In today’s universe of almost instant communications facilitated by the Internet, we often find surprising links between people, places and things. That happened to me this week in Colorado, and the heartwarming story unexpectedly connects a current, front-page news item with bit of the history of an old family-operated inn near Estes Park, Colorado, with a more modern family-operated hotel company in the Pacific, and with a Colorado state trooper injured this week while trying to stop a bizarre serial carjacking.

Stories like this were the specialty of veteran ABC radio broadcaster Paul Harvey, who, for many decades, connected apparently widely separated people, places and events with a final bit of information. When adding that last, culminating fact, Harvey would proudly announce, “And now you know the rest of the story.”

Today’s story started last year when I visited Estes Park, Colorado, the gateway to Rocky Mountain National Park, and had lunch at the historic Baldpate Inn. There I learned that Ethel and Gordon Mace along with Gordon’s brothers, Charles and Stuart Mace, homesteaded this beautiful piece of property in 1911. They built a cabin and grew rhubarb to comply with the provisions of the Homestead Act. To supplement their income, they added tourist cabins and, by 1917, added the Baldpate Inn with several bedrooms and a dining room. They used natural, local resources such as hand-hewn timber for beams for the structure and local stones from the riverbed to line their fireplace. They boasted about the inn’s hot running water, electric lights and indoor plumbing, which were unusual amenities in that area in those days.

The name Baldpate came from the mystery novel, Seven Keys to Baldpate by Earl Derr Biggers, which, also in 1917, became a silent-film mystery thriller. The author created seven visitors who traveled to a closed-in-winter hotel, each possessing a key that they believed was the only key to the property.

In keeping with the novel’s storyline, the Mace Family began giving all visitors their own key, which they could keep as a souvenir. However, the shortage and cost of metal during World War I soon forced them to stop that practice. Disappointed guests turned the tradition around and began bringing their own keys, and a competition began to see who could bring the most exotic or unusual key. The Maces encouraged this by dedicating a room to display the keys. A few years went by and they had to add another room. Now, with over 20,000 keys, “including examples from the Pentagon, Westminster Abby, Mozart’s Wine Cellar, and even Frankenstein’s castle, to name a few, the Baldpate is working with American History Savers to preserve and catalogue” the collection.

While having lunch, my wife Linda and I had a chance to speak with current owner, Lois Hoke Smith, a dynamic person who is dedicated to keeping the Baldpate Inn as the best country inn in Colorado.

We asked her if the Baldpate key collection might contain any keys from one of the hotels operated by Outrigger Enterprises, its predecessors or even Roy and Estelle Kelley in their young, entrepreneurial
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The Islander Hotel, of course, is where Outrigger Enterprises began when Roy and Estelle welcomed the first guest to their just-completed building in 1947. Serving pineapple juice on the patio and folding towels in Housekeeping were Richard, Jean and Patricia Kelley, who had not quite turned 14, 12 and 10 years old.

Finding that key at Baldpate was very emotional for me, particularly because one of my early duties was to cut replacement keys when they were lost or not returned by guests.

Now flash forward at “warp speed” to this past Wednesday, March 13. Allan Rodriguez, age 4, sat alone in a Ford Edge SUV at a Bradley service station in Longmont, Colorado, about 30 miles from the Baldpate Inn while his mother went inside to pick up a cup of coffee. In a flash, a stranger hijacked the vehicle with Allan inside. Police and a news helicopter were almost immediately on the hijacker’s tail and a wild, 60-mile chase ensued during which the hijacker took over two more vehicles and ran over and seriously injured a Colorado State Trooper by the last name of Hee.

At that point, I received an email from my daughter, Linda Jane Kelley, telling me that Trooper Hee’s full name was Bellamann Hee, Junior, her classmate at Punahou School in Honolulu. His father, Bellamann Hee, Senior, was born in Shanghai, China. In Hawai‘i, Bellamann Senior founded Bellamann Services, Inc., a company that sold signs and other promotional products. Mr. Hee, Senior, passed away on May 17, 2013.

I remember Bellamann Senior as a kind, gentle and loving man who provided our growing companies with engraved plastic signs that we used all around our hotels. We also bought other plastic products from Bellamann Services including, guess what, plastic room key tags!

Once again, we discovered what a “small world” we inhabit.

State Trooper Hee who was injured in this week’s triple hijacking in Colorado, grew up in Hawai‘i. It is highly likely that his father was the person who sold the room key tags to our Islander Hotel in Waikīkī many years ago. One of those key tags ended up in the Baldpate Inn, Estes Park, just over 30 miles from where the first carjacking occurred.

“And now you know the rest of the story!”

P.S.: Trooper Hee is currently hospitalized with serious injuries but is reported to be doing well and on what may prove to be a long road to recovery. And young Allan Rodriguez was returned safe and sound to his mother.