

# I

Uncle Bob puffed contentedly on his pipe as we glided ever nearer to the Bridge in the mighty Buick Electra Estate Wagon. Everyone in Michigan knows that “The Bridge” is Mighty Mac, the Mackinac Bridge, connecting the Upper and Lower peninsulas of Michigan. The Bridge is one of the few of man's handiworks that I haven't lost faith in as I've grown older, wiser, and more cynical. The first glimpse of those huge towers supporting the suspension bridge is always filled with a sense of wonder and awe. When I was a kid, my family always played a game with the bridge. The first one to spot the Bridge won a quarter or something like that. As the years have passed I know exactly where the first glimpse of the Bridge offers itself.

“Uncle Bob, did you play that game with your family, where you have a contest over who can be the first to spot the Bridge?”

“Yes we did. Jimmy and Laurie would always be excited about winning a nickel.”

“How about if the first one of us to spot it wins five bucks?”

“Five bucks? Why don't we just do it for the fun of it?”

“Alright.”

I felt a little guilty anyway, taking advantage of my own uncle. I drove nonchalantly, keeping my eyes straight ahead until just the right moment when I pointed 90 degrees to the left through a cut in the forest and declared “There it is!”

“You rascal! You had that spot memorized in advance.”

“Well Uncle Bob, I was just trying to profit from my hard earned experience.”

“Sounds more like you were trying to take advantage of your Uncle Bob.”

I grinned. Without needing to acknowledge the fact, we were both feeling pretty good. Perhaps only a husband and father can know the sweet satisfaction of going off on an adventure with the wife's approval. We were off on a guilt-free romp of the Upper Peninsula. Somehow I'd managed to convince my wife that going off in pursuit of the perfect pasty with Uncle Bob was a worthwhile activity. Of course it helps that my wife loves Uncle Bob and was happy to see us having a good time. We all secretly knew that the pasty hunt was an excuse for good old pointless goofing off. But even goofing off needs a theme and we had a good one. The idea had been born a few years back when Uncle Bob and I had been in the than my parents U.P. for a family reunion. I elected to ride with Uncle Bob rather and we seemed to have the same rhythm about when to stop, and what to explore, and where to eat. For example, giant EAT signs are a definite attraction; and if it says homemade pasties then it's a must. Don't pay any attention to those “World Famous Pasties” signs. They

are overshooting their mark. I lived in Paris and never heard anybody mention pasties from Michigan's Upper Peninsula, or Jerry Lewis either for that matter. We got along so well on that family reunion trip (the reunion itself was a dud) that the idea of returning on an extended pasty hunt had been brewing ever since.

Uncle Bob is a lot more enthusiastic about pasties than I am, but I can play along with the idea, no problem. (By the way, they are pronounced pasties as in the past, not paste.) Uncle Bob was born in the U.P., but not me. So for him, this vacation was also a journey into the heart of his Yooper roots. A pasty is a Cornish meat pie. They were eaten by the miners for lunch during the mining boom of the late 1800s and early turn of the century. The copper they mined is mostly gone now but the pasties are still around. You can find pasties in a few places downstate but the U.P. is truly pasty country. Theoretically, the closer to the source the better the pasties should be.

Uncle Bob had driven up from St. Charles the day before to my home in Petoskey so we could get an early start. That means trying to get away before noon. I had to make some stops around town and we hit the grocery for a few essentials. We bought some plastic cups, knives, forks, plates, and a Styrofoam cooler filled with ice. That was for the "red pop". That's Uncle Lloyd's invention, my dad's older brother. Red Pop is composed of equal parts of sweet vermouth and bourbon. We had two fifths of each in back. We knew that pasties or not, no harm would come to us.

It should also be mentioned that Patsy the wonder dog was riding in the back seat. She's always pretty quiet so it's easy to forget about her. Her one talent or drawback, depending on your point of view, is her incessant licking.

“Keep that tongue in your mouth!” Uncle Bob told Patsy as she licked his ear. She's a white Australian shepherd with a big black patch over one eye. She's a beautiful dog but I'm used to her unusual markings. So it gets a bit tiring hearing comments about how wonderful she is ten times a day.

It was already past noon but we were holding off eating until we crossed the bridge and found a pasty joint. We cruised by Mackinac City on I-75 without stopping. It looked pretty dead now at the end of September. The ferries to Mackinac Island were still running but they pretty much roll up the sidewalks after Labor Day around here. We could look down the little Main Street of souvenir shops as the roadway rose to meet the bridge. No time to stop; we had to cross that bridge. Fort Michilimackinac was beneath us, and then we were airborne over the Straits of Mackinac. Five miles to go, longer than the Golden Gate Bridge.

“Have you ever been across the Golden Gate bridge Uncle Bob?”

“No, I never have.”

“Well, I have and I think the Mackinac Bridge is more beautiful. The Golden Gate is spectacular too, but there it is connecting city to city. But the Mackinac is more like joining two wilderness continents. When you see the Mackinac Bridge rising out of the forests it comes more as a surprise. Robert Traver, the guy who

wrote Anatomy Of A Murder, said that the Mackinac Bridge was the worst thing that ever happened to the Upper Peninsula.”

“It let all the trolls in.”

The view from up on the bridge is great but a lot of people don't like to look out; it makes them nervous. The Bridge Authority will even drive your car over for you for the wooses who are too afraid. They probably got more requests after that Yugo went flying off the bridge a few years ago.

“It's hard to imagine how someone could drive their car over the edge.”

“I think her wheels jerked when she hit the metal grating in the center and she just let go of the wheel. Look, you can see the Grand Hotel on Mackinac Island. There's an ore boat over there to the left. Man, I'm hungry. Maybe if I ask the guy at the toll booth at the other side he'll know where we can get a good pasty. I kind of hate passing up Clyde's. It's a little drive-in in St. Ignace that serves up 3/4 lb. hamburgers.”

“Oh no. We've got to be serious. Only pasties on this trip. We'll find a place in St. Ignace okay, don't worry.”

“Okay, okay. I know we'll find a place; it's just that I'm getting hungry.”

“Here; I've got the right change for the bridge.”

I paid the girl at the toll booth and took the first exit into downtown St. Ignace. Uncle Bob continually re-filled his old pipe and smoked away. Patsy lay back down now that we'd crossed the bridge. The outskirts