

## Pass It On®...

### A Family Trip and a Good Night's Rest.

*How a road trip with his family inspired Kemmons Wilson to create one of the country's most recognizable hotel chains.*

The 1950s saw the family road trip go mainstream. Travel, once assigned only to the upper class, was suddenly the thing to do in America: Load up the family car and take to the burgeoning interstate system that rolled out of the major cities and coursed through the rolling hills of Ohio, crossed the Great Plains, zagged over the Rocky Mountains and edged the ocean in California.

The romance of the road trip infected every middle-class family. Rand McNally maps lay on most coffee tables, marked up with family code for best places to stay, eat, swim and picnic. The biggest challenge for a family en route was budgeting for accommodations. Prices varied widely, and extra fees were common. Kemmons Wilson became frustrated with the logistics of lodging. An extra fee per child? (He had five.) Inconsistent cleanliness. Food at some lodges, but not others. Why couldn't there be some standard to meet the needs of families on summer vacation?

Wilson had learned the value of hard work and self-sufficiency from his mother, who was widowed when Wilson was just nine months old. He worked hard in real estate before seeing an opportunity in the motel business. His vision included large, recognizable signs that would dot the highways, consistent service and predictable pricing. He opened the first Holiday Inn Motel in Memphis in 1952. By 1958, there were 50 locations. A year later, another 100 were open, and in 1964, Wilson opened number 1,000. All locations were built on the same philosophy: family-friendly, easily accessible from the highway, and featuring good food and rates families could plan on.

The name itself came from a 1942 film with Bing Crosby and Fred Astaire singing about an inn that only opens on holidays. It became the working philosophy for the business: Every night should feel like you are on holiday.

The world has changed a lot since those heady days of family road trips, the first era when nearly every household had a car, and when the nation was bursting out of the grip of the Depression and soaring free of the anxiety brought on by World War II. Today, we have become more connected to devices than the odometer; more inclined to get lost in a social media feed than on a scenic route.

But when we launch into our travels, looking for a comfortable place to spend the night, we can thank Kemmons Wilson for setting the standard in the motel business. His model created the expectations for travelers that other chains – Motel 6, Quality Inn, Howard Johnson, Ramada Inn and others – had to meet. Wilson created the host you can count on, a clean, safe place to relax on your travels.

Kemmons Wilson made the weary traveler the reason for his business. And every time you eat a continental breakfast, toss the kids into the pool for a quick swim before you hit the road again, or laugh over mile-high pancakes, you have Kemmons Wilson to thank.

**Travel Well...** [PassItOn.com](https://www.passiton.com)

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