

Jace Hersey

Dr Bednar

Roadside America

Final Research Paper

Seligman and It's Hero

“For nearly half a century, Route 66 has loomed larger in American culture than any other road. Also known as ‘America’s Main Street’ and ‘The Mother Road’, it stretched from Chicago to California, crossing through eight states while winding its way through small towns, as well as bigger cities” (Yuko 2024). Here, Yuko shows the importance of this highway and the area of the United States it covered. Established in 1926, it became the shortest, year-round way to travel by automobile between the Midwest and the Pacific coast (Mandrgoc and Dunaway 2021). Route 66 became popular in American car culture because it gave travelers and vacationing families the experience of new towns, different cultures, roadside attractions, and scenic locations along the way. This highway played a major role in the development of roadside culture through its motels, diners, and gas stations because towns had to meet the needs of its travelers. Unfortunately, In 1956, President Eisenhower signed a bill creating the Interstate Highway System. This interstate system would eventually be the death of Route 66, leaving behind its history, culture, and nostalgia (Kristen 2024). To emphasize the effects on the change in travel, John Holst owner of a bed and breakfast in Williams, Arizona, states, “One day the trucks were all rolling down Main

Street, with all the clatter, stopping at the lights. The next day they were gone. All gone” (Mandrgoc and Dunaway 2021). This quote shows that Route 66 as it once was, was no longer. But, luckily, one man failed to give up. Because of Angel Delgadillo’s determination, along with the help of other citizens, the town of Seligman, Arizona, came back after 10 years of decline. This essay will explore Seligman’s story of being a town along Route 66, and how one man led the fight to bring it back with his idea of the rebirth of Historic Route 66.

First of all, it is important to look back at Seligman’s past to understand the years of ups and downs the town experienced. Following World War II, the town’s economy was strong. In addition to the railroad, the tourists traveling Route 66 were a major source of its income (Trimble 2004). During the 50s and 60s, the heyday it so called Golden Years of Route 66, people bought cars, they began to travel, and they hit the open road to see America. But, soon things would change. The opening of Interstate 40 in the late 70s, led to a sharp decline in traffic along Route 66, devastating the economy of towns affected by the decline. To understand the effect Interstate 40 had on the town, Angel Delgadillo, the barber in Seligman and an important part of the town’s rebirth in the years to come, points out, “There were 9,000 automobiles that would go through Seligman every 24 hours. But at 2:30 p.m. on Sept 22, 1978, all the traffic switched over to Interstate 40. The town died for 10 long years. We were forgotten by the world. I felt like our government said, ‘Angel, if you can swim, swim. If you can’t, drown.’ We were dead” (Rogers 2020). Here, the reader can understand the devastation and helplessness the town barber and the residents of Seligman must have felt and what spurred Angel to do something.

Ironically, it was this devastation that led Angel Delgadillo to 'swim and not drown'. Like many small towns along Route 66 that had been bypassed, Seligman struggled, businesses closed, and some people were forced to move just to make a living. After seeing many businesses fail, Angel felt compelled to do something to help his town. First, he came up with the idea of applying to the state of Arizona to officially designate the stretch of road between Seligman and Kingman, a nearby town, Historic Route 66. During an interview, he explains how he began this task when he says, "I talked to anyone who would listen, I traveled to Kingman, and all along the route, I told them my idea, and they endorsed it". (Delgadillo). In addition, in February of 1987, Angel called a meeting between representatives along Route 66, and that day, they formed the Historic Route 66 Association, naming Angel as president. Angel's barber shop became the headquarters for the association. It was the first meeting of its kind, but time would prove it wouldn't be the last meeting like that. Together, the association lobbied the state of Arizona to designate the areas between Seligman and Kingman as an historic highway, and they convinced the Seligman Chamber of Commerce to begin to promote Seligman as the Birthplace of Historic Route 66. To explain what they had to do, Angel states, "We stayed on the State of Arizona" (Glionna 2018). In November 1987, they were successful, and that area was designated Historic Route 66 (Delgadillo "President's Award"). Eventually, the other seven states along The Mother Road created their own associations dedicated to preserving their sections of Route 66 (Bromann 2023).

Today, that 90 mile stretch between Seligman and Kingman is the longest stretch of Historic Route 66 in the country (Delgadillo). Although Angel was a barber for 50 years, he is known as the Guardian Angel of Route 66, The Father of Historic, and The Ambassador. Today, people from around the world come to meet the man, the legend, Angel Delgadillo. For example, one writer explains, “Two tour buses are parked along the nation’s historic byway, and dozens of adoring fans await: leather clad Harley riders, a Parisian wearing a Route 66 t-shirt, and Norwegians wanting to shake his hand” (Arrillaga 2011). It is hard to believe that would people travel so far to see a barber, but looking at his accomplishments and his influence on American car culture, and automobility, it’s understandable.

Visitors to Selingman can experience three important businesses linked directly to Delgardillo. First, Angel and Vilma’s Original Route 66 Gift Shop is still there and continues to sell Route 66 books, souvenirs, and memorabilia to tourists. Angel himself, now in his late 90s, still stops by the shop from time to time to talk and visit with tourists. Next, there is Delgadillo’s original barber shop. It has been preserved and visitors can visit and even see Angel’s old barber chair. The barber shop is now a museum and contains pieces of the history of Route 66 and lots of photos of the famous highway, of the town, and of his life (Naylor 2022). Tourists who come to Seligman, can still enjoy the classic cars, diners, and neon lights of a time years ago when Route 66 was a vital highway (Bromann 2023). The new signs that read Historic Route 66 are along the highway from Selingman to Kingman, where there were once Route 66 signs

before the road was decommissioned in 1985 and all the signs were removed from the highways and even on maps (Mandrgoc and Dunaway 2021).

Over the years, Angel has given over 1,000 interviews for magazines, newspapers, and television. Even John Lassiter from Pixar met him and learned what he did for his town of the story of Seligman, and it inspired his movie “Cars”. Although Delgadillo has received numerous awards and recognitions, when asked about his legacy, he explains, “ My legacy is about that if you want something bad enough, don’t go begging for it, don’t go wishing for it, go and do what you want. Go make it happen. “ (Naylor 2022). In looking back through the articles we read in class, one writer mentions that to combat congestion, we built more roads (Albert 2019). Unfortunately, for the small towns along Route 66, building more roads caused problems. But, luckily, Angel Delgadilla fought for his small town of Seligman, Arizona. To sum it up, one writer states, “The iconic American highway Route 66 would’ve faded into a distant memory of a bygone era, were it not for the excellent work of Angel Delgadillo” (Papathanasiou 2021).

Bibliography

Albert, Dan. "Are We There Yet." W. W. Norton & Company, New York/ London 2019.

Arrillaga, Pauline. "At 84, One Man Is Still the Guardian Angel of Route 66." *The Associated Press*, 29 May 2016. <https://roadtrippers.com/magazine/angel-delgadillo-route-66-Seligman/>. Accessed 30 Sept. 2024.

Bromann, Val. "Things to do in Seligman: The Birthplace of Historic Route 66." *Route 66 Maps*. 14 Dec. 2023. <https://route66roadmap.com/things-to-do-in-Seligman-Arizona/>. Accessed 30 Sept. 2024.

Delgadillo, Angel. "2023 President's Award for National Leadership in Historic Preservation: *National Trust for Historic Preservation*, 26 Nov. 2023. [https://www.youtube.com>watch?v=Jhu-IV6JnqE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jhu-IV6JnqE). Accessed 28 Sept. 2024.

Glionna, John M., "Angel of Route 66." *Las Vegas Review Journal*, 2 July 2018. [.https://www.johnglionna.com/blog/the-guardian-angel-of-route-66](https://www.johnglionna.com/blog/the-guardian-angel-of-route-66)
Accessed 30 Sept. 2024.

Kristen. "Iconic Stops, Hidden Gems, and Tips for a Route 66 Road Trip." *Let's Roam Explorer*, 14 April. 2024, <https://www.letsroam.com/explorer/route-66-road-trip/> Accessed 3 Oct. 2024.

Mandrgoc, Stephen, and David Dunaway. "The History of Route 66." *American History*, 31 Aug. 2021 <https://www.johnglionna.com/blog/the-guardian-angel-of-route-66> Accessed 26 Oct. 2024.

Naylor, Roger: "A Beautiful Life: The Arizona Barber Hangs up his Shears for Good." *The Arizona Republic*, 22 July 2022. <https://www.johnglionna.com/blog/the-guardian-angel-of-route-66> Accessed 30 Sept. 2024.

Papathanasiuo, Katerina. "Angel Delgadillo: The 'Guardian Angel' of U. S. Route 66." *Vale Magazine*.

Rogers, Joe. "We the People Saved Route 66: How one man's Dedication is keeping the Mother Road alive." *Road Trippers*. 5 June 2020. <https://www.roadtrippers.com/magazine/Angel-delgadillo-route-66-seligman> Accessed 28 Sept. 2024.