

## My Worst Vacation by Mari Lu McGinnis

There has never been a worst vacation for me, but this trip had all the possibilities – four boys, ages 15, 13, 11, and 6 – dad in Vietnam, gas guzzling Oldsmobile 88, car top rack, and a one-wheel trailer. Our itinerary: Reno, Nevada to Glendale, California via Beatty, Nevada, through the short width of Death Valley then hooking up to Highway 395 to Uncle Dan and Aunt Polly's home in the valley. It was Palm Sunday, 1963. This was to be and was a trial trip for a much longer, all summer adventure filled trek to follow in June. That trip, however, would fill a book. Five hundred words would be reached before we reached Yellowstone Park. This was a mere week, a mere 300 miles to and fro.

We loaded up: tent, water, food, lanterns, bedding ... list checked off we went down the highway. All was well till we reached Beatty, Nevada. Flat tire no problem. Just disconnect the one-wheel trailer, and unpack the trunk. Get out the spare, pack up the trunk, connect the trailer (my teen age boys did the chores) and a couple of hours later and several bottles of pop we were on our way through the narrow part of Death Valley.

The road sign warned "No access if it is raining or wet". It was bone dry so we forged ahead. The road was so tightly twisted that we could frequently see the trailer out of the side window. For the first time I was glad it wasn't a two-wheel trailer. It went on one bend after another – mostly downhill. Really downhill. I remembered not to use the brake. Low gear all the way. Brian, 6, was lying down on the floor of the back seat. Everyone was unnervingly quiet. Doug, 15, riding beside me. Kept saying, "You're doing great, Mom." And that was all. It was thirty miles on the map. It seemed like 50. Thirty miles of corkscrew bends – then just in time for dinner we spotted an empty campsite. Well, they were all empty. But this was pretty close to the road.

Boy were we outta that car! Tent erected, food, beds unfolded., fire burning, dusk falling over an eerie barren landscape. Just as we were getting to the word game stage – after that came the guitars – we heard a whirring noise. Have you ever heard a rattler? Yes, that whirring noise. So as I grabbed Brian, the other three, not heeding my "Come back!", grabbed tent flap props and rushed into the graying night. Yes, they killed what I hoped was the only rattler around. So we had a souvenir. The San Fernando relatives were duly impressed, actually horrified I think.

The problems of the summer trip could never be as serious or exciting as this one. In fact they could be and were but we were undaunted.