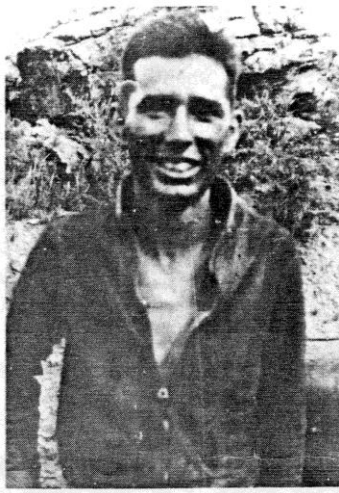


TRIP WEST BY JOHN TRIBBEY, JOE CONNOR, DON GRAHAM  
– written by John Tribbey



*John Tribbey*



*Joe Connor*



*Don Graham*

It was about the bottom of the great depression following the collapse of the stock market in 1929. As I had never been more than two hundred miles from home, I was quite excited when invited to go to the 10<sup>th</sup> Olympiad in Los Angeles with Joe Connor and Don Graham.

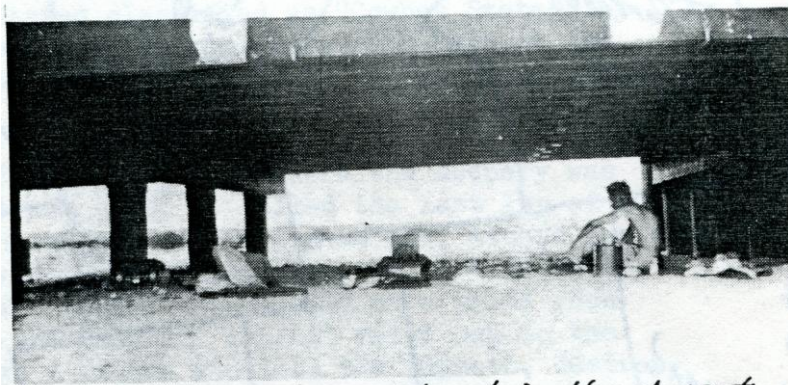
We left on Monday morning, July 25, 1932 from Joe's used car lot, on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street next to my father's paint shop, where Brown Machine Works is now located. We left as the old town clock was striking the hour of nine, to the clanging of the old brake drum mounted at the end of the rear seat of the old model T Ford. By striking the drum with a wrench we produced an alarm much more effective than the old "oogah" horn.



Our average speed of about forty miles per hour took us to St. Louis by early evening. We spent the first night with relatives of Joe and Don. From St. Louis we followed U.S. 66 – “the Main Street of America” – to Los Angeles. We usually drove twenty-four hours a day, taking eight hour shifts, but on a few occasions we pulled off the road and slept on the ground in our blankets for a while. We carried some of our food, such as bread, jelly jam and peanut butter and Campbell’s canned soups in a water and airtight container from the drug store of Joe’s father. We replenished our larder as went along and bought milk, fruit, cold cuts, etc. for immediate use. Our soup was heated by laying three cans, wired to the base of the spark plugs, along the manifold of the engine. With rags and a can opener we opened and ate them, condensed, from the cans.

We were walking up a shady, grassy gentle incline from the parking area. As we came to the top of the rise the most spectacular sight I had ever seen was before us – the Grand Canyon!!! The picture remains in my mind after these many years, and I know that it ever will. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork.” I have visited here several times but never again felt the same reverence and awe. I can not recall anyone but us being there at the time. This was long before the Interstate highway system and coinage of the word “tourism”.

We encountered many engine failures and repaired them. I will tell of the most interesting ones as we come to them along the way. In those days cars were much simpler than those of today; many owners were their own mechanics and used car lots and “junk yards” were everywhere.



*Joe Connor under a culvert in the desert  
between Needles and Barstow, Cal*

The sun was just coming over the horizon on Friday morning. We were rolling across the desert, between Needles and Barstow, California, when an exhaust valve in our engine burned off and ricocheted down through a piston. It seemed that all of our luck was going to be bad in this isolated place, which was identified by a sign at the edge of the highway reading Amboy. The only signs of habitation for miles around was sort of general store, a garage and a few little shacks, barely in sight away from the highway. It came to pass that one piston and connecting rod for a model T Ford was available. I suppose the volume of traffic on this cross-country highway, and the mid-desert location kept the owner in business. He had no neighborhood competition. Within a few hours we had repaired and put our engine together and started upon our merry way. Our joy was short-lived however, because the piston was too tight and the engine too hot under the boiling desert sun. We came upon a culvert, pulled the car off the road and found shelter from the sun, where we spent a long, hot and dreary afternoon.

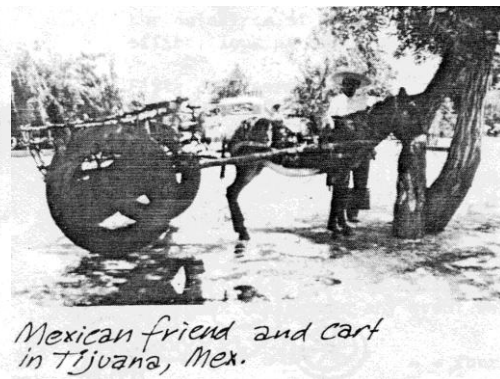
After the blazing sun had gone down, we emerged from the culvert and resumed our journey. The desert becomes quite cold at night and the engine was running beautifully. We draped blankets around ourselves as we rode in our car to keep our teeth from chattering. Upon arriving at Barstow we were able to buy a 10 quart pail of small, but sweet oranges for a quarter which we squeezed into our bitter alkaline water and quenched our big thirst.

Don was the purchasing agent for our food and the expense of our transportation. He kept the account and we paid our shares for the day before, to him each morning.

We had an uneventful journey throughout the remainder of the night, arriving in Los Angeles on Saturday morning. We seemed to attract a lot of attention as we cruised along Figueroa Street looking for my uncle, Joe Tribbey, who would be watching for us at the corner of a street in his neighborhood.

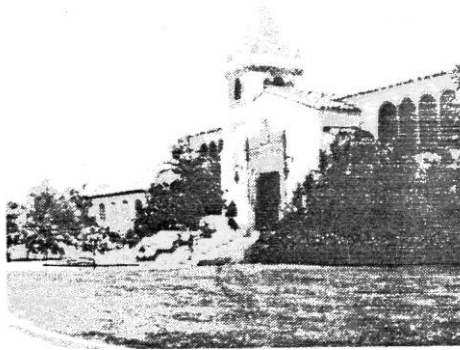
I stayed with my uncle, and his wife Annie, while we were in Los Angeles. Joe and Don declined the invitation to stay, probably because of some shyness on their part and the fact that my cousin, Frank Jones, was visiting from highland Park, Illinois. Although we were not quartered in the same place we spent considerable time together attending the Olympic events.

In looking back upon this great adventure I seem to have been in a dream. I was in a different World where everything I saw as new to me. I remember going to the top (25<sup>th</sup> floor) of the new Los Angeles city hall and looking out over the fifty-six communities surrounding the big city. One day my cousin drove 107 miles in taking me for a tour of the area. At this time when air conditioning was unknown at home, and unneeded here, the weather was fascinating with bright, but pleasant days, and evening when a jacket was welcome and we slept under covers. It was here that I first saw, and used, a dial telephone and celebrated my first birthday, the 22<sup>nd</sup>, away from home.



We decided to go “south of the border” before setting out on our long journey back home. We took my cousin, Frank, with us. It was a delightful trip as we enjoyed some of the old missions along the way, as well as Ramona’s birthplace. If my memory is correct she was the first child to be born in the State of California. We passed customs and were permitted to enter Mexico at Tijuana. We entered a casino and bellied up to the bar for a beer. This was quite a treat to us as the United States had been under prohibition for a number of years. The bar was so long that it seemed that the far end came to a point. We went into a beautiful hotel at Agua Caliente where, in the lobby we saw a stone basin into which fountains poured naturally heated and naturally cooled water. An old Mexican was kind enough to allow us to get into his cart with big wooden wheels, drawn by a donkey, and take pictures. We returned to L.A. in the afternoon and early evening. Frank and I spent the night with Uncle Joe and Aunt Annie.

Hotel  
Agua  
Caliente,  
Mex. 8/32



The next morning we set out upon our long trek back to Indiana. We passed through Bakersfield, which I recall as being just a wide place in the road at that time. We continued on through Fresno to Yosemite National Park, through the Mariposa Grove of giant redwood trees, the biggest living thing in the World. How magnificent they were, reaching thirty feet and more in circumference and towering in excess of three hundred feet toward the sky.

We drove through one that had been cut through. It was still living. We were told that some of these trees had been here before the birth of Christ, as determined by studying the annual rings of some that had been damaged by lightning and felled. I can recall two other outstanding features, among many, of the beautiful Yosemite Park: El Capitan, rising straight as a column far above the floor of the valley, and Bridal Veil Falls, falling in a double stream over a sheer bluff, striking a ledge and bouncing another hundred feet or so to the valley below.

We decided to go west from here to Oakland and then up the coastal highway US 101 to Portland, Oregon. Driving through California, from the Mexican to the Oregon border, 1100 miles more or less, is in some ways like driving across Texas. After so long a time (in a Model T Ford) you begin to wonder if you are going to get out, but Texas is easier because the roads are flat and straight.

As we moved into northern California, we found it to be very mountainous. Much as we enjoyed rugged, virgin scenery, these twisting, steep and narrow roads were almost too much. At intervals along the east side of the road notches had been cut in the stone mountainside to allow passing. These were usually near a bend with a warning to sound your horn painted on the stone bank. A look to the other side of the road was like looking from the window of a commercial airliner. This area, from north of Sacramento to the Oregon border, is known as the coastal range.

Life became much easier after we had crossed into Oregon. We were making good time one morning, on the outskirts of Eugene, when we met with a minor mishap. We were going around a curve in the road when we were hit by a car which came over the center line and struck our left front wheel, breaking the spindle. The driver of the other car was the superintendent of a construction

company working in Eugene. He apparently had enjoyed quite a party the night before and was very eager to see that our car was towed to the city and repaired at his expense. We were happy to accommodate him so that we might be on our way with little delay.

From Portland, Oregon we headed east along the Columbia River highway where, at least in one place, the road was tunneled, having windows cut in the stone wall overlooking the river. It is not quite clear in my mind but seems that we entered the State of Washington at the great bend of the Columbia river near Walla Walla, Washington, and continued on to cross the border of Idaho at Lewiston. We crossed the panhandle of Idaho to Missoula, Montana. We continued north through Kalispell, Montana to Glacier National Park, entering at West Glacier. The beauty of this park, in late August, was the great snow-covered mountains. The roads were clear of snow. We could climb a snowbank, squat and slide down on our shoes. The sun was bright, the air cool and exhilarating. We were comfortable in light sweaters. This park, bounded on the north by the Canadian border and forming the northern end of the Rocky Mountains of the United States, is magnificent with its snow-covered peaks exceeding 10,000 feet in elevation.

We departed Glacier National Park from the east side. I am not certain as to whether it was by the St. Mary entrance or from East Glacier Park, into the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. We drove through the width of the mountainous part of the great State of Montana through Helena, the capital, Bozeman and Livingston, entering Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming by the Gardner entrance in the northwestern corner of the state. Yellowstone, our first national park, has the rugged beauty of others as well as being equipped with the natural phenomena of hot water and steam. How amazing to watch "Old Faithful" relieving the underground pressure, like a relief valve on a boiler, as accurately as a clock! In this area were also the "paint pots" boiling and bubbling like so many kettles of food of various colors. Another very attractive feature were the bears. The brown cinnamon bears wandering around the park were quite harmless, but all food must be safe in your car or cabin. Then there were the grizzly bears, very unfriendly to humans. Under the supervision and protection of armed rangers, visitors to the park – if they so wished – were taken to the feeding ground each evening to watch the grizzlies dine. This was in an isolated area having a sort of corral with logs for seats, on a hillside. We watched as the rangers threw meat to the bears. While visiting in Yellowstone we rented a little log cabin for two nights. This was the only time during the trip that we paid for shelter.

We left Yellowstone National Park by the east entrance, through Cody, Wyoming, the home of Buffalo Bill Cody. There are many mementoes here of this favorite son. Among the seventeen States classified as "Cowboy States" by the "Cowboy Hall of Fame" in Oklahoma City, Wyoming must rank high on the list. Wyoming is also rich in Indian lore, particularly of the Sioux and Cheyenne tribes.

Now that we were traveling across the great plains where the scenery was always about the same, we were on what now might be called the last lap of our great adventure. The rugged western country was behind us and, except for one more major experience, the really exciting part was over. We were in southeastern Nebraska approaching the city of Scribner on a white rock road, or pike as they were called, when another exhaust valve cap in the engine burned off, went down through a piston and into the magneto, destroying it. I was sitting in the right side of the front seat. The valve head tore through the magneto housing and opened a hole through the cowl of the body of the car. This was the end of our old faithful unless we could find a replacement engine. It was my good fortune that the valve head did not go through my foot. While we were discussing just how we might get out of this dilemma, being several miles away from the city, we saw a great white cloud of dust coming toward us, which proved to be a truck pulling a road-drag. The kindly driver offered to pull us to the city, to which we wholeheartedly agreed. We learned that being pulled along a hot dusty road behind a road-drag is about as near hell on earth as one can get. Upon arriving in the outskirts of the city our benefactor pulled us to a railroad freight office, looking as if we had been pulled from a flour bin.

Fifty-one years has erased a good part of this story from my mind; however, we had three real problems, in this order: a terrible thirst, immediate need of baths and a way of restoring our means of transportation. It seems that the friendly young freight clerk allowed us to use the rest room where we quenched our thirst and each managed a sponge bath at the basin. He told us of a couple of used parts lots in the neighborhood where it might be possible to get an old engine for the five dollars we felt that we could pay. We were unsuccessful and returned to the railroad office. I can not say why, but the young man agreed to our switching engines with an old Ford of his and paying him five dollars. It could be that he intended to sell his to a junk dealer. In any event we were very grateful to him.

I believe we were near St. Louis when – yes, the same old story. Don and I were all for getting rid of this junker and going home on the train. Joe would not consider this. He was determined that we would arrive at home in the same manner in which we left. Since he was the chief, having originated the expedition, we had to agree. We did what, to us, was as natural as delivering a baby is to a physician, and changed another rod and piston.

How happy we were as we wound around the curves coming down the knobs on US 150 into New Albany, Indiana thirty-one days after our departure.

- John F. Tribbey, August 1983

[Source: VF TRIBBEY]