

On the Road to Florida

By Marilyn Reeves

After the War there was an upsurge in the American economy and all kinds of consumer goods came back on the market – including silk stockings and reasonably priced cars. So Dad bought his first ever brand new car – a shiny black 1949 Kaiser. It was a big, heavy-bodied four-door sedan that looked like a monstrosity on the outside, with over-stuffed fuzzy grey upholstery on the inside. To us girls it was like riding in the back seat of a stuffy old coffin. I got car sick just *thinking* about getting into that car. But it was our Dad's pride and joy and he just couldn't wait to show it off to his parents. So we piled into the new Kaiser for a trip to Illinois.

We headed out in the dead of winter over the mountains from Salida to Denver, across the flat farm lands of Eastern Colorado, and over the undulating hills of Kansas, where we spent the first night at a motel in Salina. Then we drove straight through Missouri to southern Illinois, finally arriving at the tiny town of Atlanta, where we were heartily embraced by my oversized grandmother and my pint-sized granddad, who were more excited to see us than they were to see Dad's car.

After visiting with them for a couple of days, rather than turning around and heading back to Colorado, my folks decided to make it a real holiday and drive the rest of the way across the country to the State of Florida. Mom had always wanted to see Cypress Gardens, so we got back in the Kaiser and continued heading east. And south – *way* south.

The farther south we drove the warmer the weather and the stuffier the Kaiser. I remember having to stop a couple of times along the road to be sick.

I also remember the world's biggest flea market – I believe it was passing through the State of Alabama where we saw stand after roadside stand that must have gone on for thirty miles or more. People selling pots and pans and bric-a-brac, and clothes hanging from make-shift racks. I couldn't believe how many people there were strung along the highway, buying and selling that huge conglomeration of stuff!

There were also little red signs with white lettering along the road that said things like: "His cheek was rough." Next sign: "His chick vamoosed." And the next one: "And now she won't come home to roost." Followed by: "Burma-Shave."

When we arrived in Georgia, we spent the night with Dad's brother Tom and his family. Then on to Florida, through the oppressive walls of cypress trees, their grey leaves overhanging the road on either side of us for mile after endless mile.

But finally we arrived at the beautiful Cypress Gardens! There we were treated to a wonderland of Southern belles gracing the green lawns, lush flower gardens, garlands of delicate orchids

adorning the trees, and a spectacular show of skiers performing acrobatic maneuvers on the water. You didn't see things like that in Colorado!

Do I recall the many highways we travelled along the way? Of course not. I was seven. But it was a memorable trip nonetheless, despite the endless hours spent riding in the stuffy back seat of that big black Kaiser.