

ROADSIDE AMERICA

Try to imagine a world without cars. For most people living in the United States today, cars are a part of everyday life. But there was a time when cars were something brand new and exciting. From the very beginning; the car was a useful invention. It was also fun! To a family that seldom traveled 10 miles from Home having a car was like being set free. Just imagine. You could go anywhere, anytime you would like. Driving to visit aunt Esther in town took less time than it used to take to hitch up the horses! Most important, it seemed, was how much it was getting where you were going. Whizzing along at 20 miles per hour was an adventure. By 1929, there were four times as many cars on the road as there had been in 1919. Driving was the country's new favorite sport! Cars seemed to change almost everything. They changed not only where people went but also how they got there. Cars changed where people ate and shopped. They certainly changed where and how people lived and worked.

A hundred years ago, a family wanted to go to town, they hitched the horse and buggies. If they went on a long trip, they took the train. When cars came along in the early 1900s, they were much too expensive for most people. Then Henry Ford's motor company, in Detroit, Michigan, built a new kind of car. It was called the Model T. This car was very simple and basic. Most important it was so cheap that any people could afford one. Other inexpensive cars followed it. In the next few years,

millions of people bought cars and too to the road.

Driving wasn't easy in those early days. The few gas stations were so far apart that people had to carry their own extra gas. The roads were so dusty that drivers had to wear goggles to protect their eyes. They needed long coats to keep the dust off their clothes. Sometimes the dust turned to mud because most roads were not paved. Many early motorists were stuck in the mud and pulled out by a horse! In fact, so many early cars broke down that the horse-and-buggy drivers often passed one of the new fangled cars. And yelled, "Get a horse!"

If drivers were traveling far from home and wanted a place to sleep, they could either find a hotel or pitch a tent. It wasn't long before business people understood the needs of motorists. They set up campgrounds, along the roads where people could pitch their tents. Soon the campground owners began to put up their own tents and rent them to travelers. Next they built little "tourists cabins," with a bed and a stove for cooking. Before long, someone built a large building with several rooms to rent, right by the roadside. It was called a "Motor hotel." Eventually the two words combined, and the "motel" was born.

Travelers also needed to eat. In the beginning, most motorists brought a pick nick lunch. Then some of the campgrounds built dining halls. As more and more cars went by, people who lived by the side of the road had an idea. Motorists didn't want to waste time finding a town

and then a restaurant. Why not build restaurants right by the road? A "quick lunch" restaurant was offered. Soon the speed at which motorists could eat increased. First came "drive-ins," where people could eat right in their cars. Then, to make eating even faster and easier, some drive-ins add "car hops." These were waiters who took your order and brought the food right to your car. Sometimes while wearing roller skates. Talk about fast food!

Of course, it wasn't enough for people to be able to buy gas and have a place to sleep and eat on the road. As millions of new cars were sold, people needed better roads. At first old dirt roads were just paved over, but they were narrow. Gradually, two lane roads took their place. Then divided highways were built with a strip of land down the middle to keep the two lanes of traffic apart. Finally in 1940, America's first "superhighway," the Pennsylvania Turnpike, was opened. It was only 160 miles long, but it had 4 lanes. Its opening was such an event that hundreds of people lined up to be amongst the first to drive on it;

In 1940, it must have seemed that people would just go on driving and enjoying these roadside reassures forever. The next year the United States went into World War II. Men went away to fight and woman worked long hours in factories. It was more important to provide jeeps and planes for the war than it was to make cars. In fact, passenger cars weren't even made in the United States from 1942 to 1945. The armed forces needed gasoline, so

people at home had only a small amount of gas to use. It seemed as if the age of the car had reached a STOP sign.

When World War II ended in 1945, the soldiers came home. Soon life returned to normal. Many couples got married and had children. All these new families needed places to live. The cities couldn't hold them all. Luckily the car and better roads gave them a new place to live - the suburbs. These new towns spread out in every direction. Now many families even had two cars! Dad went to work in the city of in one of the new "industrial parks" out by the highway. Mom drove the children to school and lessons and did errands at the new "shopping center," or "mall." By the 1970s, many moms were driving off to work too.

Of course, today we know that cars have also brought problems. Roads are crowded and millions of cars pollute the air. Cars use up the world's oil and gasoline supplies, and people sometimes rely on cars too much. Now we need to look at new ways to travel. We also need to find new kinds of fuel such as electric and solar power, and don't pollute the air. We need to think about new divisions for cities where there's space for parks and people, as well as for roads and buildings. To someone growing up today it seems that cars have always been a part of people's lives. In your grandparents' and great-grandparents' days, cars were just beginning to change the United States. Though some of these changes have been for the better, and some have not, they certainly have helped create the world we live in today.