car passed him by and then backed up and the folks asked if he needed help. They helped him get to the police.

I do not remember finding the children's shoes and clothing and dressing them, but I did so, and then I just sat and talked with the children who were full of questions as to what had happened. Fortunately, though they were small, they didn't get hysterical or even cry, except at first. After what seemed an eternity, Tracy returned with the state troopers who helped us up the muddy embankment and into their cars. I had maintained my calm until then, but as soon as I got into the patrol car I started shaking like a leaf. The officers were

very kind. They took us to a hotel, settled us, and arranged for a tow truck to pull out the car the next morning.

When we saw our new car the next morning, we realized just how blessed we were not to have been seriously hurt. The top was smashed in and the back window was sprung out. The front window was cracked and also the window on my side. All the doors were sprung. It was a mess. Our poor new car!

The state troopers took Tracy down to the site of the wreck the next morning to get pictures and determine the cause of the accident. The state road commission had not been idle in the meantime, however. By the time Tracy and the troopers arrived at the site of the wreck, the road had been scraped clean of the ruts. Tracy took some pictures of the marks of our tires as they reached the culvert, however, and found that the culvert had at one time but marked, but the cement posts and fence were halfway down the hill and the entrance to the culvert had been hidden by vegetation. Only the natives would have known it was there. Now the culvert was marked by red flags.

The insurance company arranged to have the car fixed up enough to finish our trip to New York, but they considered the car completely ruined and said they would replace it when we got back to Schenectady.

As a family, we did not revisit the site for two days, and it was mostly cleaned up by then, but we did get some pictures of the location of the accident. We were very happy to arrive back at the Marion Avenue Housing Project two days later in our battered new car!