



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“The motorbus industry occupies a vital place in the everyday life of the American public. In rural areas and in the thousands of towns and cities across the nation, it provides personal transportation for many purposes, carrying more persons daily than all other public modes of transportation put together.”

-From the Museum of Bus Transportation website
(www.busmuseum.org)

The first bus we saw when we pulled into the parking lot of the Museum of Bus Transportation in Hershey, Pennsylvania, was an old Lakeland, sporting a license plate that said simply “Forrest Gump.” Surprised, I read the sign on the side of the bus that explained: “This bus was featured in the movie *Forrest Gump*.”

We were there because my husband is a fan of old buses, collecting items like schedules, bus signs, and destination signs (the signs on the front and sides of buses that indicate where the bus is going). Museums like this serve many of the same functions as special libraries, where one can explore a particular topic, like aviation, music or – in this case – transportation.

But when we walked in, the first floor was all automobiles – room after room of restored antique cars, each carefully described on accompanying signs posted nearby. It turns out this museum is a collaboration between the bus museum and the Antique Auto Museum.

Apparently, most people are interested in the cars, since our young guide – Travis – seemed amused when I explained we were there to see the buses. I did spend some time looking around, however, and I saw some wonderful cars, like a bright red-and-white 1959 El Camino; a 1910 Brush open air 2-seater, built on a wooden frame; a 1917 Pierce Arrow; and a white 1910 Buick, with red seats and acetylene headlamps, which were powered by water dripped on carbon. My favorite was a truck – a gorgeous grey 1938 Willys Model 35, with a 4-cylinder engine and 48 horsepower. It had white wall tires, with a red line around the center of the wheel.

Outside a replica of an old-fashioned gas station, I couldn’t resist stepping on the thin black rubber hose on the ground and setting off the bell. I clearly remember those hoses – when a car rolled over it, the bell would ring to let the attendant know to come out. In fact, I don’t know if I realized they don’t

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exist anymore.

The bus section was smaller than the car one, but fascinating nonetheless. On the wall were laminated signs giving a chronology of the history

of buses, including the early years of Greyhound buses and bus workers. One of the buses described was the "more luxurious Parlorcar model featuring

Madagascar leather upholstery and vacuum cups on the legs so that by pulling tassels on the arms one might move the seat around at will." Bus memorabilia, like bus station signs and toy and model buses, filled glass cases, and there was a row of bus motors, including a Wankel rotary one.

And then there were the buses themselves. We saw a 1927 Fageol with wicker seats, made with a bus chassis (rather than a truck one) and a Trail-

ways Golden Eagle from the early seventies, with mannequins of the attendants standing in the front. These cross-country inter-state buses had reserved

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seating and operated like airlines, with uniformed attendants ready to give some passengers 5 Star service.

The museum also had a special room just for children called "Investigation Station." The interactive displays included gears to be turned, worn and new shock absorbers to be compared, and rubbings to be made of old license plates.

It was a visit well worth the time and if you ever find yourself in Hershey, I recommend taking a look.