

Oh, What a Web My Lies Did Weave!

*By Mary Jane McCormick*

I entered the convent at age 17. After the first three years, I was able to take vacations each summer. These would be spent at my parent's home visiting family and friends.

I had been in eight years when I befriended two lay nurses while working in a small rural hospital in central Illinois. Mary Anne and Suzie decided it would great fun to travel west and visit several national parks. They begged me to join them.

Well, such a request to the Mother Superior would have resulted in a resounding "No" followed by, "Are you crazy?" This was 'verboden' meaning 'forbidden' in this very conservative community originally founded in Germany.

By this time, I had learned the adage, "It is better to ask for forgiveness than permission." And since I really wanted to go on this off trip, I told my parents I was not being granted a vacation that summer and told my superior I was going home to visit my parents.

And so with a heavy burden of guilt, I headed west from Illinois with my friends. After the first 200 miles, we got a flat tire; another 400 miles, the engine overheated.

But we pushed on and made it to Yellowstone Park right after nightfall on the third day. We were exhausted; we crashed on our cabin cots and fell into a deep sleep. The temperature dropped below freezing and we shivered all night. It never dawned on us to turn on the cabin heaters.

By morning all three of us had severe laryngitis and could not speak for four days. We did our best using sign language but tempers flared. We got lost several times, ran out of gas once and encountered a very angry moose traveling through a thick forest.

We did manage to see the beauty of Glacier National Park on the "Going to the Sun" road towards the Canadian border. Zion National Park and Bryce Canyon in Utah were spectacular. All in all, it was a wonderful trip.

But as we headed east returning to Illinois my fear as to what might happen took over. I wondered if my lies would catch up with me.

Would my superior find out I did not go home to Mom and Dad? Would my parents find out and be hurt by this elaborate ruse?

Would this heavenly trip send me to some version of hell?