

Tom Remembers Trip To Florida



My father wrote (and I pondered and sometimes cringed)...

... and Mother Jane said, "Tom, in a way I hate to see you go, but I know you want to go and I suppose you have to go. You have worked and studied so hard for this time in your life and you are well prepared for life. You have everything and I might add that you are a very handsome young man of 17 years old."

... and Miss Maude said, "There was one thing for sure when anyone meets you, they will remember you for a long time after getting a bear of a handshake and looking straight into those steely blue eyes, and seeing that bronze complexion with almost the same color of hair, and wavy too."

... and Aunt Hattie said, "Tom, I am happy for you but its going to be awful sad for me and Uncle Gus. We will miss you so much. No couple could have had a better son than you have been to us and our Lord and God will always be with you. Bless you, and we both will be praying for you at all times. Now go, my son."

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It was in the late fall of 1918, I was 17 and getting restless. I did not know just what I wanted to do. I could join the Navy at 18, but I had to find something to do until then besides farm.

I had done pretty good. I had my own cotton field, a fair amount of money in the bank; everything on the farm was gathered and all the fall plowing and planting was finished and all the winter wood was cut and stacked up out behind the house.

I had been talking to some other farm boys about going to Florida. They were the two Saunders brothers. Joe was two years older than me and Red was my age.

I went into town and found Red and Joe shooting pool with Ben Allen. He was about Joe's age.

Red says, "Come on, Tom, and join us. We're not playing for any money - just fun."

I brought up the idea again about going to Florida.

Joe says, "I am ready to go now." Red said he could be ready to start tomorrow. Ben said he could go now.

Joe said, "I'll tell you what I will do. I will furnish the car; you guys furnish the gas and my food and lodging." He had a 1917 Model T Ford, 4-door sedan.

The others yelled, "Joe, you want too much."

Personally, I thought that was a pretty fair deal for everybody. We all finally came to an agreement on that. Joe said he had been to Florida and it would take us two days to drive down and we would stop somewhere around Fort Pierce. There was a lot of citrus fruit in that area and maybe we could get a job gathering fruit.

Red said, "Did you meet any girls down there?"

Joe said, "Lots of girls."

It was on a Thursday and we decided to leave early Tuesday morning. We were all getting excited. Red and me went out to a department store and bought us a couple of suitcases. Joe and Ben said they both had suitcases.

Then, I went home and talked to Mother Jane and Big Issac. They were not too surprised and that made me feel awfully good. Mother Jane and Aunt Hattie got all my clothes ready and my shoes all shined up. I had a long visit with Aunt Hattie and Uncle Gus over the weekend and Aunt Hattie had me read the Bible to her a lot.

There was a lot of hugging and kissing and we took off.

The very first gas station we came to Joe pulled in and filled the tank and we joked with Joe if he didn't need an oil change also. He said the very first thing in the morning and he wasn't kidding. We stopped in a little town and got some lunch, I paid for our lunch. Ben had paid for the first tank of gas and, when we filled the tank again, Red paid for it. Ben had a small notebook and put down what each one had paid out.

When we stopped at night we found a motel that had a restaurant and when we got into our rooms, the first thing we all did was take a bath. That was a very luxurious occasion for four farm boys who were used to taking a bath in a big tin washtub.

Then we went over to the restaurant and had supper and I might add it was a very good meal. I bought me a paper and went back to my room and the other guys went to a poolroom but came back rather early. Ben got out his notebook and we all settled up for the day and went to bed rather early. Red's snoring woke me up. What a noise! I was not used to sleeping with anybody. I had always had a bed by myself, but after awhile I went back to sleep and had a pretty good night's sleep.

I woke up real early and had another bath. Then I went out and the sun was just coming up. It was just cool enough for a sweater. I took a long walk. Today I would see the ocean.

When I got back from my walk the guys were up and eating breakfast and they began to kid me. They thought maybe I had gotten homesick and started back home walking. I said, "Not me! I am heading for the ocean today."

And about that time a pretty young waitress came over to my table and said, "Oh, you are that beautiful man your friends have been kidding me about, eh? What will you have, blue eyes? Oh, look, he is blushing."

"My name is Tom. Please just call me Tom."

I had ham and eggs and milk to drink, then a cup of coffee. The other guys were having a second cup of coffee and smoking their cigarettes. I had not started smoking at that time.

We stopped at Daytona Beach and got us a place to stay, then headed for the beach. What a beach! So big--and the sand so white and the water so blue. I had on a pair of shorts, a tee shirt and an old pair of tennis shoes. I pulled off my shirt and shoes and waded out into the water and, oh boy, was it cold. It was so cold it made your teeth chatter, but I had a long swim and got warmed up some. Then I walked and ran up and down the beach for a couple of hours, then went back to my room and had a shower. I suppose that hot and cold running water tub and shower was just about the nicest thing that had ever happened to me. I just could not stay out of that shower.

We all had supper together and I got me a paper and read it, then went looking for the other guys, but could not find them. I went out in the lobby and talked awhile with the clerk and he gave me a book and magazine to read. I read until I felt sleepy, then went to bed and thought about the folks back home for a few moments and then went to sleep.

The next morning we all had breakfast together. Then we went back and checked out of our motel and headed for Fort Pierce.

It was a very nice ride down to Fort Pierce--a lot of pretty scenery to see. We came to a big orange groves. How I would have liked for Issac to have seen those orange trees, as far as you could see.

On down the road we came to a road stand and drank our fill of orange and grapefruit juice.

When we got to Fort Pierce we found a place to stay as close to the beach as we could so we could go swimming and play on the beach. It seemed much warmer than it was at Daytona. We liked it so much we stayed three nights.

We met some girls at Fort Pierce and had lots of fun. I met a girl at the drug store. Her name was Nancy. We got along just fine. Nancy had long legs. She had blue eyes, a pretty mouth, and beautiful white teeth. Nancy was easy to talk to. I studied everything she said the way I studied everything everybody said.

During that time we got real close. I met her family and there was even some talk about getting married.

We drove straight to Fort Lauderdale and found us a two bedroom apartment with everything furnished. It was two blocks back from the ocean and we all headed for the beach. I wanted to go swimming, but the other guys didn't seem to care that much about swimming or just being out on the beach. All they seemed to want to do was find girls.

That was okay in a way, but there were girls everywhere and there were not beaches everywhere.