

Our Best Pok-e-Jo's Story

by Tony and Jane Rose

In June 2006, Steve, a good friend of ours was getting married. We had met here in Austin when he lived here after graduating from UT and then he moved to Lincoln, Nebraska in 2004 where he subsequently met his wife, Liz. When he lived in Austin, Steve was a great fan of Pok-e-Jo's (as were/are we) and ate it frequently before basketball games at the Erwin Center and at the restaurants, especially the Great Hills location.

Steve and Liz's wedding and reception was going to be a fairly casual outdoor affair at her brother's home and they were expecting about 100 people to attend. Steve really wanted to have barbeque at the reception, but he had learned one important thing in his time in Lincoln – there really wasn't much good barbeque in Nebraska and what there was couldn't compare to Texas barbeque. (We have since eaten at a location of the chain having the “best barbeque in Nebraska” and can attest that it's not very good!) In a case of “great minds thinking alike”, Steve and Tony both came up with the solution at the same time – knowing that we would definitely be driving up for the wedding, even though it is about 810 miles from Austin to Lincoln, they concocted a plan for us to bring the barbeque for the reception with us.

Steve contacted Sam at the Round Rock location to place and pay for the food order: brisket, turkey, sausage, chicken, three side dishes and trimmings for 100 guests plus several pounds of chopped beef (his favorite) for himself. At the same time, we researched the best way to package the food so that it would be easy to handle and still fit in our 11-month old car with luggage for the 5 day trip (we have an SUV that would have been better to use, but we wanted to show the car to Steve and Liz). There were countless numbers of phone calls in May and early June between Steve, Sam and Tony to ensure that everything went smoothly. Tony ended up purchasing three 100-quart coolers for the task in addition to using a fourth 56-quart cooler that we owned.

Around lunchtime on Thursday before the wedding, Tony left work and drove to the Pok-e-Jo's Round Rock location with the coolers to pick up the food prior to heading home to pack the car for the trip north. While at the restaurant working with the staff to load the food into the coolers, Tony was told that, while they periodically ship food across the country, they'd never packed coolers like this where the food wouldn't reach a refrigerator for about 36 hours. The staff took great care to place chunks of dry ice covered by aluminum pans on the bottom of three coolers to ensure that the dry ice didn't burn any of the meat. Tony was also given a thermometer to periodically check to ensure that the coolers didn't warm above 40°F.

Our trip was a pretty smooth trip, with a stop in Gainesville, TX to spend the night and have dinner with friends (who couldn't believe what was in our car) and lunch with other friends in Wichita, KS (who also couldn't believe it). We probably checked the temperature in the coolers more than we should have, but we wanted to be safer than sorry, and everything stayed chilled as needed. We arrived in Lincoln around dinnertime and met Steve to unload the coolers into his church's kitchen refrigerators. He had arranged for people to warm up the food there the next day and then bring it to Liz's brother's house in time for the reception.

Steve had apparently been bragging about the barbeque for a while, telling the Nebraskan wedding guests that they didn't know good barbeque but soon would, and he was thrilled that everything had worked out as planned.

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The wedding was beautiful and everyone seemed to enjoy the food at the reception. We know Steve did. A number of people came up to him and said that he was right about this being much better barbeque than they were used to and many of them even thanked us for bringing it up (as if that was the only reason we were there!). There was so much food left (we think that only 50-55 people showed up) that Steve and Liz stored most of the leftovers in her brother's extra freezer and the family had leftovers for July 4th and other events throughout the rest of that summer.

See the photos below that chronicle our trip and the wedding reception.

While this is certainly our most unusual Pok-e-Jo's story, we wanted to add that we have used Pok-e-Jo's catering on a number of other occasions ourselves for groups as large as 300. At each event, the staff was great to work with and the food has always been highly praised by attendees. Otherwise, we frequently eat at the Great Hills location and occasionally at the Hancock Center location and enjoy the food each and every time. Keep up the good work!

P.S. – We've told Steve about this contest and have promised that, if this story wins, we will find a way to share the prize with them. Even if it takes another road trip to Nebraska!

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The photo above left shows 2 of the 4 coolers in our trunk with our hanging clothes and a pillow on top and other luggage stuffed around them. The green cooler held meat and the lid had a section that opened to make it easy to check the temperature. The blue cooler held green bean and baked potato casseroles.



The photo above right shows the cooler on the back seat on the passenger's side with a box of sauce and other non-chilled items on the floor. This was set up so that the front passenger could recline (it's a long trip!). This cooler also held meat and was set up similarly to the green one in the trunk. Note the towels underneath the cooler in this and the photo below to keep any leakage away from the seats (this WAS a new car after all!). And, despite all of these arrangements, we even remembered a wedding present that sat on top of this cooler.

The photo below left shows our smaller cooler that contained pickles, onions and potato salad. You can only imagine what this cooler smelled like after the trip! We had to let it air out for several days to get the odor out. The box on top held loaves of wheat and white bread. We also managed to get a couple of personal items on the floor here.



And this photo below right shows that there was actually room in the front seat for a driver and passenger!



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At left, Tony (far left in hat) converses with the food volunteers (probably telling part of this story) in the kitchen where the meat and sides were being kept warm.

Below, a better shot of the full trays where the food was kept warm.



Below, guests grab plates, utensils, bread, cold sides and sauce from a table in the breakfast area.



At right, Steve and Liz visit during their first meal as husband and wife. Liz may have been telling Steve how much she was enjoying the barbeque. Note Steve's empty plate; we can vouch that it wasn't his only one that day!

