If you’re lucky, you might have a prized memento from your grandparents, maybe some yellowed photographs, an antique clock, a well-worn gold pocket watch. But sometimes your forbears can leave a little silver behind—in the form of a beloved Airstream.

In Roger Smith’s family that precious silver goes way back: his parents had six Airstreams, one of which, their 1992 25’ Classic, was bequeathed to Roger and his family after his father became a bit too old to keep hitting the road. Roger is definitely still rolling, but he’s about to move the ’92 on to his son Aaron; after all, he and his wife just got a 2012 Classic Limited 31. Family traditions—and old Airstreams—die hard.

Roger’s Airstream traditions are built into his bones: his folks took him and his older sister on a long Alaskan trip when Roger was four years old. Although he was so young, he does carry some memories of that journey: “I remember we had nine flat tires. I remember a hot springs in Alaska where the mosquitoes did not bother me, but bit everyone else. I remember the sun being up at two in the morning.” Nine flat tires might take the air out of subsequent travel inspirations, but those didn’t slow Roger’s dad. Roger estimates that the family went to between 25 and 30 states in the various trailers, and western Canada a couple of times.

But even when they weren’t making state-to-state sojourns, Roger’s family made weekend use of their trailers. “I do remember when we would go to a close weekend spot in southern California. My mother would have everything ready to go in the trailer. My dad would get off work at five, hook up the trailer and we would be off. My mother would sometimes turn on the oven as we left, put in a casserole and cook it on the way. We then had a hot meal when we got there.”

From their southern California base, the family often made shorter trips to Joshua Tree National Park or Anza-Borrego State Park. Roger’s father loved the desert, as Roger learned to do also, and Roger’s own family Airstream travels often touched those sun-sparkled regions. His parents took them further afield on more extensive summer trips to great national parks of the west: Banff, Jasper, Sequoia, Yellowstone, Mt. Rushmore, Lake Powell, Zion, Grand Canyon, Petrified Forest, Canyon de Chelly, Rocky Mountains, Glacier, Organ Pipe, Carlsbad Caverns, and...
even as far east as the Everglades and the Florida Keys. And all those in a station wagon with no air conditioning towing a trusty trailer.

One Yellowstone trip is etched in Roger’s memory: “My parents were visiting with the neighbor campers, as they would do often. My sister was making popcorn and melting butter on the Coleman stove. I was around 9, so I was messing around as normal. It was just dark. My sister went back to the butter she was melting and there was a bear licking the butter out of the pan. She screamed and ran into the Airstream, closing the door with me outside. I couldn’t get in so I went and got in the car, which was probably safer.”

That recollection didn’t stop Roger from taking his own son and daughter on many a family trip in their ’92 Classic, though they mostly confined those journeys to the western states, Mexico and Canada. Those trips include traveling to New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming and Montana, and three trips to San Felipe, Mexico. At 22 days, their Canadian trip has been the longest.

Rolling along with the Classic has been a bit different than in his parent’s 1957 or 1962 trailer. “Naturally, fuel costs were less. I remember a lot more Airstreams being on the road, or maybe that was just proportionally. Camping can be much more luxurious now—it seemed more primitive back in the ’60s,” says Roger.

“Roger does have a vivid memory of a rather primitive event while traveling with his parents. “We were coming back from a long trip through Springerville, Arizona. There was a slight dusting of fresh snow on the ground. We crested a hill that had some black ice on it, and the wind caught the trailer from the side. The rig fishtailed right, the left, then right again.”

“All my dad said was, ‘Here we go, kids.’ The hitch broke and our car was up on the berm of the embankment at the top. The trailer ended up at the bottom of the 12 foot embankment on its curb side. The only thing we could not recover from the contents was a Coleman lantern, although the interior looked like spilled matchsticks. I couldn’t be in snowy conditions for quite a while after that.”

But neither bears nor slippery snow has frightened Roger from the Airstream path. He can see Airstreams when he looks back through the long stretches of his past, and he can see their sweet shine long into his future.

“Airstreams are more than just a trailer. They are a way of thinking. I cannot see myself in something other than an Airstream, even though other brands are cheaper or have more storage. I would feel like I was ending a tradition if I did so. After their first teardrop, my father always had an Airstream. He was very analytical, and I feel that he found something that made sense.”

Got a story about your family’s history with Airstream? Write to us, or share your pictures, at editor@airstreamlife.com.

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TOP: Roger and Roxie Smith only recently handed down their 1992 Airstream and bought themselves 2012 Airstream Classic for more decades of travels.