

The Water Jug

When I take a road trip with my family I stock up on plastic bottles filled with water from Mt. Shasta, Lake Arrowhead, or even Mt. Pellegrino in Italy. But, when my dad took our family on trips as a kid, he used a jug -- a brown, pottery jug commonly used by the hillbillies of Missouri to store white lightning. Of course, he had water in it, but it would have been hard for a state patrolman to tell that from a distance.

My dad had a unique way of drinking from his jug while driving. He kept the jug on the seat next to him when traveling long distances and stuffed a corn cob in the mouth, so it looked authentic. When he got thirsty, he didn't ask anyone to help pour him a drink, he simply removed the corn cob, stuck his forefinger in the small handle near the mouth of the jug, and lifted it onto his right shoulder. While keeping one eye on the road, he would tilt the jug down to his mouth and take a swig. This habit revealed a side to his character inherited from old family traditions. It's one of my favorite memories of my father -- a mix of the sophisticated professional with the tradition of a Missouri farm boy.

The jug wasn't used just on road trips. Whenever my dad helped harvest hay on the farm he would bring along the water jug. Because it was made of thick pottery clay it kept a gallon of water cold for a long time on a hot, summer day. My dad also had an old metal Thermos jug he could have used, but he seemed to prefer the water jug for road trips and on the farm. He used the Thermos to keep his coffee hot when traveling to work. I think he had that old green Thermos for at least 25 years because I remember how dented and scratched it was.

When we lived in Texas for about 4 years my dad also learned how to use a canvas water bag to keep water cold for the whole family. He would drape the rope handle of a one-gallon canvas bag filled with water across the hood ornament of our old 1950 Ford sedan for long drives across West Texas. The canvas bag would leak just enough to keep the outside wet but not enough to lose much of the water. As the hot, dry air whistled around the bag it would cool the water by at least 30 degrees. It worked like a swamp cooler used in mobile homes in the southwestern United States. The only problem with this portable water cooler was that my dad

hated to stop for any reason while traveling. The family could see the bag of fresh, cold water just out of reach on the front of the car as we begged him to stop for a drink and take a bathroom break. But, I don't recall ever drinking from it!