



Blog Post #4: OKLAHOMA

Greetings from the Sooner State!

A welcome indulgence. As it closes in on mid-afternoon, I'm savoring in a slice of French Silk Pie at Country Dove – a Victorian tea room in Elk City, OK. The calm of of this brick and clapboard house and its lovely grounds enriches a sweet and restoring moment. My gosh – it feels like we've traveled more than just the miles since I last checked in. Our elation at having the car fixed amplified the Oklahoma leg of our trip. From Baxter Springs we headed on to Tulsa, ravenously taking in both the road and the inviting attractions served up by the towns and way stations along our route. We made a late afternoon detour beyond Quapaw to Devil's Promenade Road, but with darkness yet to set in we had no chance of sighting of the Spooklight – an unexplained phenomenon said to look like a moving ball of light in the night sky. TJ and I agreed that it was likely similar to the Marfa Lights, which we'd had the fun of experiencing on a Big Bend trip some years ago. Our luck wasn't much better in Vinita, which we heard was the oldest village in the state. The Eastern Trails Museum closed around 4:00 pm, so again our timing was off. However... a consolation prize came our way when we stopped for a snack at the McDonald's spanning the Will Rogers Turnpike (I-44). The restaurant (along with a number of other food service and retail spaces) sits above the highway, and in the past claimed to be the largest McDonald's in square footage. Nice to have a bird's eye view over the center highway lanes while we munched on salads. Fortified, we drove on to Foyil – site of Ed Galloway's tremendous totem pole. We had just enough light to get the full measure of the structure: 60' tall, and is 30' in circumference. Images adorning the pole include colorful lizards, owls and Indian chiefs.

Wit and wisdom. Our Route 66 odyssey hardly would have been complete without a stop in Claremore to pay our respects at the Will Rogers Memorial Museum. Artifacts, memorabilia, materials from Rogers' performing and film days – plus a saddle collection – vividly tell the story of his life and legend. We were awash in he humor and showmanship of this American master as we resumed our drive down the aptly named Will Rogers Highway. Tulsa held a special stop for us – time with TJ's aunt Emily. As a boy, TJ lived with Emily 's family for a number of years while his parents were working abroad. I hadn't realized that Tulsa was part of his past, and wondered how he would like the city he found today. It had been years since his last visit. The plan was to stay at Emily's house, but a water line upgrade on her street put the kibosh on that. Flooding and back-ups had displaced Emily to TJ's cousin Mark's place. We made due with our usual accommodations (budget chain – cheap but clean). TJ was psyched to have dinner at the Metro Diner – and again we were too late for the show. Emily shared the sad news that the Metro closed in 2006 when the University of Tulsa took the land for its campus. The Route 66 Diner was satisfying substitute. Between the four of us (Mark

included), burgers and plates filled the table, and memories from TJ's Tulsa years filled our conversation. As with Trolley and Russ, this confirmed my belief that your family is the friends you make along the way. Over the course of our stay, Emily graciously served as our tour guide, taking us to the Philbrook and Gilcrease museums of Art, pointing out handsome Art Deco Buildings known to be built by oil barons in the 1920s-30s, and carefully tracking down segments and sites original to Route 66. We'd hoped that Mark could join us, but he was on long duty stretch at one of the local hospitals, where he's an ER doc.

Three for the road. Literally as we were saying our goodbyes to Emily, Mark called to say that he'd been sprung from work early, and asked if he could join us as far as Amarillo, TX. We eagerly said yes, and quietly agreed that we'd get the details on this unexpected development at a later date. Emily gave us a wink and a knowing smile... So, with Mark at the wheel (older cousin gets dibs) and TJ riding shotgun, we made our way to Catoosa. It was a rare treat to hear the two of them swap memories: youth soccer, riding bikes, hours at the movies and listening to Mark's "monster" stereo, catching chili dogs and onion rings at the little drive-in near Mark's high school, devouring comic books... and, tagging along with Mark's dad, Fenton, when he made sales calls to doctors and hospitals in the surrounding towns. One of the side trips Fenton always made with the boys was the Tulsa Port of Catoosa – the furthest inland seaport in the US. As our first detour driving west, we took stock of port – but focused our collective attention on the true local attraction: the Blue Whale. The guys doubled over in laughter remembering their attempts to construct a scale replica of the mighty sea mammal for the pool in Emily and Fenton's back yard. The merriment quieted when we admitted that none of us had read *Moby Dick*. Perhaps our epic tale of travel and whale spotting gave us a pass on that omission... Oklahoma City was our next major off ramp. Coming into town we checked out the Round Barn in Arcadia – a huge red circular barn that dates back to the late 1890s. So much to see here, but we were starting to sense that time was nipping at our heels. We covered some of the ground with our visit to the Overholser Steel Truss Bridge, and counted a good number of lively neon signs – especially the Route 66 Bowling Alley. West of the city in Yukon we cruised past the landmark Yukon Mill & Grain Company's elevator.

TJ and Mark fondly remembered Pop Hick's Restaurant in Clinton, which burned down in 1999. When the guys were young, this was a regular stop of the family's when driving to Wichita Falls to visit his Fenton's sister. Again, we were too late to the dance. As a substitute, we stopped for dinner Lucille's Roadhouse in Weatherford. Inspired by Lucille's Historic Highway 66 store and gas station in Hydro, this was another interpretation of the diner nostalgia – chrome counter, turquoise stools, and black and white tile floors. We slid in for their storied fried onion burgers.

What next? After a day of rest in Elk City, it seemed the trick to part with the boys while they went in search of a lonely road to "see what the 'Stang could do". Even though the pie is gone, I still have a few sips of tea remaining in my cup. That will pair well with the Fred Harris novel at hand, *Easy Picken's*. It feels good to steal a moment

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and some solitude to reflect on all that we've encountered in Oklahoma. So many things gone, but not forgotten. No matter what your timetable, you're never too late to revel in the mystique of Route 66. Take care, and be well!