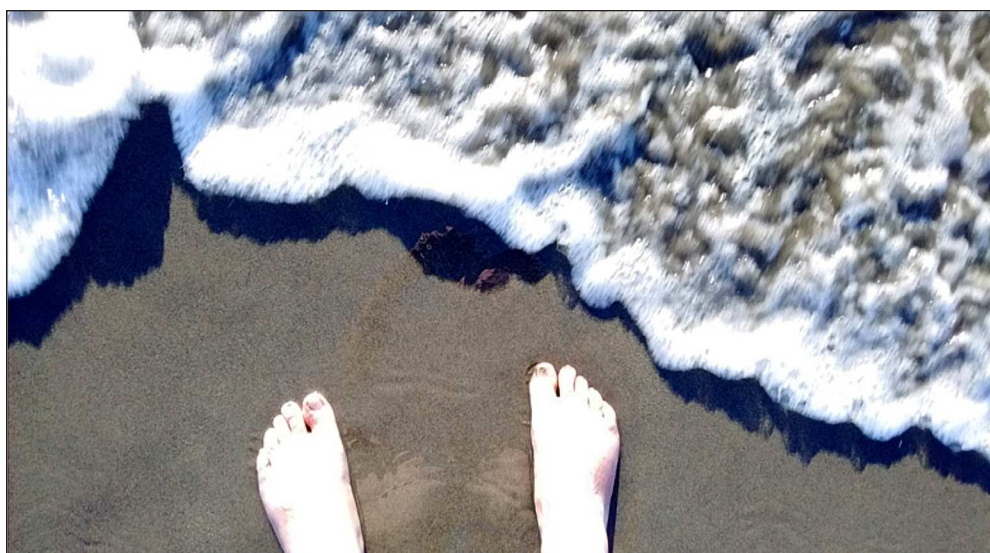


PUBLIC TRANSIT BUS ODYSSEY

Riding from Parkland to Ocean Park, Wash., for just \$6.25

By STEVEN KVAMME
For EO Media Group

In 1989 my father, Olaf Kvamme, made a bus journey from his home just north of Seattle to Pacific Beach, which is located 20 miles north of Ocean Shores, Washington. He wrote an article on the trip which the Seattle Times published under the title "On the Buses: From Seattle to the Sea for Just \$1.55." I always thought I would like to complete a similar journey. Coming from a frugal extended family I decided to wait until I turned 65 so I could get the senior fares. I have now completed that trip.



A daylong bus trip ended with toes in the sands of Surfside.

On Thursday morning, Aug. 25, I made my way to 112th and Golden Given in Parkland. The Pierce Transit, Route 4 bus was on its way from Pierce College-Puyallup to the Lakewood Mall Transit Center. At 7:59 a.m. it stopped for me, I stepped on, paid my \$1 senior fare, and found an empty seat. There were seven passengers already on the bus. Six of those seven were gazing intently at the screen of their phone or tablet. The seventh looked like she was asleep. None seemed to care, or even notice, that I had boarded their bus. This would be the shortest leg of my journey. In 12 quick minutes we were at the State Route 512 Park and Ride and I got off.

I would next be riding an Intercity Transit bus to Olympia. Noticing that an Intercity bus was already at the Park and Ride I was reassured. I found the location to board the Intercity and after several minutes the bus moved from where it had been waiting and pulled up to the loading zone. Several of us boarded the bus and I paid my \$1.25 fare. A few minutes later the bus left. Something did not feel right. We picked up more passengers at the nearby Lakewood Station and were again on our way. It was then that I realized what had been bothering me. I went to the front of the bus and picked up the Intercity Transit Guide. I figured out that I had boarded the 8:22 Route 609 instead of the Route 603 at 8:30. The bus I was now on did not stop at the Olympia Transit Center where I need to make my next connection! Was my glorious journey about to end prematurely?

I told the driver about my problem and asked about the closest stop to the Transit Center. He answered 3½ blocks. The person sitting in the row behind me explained that she had also made the same mistake. The driver suggested that instead of walking the 3½ blocks we get off at an earlier stop and take Olympia's free Dash Bus which serves the capital area to downtown. He was very attentive to us and gave us all the details needed. His reassurance made us feel that all was not lost.

I spent the rest of that trip talking of past bus trips with my fellow mistake prone rider. We each caught the Dash and made it to our transfer point with time to spare. The experience had the extra positive of adding one more bus route to my trip.

Scenic back roads

Grays Harbor Transit operates the next leg of the journey. Route 40 took me from Olympia to Aberdeen Station. At \$2.50, it was the most expensive of the trip. Early in this route we went past Capitol Lake which brought back memories of many Lakfair 10K runs I had participated in the past. The bus then headed out Harrison Avenue toward Mud Bay where I ran with the Capitol City Marathon Training Group in preparation for marathons in 1989 and 1990.

I was puzzled upon reading that there are 62 stops on this route. It took only a short while to decide that it must be 31 stops each way. There are seven stops listed on Highway 8 between Mud Bay and McCleary. Driving down that highway at 55 mph it was hard to imagine the bus stopping for a passenger. During a short stop at McCleary Station I asked the driver about these stops. He replied, "They are not really stops, but you can flag down the bus."

I asked how this is done. He said, "You need to be standing on a long straight stretch, at an intersection, with room for the bus to pull over. Wave your hands like crazy as soon as you see the bus. Most people wave a white cap or something else that is easy to see."

I next asked how often this happens. "Maybe once or twice per trip. Most of the people who flag down the bus are regulars, so we know where to look for them."

No new passengers boarded in McCleary. A few did get on or off at marked stops as the bus made its way through Elma, Satsop, Brady and Montesano. Although these towns are only a short distance from the main highway, I do not recall ever driving through them, with the exception of Montesano. On my next car trip to the ocean I think I'll take the bus route. I liked it.

After leaving Montesano we reentered the main highway, which at this point is Highway 12. We finally made our one and only flag stop. And sure enough the passenger was waving a white cap.

No Goodwill, but great tortas

I had been planning on getting off the bus at the Aberdeen Walmart in the Gateway Plaza shopping center. There is a Goodwill next to the Walmart, and I never pass a Goodwill without stopping. Imagine my horror when the bus did not pull into the shopping center. I reread the schedule to see that the bus only stops at the Walmart east bound. No west bound stop.

My plan had been to spend part of the two-hour layover shopping at the Goodwill. Now I had to change my plans and spend the entire two hours eating.

Before the trip I had researched eating establishments that were within walking distance of the Aberdeen Transit Center. There were several fast food places, one that seemed similar to a Denny's, and a couple of higher-end eateries.

There was also La Salvadoreña. Just a short two blocks from the Transit Center, this Salvadoran/Mexican restaurant appeared to be my kind of place. These phrases from Yelp reviews made me start to salivate: Good traditional Salvadoran food, Prices are extremely reasonable, The food is incredibly tasty, Great service. One final phrase which would be a negative for most people, but is a positive for me: Bland atmosphere.

When I walked up to the counter to order, I saw a vat of complimentary pickled carrots, onions and peppers. I knew I had chosen wisely. Although I knew I would love the tacos, burritos, tamales, or tortas on the menu, I had decided I wanted Salvadoran. After looking the menu over I decided on the #5 Combination Plate. It consisted of arroz (rice), frijoles (beans), curtido (coleslaw), and two pupusas. Pupusas are homemade corn tortillas stuffed with cheese and one or more meats or vegetables. I ordered one chicharron and queso (pork and cheese) and one pollo and queso (chicken and cheese.) The combination plate was a great bargain at only \$5.49. I filled a small bowl with pickled carrots and peppers to snack on while waiting for the main meal. The meal arrived in about five minutes. Everything was delicious! The pork and cheese pupusa and the rice were particularly outstanding! I'm sure I will be back again.

Before leaving, I went up to the counter to ask where I could find the nearest free Wi-Fi access. They were unable to answer, but a friendly customer suggested the nearby Jack in the Box. I did not feel comfortable using their service without ordering something, so I got a chicken sandwich and a Diet Coke.

Like many people my age or older, I suffer from the need to urinate frequently. This was always my biggest worry about the journey I was now less than half way through. My normal routine is to start each day with some caffeine. Most people have a cup or two of coffee. I have never cared for the taste of coffee, so I start my day with an ice cold Diet Mountain Dew. In preparation for the trip I had stopped drinking any liquids at midday on Wednesday. I'd had only a few swallows of water up to this point in the day. Although I knew the Diet Coke was a diuretic, it sure tasted good! I would have to spend the next hour seeing how little of it I could drink.

I sipped my Diet Coke as slowly as I could, and nibbled at my chicken sandwich as I read the morning Tacoma News Tribune on my notebook. My next bus was scheduled to leave at 1 p.m., so at 12:45 I left the Jack in the Box. I felt real pride as I poured more than half my beverage into the garbage.

At 1 p.m. there was no bus. 1:05, 1:10, 1:15 still no bus. During all of this time an elderly woman was talking to her dog in a small pet carrier. At least I think she was talking to her dog. The thing is, the dog never made a sound. There may have been nothing in the pet carrier.

Pacific County bound

Finally at 1:18 p.m., the Pacific Transit, Route 14 bus to Raymond arrived. Pacific Transit offers

the best fares of any of the four transit systems that were part of my journey. They charge \$0.50 for long routes and \$0.35 for shorter routes. I would be taking two longs and two shorts. I asked for a Day Pass and dropped \$1.50 into the box. Good planning had saved me \$0.20. I traveled on Pacific Transit for about 110 miles. This portion of my journey cost just over one cent (137 cents total) per mile.

The fact that the bus was 18 minutes late caused me to rethink my plans. My original schedule called for a 50-minute layover in Raymond. I had planned to use that time to make a quick stop at Raymond's Carriage Museum. This no longer was an option. I would just wait and decide what to do once I reached Raymond.

There were six passengers on this bus. A young man sitting near me decided to have a one-way conversation with me. In about one minute I learned that he was 18 years old, he was having a stressful day, his girlfriend was 23 weeks pregnant with his child, she went to prison earlier in the day, he had recently got out of prison, he was going to temporarily live with his drug-addicted mother.

Luckily, at this point, the dog lady got interested in his story and they began a two-way conversation that lasted the length of the trip. I tried not to listen, but at one point I could not help notice that she said a five-minute prayer for him while holding his hand.

Just as we were entering Raymond the driver was talking on his radio. He asked if anyone wanted to immediately transfer to the bus headed to South Bend. I said I did. He told the other driver to wait until we got there. I made the transfer and we were off. I missed out on visiting Raymond, but now had 1 hour 40 minutes to visit South Bend.

I first visited Olson's Thrift Shop. It made me feel a little better after missing out on Goodwill earlier in the day.

Next I walked a couple blocks down the road to the Pacific County Museum run by the Pacific County Historical Society. It is a small museum that is rich in historical photographs. One of the first things I noticed was a long picture of a train that ran on the South Bend rail line between Chelalis and South Bend. The line operated between 1892 and 1954. My uncle, Dale Finley, came to work on this line in the late 1940s or early 1950s. His wife Esther, daughter Christine, and he lived in Raymond. I have pictures taken in Raymond from my first birthday party in 1952 which was celebrated with them at their residence.

Courthouse adventures

After leaving the museum, I walked up the hill on Memorial Drive to the Pacific County Courthouse. The Courthouse was completed in 1911 and is well known for its stained glass dome.

The dome was impressive, but what I really appreciated was that the building was air conditioned. It was a very warm day and after walking up the hill I was hot and sweaty. I went up to the second level and plopped myself down in one of the many great old wood and leather chairs.

I had been sitting there for about 10 minutes when someone in business dress went past me, down a short hallway, and into a room. In the next couple minutes several more went past. I heard some metal clanging and look up. I saw a man that looked to be in his 60s with chains on his wrists and ankles. He was walking straight towards me. He was wearing a full body jumpsuit that looked almost bumpy, including matching booties. The most bizarre thing was the color of the jumpsuit. It seemed to be a combination of hot pink and bright orange. Take off the chains and give him some floppy ears and he could have been the Easter Bunny. An officer was following him. Just before he reached me he turned the corner, walked down the hallway, and entered the same room as the rest of the people. I decided I had seen enough of the courthouse.

Back down on the waterfront, I headed for the Oyster Shack. I wasn't hungry, but had been told that this place was not to be missed. I've only had oysters on the half shell twice before. Both times I had to gag them down. I ordered a single

oyster. I asked for a small. I went with The Caribbean — lime, fresh cilantro and olive oil.

I added a couple of shakes of Tabasco. I asked how I should eat it. The owner said to really get the fresh oyster taste, give it a couple of chomps, then down the hatch. It was really good. I am looking forward to the next time I am in South Bend and can have at least half a dozen.

Via Astoria

It was now 4:05 p.m. and time to begin the longest leg of the journey. The Route 50 would go through Naselle, over the Columbia River to Astoria, and then back over the river to Ilwaco. It was scheduled to take 1 hour and 45 minutes.

There were four of us on the bus including the dog lady. I have to apologize to this lady. I have no evidence that there was not a dog in the pet carrier. Everything I heard her say, or saw her do, leads me to believe she is a hard-working, thoughtful and caring person.

The other two passengers were a man and a woman that both looked to be in their 70s. I gathered that they lived near each other and sometimes took outings together.

If you ride the bus there are a couple things you should be aware of. The more people on the bus, the smoother the ride will be. Sitting above the rear axle is the bumpiest place on the bus. The bus ride was a bumpy one for all of us. The fact the couple sat in the last row on a nearly empty bus made for a very bumpy ride for them. Each time we would hit a bump the man would vocalize his discomfort. Sometimes he would utter a mild profanity. This continued to bother him more and more. At one point he told me that he had been involved in three helicopter crashes and that this bus ride was worse than any of them.

When we reached Naselle the driver pulled off the highway at the bus shelter. He stopped the bus and told us that we would transfer to another bus to finish the route. He expected it would take about eight minutes for the second bus to arrive. We all got off the bus to stretch our legs. I used this opportunity to walk into the woods for a natural break. After 20 minutes, the second bus arrived.

We all took our seats in the new bus. The couple picked better seats this time. The original driver handed some paperwork to the new driver. The new driver gave a handful of Jolly Rancher candies to him as he left. I was thinking it sure would have been nice if he had shared them with everyone.

Crossing the bridge into Astoria I could see a flag man ahead. The bus driver saw him too and picked up speed so there would be no gap with the car in front of us. We made it past the flagger and then passed five large construction trucks that were parked in the opposite lane. I counted the cars waiting in line to cross into Washington. I could finally stop counting when I got to 87 cars. Who knows how long they had been waiting?

After arriving at the Astoria Transit Center, one boy, his two sisters, and their grandma were about to get on the bus. The boy, who looked to be about 3 years old, looked at me and said, "You're sitting in my seat." Not wanting to cause trouble, I move back to the next bench. This left the first bench, that faces sideways, on the door side, available for the kids. The boy sat in the middle with his 5 and 6 year old sisters on either side of him. Grandma sat in the bench behind me.

Before leaving the driver offers each kid a Jolly Rancher. Now, I really was getting steamed.

Crossing the bridge back into Washington the flagger, trucks, and construction workers were gone. They must have gotten off work while we were in town.

In Chinook, the driver dropped off a passenger right at his house. The boy asked the driver if he would drop them off at their house. The driver said he did not know where they lived. The kid asked his grandma where they lived. The grandma said they lived in Washington. The girls smiled, but the kid seemed satisfied.

Upon arriving in Ilwaco, we were told that the same bus would be used for Route 20. This would be my last bus that would take me through Long Beach and Ocean Park. It would finally drop me off at the Surfside Inn. I was almost there.

The kids and grandma finally got off the bus in Seaview. It turns out they were staying at a motel just across the street. The driver did drop them off at their house.

In Long Beach a group of about eight teenage boys got on the bus. They each had skateboards in their hands and each paid their \$0.35 fare. Every few miles one or two would get off the bus until finally they were all home.

I got off the bus for the final time at the Surfside Inn. I walked over a wooden bridge across a canal and then a half block down the road to a condo that belongs to a good friend of mine. I unlocked the door, went to the fridge, and popped open an ice cold Diet Mountain Dew. I went out the back door, walked down to the beach, and took off my shoes.

As the Pacific Ocean water lapped over my toes, I knew my journey had been a great success!

our
coast
MAGAZINE



3 WAYS TO GET
YOUR COPY
TODAY!

ORDER ONLINE

www.DiscoverOurCoast.com/order

STOP BY ONE OF OUR 3 LOCATIONS

Astoria • 949 Exchange St.

Seaside • 1555 N. Roosevelt Dr.

Long Beach • 205 Bolstad Ave. E. #2

or CALL HOLLY LARKINS

at 503-325-3211, x227

Email: hlarkins@dailystar.com