



## Greetings from the Sunflower State!

The Kansas State Motto, “Ad Astra Per Aspera” (translation: “To the stars through difficulties”) has proven to be strangely prophetic as we pressed on in our journey. We had a rough start out of Joplin – those menacing storm clouds indeed came through with rain – but the persistent showers and thunder were the least of our problems.

**Plan A:** We’d intended to make pretty quick work of Kansas, given that Route 66 spans only a small portion of the state (13 miles...) – and that we had many stops in mind for Oklahoma. As soon as we got into Galena, it was obvious that the ‘Stang was in distress. After pulling into a local gas station/garage, TJ disappeared into the tollbooth-sized office for a 20 minute consultation with the mechanic on duty. Upon returning to the car, he reported that a new part was needed, but we’d have to try repair shops in Riverton or Baxter Springs. As we sputtered down the road, the rain was unrelenting – much like the look of defeat on TJ’s face. Luckily, we found what was needed in Baxter Springs – repair of both the vehicle and our psyches. Russ, the mechanic at a spruce but well-worn shop immediately could see what the problem was, and had a connection in Tulsa that could supply the requisite parts in about 4-5 days.

**Plan B:** Realizing that our fate was in the good hands of Russ and his people farther down the road, we were able to see beyond the darkness of the rain and our delay, and figure out how to make the most of this detour. It was a chance to be in the moment... to breathe and re-boot. Russ was intrigued by our trip, and could see how we were at a loss in defining our next steps. Being an expert diagnostician, Russ invited us to his house for coffee and some strategy. We could tell that Russ had a deep fondness for the car, and that he was trying to think of how he could entertain us during the wait for parts (or as we came to call it, “WFP time”). After countless cups of strong, home-brewed coffee and a few donuts (courtesy of Russ’s wife Fern’s early morning run to Daylight Donuts), we hatched a game plan:

1. Russ would make sure we had accommodations at The Little Brick Inn. Serendipity – this historic building is located on Route 66, and was a bank in the 1870s. Guess who made a memorable visit (and withdrawal) in 1876? A nice little restaurant, Café on the Route, is a companion to the B&B.
2. Russ realized that we might get a bit restless spending the better part of the week prowling around the town limits, so offered us use of an old Wagoneer that he kept at his place. Not so good on gas mileage, but it would get us to the surrounding towns and back.

3. And, he said that we were welcome to hang out with him at the shop or his home whenever we liked.

**All is not lost.** Surprisingly, we fell into an easy routine as the week progressed. We were up at a reasonable hour for breakfast at the B&B – where we met a handful of people with all manner of life stories: German students hostelling along the Mother Road, a woman and her aunt visiting relatives, and retired RVers tanking up on coffee and local news before heading on to the Texas Coast. (We also were sure to catch either lunch or dinner at the Café, as well; TJ became quite enamored of the fried potato salad and smoked turkey pretzel.) After this leisurely time of sustenance and conversation, invariably we provisioned for the day at Eisler Brothers Country Store, a few miles away in Riverton. At this former Standard Station (built in 1925), we found good sandwiches and accompaniments packed up freshly and with generosity. The store’s owners clued us in on local history and geography as we placed our orders. It was a treat to inspect the souvenirs, and we couldn’t stop admiring the workmanship of the pressed tin ceiling.

**Down Time.** An immediate point of interest in Riverton was the Rainbow Bridge – a restored arch bridge complete with commemorative marker. Another of our day trips took us up to Pittsburg. Technically not part of our Route 66 experience, but a fine destination in its own right. We did our laundry there – you can imagine how pronounced the accumulations had become... Then back to play: Big Brutus more than caught our attention – “the world’s second largest electric mining shovel.” We did the full inspection: walked its “cavernous body”, sat in the operator’s chair, and climbed all 16 stories to the top of the boom – quite a vantage point for viewing the tranquil Kansas prairie. Our favorite stop was the Pittsburg Public Library, which gave us an extended chance to read (TJ was working on Truman Capote’s *In Cold Blood*, while I was involved with Peter Cameron’s *The City of Your Final Destination*) and grab some WIFI time. The original library was a Carnegie, built in the style of Frank Lloyd Wright. In the course of these meanders, we found the Wagoneer to be a competent and dependable ride. Perhaps we had a getaway vehicle in case the ‘Stang met with an unfortunate fate...?

**On the road again.** Baxter Springs took good care of us. After a morning of local sites in our temporary home town – the Little League Baseball Museum, Bilke’s Western Museum (another mural – this one showing a longhorn cattle drive), and the Baxter Springs Heritage Center and Museum (plus some newspaper time at the Johnson Public Library) – we settled in for lunch at Café on the Route with Russ’s wife Fern. Just as I tucked into my cup of soup (cream of baked potato), Russ appeared at the table. Not only did he join us for lunch, but he also reported that the parts had come in from Tulsa a few hours ago... and the ‘Stang was now more than road worthy! We raised our iced tea glasses in celebration, and tried to train our mindsets back to the road. We were a bit wistful at saying goodbye to our new friends, but we were also feeling the clarion call of the road. Unlike Ulysses, we could not resist the sirens’ song along Route 66.