

A DREAM COME TRUE (or was it a nightmare?)

By EVELYN J. BISHOP*

Dreams do come true; and to prove it, Louise Brown, Elizabeth Sanders and I had travelled from Johnston County Library to Wooster, Ohio. After months and months of planning and anticipation, we had just taken delivery of a shiny new Trailblazer Bookmobile. Hearts aglow with pride and happiness, we maneuvered our Dreamboat out of the grounds of the Gerstenslager Company into the afternoon traffic of Wooster, and pointed its gleaming beauty toward North Carolina and home. Thursday, January 6, 1954, would ever be a red-letter day in the history of our library, marking the perfect fruition of a seed planted more than two years before. The next few days would be un-



eventful, we anticipated, except for our enjoyment of the snowy beauty of Ohio and Pennsylvania as we drove leisurely through them at 35 miles per hour "breaking in" our new motor and watching for the disappearance of snow and ice as we drove steadily southward. The veil over the future had not been lifted to give us any warning of what was to come.

The speedometer registered a total of 50 miles traveled from Wooster, and dusk was falling as we approached the town of Salem, Ohio. Since life was so sweet and fatigue unknown, we made plans to drive as far as feasible on the Pennsylvania Turnpike before seeking a motel for the night. Alas,

for the best-laid plans! Wishing to get a sweater from my suitcase, I rose from the seat beside the driver just as a changing traffic light necessitated a quick stop. Our new, tight brakes were overly efficient. Their instantaneous grab sent me sprawling backwards, only to strike my head severely on the metal of the front seat.

While my life's blood gushed forth from a gash in my cranium and poured in a steady stream down my neck and shoulders, and my one coherent thought was to keep it off the new Bookmobile, my two thoroughly-frightened companions valiantly applied first aid to pressure points and literally became my "staff" as they supported me between them into the emergency room of the Salem Hospital. A bewildered doctor and nurse ministered very gently to me while trying to ascertain, at the same time, how one could get so battered without actually being in an automobile accident. Two hours later we emerged from the hospital with reservations at a motel, made by the kindly doctor, who explained our predicament over the telephone to his friend, the motel manager. Explanations were definitely in order. There I was in clothes so stiff with blood they would stand alone, with my partially-shaved pate and its six neat stitches all bound round and round with gauze in a design like a Hindu turban. A county librarian, indeed!

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After a night spent just as the doctor had cheerfully predicted—"with a head like a terrific hang-over"—I reported back to him in the morning for a check-up, accompanied by my two faithful retainers. He opined that in spite of being bruised and battered I would live to reap my just desserts. Over yards of a fresh Hindu turban he pulled a white skull cap to keep it firmly in place, and anchored the material to my forehead with strips of adhesive tape. Rather gingerly, it must be confessed, we three musketeers clambored aboard the Lethal Machine (formerly known as the Dreamboat) and, in due time, entered the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

The sun shone brightly on the crisp snow. The scenery was lovely, the air like wine, and our spirits lifted as we rolled smoothly over the super-highway. It was going to be a good trip after all! The fuel gauge registered one-fourth full and the speedometer had just turned over the 100-mile mark when the smooth purr of the engine changed to sputters and finally hissed into silence. With horrified faces we looked at each other—out of gas on the Turnpike! Though badly bent, I was still the main support of the library, and my girls looked to me for help. "What do we do now?" they quavered.

"Just wait here until the road patrol comes along," I comforted them.

In about ten minutes a brisk young officer pulled up beside us on his motorcycle. Seeing the storm-clouds gathering on his authoritative brow when he learned of our gas shortage, I hastily interposed, "Officer, this is a brand new bookmobile which we have driven only 100 miles. It has many idiosyncrasies, like the fuel gauge not being accurate, and we'll have to learn about them."

Batting his eyes slightly, he said, "A bookmobile, eh? I've heard about them, but we don't have any around this part of Pennsylvania."

"Do come around to the other side and come in and see it," we chorused. "It's a beautiful piece of craftsmanship."

"I'll tell you one idiosyncrasy you might as well learn right away. It is that your Dodge has a quarter tank of gas all right, but it just won't pull this heavy truck up a grade. Always keep your tank at least half full and you will be safe."

While the officer was admiring the beautiful interior of the bookmobile and learning about Johnston County Library, I noticed that he kept looking rather askance at me, but I thought it was perhaps my odd head gear which was impressing him. Suddenly my eyes fell upon some blood spatters we had overlooked in our morning clean-up job. Yes, that was the subject of his inquiring look, for suddenly he demanded, "What's happened here?"

Shamefacedly, I confessed.

"Aha," he gloated, "now you can understand why we have a state law forbidding passengers to ride standing up in a bus or truck!"

While we waited for the gas he promised to send, I complained, "Why did he persist in calling this a Truck? We explained plainly that it is a Bookmobile."

Louise, whose turns at the wheel had happened to coincide with my fall, and again with the gas incident, muttered that she agreed with the officer—it was a truck, and a big one, too—and, personally, she longed for our little old familiar one-half-ton pick-up bookmobile.

A day with no further incident, but spiced with admiring visitors at gas stations and eating places all along our route, lulled us into contentment again, and evening found us comfortably bedded down in Maryland, planning several hours' sightseeing in Washington, D. C., on the morrow.

Lumbering along in the Saturday morning traffic, we spied the white finger of the Washington monument pointing skyward just ahead. Once more we all looked out upon

a world grown rosy again. Just then Louise spoke up, "If we don't do anything else this morning, I would like to climb to the top of the monument."

"Let's do it the first thing," was my suggestion. "Turn up this road to the right. It leads directly to the monument."

"But," objected Elizabeth, who was driving at this time. "Look at that sign. It says 'NO TRUCKS ALLOWED'."

"Ho! Ho!" I scoffed. "That means big freight carriers. We are not a TRUCK. We are a BOOKMOBILE."

"You're the boss," shrugged Elizabeth, and drove down the parkway to nuzzle our big "Blunderbus" in among the low-slung passenger cars in the parking area.

What a thrilling half-hour we spent: riding the elevator to the very top of this tallest all-stone structure in the world, looking out over the whole city of Washington from a height of 550 feet, identifying nationally-recognized buildings! Enthusiastically planning which shrines to visit next, we pulled out into the main road once again.

But suddenly our joy was interrupted by the sound of a police siren, ever so close upon us; and with a side-glance in my direction, which could have been interpreted as an I-told-you-so, Elizabeth pulled to the curb and looked down upon a small policeman bristling with importance.

"What are you doing with a truck on the Parkway? I'm sorry, ladies, but there is a \$25 fine for driving a truck on the Parkway in Washington."

Silence from the Bookmobile!

"And," in a tone fraught with menace, "I seen you parked up by the monument a little while ago!"

Heavy silence!

"What are you doing with this truck, touring the country?"

I drew in my breath to expostulate, "But, Officer, this isn't a Truck. This is a Bookmobile!" A flash of genius was granted me, however, as I remembered my turbaned head, "Let young southern charm handle this," advised Wisdom. "You keep out of it."

A humble account of our journey from Wooster to Smithfield, a heart-stirring picture of our longing to visit the President's memorial since we were driving so close to it; warmed by the lovely smiles and soft drawls of my North Carolina belles melted the stony heart of the Law.

"Well, under those circumstances, I'll let you off. But, (with a returning growl) Get this thing outa here!"

"Here's to the Old North State," we carolled, as the Bookmobile nosed safely in to the stream of traffic on U. S. 1, and we regretfully left our nation's shrines behind us.

If space permitted, we could wring your hearts with the account of our heroic attempts to "get that thing outa here"! Having been warned about the deadly traffic clover-leaves around Washington, we stopped to get directions for reaching the Shirley Highway into Richmond. For the next thirty minutes, following three sets of instructions, we turned right, we turned left, we turned under (every way but up) and at the end of each road so followed we came up short at a different facet of the Pentagon (a shrine not on our itinerary at this time).

Where were all the cops? The question "What are you doing here?" would have been most welcome, since what we wanted desperately was to get out. Nothing human stirred in the vast spaces. Spying a moving bus across a parking lot, Elizabeth took after it like a homing pigeon, and it led us at last into Alexandria. The evening shadows found us in Petersburg, Virginia, with welcome visions of home next day.

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The warm, balmy sunshine of a typical North Carolina Sunday morning cheered our hearts as we started on the last lap of the journey we had visualized as being so "uneventful." For sentiment's sake, the girls had permitted me to drive over the Virginia-Carolina state line, and I had just negotiated the church-time traffic of Wilson. Gayly chattering, we sped (at 35 mph) over the road toward home, and, as you would naturally expect, I completely ignored the large sign reading ALL TRUCKS PULL TO THE RIGHT. In less than a moment, police whistles sounded and two men ran to flag us down. I must return and go through the truck weighing station! Instead of censure this time, however, we were teased about being "overloaded," and again enjoyed the admiration of bystanders for our new Bookmobile.

Route 301 stretched smoothly before us in the bright sun. Only thirty miles separated us from Smithfield, and we had brought home our prize unscathed. Thoughtfully I turned to my pals and sheepishly admitted, "This *is* a truck!"