‘Dad’s postcards inspired my passion for travel’

Mementos from across the globe keep his memory and a lifetime of stories alive

Writer and editor Angela Saurine spends more time posting about her travels on Insta than on postcards these days.

If someone were to ask me where my passion for travel came from, the answer would be easy to pinpoint. Without a doubt, the inspiration was the dozens of postcards written by my dad from around the world. Now stored in an old shoebox, the postcards were sent from just about everywhere you can imagine.

Many are not postcards at all, but photos of my dad in his signature cowboy hat in various locales, with tales of his adventures scribbled on the back.

He writes about skiing in Austria being “like jumping off the top of the world”, feeding fish frozen peas at Hanauma Bay in Hawaii, and riding in a jeepney in the Philippines. In others, he mentions visiting Yogi Bear’s home in Yellowstone National Park and being fearful of ninjas running out and attacking him at Nagoya Castle in Japan.

Some are addressed to me; others to my mum, written many years before I was born. It’s extraordinary really, to think that at a time up to 50 years ago, when organising international flights was a lot harder and more expensive than it is today, that he was jet-setting all over the globe.

But it’s not just postcards in the box. There are also brochures promoting annual ski tours he led to US resorts – in order to get the trip for free. There’s even a snippet from a local newspaper column that mentions the raucous times had at the ranch he rented in his favourite resort, Sun Valley in Idaho, every year. His postcards from there (of which there are many) made it sound like a magical place for a little girl. He compared the mountains to the kind you would see in Walt Disney movies. In one he describes a white rabbit that scampers away in the snow when he gets too close; in another, a squirrel that jumps from tree to tree, then into its little house, with nuts in its hand.

In a couple of his postcards, he writes about the places he would love to take me to see, but my mum always insisted we waited until I was old enough to appreciate it. The year we finally booked every kid’s dream trip, to Disneyland Resort in California, Continental Airlines went bankrupt so he took me to Norfolk Island instead. It was my first time on a plane – but far from the last.

After my dad died when I was 11, his postcards became among my most-treasured possessions. Their impact on my psyche cannot be overstated.

Since then I’ve travelled to more than 50 countries. The first was Vanuatu, which I eased into during the Fairstar schoolies cruise. Then came a Contiki tour across the US’s Deep South, which covered many of the familiar landscapes I’d seen in the pictures on Dad’s postcards. I spent a season working at Whistler in Canada and a year in London, using it as a base to explore Europe, attending such events as Anzac Day in Gallipoli and the running of the bulls in Spain.

After I returned to Australia and gained a job as a newspaper journalist, I began writing the odd travel story on the side.

It eventually led to a role as a full-time travel writer, which has taken me everywhere from Arnhem Land to Antarctica, and from Christmas Island to Easter Island. I even went to Sun Valley, which was a particularly poignant trip.

Every now and then, I pull my dad’s postcards out and read through them. I think it makes me feel somehow closer to him. I consider myself extremely lucky to have these insights into his life and personality, and know that these thin little pieces of cardboard with ink on them have had a profound impact on shaping who I am.