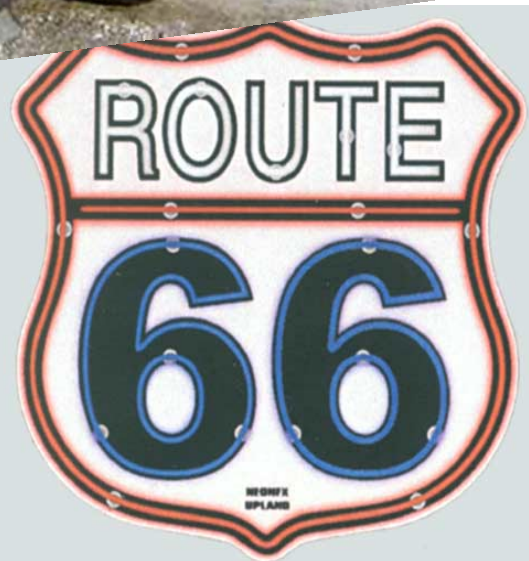
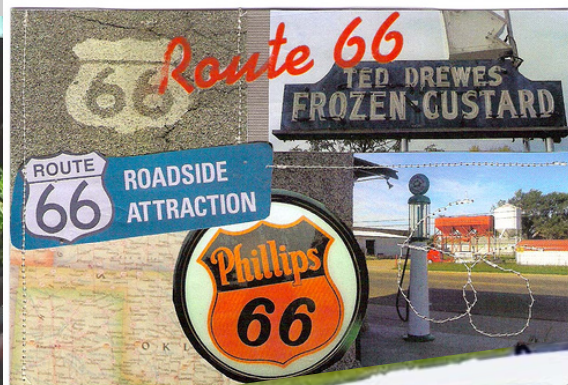


Big Red's Journey

The Chronicles of Route 66





Once upon a time, in the year of nineteen-hundred and seventy-three, a beautiful, bubbling, red Cadillac named Big Red was born. Big Red was a special car and everyone he met knew that he was destined for greatness. He spent his early years doing what normal Cadillac boys and girls did; traveling happily with their families, learning the rules of the road and testing out his wheels. Big Red encountered some trouble in his early adulthood because it turned out that doing “doughnuts” in the parking lot of the supermarket was fun, but frowned upon by local law enforcement. Times looked dim for Big Red after that and he hit more than one bump in the road (both metaphorically and literally). He was convinced that the greatness everyone else saw in him was just a fairytale, so he closed up his convertible top and spent a majority of his days wallowing in his own self-pity. Thirty-five years came and went and Big Red just chugged along never finding the right road to follow. And then one day, while parked outside the Cozy Dog Drive-In in Illinois, he saw it. He saw his sign, his direction and suddenly knew what he had to do. Historic Route 66, long forgotten by the world of interstate highways, needed desperately to be revived. A plan - that’s all Big Red needed now. He got himself all cleaned up and polished and set out to find new, worthy owners who would take him on his destined journey. Determined and unrelenting, Big Red found his drivers; Michael DeShane and Steven Vick, two boomers who were worthy of his cause because they had a cause of their own, too. It turned out that Michael and Steven were



generous people, looking to help others less fortunate than them. They wanted to make a substantial, unique donation to the Jessie F. Richardson Foundation (JFR), a private charitable 501(c)3 organization whose mission it was to improve housing and long-term care services for older adults. An agreement between the three was made and Big Red agreed to be donated to JFR at the end of their journey. Finally, Big Red was going to fulfill the greatness he was destined to achieve. And so Michael, Steven and Big Red embarked upon their Route 66 journey on the first of June, two-thousand and eight.

Big Red, Michael and Steven started out their first day in the Windy City, Chicago, IL and headed for Bloomington, IL, known for its great golfing. Although Michael desperately wanted to get a few rounds of golf in, he knew he had to get back on old 66 and make it out to Springfield, so he hopped back into Big Red. When the three men finally made it to Springfield, they immediately had to indulge in the world famous Cozy Dog Drive-In corn dog. They saw some more sights, paid homage to Abraham Lincoln by taking a few pictures with him and rested for the evening. Dreams of 66 danced through their minds and in the morning, the trio left Springfield. Contrary to what Michael and Steven insisted, the



chili cheese fries of the Polka Dot Inn of Braidwood, IL did not give Big Red gas as they had for them, so he fueled up at an old gas station in Mt. Olive. Then it happened. The threesome faced their first obstacle when Big Red’s drive shafts lost some of the bolts that connected to his transmission. Three hours and less than \$200 later, the obstacle turned out to be only a minor set back and they were all back out on the road. After finally making it out of Illinois, good ole 66 took them to St. Clair, MO where Michael and Steven began their individual battles with an evil bottle of Grey Goose vodka and Big Red rested his engine for the night.



Four days, six-hundred and forty-five miles, 8 beers and 75% of a bottle of vodka (who won the battle against the men) later, the three travelers still had quite a ways to go. Big Red, Michael and Steven learned that word of their incredible voyage was really inspiring other people to set their own goals and was sparking memories of old Route 66 when she was the Mother Road connecting Chicago to Los Angeles. While they were traveling many miles for JFR, other men and women were also making strides for JFR by participating in a walkathon that was taking place in multiple senior living communities on the west coast. Of the participants, there was one very special man named Al Wexler at Franklin Park Retirement in Fort Worth, TX who walked 10 miles a day and was an inspiration to Michael, Steven and Big Red.



The excursion continued and Big Red passed through the twists and turns of Route 66. He took Michael and Steven to the Merrimac Caves, Devil's Elbow, over historic bridges, passed breath-taking rivers and to many icons of Route 66 including the Munger Moss Motel in Lebanon, MO and to Bell's Diner for their world famous meatloaf. Big Red's wheels began to hurt a bit and needed to have some wheel bearings replaced; he was, after all, a boomer of sorts, himself. Michael and Steven used this time to meet some local people and explore some Missouri towns like Red Oak, Red Oak II (an obvious extension of Red Oak) and Joplin, where Michael and Steven spent the evening. Big

Red waited patiently for his parts and, finally, the next morning all three once again hit Route 66. They got through Kansas in one day, as Route 66 only enters the state for 13 miles and crossed the threshold into Oklahoma. Oklahoma met them with single lane sections, green farms, woodlands, and areas of abandoned homes and buildings where Route 66 had been decommissioned many years earlier. Big Red wasn't very fond of this spooky area, so he was sure to high tail it out of there. They headed for Okarche, OK to drink at Eischen's Bar, the oldest bar in OK, where they don't believe in plates, but make a fine fried chicken. So far, the trip was panning out to be everything that the three amigos had hoped.



The trio became a duo when Steven left the group, but Michael and Big Red became quite the couple and saw many of Route 66's sights together. Michael even nicknamed Big Red, *El Gigante!* They went to an old car show in El Reno, OK, where Big Red was reunited with some old buddies. Having always been a modest fellow, Big Red had no idea that his beauty ran as deeply as it did until he was ogled up and down by admirers who stroked his cherry red paint and drooled over his satiny upholstery. Michael quickly felt the rush of jealousy boil up inside of

him and set back out onto Route 66 with quite a quickness. They commenced the outing and visited some Route 66 museums in OK and finally crossed into TX where they were met with excruciating heat. Big Red showed his discontent to Michael when he put his top up to bask in a little air conditioning, so Michael grudgingly put the top back down, again. The two continued to ride smoothly when Big Red started to feel a little funny and little too hot. Something just wasn't right. Big Red rested up while Michael visited with some family and friends in Amarillo, but a little r & r wasn't all that he needed. Michael called the car doctor and it turned out that Big Red threw the fan belt that operated his water pump. There ended the first half of the Route 66 journey; Big Red in Amarillo, Steven in Dallas and Michael en route to Portland, OR until July.



Days passed, participants in assisted living communities walked and enjoyed activities, and Big Red sat there in Amarillo feeling antsy as he fought the dust that was trying to collect on his stunning red paint and sparkling windshield. He felt as idle as the odometer on his dashboard and yearned for Route 66 ever since the car doctor had fixed him up and fine tuned him. He could taste the sweet, summery air of Los Angeles tempting all of his senses and signaling victory. Finally, the day rolled around that Big Red broke free of the garage that imprisoned him when Michael and Steven came back. Although the day started well and Big Red felt the wind upon his face, it soon panned out to be a day not soon forgotten. In the days



leading up to departure, Big Red was sure that he'd see some of his long-lost relatives at the Cadillac Ranch, happy and enjoying their sunset years on vast land filled with horses and barbecue, but as he approached he realized that his vision was far from accurate. There, in front of him, stood his brothers and sisters, buried face down in the dirt up to their backseats and covered in the disrespect of graffiti. Aghast, Big Red nearly ran Michael and Steven over trying to leave the scene of this vicious crime, but Michael and Steven pleaded with him to stay for a moment so that they could be photographed by some professional photographers who were inspired by Big Red's beauty. The two men convinced Big Red that the photos could prove to be good publicity one day for JFR and he surrendered his morals out of the goodness of huge engine and posed for the photo op. Big Red, Michael and Steven spent Independence Day with some friends and then got ready for New Mexico.



New Mexico wasn't that exciting in the beginning, with Steven and Michael having to stop off on the Continental Divide to make conference calls. They all enjoyed the scenery and soon hit the road again, only to be confronted with some unwelcome excitement. Michael pressured Big Red to perform some questionable tactics (going around a barrier and driving on the wrong side of the road) and, lo and behold, an officer caught them in the act. After some negotiation, the officer let them go, but it wasn't until much further down the

road that Michael realized his license hadn't been returned to him. Having a criminal record, Big Red was worried about toying with the law and letting Michael sit behind his steering wheel, but realized there was no point in his freedom if he couldn't accomplish his dream. . . so they continued. They proceeded through New Mexico and into AZ and searched for some of the famous wigwam motels that still stood across the western portion of Route 66. They learned that only two remained – one in Holbrook, AZ and one in San Bernardino, CA. They stayed in the Arizona Wigwam and pow-wowed with some of the locals and, refreshed in the morning, set off again.



THE LOCALS



Winslow, AZ

beckoned to Big Red, Michael and Steven next. They couldn't help but have to hum the tune of the famous Eagles' classic song "Take it Easy," as the town's décor paid tribute to the song with statues and murals galore. Winona, AZ came and went and they drove on to Flagstaff, the largest Route 66 town with a remarkable, restored downtown. Big Red couldn't help but take some reflective moments to think about how far he'd come and all that he'd made of himself. He'd seen



more states, met more people and felt prouder of himself in just a few short weeks, than he had in all his 35 years combined. Both he and Route 66 had been revived by the JFR Donor Challenge and all the big-hearted people who participated. Big red carefully maneuvered along the crooked roads crossing the mountains into Oatman, AZ and felt as though they'd been through a time warp when they entered a town choc full of staged gunfights, tumbleweed and chap clad cowboys. The town made the men feel like they had shed decades when souvenir shops filled with cap guns and sheriffs' badges sparked their interests and opened their wallets. CA was only a short distance away, and their destination called for them to get back on the road.



From Needles to Barstow, CA, the trekkers traipsed through the Mohave Desert. Big Red let Michael and Steven finally put the air conditioning on as temperatures crept up to a scorching 119 degrees. They marveled at the berm (think big mound of dirt acting as a shoulder on the road) that was likely built at the same time as the highway. Over the years, people spelled their names in rocks on the berm and you can see them as you drive by. The next great sight was an old shoe tree. Big Red had never seen a tree that grew sneakers, but Michael and Steven explained that people just threw their shoes into the tree. Big Red wanted to throw his spare tire, but as a precaution, Michael and Steven convinced him to hang on to it instead. In Barstowe, the



trio stopped at a museum so that Michael could visit his curvaceous old flame, Marilyn, and then Big Red took them on to San Bernardino to spend another night in a Wigwam. It was shortly thereafter that Route 66 came to an end. The old time luster faded as they rolled through Pasadena, Los Angeles and Beverly Hills. Big Red could smell the salty sea water of the Pacific Ocean and he knew that he had done it. The journey was officially over when they reached the intersection of Ocean and Santa Monica.





Having fulfilled his destiny, Big Red felt a surge of accomplishment flow from his tailpipe to his headlights. He had made it through the trials and tribulations of Route 66 and had spread the word about the wonderful things that JFR was and still is doing for the elders of the world. He told as many people as he could to visit www.jfrfoundation.org to learn more about the foundation and to find out how they could help create sustainable solutions for the aging world by contributing at any time! Big Red knew that all the years he spent idling on roadsides was all behind him because he had really done something with his life. Now, he was lucky enough to have the opportunity to seize more adventure with a new owner who opened their hearts to JFR. He was so excited about this prospect that he almost blew a gasket! Although he knew he'd miss Michael and Steven, he knew that they'd always have Route 66. Besides, Big Red heard that Michael and Steven were planning another road trip without him in 2009. Ingrates! However, he is sure that his next owner will love him just as he is and will let him enjoy a nice retirement.



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