

Memories of My Parents

Bryce Clark Leavitt and Ella Beth Weeks Leavitt

Interstate 15 Opens

By Ron Leavitt, Their Sixth of Eight Children

Foreword—



*Bryce Clark Leavitt, age 17
Indianapolis, IN, 1943*

Camron Wright wrote, “Our memories are the key, not to the past, but to the future. Oddly sharp and near they are, as though they’re not finished, it’s as though they have something more to say. We are memories—our lives, our hopes, our desires, our despairs, our passions, our strengths, our weaknesses. Memories express our longing not only to make a difference today but to see what is possible tomorrow. Memories are a handbook for the art of being human.”



*Ella Beth Weeks, age 17
Vernal, UT, 1944*

This memory is my attempt to give life and preserve the behind the scenes efforts of my parents, Bryce Clark Leavitt and Ella Beth Weeks Leavitt, their eternal marriage, their unwavering commitment to raise eight children, and their passion and devotion to their faith. It's a true story according to my best recollections. However, in addition to the inevitable flaws of remembrance, this memory is told through the lens of how I view the world, including my single-minded focus, and a lack of understanding about the inner worlds of others.

The events described below unfolded in my young life around the age of seven or eight—either in 1963 or 1964. They are described from my perspective. They are my memories. I lived them. Sadly my parents are no longer with us and can't provide their points of view. The events I describe did not necessarily happen in the order they are portrayed. Or even on the same day. But each of them happened.

I have attempted to use words, idioms, and expressions my parents used through the years. Some of them are unique to them, their day, or both.

I regret not writing this history while Mother and Dad were still living. Their feedback might have been comical, moving, tender, and priceless. Perhaps they might have provided additional

insight derived from the benefit of Monday morning quarterbacking. Had I presented stories such as this to them, perhaps they would have contributed additional lessons for their handbook on the art of being human.

Many of the memories I have shared are crystal clear in my mind—it's as though they happened five minutes ago. It's like picking up a remote and pressing "Play." The movie begins. This is a blessing, and sometimes a burden.

Take a ride back in time as you lose yourself in their story. Crawl inside their skin. For ten or fifteen minutes wander around in their socks, shoes, and slippers. Look out through their eyes and view their mortal trials and demands as they experienced them. Carry their heavy loads around the block. Just the block—they carried

them all their lives.
Take a ride
in the car
with them.
Feast at
their table.

Attempt to raise their eight nincompoops. Work in their restaurants. Endure the Great Depression. Dig through the couch looking for a quarter. Endure Adolf Hitler. Pearl Harbor. World War II. Kamikaze attacks. Atomic bombs. Gaze at their eight children and wonder.

Calvin Coolidge was president when they were born. Heber J. Grant was the prophet. They were born and lived in a different era. Walk back in time with them. They struggled but tried hard to comprehend the realities of our time.

"How do you kids afford cable?" Mother asked.

She wasn't questioning our ability to pay the bill. She couldn't comprehend why anyone spent money to watch television.

Dad couldn't wrap his arms around our needs for three or four-car garages. Yet no one loved cars more than Dad—none of us will ever buy as many as he did.

Mother and Dad made valiant efforts to relate to our worlds in the autumn of their lives. We owe it to them to identify with theirs.

They left us a masterfully written handbook on the art of being human. Our memories are our very



Ella Beth Weeks, age 18
BYU, 1945



Bryce Leavitt, age 18
US Navy, World War II, 1944

own set of scriptures they majestically composed. For us.

Push the "Play" button and lose yourself in their memories of life.

My desire is that these memories will live on through their posterity—their children, their grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and beyond.



*Ella Beth Weeks and Bryce Clark Leavitt
Wedding Reception, Vernal, UT, 11 April 1947*



Meet the Actors ... Starring the Bryce and Ella Beth Leavitt Family ...

Janet Lee, age 9; David Leon, age 5; Dennis Clark, age 15;
Bryce Clark, age 38; Kathleen, age 16; Ella Beth, age 37;
Steven Bryce, age 14; Ronald Wayne, age 8; Bonnie Laurie, age 11

*(Photo was taken in the living room of our home at 674 W Center, Orem, UT
in 1964; this is what we looked like the day I-15 in Utah County opened—we
were dressed more like ragamuffins for that infamous ride to the Point and back)*

Interstate 15 Opens





Ron and David

It took all day, it seemed, to travel the forty miles from Orem to Salt Lake City, and then back. That was my impression at such a young age. Dad or Mother drove a few blocks and then had to stop at a light, or a stop sign. This was repeated dozens of times. Imagine stop signs on State Street between Orem, Salt Lake City, and Bountiful today.



Janet

Little David often yelled out, "Mom, how old will I be when we get there?"

I was car sick more than once. Boredom came easy in those long drives.

Janet—age nine, and David—age 5, and me—age 8, were cramped and uncomfortable.

"Scoot over!"

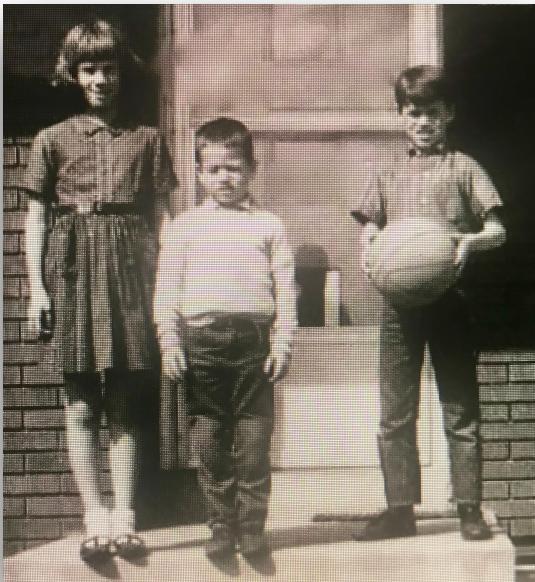
"Quit looking at me!"

"Stop picking your nose!"

"Did you let one?" we said.



We stopped at a traffic light or stop sign and had to stare at the grille of the car or truck behind us. People in the vehicles behind us gawked at us. We felt like little monkeys at the zoo. We got so we could read their lips.



Janet, David, Ron

"Look at all those kids in that car. There must be a dozen of them."

We stopped at the next light.

"Look at that darling little girl with the pigtails having to ride between those miserable-looking boys."

I was too young to know what flipping the bird meant, but I wanted to wave at them with my middle finger. But I didn't dare. I only knew it was bad. And standing in the corner with my nose touching both walls for three hours as punishment wasn't worth it. And what if at the next light the guy got out and smacked me through the tailgate

window?

Dad came home from Salt Lake City excited to tell us the freeway was open. All I wanted to know was what we were going to get for free. Freeway ... free ...

It was dark. I couldn't see the moon, but the stars were shining brightly. For the first time I wasn't thinking life was unfair because I was forced to ride backwards in the very back of Mother's Ford station wagon. Life always feels unfair when you're one of the younger ones in a large family.

Our station wagon seemed as long as an aircraft carrier —Dad and Mother and Bonnie arrived where we were going five minutes before I did, it seemed.

Bonnie, age 11, was riding in the front seat between Mom and Dad. Not fair. She came up with some cockamamie story about getting car sick if she didn't ride up front. Dad bought her half-baked tale hook, line, and sinker because she was his "Bread Buddy Jelly."

And Bonnie got to steer the car! Really not fair. Not fair times ten.

Mother was nervous when Bonnie steered. Often she'd fuss at Dad. Dad had his standard answer.

"Ella Beth, for heaven's sake, my hands are right here close to the steering wheel."

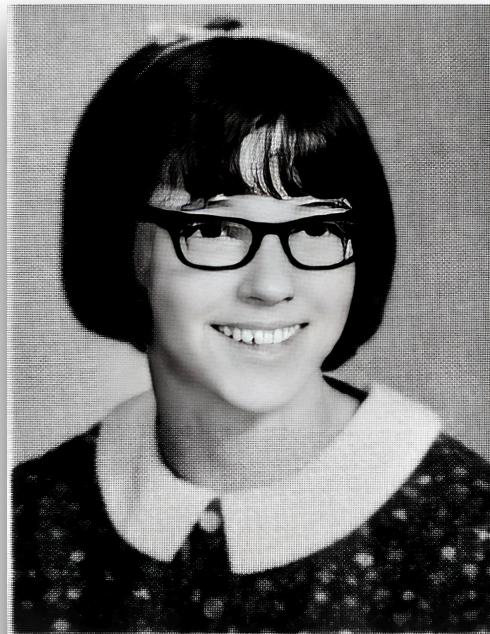
It was fun when Dad overruled Mother. He didn't do so very often. But always when we got to steer.

Dad told Bonnie she was a good driver.

I couldn't wait till Dad would let me hold the steering wheel.

Kathleen—age 16, Dennis—age 15, and Steve—age 14, were comfortable, as usual, in the back seat in their reserved spots.

Kathleen sat behind the driver —usually Dad. Dennis sat behind the person riding shotgun—usually Mother. Steve sat in the middle. They really did arrive two



Bonnie Leavitt



Kathleen

Dennis and Steve



minutes ahead of us. It wasn't fair!

Our baby sister, Kristine, wasn't born until 1968.

Upon arrival, Janet, David and I were doomed to wait a couple of minutes for Dad or Mother or Dennis or Steve to open the gate to our cage, the tailgate. If Dennis or Steve could have had it their way, they never would have let us out—no reason to turn the animals loose. Our 1963 white Ford Galaxy Station Wagon didn't have a handle on the inside, so we were at the mercy of someone to let us out. And we were not allowed to climb over the seats. Not fair. We couldn't unroll the tailgate window—there was no crank to turn. We fussed and complained so much that I believe the two-minute delay was on purpose.

"Daddy, Ronnie won't stop looking at me!" Janet grumbled.

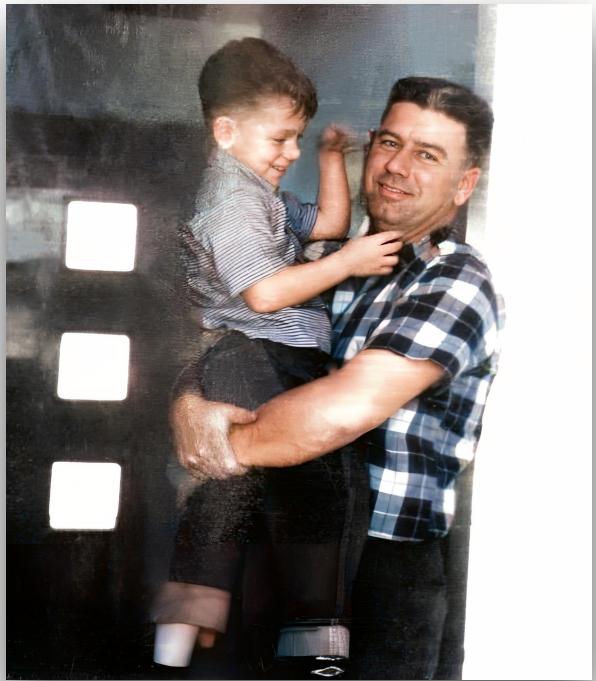
"Mother!" Ronnie and David are passing gas. Pee-u! Gross!" she said repulsively while plugging her nose.

We were forbidden from saying the "F" word—another word for flatulence.

"You boys stop that!" Mother demanded.



Bonnie, David, Janet



*David and Dad (Bryce)
Little David analyzing Dad's stubble*

"You little monsters need to grow up!" Kathleen mumbled.

"It was David," I fibbed.

I was always curious about what a perfect person did when they needed to let one. In Kathleen's case she was so much better than the rest of us I assumed she either didn't break wind, or someone of her stature was lucky her toots slowly, discreetly, and muted squeaked out through her ears absent the aroma.

Dad pushed the button to lower the tailgate window to enable the brown dirty fog to cut and run into uncontaminated air. As the window slowly disappeared, Steve announced, "Somebody cut the cheese again."

He burst into laughter. We all did ... Well, Mother, Dad, and Kathleen didn't.

David and I didn't know what cutting the cheese meant, but we laughed anyway.

"Smeller's the feller!" Bonnie let slip.

In the middle of this free-for-all, Dennis thoughtlessly leaned toward the door, elevated his left rear end cheek off the red vinyl seat and blasted away. We were all plugging our noses—the foul odor was so bad we could taste it.



David

Little David wanted in on the fun. Red-faced and grunting hard, he pushed a silent but deadly one out saying, "Ahhh." He was so proud of himself.

My dignified and proper parents didn't tolerate us giggling at such unrefined monkey business. Mother turned around with smoke gushing from her ears and said, "You kids should be ashamed of yourselves!"

We knew we were in trouble, but trying not to laugh was as funny as our crass behavior. And of course, Kathleen felt obligated to throw in her two-cents.

"You guys need to act your age!"

"We are!" Steve quickly responded.

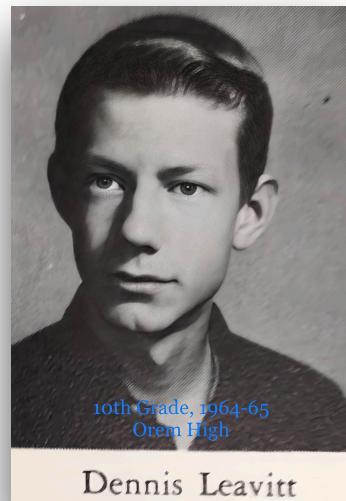
We burst into laughter again.

Little David proudly proclaimed, "I thought I was!"

At that point we proved we were nothing but heathens to our oldest sister.

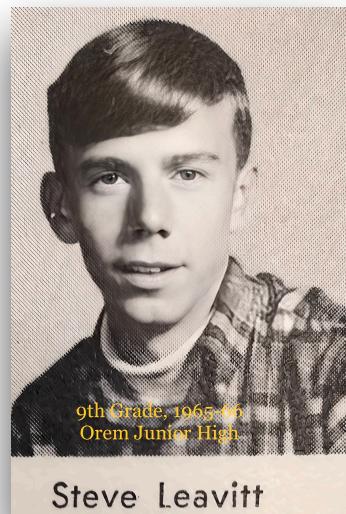


Steve, Bonnie, Dennis, Janet, Kathleen,
Ron; Little David (not pictured) was
directing the choir



10th Grade, 1964-65
Orem High

Dennis Leavitt



9th Grade, 1965-66
Orem Junior High

Steve Leavitt

I believe, to keep from laughing, Dad said, "Ella Beth, what kind of honyocks are you raising?"

Mother countered in her characteristic style, "Isn't this freeway just going to be wonderful, you kids?"

When Mother didn't like the tenor of a conversation, or wasn't sure what to say, she masterfully changed the subject.

Kathleen stared out the window, disgusted with her six younger siblings—embarrassed to be part of our heathen family.

In their wisdom the freeway engineers designed an I-15 Orem Center Street southbound exit, an Orem Center Street southbound onramp, and an Orem Center Street northbound exit.

Mother asked incredulously, "Well for heaven's sake, Bryce, why didn't they build a northbound onramp?"

Before Dad could come up with an answer, I piped up while raising my hand like I was at school. "I know! Mom! Mom!!! Mom, I know!"



Ron



"Why, Ronnie?" Mother patiently asked like I might say something important—though she knew better.

"Because they don't think anyone from Orem goes North!" I proudly stated.

I thought I was so smart. But there was a long pause. Before Dad could snap his fingers, which meant "STOP NOW!" my brothers and sisters responded to my brilliance.

"You're so dumb!"

"You are so stupid!"

"You're so brilliant, Ronnie."

"Dopehead!"

"Bird-brain!"

Janet leaned over and whispered in my ear, "Well, duh!"



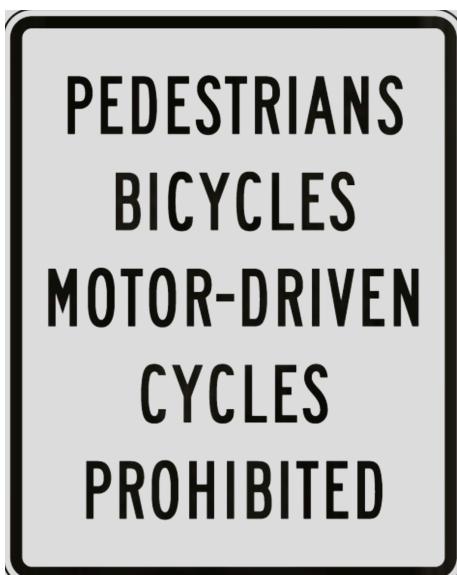
Janet and Ron

Dad drove us up 800 West to 800 North and started up the onramp. I was surprised to see a sign that said, "No pedestrians, no hitchhiking, no bicycles, and no animals."

I yelled out, "Dad, what's a pedestrian?"

Before I could be called stupid again, I felt the car jerk hard and fast. Instantly Janet and David and I torpedoed into the tailgate and the window. The gravity forces had our noses, eyes, lips, and cheeks scrunched up against the window. Not only did we not have seatbelts, we didn't have a seat.

Slowly we peeled ourselves off the window.





Dad was proud of the peppy 390 four-barrel engine in Mother's car. He buried his foot into the carburetor, as he liked to say and do.

I loved going fast. We all did.

Well, except Kathleen and Mother.

With Dad cruising at a high rate of speed, Mother nervously screamed, "BRYCE! SLOW DOWN!"



Dad obeyed. But he didn't want to. Dad slowly returned our ginormous station wagon to seventy miles per hour—it was the speed limit.

"That was a riot!" I yelled. "Do it again, Dad!" How fast were we going?"

Before her mind engaged, Bonnie yelled out, "NINETY-FIVE!"

trouble with your mother."



Dad put his index finger over his lips and whispered, "Shush!" as if to say, "You're going to get me in

"Don't you do that again!" Mother said to Dad with a displeased and horrified look.

The freeway thing was cool, I thought. We could go ninety-five and not get a ticket. I liked it when Dad drove fast.



We didn't ever have to stop at a light or stop sign again on State Street.

We drove all the way to the Point of the Mountain without stopping. We had never done that before. I was in heaven.

Dad turned our enormous car around and drove us back to 674 West Center Street in Orem. We didn't stop until the exit. No one stared at us—we were no longer in the zoo. I was all smiles.

And as usual, Mother was correct. The freeway was wonderful. Our lives would never be the same.

—Ron Leavitt



The HONYOCKS, or NINCOMPOOPS, Christmas 1964, 674 W Center, Orem, UT, a few months after I-15 opened in Utah County; L-R: Bonnie, Kathleen, Santa, Dennis, Ron, Steve, Janet, David



Mother (Ella Beth),
David, Bonnie



The Children of Bryce and Ella Beth Leavitt, Lakewood, California, 1960
L-R: Dennis, 11; Bonnie, 7; Janet, 5; Kathleen, 12; Ron, 4; David, 9 months; Steve, 10



Orem 3rd Ward Fathers and Sons Outing, near Timp Haven—now named Sundance, May 1963; Dad (Bryce) wasn't able to go; Mother (Ella Beth) had Dennis and Steve take us
Front: David, Ron; Back: Dennis, Steve



David and I, doing what we did best at that age, drinking free, cold A&W Root Beer at Grandpa's and Dad's restaurant, Orem, UT, 1963



Mother's (Ella Beth's) 1963 Ford Galaxie 500 station wagon with that hot 390 four-barrel after a very bad day. Mother, Grandpa Alvin Weeks, Kathleen, and David were headed home from Salt Lake City, traveling over the Point of the Mountain in a snowstorm. They were rear-ended and pushed into northbound traffic, then hit head on. No serious injuries, but that car spent some serious time in the "hospital." It was repaired to look like new. What memories we all have of riding in that car. But it's still not fair—Bonnie got to ride in the front and steer while Janet, David and I rode in the cage in the very back with no seat.





*Our baby sister, Kristine Marie Leavitt, wasn't born until 13 July 1968
Lucky for her, she missed out on a lot of our nonsense and those long rides*



Mother (Ella Beth)



Dad (Bryce)

Access the link to a NotebookLM Podcast of
I-15 Opens 1st Version by scanning this QR code



I-15 Opens 1st Version

This collection of text contains **excerpts from "Highway to Family Memories: The I-15 Opening,"** a personal account penned by **Ron Leavitt**, the sixth of eight children born to **Bryce Clark Leavitt and Ella Beth Weeks Leavitt**. The author's foreword establishes the narrative as an effort to **preserve the memories** of his parents, focusing on their marriage, dedication to raising their large family, and faith, all told from his childhood perspective around **1963 or 1964**. The included excerpt, "Interstate 15 Opens," humorously recounts a **family car ride** on the newly opened freeway, highlighting the **challenges of traveling with a big family** in a station wagon before freeways, and the **children's antics and differing perspectives** on the journey and the new infrastructure. Ultimately, it emphasizes the **transformative impact of the freeway** on their lives.

Podcast Transcript - 1st Version

Yeah. It's a different world.

So this deep dive, it's basically your shortcut to understanding those um fascinating sometimes chaotic family dynamics. We're looking through the lens of a very specific memory.

Okay,

we're focusing on the Leavitt family back in the 1960s, right when Interstate 15 was opening up. Our main source is *Memories of My Parents* by Ron Leavitt. He was uh the sixth of eight kids.

Wow. Eight kids. That's a full house and a full car, I imagine.

Exactly. So, our mission here is to pull out the key nuggets about family life in this kind of mobile microcosm, the memory quirks, and how something pretty everyday like a new freeway could actually, you know, profoundly change a family's life.

It sounds fascinating because often it's those seemingly small details, those everyday moments that tell us the most. Ron's memoir, he calls it part of a handbook for the art of being human.

Yeah, I like that. So, this deep dive really lets us unpack a key chapter of that handbook.

Let's do it.

Okay, so we're going back to the 1960s. This one memory gives us an incredible look at big family life, right? At the center you've got the parents Bryce Clark Leavitt and Elizabeth Weeks Leavitt, right?

Really committed to raising those eight kids. Very devoted to their faith. But the source notes they were definitely, you know, from a different era. Calvin Coolidge was president when they were born.

Okay. So, a different perspective entirely.

Totally. Their mom, Ella Beth, apparently couldn't understand why anyone would pay for cable TV. And the dad, Bryce, he loved cars but just couldn't wrap his head around why people needed three or four car garages later on. That generational gap. Yeah, it's classic theme. You see how parents, even loving ones, just perceive the world differently than their kids, trying to make sense of all the changes.

So, try packing seven of those kids plus the two parents into one car.

That's nine people.

Nine people in their uh 1963 white Ford Galaxie station wagon, which Ron described as being as long as an aircraft carrier.

Chuckles. An aircraft carrier. Okay, that gives you a sense of scale, right? And in the car for this specific specific memory. Kathleen, she's 16. Dennis, 15, Steve, 14. Then Bonnie, 11. Janet, nine. Ron, the author, he's eight. And little David, just 5 years old.

So, a wide range of ages packed in there. The youngest, Kristine, wasn't born yet.

Nope. She came along in '1968, so you had nine people. And this wasn't just a quick trip, right? You mentioned this was the Orem to Salt Lake City journey. 40 miles.

40 miles.

But before the freeway, Ron says it felt like it took all day.

I believe it. Stop and go, traffic lights. Dozens of stops, lights, stop signs, all along State Street. It's no wonder little David would apparently yell out, "Mom, how old will I be when we get there?"

Oh, bless him. You can just picture the scene. The sheer discomfort.

Oh, yeah. Ron often got car sick. Bored. He, Janet, and David, the youngest ones crammed in the back, felt cramped and uncomfortable. You hear the constant scoot over, "Quit looking at me."

"Stop picking your nose." Probably

exactly. That's in there, too. And then there's this feeling of being watched.

Ah, the zoo feeling. you mentioned.

Yeah. When they stopped, people in the cars behind would just stare, gawking. Ron said they felt like little monkeys at the zoo

and they could read their lips.

Apparently, things like, "Look at all those kids in that car. It must be a dozen of them." Or, "Look at that darling little girl having to ride between those miserable looking boys."

Wow, that's intense public scrutiny. It highlights something interesting about big families in tight spaces, doesn't it? That pressure cooker effect.

How so?

Well, it magnifies everything personal. And it conflicts, but that gawking, that feeling of being on display, it could also maybe inadvertently build a kind of solidarity among the kids, like us against the onlookers vibe.

That's a really interesting point. Maybe that zoo feeling made them more resilient or even fueled some of the humor because this journey Yeah. It wasn't just point A to point B. It really was a masterclass in sibling dynamics under pressure.

Absolutely. The car, the trip itself, it's like a mobile microcosm of their whole family structure. You see the personalities, the interactions all playing out right there.

And speaking of structure, uh let's talk seating cuz that was a major source of drama. Perceived unfairness, you know.

Oh, always. Who sits where is huge in a family car,

right? So Bonnie, she's 11. She gets the prime spot front seat between mom and dad. Ron felt this was deeply not fair.

And what was her reasoning?

She claimed cars sickness.

Mhm.

And dad, who called her his Bread Buddy Jelly, apparently bought for her story hook, line and sinker.

Ah, there's that classic dynamic. Maybe a little bit of perceived favoritism, which of course the younger kids pick up on instantly creates that hierarchy.

Oh, it gets better. Bonnie was even allowed to steer sometimes.

Steer the car. Seriously.

Yeah. Mom would get nervous naturally, but Dad would say, you know, Ella Beth, for heaven's sake, my hands are right here close to the steering wheel. Meanwhile, Ron's just dreaming of the day he gets to hold the wheel.

You can feel his frustration. And the older kids,

Kathleen, Dennis, and Steve, 16, 15, 14. They were comfortable as usual in their reserved spots in the middle row. Kathleen behind Dad, Dennis behind Mom, Steve in the middle. Ron felt like they basically arrived two minutes ahead because they were so much more comfortable.

That rigid setup, it just fuels that sense of injustice for the back, the cage, as Ron called it.

Which brings us to the

Well, the cage. Yes.

Ron, Janet 9, and David five were doomed, as he puts it to the very back riding backwards.

Backwards. Yeah, that's rough.

And get this, no seat belts, obviously,

but also no seat, just the floor space. No inside handle for the tailgate, no crank for the window back there.

So, they were literally trapped

completely at the mercy of someone to let us out and they weren't allowed to climb over the seats. Ron sums it up perfectly. Life always feels unfair when you're one of the younger ones in a big family.

That feeling of being powerless, relying on others just to get out. Wow. That's a vivid memory. The physical space or lack of it really shapes the emotional experience there amplifies that unfairness

and that confinement. Well, it naturally led to some incidents. The source details what Ron calls the fart saga.

Oh boy, here we go.

Predictably, 9-year-old Janet yells, "Daddy, Ronnie won't stop looking at me." Yeah. Quickly followed by, "Mother, Ronnie and David are passing gas. Pee-hew." Apparently, they weren't allowed to say the actual f word for flatulence.

The parent reactions must have been something.

Oh yeah, Mom demands, "You boys, stop that." And Kathleen, the older sister, chimes in with, "You boys need to grow up." Classic older sibling.

It's that constant attempt to maintain some kind of order, some decorum in what's basically a chaotic enclosed space.

Ron naturally fibs. It was David. He even admits wondering if flawless Kathleen ever, you know, chuckles. Kids are kids, aren't they?

So, the climax comes when dad finally pushes the button to lower the electric tailgate window to air things out. this brown, dirty fog, as Ron describes it.

Oh, the immature.

As the window goes down, Steve's, the 14-year-old in the middle, announces, "Somebody cut the cheese." Which cracks everyone up

except mom, dad, and Kathleen, of course.

And then Bonnie in the front seat.

She pipes up with Smellers's the feller.

Oh, the brutal honesty of siblings. It's those raw, unfiltered moments, isn't it? Personal space is non-existent, so humor becomes the escape valve.

Totally. Then Dennis, 15, apparently discreetly elevates his left rear end cheek off the red vinyl seat and blasts away. Just adding to the mix.

Peak sibling behavior, that casual defines. It really does make you think, how do parents navigate that level of chaos and how kids find ways to bond even through well unrefined situations like this? The car's like a stage. It really is. And you wonder how they kept any sanity.

Today, you just hand out devices, right? Yes.

This was the entertainment

pretty much.

And little David, 5 years old, not wanting to be left out, apparently grunts hard, pushes out a silent but deadly one, and then proudly proclaims, "Ahhh."

oh, David, contribution acknowledged."

The parents try again. Mom, Ron says, with smoke gushing from her ears, says, "You kids should be ashamed of yourselves." Dad, trying not to laugh, asks Ella Beth, "What kind of honyocks are you raising?"

Honyocks? I like that one.

The laughter just continues. Kathleen says, "You guys need to act your age. Steve fires back, "We are." And David perfectly timed says, "I thought I was."

That's actually pretty funny. And then Mom changes the subject.

The classic parental pivot. Knowing the battle is lost, she just blurts out, "Isn't this freeway just going to be wonderful, you kids?"

A masterful deflection from the immediate atmosphere. Perfect timing to talk about the freeway.

Exactly. Because the freeway was the big change. Dad came home all excited about it opening. Young Ron, though, his main thought was, "What were they going to get free?" He took freeway, literally. That's brilliant. The kid logic versus the adult anticipation. It's a lovely detail. Highlights how different generations saw things.

So, then comes the test drive. Dad's super proud of the Peppy 390 four-barrel engine in Mom's station wagon.

Uh-huh. He wants to show it off.

Oh, yeah. He buries his foot into the carburetor and Ron, Janet, and David, seatless and beltless in the back.

Oh, no.

They get torpedoed into the tailgate in the window, faces scrunched up against the glass, just pure acceleration physics back there.

Wow. It's such a stark reminder of how much safety standards have changed. That wasn't just a fun ride. It was like physically challenging for those kids. And it shows how technology, even a road, changed the actual feel of travel.

Definitely a different era of parenting, too. Maybe less about childproofing everything.

More about letting them experience the bumps, maybe literally.

So, Ron loved it. I loved going fast. We all did. But mom and Kathleen, not so much. Screaming SLOW DOWN.

Predictable.

Dad did eventually slow down to the 70 mph limit, but not before Bonnie from the front seat blurts out they hit 95.

95. Oops.

Dad quickly gives her the shush signal finger to his lips.

Huh. Even with the new speed, the family dynamics are exactly the same. Excitement versus caution, bending the rules, parental control attempts. It's all still there, just faster.

And then there's Ron's moment of uh brilliant insight. Mom asks why there isn't a northbound on-ramp yet in Orem.

Okay.

Ron proudly raises his hand. His theory

because I don't think anyone from Orem goes north.

Oh, Ron.

The sibling response was immediate and brutal. You are so dumb. You're so stupid. Dopehead. Bird brain. And Janet whispers, "Well, duh."

That is perfect childhood logic meets merciless sibling takedown. Kids are so quick to puncture any hint of self-importance, aren't they? Especially in a family. That collective dismissal is sharp. But despite the jabs, the freeway itself, it was revolutionary for them. They could drive all the way to the point of the mountain without stopping once. No more being the zoo exhibit.

A huge change to the experience.

Ron's realization sums it up. I was in heaven. He says mother was correct. The freeway was wonderful. Our lives would never be the same again.

So, what does this all mean for us? You know, listening to this, it's more than just a fun story. It's a really powerful window into how a seemingly simple thing, a piece of infrastructure, can just fundamentally change daily life. family experiences,

right? It shifted routines, sure, but it also reshaped the whole nature of a shared family memory for that generation. Yeah. And if you connect it to the bigger picture, it really shows those often invisible ways that infrastructure changes our personal lives. It's not just about less traffic friction. It alters our sense of time, distance, how we interact. Opening I-15 wasn't just faster travel. It changed the intimacy, the challenges, the type of shared experience they had on those journeys, created new memories.

Yeah. So, deep dive looking at just one family's specific memory. It really did uncover some universal things, didn't it? Big family dynamics, the humor, the tough parts of growing up, and a surprisingly huge impact of something like a new road.

Yeah.

Ron Leavitt called memories a handbook for the art of being human. And this story, well, it feels like a really vivid chapter in that handbook, shows us how we adapt, how we argue, how we find joy even when things change. Really human story.

Definitely. So maybe something for you to think about as we wrap up in your own life right now. What are the seemingly small everyday things happening? The interactions, the technologies you use, the shared routines or frustrations.

What parts of your daily life might become those crystal clear memories for your kids or grandkids? How might the things we take for granted now, our commutes, our devices, how we connect, seem like a completely different world to them later on?

It's a great question.

What story are you writing just by living day-to-day? that future generations might look back on as their chapter in that handbook for being human. Something to mull over.

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Podcast Transcript - I-15 Opens—Holier Than Thou Version

Welcome to this deep dive. Today we're jumping into a really um vivid personal memoir. It brings family dynamics to life, but also uh captures a really pivotal moment in transportation history.

We're looking at excerpts from Opening the Interstate, a family odyssey by Ron Leavitt, and that's pronounced Le-vutt

right? Leavitt.

He was the sixth of eight kids of Bryce Clark Leavitt and Ella Beth Weeks Leavitt. It's just a remarkable window into his world. It

really is. So, our mission really is to unpack these memories. They're raw, honest, sometimes pretty hilarious. This big family's journey, we want to focus on the sensory stuff, you know, a feeling of being crammed in that station wagon. Oh, yeah. The different personalities in the Leavitt family and uh the huge impact of Utah's very first freeway. It's

like a great lens.

Okay, let's unpack this. Just try and picture it. A time when driving, say, 40 miles felt like this epic quest. And the idea of a freeway, it sounded like maybe you were getting something for free.

Exactly. And what's fascinating like you said is that Ron Leavitt tells this from when he was what seven or eight years old around 1963–1964.

Yeah.

So you get this child's eye view of not just his family which is you know deeply personal but also this massive historical shift. It really captures the universal stuff too. Childhood family and just how fast things were changing back then mid 20th century

and before that freeway. Wow. He describes the trip from Orem to Salt Lake City. It took all day it seems. Yeah,

just imagine driving a few blocks, hitting a light, stop sign, repeat dozens of times. He even remembers his little brother David yelling, "Mom, how old will I be when we get there?"

Oh, bless him. That really hits home, doesn't it? The sheer frustration of car rides back then.

Totally.

And it wasn't just boredom. He mentions being car sick more than once.

Yeah,

think about it. None of the gadgets or comforts we have now. These trips were genuinely tough, which, you know, really underscores how big a deal the freeway was going to be.

And stuck in the car. The kids were constantly at it. You can almost hear them scoot over. Quit looking at me.

Stop picking your nose.

Yes. And the dreaded, "Did you let one?"

It paints such a picture. He called it feeling like little monkeys at the zoo. They'd stop at a light and people in next car just staring. He says they learned to read lips.

No way.

Yeah. Things like, "Look at all those kids." Or commenting on the darling little girl stuck between the boys. It really shows that feeling of being pinned in. No privacy at all. But it also sort of forced them together.

That constant scrutiny. Yeah, it must have shaped things. Let's talk about the parents. Bryce and Ella Beth Leavitt. Born in a totally different time, right? Calvin Coolidge era.

Different world.

He writes, "They struggled with modern stuff like cable TV or three car garages. The mom's reaction to cable is priceless. How do kids afford cable?" Not questioning the money, just why pay for TV?

That captures it perfectly. And their personalities are so key. Ella Beth, the mother, always dignified and proper,

very formal. Yeah.

Got nervous when dad let the kids steer.

Yeah.

And she was apparently a master at changing the subject if things got awkward.

Oh, I know that move.

Whereas Bryce, the dad, seemed a bit more lenient.

Found the humor in the kids' chaos, but also had his standard answers and secret signals like snapping his fingers to get them to stop messing around.

Right.

But definitely, yeah, a more serious formal vibe overall, especially from the mother trying to keep with what? Eight kids eventually.

Eight kids. And Ron, our author, was number six. The seating chart in that 63 Ford Galaxie wagon. That was a whole thing.

Oh, absolutely.

Kathleen, the oldest at 16, Dennis 15, Steve 14. They were comfortable as usual in the back seat in their reserved spots.

A hierarchy.

Exactly. Kathleen behind dad, Dennis behind mom's side, Steve squished in the middle. Ron says they always arrived 2 minutes ahead.

Huh. And that spatial arrangement says so much about the family culture, doesn't it? Then you had Bonnie, age 11.

Ah, yeah. Bonnie

riding up front between Mom and Dad. Apparently faked car sickness to get the prime spot.

Smart kid.

And she even got to steer sometimes, which drove mom nuts. Dad called her his Bread Buddy Jelly. Classic middle child maneuvering, maybe.

But it definitely highlights that feeling of unfairness the younger ones probably felt.

Oh, for sure. Because while the older three had their spots, the real squeeze was in the very back. That's where Ron age eight, Janet nine, and little David five were

cramped is probably an understatement.

Totally cramped and uncomfortable. And here's the kicker. Absolutely no safety features. He explicitly says, "No safety belts, no seat back there."

Wow. Just loose.

Yeah. He calls it a cage with no handle on the inside. They were literally trapped until someone let them out. And remember, Kristine, the youngest, wasn't born yet. Imagine adding another one later.

It's incredible. And that environment, that specific family culture.

Yeah.

It must have built resilience

and humor probably as a coping mechanism that forced closeness, but it also, like you said, really cements that hierarchy,

the older kids versus the younger ones. Parents trying to keep the peace. Yeah.

And the kids finding ways to bond, creating their own rules, their own, as he puts it, handbook for the art of being human. Yeah.

Right there in the station wagon.

And within that dynamic, Kathleen, the oldest sister, really stands out. Ron paints her as having this holier than thou attitude.

Oh. always muttering, "You little monsters need to grow up." Just generally disgusted by the younger ones. It's such a relatable oldest sibling vibe in a big chaotic family.

Oh, absolutely. Her reaction during the uh famous cutting the cheese incident really shows that she felt she had to chime in, right? You guys need to act your age.

Exactly.

Just disgusted with her six younger siblings, embarrassed to be part of our heathen family. And Ron's observation about her own digestive flawlessness is

hilarious.

Like she was above it all. Or if she did it would be like silent and scentless and come out her ears or something.

It's such a funny cutting observation about that perceived perfection. Really captures those sibling tensions. One trying to impose order, the other sort of reveling in the chaos.

And then everything changes. Dad comes home from Salt Lake all excited. The freeway's open.

The big moment

and Ron being, you know, seven or eight, here's freeway and

well, something's free.

Exactly.

Adorable.

But this wasn't just about a faster drive for the Leavitts, was it? This was huge part of that massive interstate highway system project rolling out across the US,

right? The bigger picture.

It was going to change everything, daily life, business, how people moved, Utah's first freeway.

It felt monumental. Even from a kid's point of view, a symbol of progress, the future, the sheer magnificence of it, this brand new road promising speed and freedom. It was immense.

And that first ride sounds absolutely wild. Dad gets the ginormous station wagon onto the on-ramp.

Yeah. They see these strange new signs.

Yeah.

No pedestrians, no hitchhiking, no bicycles, and no animals. And Ron, of course, pipes up, "Dad, what's a pedestrian?"

Huh?

It really was a new world. And the description of the speed, Dad just floors it in that peppy 390 four-barrel engine.

Oh, yeah.

That was a serious engine for a family car back then. A big V8 made exactly for these new high-speed highways. It was a new era for cars, too.

And the result, the car jerks hard and fast. And Ron, Janet, and David back there with no seats or belts.

They get torpedoed into the tailgate and the window. Just pure g-forces. It's such a vivid, slightly terrifying image of acceleration without safety.

Absolutely terrifying by today's standards, but back then

the kids thought it was amazing. That was a riot. Do it again, Dad. How fast were we going?

Of course they did.

But mom, Ella Beth, she's screaming, "Bryce, slow down." Her proper nature just couldn't handle it.

Total opposite reactions. And dad, he just puts a finger to his lips, shushing Bonnie. when she blurts out they hit 95

95 in a station wagon full of kids

trying to keep Mom calm probably clearly Dad was enjoying the thrill of this new freeway too even if the speed limit was 70 it shows everyone felt the excitement of this new technology this speed

but even with the freeway changing how they traveled some things inside the car stayed the same those unforgettable road trip moments they define their family car culture that cutting the cheese incident is just peak Leavitt family

it's a classic Steve says someone cut the cheese. Everyone laughs except Mom, Dad, and Kathleen. Naturally, Bonnie yells, "Smeller's the feller."

Dennis apparently just leans over, lifts a cheek, and blasts away. And then little David gets all red-faced, grunts, lets out a silent but deadly one, and proudly says, "Ahhh,

it's so perfectly described." And beyond just being funny stuff, it says something about coping, doesn't it?

Cramped space, boredom.

Yeah.

That kind of raw uh unrefined humor becomes a way to bond, maybe push back against the formality like pressure release valve.

Exactly. And Mom's reaction, you kids should be ashamed of yourselves.

While dad's trying not to laugh, asking, "Ella Beth, what kind of honyocks are you raising?" It just shows them navigating this chaos, this, you know, very real, very human interaction. It was their way.

And then Ron's own moment of uh brilliance, he notices there's no northbound on-ramp in Orem and declares because they don't think anyone from Orem goes north.

Oh, well. Siblings immediately jump in with the loving insults. You are so dumb. You are so stupid. Well, duh.

That sibling love. But it does make you think, right?

How do families manage that constant closeness, all those different personalities, and still build love and resilience?

Yeah,

that story sums it up perfectly. Cramped and confined, we learn to love each other, laugh, and make the best of tough times. It shows that deep bond underneath all the teasing and squabbling. They were forging their handbook right there.

And the freeway's impact, it was instant. The trip back was smooth, fast. Ron says we didn't ever have to stop at a light or stop sign again on State Street.

Huge change.

No more people staring. They were no longer in the zoo. The whole experience just transformed.

It brings it all home. Mother was right. The freeway was wonderful and their lives really would never be the same.

Mhm.

It wasn't just about convenience. It was a fundamental shift from being stuck, confined to having this new sense of freedom, speed. It changed their whole perception of distance. A perfect example of how big infrastructure projects filter down into the everyday.

So, wrapping up this deep dive, Ron Leavitt's family story. It's just such a powerful way to see a massive societal change through a very personal lens. It really highlights the resilience, the humor, the um undeniable love in a big family, especially one navigating, you know, the back of a station wagon at the dawn of the interstate age.

Mhm. It shows how shared discomfort, even something like being crammed in a car, can actually build strength. And that laughter is maybe the best shock absorber. And it leaves you thinking, while these huge engineering projects change the world around us, maybe the biggest changes, the most profound transformations happen right inside those close family units, shaping that very handbook for the art of being human, like the forward says.

Yeah.

So, it makes you wonder, doesn't it? What handbook are you writing through your own daily life? How are you navigating your own freeways and stop signs to build those connections that last?