



**Norma, the dogs and the trailer**

# Maiden Voyage

**L**IKE MOST people in California, my wife Norma and I came from less comfortable climes—she from Connecticut, I from Illinois. The families are far away, and the visiting problem is a hard one to solve. Many days, and many dollars separate Los Angelenos from their people in such far places.

One day I was over in Glendale, and I fell in love again. Now, ordinarily that's a careless thing for a married man to do, but this was different — a good thing all round, especially for Norma. You see, I fell for a lovely, light-as-a-feather, all-aluminum trailer — a 16-foot beauty, ready and willing to go anywhere, anytime. So I signed for life.

Now that may seem very silly to you, if you've never taken a landship to your heart, but if you give yourself a chance you may find out it's true, and I hope you do.

First, let me tell you that I'm in a very peculiar business — I do commercials on television. For the past three years I'd never had a day off. Well, not really off—if I didn't have a show to do, then I had something to memorize. That's why I said I never got a vacation. But whoever said that all good things come to an end was so right, especially where broadcasting is concerned. In mid-December I found myself about to be showless. It's a normal thing in show business, unpleasant, but a thing to expect from time to time. For a while I felt sorry for myself, then I felt relief at having some free time. Suddenly I realized that free time, plus the trailer, plus the holidays, plus Norma's folks could add up to something wonderful. The weather might be cold, even dangerous, but we could make the trip in comfort without going broke, thanks to the landship. I thought about it for a day or so, then told Norma.

"Oh, wonderful. But do you think we can do it at this time of the year?"

"Sure we can. May have to take it easy in spots. If necessary, we could go far south, turn north from Atlanta, and from Washington on we could practically walk, if we had to."

So we planned the trip, beginner fashion. How else? Nobody's an old salt even before the maiden voyage. You learn fast, though!

We anticipated what we could, then stowed. The permanent double bed in the rear of our trailer has lots of storage space under

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Looking north over El Paso from Scenic Drive

## Part I of a Trailer Trip

by Ralph B. Reid



Lookout Mountain, Chattanooga, Tennessee

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it. Into it we piled enough canned meats, vegetables, fish, fruit, cake, bread, and so on to stock a small store. Yet in every state through which we passed there were lots of towns with lots of stores just filled with food, fresh food, even! So the canned goods in the stern made the round trip almost untouched.

Then, too, when it came to stowing our clothes, we did it big. Into the closet we stuffed a fine wardrobe for hot or cold weather, for leisure, for dress occasions. I finally got the door closed, but it could have stayed closed the whole trip except that we kept the cookie jar on the top shelf!

Finally we were ready to go except for one last show. I went to do it, and Norma stayed home to do whatever last-minute things wives do at such a time. Finally I returned from the studio, we had a snack, and turned in at about ten o'clock.

I turned over and kept turning. So did Norma. Then a brief quiet period, followed by more restlessness. Finally, at about eleven o'clock I whispered, "Norma, are you asleep?"

"How could I be asleep with you acting like a whale, throwing your-

self about? I'm wide awake!"

"So am I. Let's stop kidding ourselves. We want to go tonight, so let's do it. What do you say?"

"All right with me. I was sure it would turn out like this, anyway."

"Say, hear those dogs at the door! They know we're ready to go."

"They always do. And you always marvel at it."

Then a hurried breakfast, the trip to the trailer parking lot nearby, a quick hitch-up, and away we went, wide awake and happy as kids when school lets out for the summer vacation. The dogs got the fever, too. Herk is so excited by travel that he nearly has a heart attack, pants like mad, licks his chops, and jumps from side to side in the rear seat, looking in all directions. This is the spaniel member. Henry the beagle, on the other hand, quickly sized up the situation: another of those long, tiresome rides. Well, better get some sleep. So there he was in the middle of the seat with his hind quarters in the air, braced against the back of the seat and his head on the seat, asleep! From time to time that odd dreamer would lower, then raise himself in the rear, always keeping his chin on the seat, and remaining fast asleep.

Meantime, Herk ran back and forth excitedly, climbing on Henry's whiskers. And the act would continue daily for 8,000 miles!

South on the Arroyo Seco freeway we went, then east on US 60-70.

All the usual wifely doubts about trailers were with Norma still. Soon she put one into words.

"I'm afraid to look back," she said. "If I ignore it, then I'm not so scared."

"No need to worry about it, Norma. The hitch is secure. The running lights are on. Why, you'd hardly know we're pulling anything; the car handles it easily. You know, I'll bet that by tomorrow night you'll pay no attention to it being back there at all."

"I doubt it," said she. "I'll never get used to it."

But of course she did. She finally paid absolutely no attention even when we passed a truck on an old iron bridge.

And so on into the balmy California night, east through El Monte, past the intersection where 60 and 70 part company with 99, on past the Palm Springs turn-off, past Indio, and then we were out in the desert. The hands of my watch were reaching for three o'clock

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when Desert Center came into sight.

"Wonder if we should drive all night and get off to a real flying start. How do you feel about it, Norma?"

"I don't mind," she said. "But you're the one who does the driving. Aren't you awfully tired? And won't we feel terrible tomorrow if we go on all night?"

"Well, to be honest about it, I've been feeling as if my eyes would fall out of my head. These guys who won't dim their lights! Well, let's stop at that gas station."

I checked the mileage mentally—about 15 miles on a gallon. Much better than I'd expected. If I'd used a pencil it would have figured about 12, but I was so sleepy!

The station operator didn't seem to see anything wrong with it when I asked him if we might take a nap there. "Sure thing," he said, "Pull over there. By that grease rack is okay."

We pulled over, stopped, and got out. We let the dogs out, gave them fresh water, called them back, picked the burrs out of their footpads, gave them water, put them into the car, and went to the trail-

er. It looked like the Waldorf. Fortunately, the bed was made up, and we fell in.

As I recall, the sun was getting up rather late on December 22nd. Anyway, I didn't stir until the bright light streaked in past the curtain. It was not a long sleep, but a good one. I tossed the covers aside, got dressed, took the dogs off into the desert, brought them back to the car, removed the burrs from their feet, and went for coffee water. Meanwhile, Norma had gone into action. We had breakfast—grapefruit, coffee, and rolls. We stacked the dishes, waved to the station operator, and off we sailed, with the Arizona line an exciting target.

"Let's not make our usual mistake," said Norma. "Let's eat light food—plenty of apples and other fruit. We always feel better, you know." We had an apple.

It was a lovely day, brisk at the early hour, but gradually warmer as the sun rose higher. We reached Blythe, crossed the Colorado, entered Arizona, and watched eagerly for changes in the scenery. It was all new country coming up, all the way to Flagstaff. We intended to leave 60 and 70 west of Phoenix and take 71, then 89, and finally 89 alternate. So far the roads were excellent. I wondered if we'd chosen well ahead. I knew that the minor roads are often better than the major highways, but I was concerned because of pulling the trailer.

In mid-afternoon a sign promised that soon we'd be in Jerome, billed as the biggest ghost town in the world. I pictured it in my mind—a little place like every other abandoned western town, rough wooden buildings, leaning on the wind.

But here is a surprisingly large city perched on the top of the mountains facing north and east. If this is a ghost town it's certainly the world's biggest. It's quite a modern town, yet it is deserted. We drove on, and the place grew stranger by the block. There were a couple of big hotels. There was a high school that had been built about 20 years ago, a big one. Yet it was apparent that for a good many years now the place had

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been deserted. Must be quite a story here, probably connected with a vein of metal that brought great wealth to a few, then petered out and brought grief to many. We slowly dropped down the mountainside, away from Jerome. Someday I'd like to go back there with time to look around.

Soon we came to a stretch of colorful red rock country. It was somewhat like the Colorado Garden of the Gods, but more interesting with giant red boulders everywhere, red cliffs in many shapes and shades of red, and much green vegetation. I found myself wanting to build a trailer park there. From here we dropped down farther, then started up again.

The day was almost gone, so was the gas, when we came to a campsite in Coconino National Forest. I knew that it would be better to get stuck in the daytime so I pulled into the campsite, thinking that if I had to walk for gas, at least it would be by daylight. There seemed to be about twenty miles of up-grade driving to Flagstaff when I checked the map. Well, we'd found a lovely spot.

We parked the trailer after a lot of backing and filling, then got

out of the car, and it was like stepping into a deep freeze. There was ice on the stream, frost in the air. I let the dogs out, and without regard for anything they rushed to the stream, walked in, and frantically tried to drink it dry. Then I realized that I'd forgotten to refill their water dishes for hours.

We went into the trailer, and I started looking for matches at once. Must have been below zero in there, too. None to be found. No matches meant cold food, no heat from the Panelray heater, no hot coffee in the morning. It would be much colder before morning. So we looked around at this beautiful campsite regretfully, thinking how nice it might have been, and set out again up the difficult grade.

At Flagstaff, the station attendant suggested antifreeze as a good investment. I said that I'd drain the radiator if it remained cold when we stopped for the night. I just didn't realize yet that California weather didn't extend beyond California. We'd be going down to warmer country during the night. So down we went, but not to any warmth. About eleven we found a big gas station in a small town, filled up, and were given permission to park there for the night. It was even colder than in Flagstaff,

so I drained the radiator and then tended to the dogs. The beagle needed his sweater that night.

The next morning the radiator drain pipe had a big icicle hanging from it, and there was lots of ice under the car. I was sure the block had cracked. Even if it hadn't, how could I ever get it started at five below zero? I tried, and it began to hit. I pumped the accelerator. It hit again. I pumped some more. Finally it took hold and then died. Then it started and ran all right. But suddenly much smoke came from the open hood. I shut it off, got out, looked it over, and found that the water pump had frozen so that the fan belt was slipping on its pulley, just like a skidding tire on the pavement. I carefully freed the pump by rotating it, then started the car again, let it run for a minute, then shut it off. When Norma came out I'd be able to start it easily, fill the radiator, and we'd be able to go. Unless the block had cracked we'd be all right, and about the block only time could tell.

Norma was still quaking under a mountain of clothing and bedding. "Wake up, dearie," I told her. "The trailer is nice and warm now."

"I don't believe it," said she, but she fought her way up out of the depths. We had breakfast, then went to the car. It started readily. While Norma kept it going with a light touch on the throttle, I filled the radiator. I checked the oil, and the dipstick had no water on it. Perhaps the block was unharmed. Away we went, hopefully, headed for the warmer weather that was

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supposed to be waiting for us in the low country to the east.

It wasn't long before Arizona lay behind us, and soon we reached Gallup, New Mexico. Into a gas station we went, and this time we got antifreeze! The station attendant said that normal winter weather brings two feet of snow on the highway. And this was the southern route? Well, now we knew, and on the return trip we would plan it better.

Beyond that eastern horizon we would come to Albuquerque, then Tucumcari, where we would want to turn off to the north for the short route to Chicago, where my sister lives. We had never really believed that we could make that part of the trip, but had hoped to do it. We began to listen to the weather forecasts. A cold front was pushing out of the Arctic icebox, headed for Chicago, Cleveland, and points east. We shuddered and continued east on 66, figuring that Oklahoma City was the last chance for a turn off to the north. If we passed that, headed straight east to Memphis, then there'd be no Chicago visit.

All the forecasts pointed to bad roads and a white Christmas for Chicagoans. But when Memphis was far behind and we were approaching Chattanooga, we got the final word on what Christmas day in Chicago was really like: sunny, no snow, no cold! The oldsters were saying, "Just doesn't seem like Christmas. Why back in 1910 the snow was . . ."

Christmas dinner found us in a Tennessee roadside park. I fortified the dog dinners with some bacon fat, and they had a fine holiday. After a good dinner, they had a wild romp on the grass in the sun—both scarce, indeed, for the last 2,000 miles. Our Christmas fare may seem grim to you, but at the time it hit the spot—chili with melted cheese, salad, peaches, and coffee.

We felt much better, quite new, in fact. We had been on the road since the preceding Tuesday night, and had covered two-thirds of our journey east. A complete change of clothes, and the prospect of see-

ing old friends made things look very good.

The friends didn't know we were on the road. They hadn't seen us for five years. And they didn't know that we had a trailer, nor did they know anything about trailers. It baffled them. They never figured out how to behave toward guests who didn't need bed or board. It was wonderful. Their teen-age son, heretofore displaced by our visits, kept his bed, and it was nice for everybody. We stayed that night, most of the next day, and then prepared to leave. At that time we intended to come back on the trip west and spend a little more time.

We headed north on 11, Connecticut-bound with only 800 miles or so left to go. The weather turned foul, it started to rain, and grew colder. We decided to drive hard and finish the trip to Hartford as soon as possible, because from here on north anything could happen in the weather department. That night we couldn't find a trailer park, but we did find a nice, quiet little Virginia town with very wide streets. We pulled off onto a grassy shoulder near a street light, and we were home.

At sunrise next morning the dogs  
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began to jump madly, the trailer bobbed in sympathy with the car, and I thought it was an earthquake. I looked out, and as usual the alarm clock turned out to be a passing canine. Harry and Herk didn't waken the neighborhood, but they made up for subdued barking by leaping up and down. Together they weigh no more than 45 pounds, yet it's amazing how they can rock the boat. I was glad to get an early start, however. It was noticeably colder.

After the usual chores we set out to the north on Highway 11, passed the Winchester turnoff to the Skyline Drive, and made a note to take it instead of the highway when we headed back to California. Toward the end of the day we reached Gettysburg. That evening we left 11 in Harrisburg, turned east on 22, and drove from Easton north to 6, which crosses the Hudson at Bear Mountain.

Although it was cold in Pennsylvania, it seemed from the weather reports that we had nothing to worry about if we just kept moving. A cold front was moving east, but it appeared to be about 24 hours away. Allowing for error, it appeared that we'd be in Hartford before it got there. But as we approached The Bear Mountain area it started to rain. After battling the narrow blacktop road with its abrupt curves for an hour or more, we came to a busy intersection with an exceptionally big gas station. We filled up, and I asked if we might stay over night.

We turned in about two in the morning with the wonderful feeling that we had it practically made—just a hundred miles or so to journey's end. Why, we could make that in a day, even on ice! And right then it began to look as though we might have a chance to prove that we could; for rain began falling on the roof, and it was getting colder.

Next morning it was colder still, but the rain had stopped. We crossed the Bear Mountain bridge, headed up the mountain, and stopped at the summit, where there's a large parking space overlooking

the Hudson. It was a grey day, of course, but that wasn't the only reason for the sorry landscape. Such a collection of litter—paper, cans, bottles, old pieces of sandwiches—everything imaginable, from one side to the other. No trash cans in sight.

That reminds me — we've found that on a trip of any length a waste basket in the car can be as useful, or even more so, than the one at home. It keeps the litter in the car until it can be burned.

The weather continued cold and threatening, and there was quite a lot of ice and some snow at the roadside in the gullies. When we descended to the lowlands there was no more snow, however.

A winter vacationer from California is struck by the grim, leafless trees in the eastern part of the country. We're accustomed to variations, of course, but even in desert country there are some green things, or at least some leaves. It seemed to me that Old Man East was naked. He needed a white blanket.

The outlook improved quite a bit as we approached Hartford—some wooded country, a lake or two, good-looking, old, white houses and fences. It's a rolling country, with black-top roads of the back-country sort. They wind and meander up hill, down dale, curving too much for fast driving, but mighty pleasant if you're not hurrying. With less than 50 miles to go we didn't have to hurry any more.

We arrived at the folks' about 2:00 p.m. Wednesday, after just one week on the road.

The old homestead was bulging with out-of-town relatives who had been there since Christmas, and had stayed on to see us.

How useful the trailer could be was soon demonstrated for, as I said, the house was filled, so the beds were, too. But that was no problem; we had brought ours with us!

We had made harbor safely, and the good ship lay at anchor in the back yard, orphan by day, home by night, until the crowd thinned out a bit.

Now that we were at rest for ten days, there was time to do  
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some work on the trailer. Most important item was the heater, which had picked a fine, frigid time to get fouled up. The pilot flame wouldn't stay on. The only way you could get the big burner to work was to hold your finger on the pilot-primer button, and that meant standing on your head. The moment you took your finger off the primer button, the flame went out. It was apparent that by keeping the primer button depressed I could have a heater that would heat, but would require matches to get it lighted. I took off the fitting which covers the primer button assembly, put a turn of wire around the shaft, put the plate back on so that it would press against the turn of wire and hold the button in, and screwed it tight. Then, although the pilot light was dead, the heater was very much alive when you put a match to it. So we had heat, which was lucky, for without it we could not have slept in the trailer. Later I discovered that there had been nothing wrong with the heater. The butane had frozen, that was all.

While in Hartford I wanted to get our table problem solved. With a bed in the back and a large couch in the front our 16-foot trailer had no table. We had tried to use one of those fireside tables, but it was heavy, unstable, too high for comfort when you sat on the couch, and very much in the way. Also, the ice-box door could not be opened when the table was set up. I finally noticed that the folding cover over the stove was just the right size for a table for two. I unhinged it from the galley top, put appropriate hardware on one end, put matching hardware just above the ice-box, screwed an aluminum closet pole fitting to the bottom of the table, and then set

it up. A rubber tip such as you might use on a crutch fitted over the leg, and that was all there was to it. It was perfect. Just the right height for the couch. There was only one leg, and it was out of the way. The stainless steel edge and the matching linoleum top made it look like a custom job. It could travel up or down, and took only a minute to handle.

Our eastward journey demonstrated the need for prompt dish washing, too. It may be all right to carry over the breakfast dishes till lunch-time washing, but that's the limit. Letting dishes go for the sake of getting under way again quickly is a great temptation, so beware! Your trailer and your attitude are really fouled up by a lot of dirty dishes.

Water is always a problem. I think that one of the smartest ways to spend a little money is on a good pump and tank. For a travel trailer, a new GI gas can makes an ideal tank. With one of these you only have to attach the pump to the sink top and connect a rubber hose of the right length to it. I like the GI can because it's easy to keep it sanitary, easy to fill.

You'll want a large spigot jug or a large refrigerator water bottle, too. You can't always connect to city water, and won't want to drink water from any tank. Take some chlorine tablets along, too. You may never use them, but chances are you will.

Another thing that makes all the difference is a butane light. They don't cost much, and they make you independent. If you don't want to install a butane light, get a Coleman lantern. It gives a good light, and can be taken outside, too.

Finally, a good two-burner gasoline camp stove will add a lot to your pleasure. You might like to cook outside. And then too, you might be out of butane at dinner-time! Another thing: the gallon of high-quality, white, stove gasoline is as good as any other for an emergency supply for the car.