

Hello friends!

Baruch here. This year I've got a special edition of the annual newsletter:

"2020, When the Weissmans Went West!!"

My two brothers will be contributing for the first time, so brace yourselves. 😊

The three of us fulfilled a quest this year, at Shecky's request. With 32 years hitting the road for the Greeley County Highway Dept. (ha ha), he decided to retire. The first to-do on his list—a reunion trip. The destination? Robert Redford's birthplace in Santa Monica, California.

As you know, Shecky is impressionable. When Avram got his drivers license back in 1974, he took his two younger (and only) brothers into the house, asked our parents for the pickup keys, got them, and told our folks, "We're off to the big city!" Garden City, Kansas. Specifically, the Sequoyah movie theatre for the six-month-old premiere of "The Sting."

Shecky couldn't stop gabbing and gandering like a puppy the whole two-hour ride from Tribune. Then, he was like a hypnotized statue for the two hours in the theatre. I'm sure he was breathing because he walked out with us when the movie ended.

Ever since, he's seen all things Redford—even *Havana*. Never wrote a fan letter, never went to the Sundance Festival, just raved about Robert. Well, now that Bob's shining star is 80-some years old Shecky said he, meaning we, must pay tribute.

Avram said, "Why don't you just go to Park City and Sundance? It's closer."

Shecky answered, "I imagine it's disappointing meeting your idol. I don't want him to be disappointed in me."

Avram said, "Why don't you just fly out to L.A. yourself?"

Shecky replied, "Don't you want to help make my retirement wish come true?"

Avram may deny it later but he's a softie. The next day, he arranged time off from his commodities job in New York and made sure his family was OK with ten days away. I left Amy in charge of "Now & Then," our microbrewery in St. Paul, MN, and two weeks later Avram and I flew into Wichita.

Shecky stood outside baggage claim grinning brightly in his best blue sportscoat, hefting a big hand-written sign: "Butch & Sundance." The shiny SUV in the lot was his 1st retirement purchase and a thoughtful choice for our road trip.

As you know Shecky is faithful. He'd been living in our family's home since before Mom and Dad passed. So we stopped in Tribune to pay tribute...and rest up before launching the next day.

The décor was just as home-spun but a little sadder, a little bluer since we came for Christmas five years back.

After a good night's sleep (on the sofa?!), we packed PB&Js for breakfast and stepped outside when Shecky turned to the house and shouted, "We're off to the big city!" Even Avram had to smile at that.

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AVRAM: 1541 miles and 22 hours of travel, if speed limits are to be believed. I don't apologize for being a numbers guy. It may make me the 'black sheep' of the family but it's what got me a scholarship to Columbia and my job in New York City.

Shecky lives a sheltered life by comparison. He never takes advantage of opportunities, so this was a shocker. I couldn't tell you the last time I took a wanted vacation vs. a needed one. No offense to Sylvia and my girls. I just knew the Three Weissmans had to reunite.

I was the official log-keeper and journalist of the trip to the superstar's birthplace.

DAY ONE: We left Tribune, KS at 8:10 a.m., merged onto I-70 Westbound and left the cornfields behind. Driving to the Rockies (*Shecky let me take the first shift*) is like blinking while you move towards a castle. The purple mountains get progressively bigger and clearer.

We took a slight side trip to Breckenridge, CO because Bar needed to check out his brewery 'competition'. They gave us a complimentary tour, some spice samples, and bid us farewell.

Driving through the snow-topped Rockies captivated and energized me. We hit our limits, though, and stopped in Grand Junction at a Holiday Inn Express. *Service and facility I rate a 7 of 10.

DAY TWO: Bar took the wheel and declared 'Radio-Free Weissman Day!' The Sirius network gave all three of us satisfaction—Bar his late '80s and early '90s Punk; Shecky his American Folk fixation; and my classical composers were pleasant distraction.

Shecky did an unusual amount of asking and listening, truth be told. Bar and I updated him on our professional and personal lives while he smiled and kept repeating, "Good, I'm glad." I may have been distracted because our old-school navigation (*Maps? how quaint*) took us onto U.S. 50, not I-15 in Utah. At which point, I exploded with a litany of...not fit for print. Silence. Then Shecky said, "Think you used enough dynamite there, Butch?" We laughed and enjoyed 'the scenic route' to Ely, Nevada. *Red Roof Inn. Meh.

DAY THREE: Shecky engaged the GPS system and led us from U.S. 6 to U.S. 93 finally back to I-15 West. We stopped in Las Vegas because none of us had ever been. A casino called 'The Silver Mine' left us a collective \$84 poorer but Shecky bought some foil-covered chocolate coins at a corner shop to give us a 'moral victory'.

We then pushed our luck—and the speed limits—because Shecky insisted, "Three days! It has to be three days!" Circumventing the beast that is L.A traffic took some doing but we arrived at Mr. Redford's birthplace just as the sun was setting: 7:31 p.m.

As if we planned it.

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SHECKY: I lied. But for the right reasons.

See, I watched the Twilight Zone episode where Robert Redford is a young man needing help from an old woman. She's a shut-in who fears strangers because, well, Death could show any face and take her. It did—his. But she accepted it, him, both.

That night, I had a dream. I saw a bright star in the night sky. It was wondrous. What I heard was 'Three...three.' Then a kind of photo-negative of Redford's face as he looked in *The Sting*, with his fedora on.

It took a couple of days but I figured out what it meant. Lately, I just let dreams go. 'Stuff and nonsense' my Dad called 'em. But Mom always said bad or good, 'They're an inspiration, a starting point for when you wake up.' Then she'd kiss my forehead and say, 'So get started.'

Avram, Baruch, and I hadn't connected the last couple Christmases. We're pretty spread out. So I got inspired.

I had plenty of vested credit on the job; never really even took a trip out-of-state. If I put it all this together, I knew I couldn't go back to work. SO the Dream inspired the Trip that inspired Retirement. Sorry for the fib, fellas.

Charles Robert Redford Jr. was born in the Santa Monica Hospital in 1936. It was a distinguished year. Burt Reynolds, David Carradine, Albert Finney, Wilt Chamberlain, and Pope Francis also born that year. Who's left? Just Bob and the Pope. Think about it...

Anyhoo, I know my brothers don't have the same appreciation for Bob that I do. It's okay. During our trip, I saw how Bar appreciated positives in all the people we met—especially the rude trucker at a gas station in Ely: "He sure has an impressive speaking voice." And Avram doesn't talk much but you could see the sparkle in his eyes when he talked about his daughters or just watched the wild rock formations in Utah.

I'm the youngest but not the smartest of us three; I'm not the richest either. I live alone, not for lack of trying. But I don't envy them. I appreciate them both.

After we survived the bad road food, so-so motels, and three days cooped up together, there was...a moment.

We arrived at the hospital as the sun sank below the horizon. Music from the Santa Monica pier played in the distance. It wasn't the Maple Leaf Rag but it fit. I felt a need.

I said, "We have to give—we have to make an offering."

Avram asked, "What do you mean?"

“A token of our appreciation.”

Bar said, “Just like that?”

“Yeah, whatever you’ve got, right now, that has some value!”

We each dug in our pockets. Bar held up a bag of frankincense from the Colorado brewery. Av took out a packet of Myrrtec, his circulation meds. And I found a gold-covered chocolate coin.

We placed them on the grass. After a moment I said, “Thank you, Mister Redford, for all you’ve done and will do.”

Bar said, “Like reuniting the Weissmans.”

Av whispered, “Who says we were ever apart?”

And both of them were right.

Happy Holidays everyone!