

## RAIL HAVEN REVISITED

(Note to editors: For this piece, I've used the words *Rail Haven motel*. It's also known as *Best Western Route 66 Rail Haven*. Earlier signs included *Rail Haven Motel* and *Rail Haven Motor Court*. And Best Western uses the term *hotel* in some instances for Rail Haven. I used *motel* up front because I thought *hotel* would be misleading and *motor court* might cause confusion, especially joined with the words *rail haven*. – Greg Clock, Aug. 9, 2014)

On a solo drive from Wisconsin to Texas, I got off the interstate in Springfield, Missouri, on Aug. 4 and stopped at the Rail Haven motel on South Glenstone Avenue.

I hadn't been there in 53 years.

It was late August of 1961, and I was about to enter the seventh grade near Dallas, Texas. I was with my dad and mom on a business trip to Missouri, where he helped fix bread-wrapping machines in bakeries.

The 1961 Rail Haven had a swimming pool that I was happy to use, and there was a bowling alley across the street. And I had a tennis ball that I threw against the side of the motel for imaginary major league baseball games on the grassy expanse facing Glenstone. To my knowledge, there were no complaints to the front desk.

At the bowling alley, I scored a then-high 155. I eventually lost the paper scoresheet that could have provided present-day confirmation, but I remember the momentum from being on a roll above my usual 115.

In late August of 1961, while I was bowling on Glenstone, John F. Kennedy was quite alive in his first year as president, and Barack Obama was a few weeks old. Lee Oswald lived in Belarus. The Cuban Missile Crisis was more than a year away. And I'd never heard of Hanoi.

At the Rail Haven on Aug. 4, 2014, I opened Room 408, locked the door, and turned on the TV. I then decided to take a swim. The pool depth was 3 feet in the shallow end and 4 feet in the deep. Four sycamore trees, maybe 50 feet high, stood near one corner of the pool. At another corner was an American flag hoisted high on a pole. The electronic sign said Elvis had stayed here in 1956.

Back in the room after 30 minutes, I read a few pages of the News-Leader, and shut my eyes. I thought briefly about people who get enough cash to move out of living in their vehicles and into a motel room for a few days for a shower and a real bed.

The night moved on. The only major sounds came from a motorcycle and three separate sirens from emergency vehicles.

In late August of 1961, unpredictable events -- including missed opportunities, painful failures, and pleasant successes -- lay ahead, for both the U.S. and for me. On Aug. 5, 2014, my pickup truck was still intact after a night in the open parking lot. After breakfast in the lobby, it was time to get back on the interstate.

(Author's note: A cost-conscious business trip to Springfield in August of 1959 had us in the Rest Haven Court on East Kearney Street...Route 66. No pool, but visits to a large public pool and to Coley's Place -- that was the name, I'm pretty sure -- for hot dogs and extraordinarily thick chocolate shakes helped with the no-pool disappointment. And I still have a 94-page baseball magazine, now coverless, with a review of 1958 and a forecast of 1959, purchased from the Rest Haven magazine rack.

In August of 1961, we had driven to Springfield from Kansas City, where the real-life New York Yankees had swept the A's in a three-game series at Municipal Stadium. Sellouts for all three games due to the presence of Roger Maris and Mickey Mantle. Maris hit his 51<sup>st</sup> in the Saturday afternoon game on Aug. 26. Whitey Ford, Yogi Berra, Bobby Richardson (MVP of the 1960 World Series), and many other stars of the day, all near the corner of East 20<sup>th</sup> Street and Olive Street. A's owner Charles O. Finley was on hand; there's a black-and-white photo of Charlie with me and other autograph seekers after the Sunday game. Yankee Elston Howard had turned me down from the visitors' bullpen area a few minutes earlier. "Hey Howard, how about an autograph?" "No boy, go on.")

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