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**HOW GROWING UP
CAMPING BECAME A FAMILY BUSINESS**

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ABSTRACT

This is a story about the importance of RVing and the development of a long term perspective about its future. It is how a family had the necessary vision to develop a successful business and understand the changing needs of the consumer and their needs to sustain and grow a successful business. It is the understanding of customization of Airstream trailers and the importance of this brand to RVing.

Key Words: RV Customization. Airstream, Business Model, Family Camping

START

The Mackinac Bridge opened in 1957 when I was 10 years old. Friends from our hometown invited our family to come and stay in their cabin in St Ignace which is just across the bridge. It took a few years but in 1960, Dad, Mom and 5 kids piled into our 1954 Buick and headed north. We drove as far as Higgins Lake where we rented a cabin for the night. The next day we crossed the magnificent Mackinac Bridge and arrived at our friend's summer home on the shore of Lake Huron.

This trip and the beauty of the Upper Peninsula of Michigan is what I believe put the desire in my parents to purchase a used travel trailer. I don't remember what year the trailer was, but it was old and bare bones with a couple beds and the only light and heat was gas light on the wall. Hitched behind the Buick the next summer and off to the UP where we camped at Brevort Lake State Park about 20 miles west of St Ignace. Cooking our meals over a campfire, swimming and fishing in the lake, singing around the campfire in the evening with neighboring campers gave us lifelong friends and many memories.

In 1963, Dad purchased a new pickup and slide in Camper, and we would spend a month camping at Brevort every summer. We also made trips to the Ohio State and Michigan State

Fairs. I would ride in the truck cab with Dad and Mom and the girls would ride in the camper and they would lay in the bed above the truck cab and watch the scenery through a large front window.

In 1965 I graduated from High School, and we planned a trip to New York to attend the World's Fair and tour New York City. We camped in New Jersey and on the first day we rode a bus into Grand Central Station then boarded the subway to get to the World's Fair. It was a local, so it made many stops until we arrived at the Fair. It was quite a trip for a family from the farmlands of Ohio. We saw so many futuristic displays and Corporate pavilions that day then boarded the subway, which was an express and we were back downtown in no time. The next day we spent sightseeing downtown NYC. We visited The Empire State Building, St Peter Cathedral, ChinaTown and other landmarks. We left NYC and headed north into Canada then west to our favorite place to camp...Brevort.

As time went by, we had families of our own and we started camping together with Mom and Dad in Michigan. What great memories we have camping with my parents and my sisters' families.

BUSINESS

One of our camping friends had an Airstream trailer and it caught Dad's eye, so one rainy day Dad and I went to Toledo to a new Airstream dealer just to look around. They had a used Airstream that Dad thought he and Mom would like. The asking price was more than Dad

wanted to spend but in getting to know the owner, he found out that he wanted to clear brush from an adjacent lot to make a storage area. Since we were in the excavating business, Dad offered to clear the brush off the lot for a discount on the trailer he wanted. They made a deal, and Dad rented a dozer from a construction equipment dealer near the dealership, and I cleaned up the lot and Mom and Dad got their first Airstream.

That fall, Dad polished the aluminum exterior of his Airstream and when he and Mom went to Florida that winter, other Airstream owners wanted to know what he did to his trailer and could he make theirs look that good. Well, that next winter we polished some Airstreams, and so the beginning of P&S Trailer Service. This was in 1968 and over the last 55 years, we have refinished over 3400 Airstreams besides service and collision work on many more.

In 1973 Mom and Dad moved to Florida for my mother's health and Dad helped build an Airstream Park called Traveler's Rest near Dade City and eventually became the manager of the park where they lived for over 20 years. Residents of the park would question Dad about problems with their trailers and of course many would travel to P&S for repairs.

My wife Becky and I bought our first Airstream in 1975 so my family could visit Mom and Dad over the Christmas Holiday and use it for summer trips. The trailer was a 1957 30ft and we fixed up the interior and polished the exterior. We enjoyed many camping trips with our family and other camping friends. Years later, I was also able to take my grandsons to Oshkosh, Wisconsin and camp near the airfield for the annual Air Show and on another trip, we went to the Sand Dunes in Michigan on the shores of Lake Michigan.

We began reconditioning older Airstreams and listing on eBay and some of our first buyers were from overseas as the Airstream dream spread around the world and we have shipped Airstreams to 8 different countries. We towed the trailers to the Port in Baltimore where they loaded on ships for transport to designated overseas ports.

One day while surfing the internet, I saw someone in Germany had built a Food Truck out of an Airstream by cutting open the side of the trailer and building a door to fit. I thought to myself, I could do that, so I purchased a welder for aluminum, taught myself how to weld aluminum by watching YouTube and we never looked back. Food Trucks caught on in Europe before here in the States. We shipped many to Dubai, Saudi Arabia, Europe and the Caribbean.

When Covid hit, many restaurants took their business to the streets and Food Truck mania was on. The last few years our units are built mainly for use here in the US. Today building custom Airstreams is 80% of our business.

I retired about 6 years ago, but I am still helping where I can by traveling to the Airstream Factory in Jackson Center, Ohio for parts and delivering trailers most anywhere in the continental US. Becky and I spend January and February in Florida at Land Yacht Harbor in Melbourne which is an Airstream Park.

Our son Kevin took over and has made some positive changes sourcing out the building of the Food Truck serving doors and started purchasing new Airstream shells to his specifications. This

has streamlined our shop, which has sped up the completion time on the units.

We have customers who want to design their own interiors and depending on their budgets, we use either a vintage Airstream or a new Airstream shell and they work with our designers to create their dreams.

P&S Trailer is not a typical business in that we never had a business plan or example to follow. We took on challenges as they came along and did things that no one else had done before and found a way through them. My Dad always told me if someone asks you why you're doing it that way, just tell them that is the way we have always done it.

I give all the glory to God for how the idea of the business started and continued to this day. There were times in the early years I would struggle with working alone and keeping focused on what needed to be accomplished. Here are a couple of my favorite Bible verses that have helped me stay on track through the years.

INSPIRATION

He set our feet on a solid rock and He establishes my steps Ps 40:2

Whatever you do, do all to the Glory of God I Corinthians 10:31b

PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY



Nightly Campfire with Neighbors at Brevort Lake, Michigan 1963



Camping in Canada 1963



Camping at Michigan State Fair 1964



Our Winter Getaway at Land Yacht Harbor in Melbourne, Florida



Camping at Michigan Sand Dunes with Grandsons