**ONCE MORE TO JENNY LAKE**

It was always in a mood of high excitement and logistical preoccupation that we gathered the ingredients for the annual summer vacation. A Nash Rambler, a surplus army tent, a Coleman stove, 2 pans, assorted utensils, a heavy metal cooler, 6 sleeping bags, a few changes of clothes, a pile of more or less reliable maps, two parents, four children, one small, black, extremely nervous cocker spaniel.

My parents had grown up rooted in small towns in Indiana in unremarkable modest homes. There is no account that their families ever camped. We could not have afforded motels but we could have driven to the Indiana dunes two hours away from our apartment in Chicago’s Hyde Park neighborhood and camped there.

Yet we never questioned this adventurous mode of vacationing. It was the 1950s and Americans were on the move. The war was over. Many, like us, owned their first car. Simply being on the road was exciting. We went for bedtime rides on summer evenings, even in Chicago. Then there was the fact that my father had grown up on the National Road West, once a stage coach route for pioneers and that my mother went along for the ride when her father drove across the country, working for the Federal Housing Authority during the Depression.

Whatever the reason, my parents sought adventure, and often got more than they bargained for. There was no interstate highway system in the early 1950s, and the excitement of the trip was increased by the fact that the maps that promised paved back roads and campgrounds often bore little relationship to the rutted paths and cow pastures we discovered. After a long day on the road, we could pull into what was shown as a campground and find instead a farmer’s field or uninhabited woods.

The Nash Rambler circa 1952, was our first car, a two-door economy model, smaller than others, but still bearing a striking resemblance to an inflated balloon, somewhat elongated. My father installed a large luggage carrier on top to hold the heavy canvas green army tent with its wooden poles, and some sleeping bags. Then we piled in, three in front and three in back, unincumbered by seat belts. Later, my sister, who had the good sense to be born four years before me, managed often to stay home because she was a teenager, with all the summer obligations and independence that accompany that status. That left me and my two younger brothers, and Perky, the cocker spaniel, undoubtedly the best behaved of the lot.

There were many camping trips, around Lake Michigan from one state park to another, with stops at Mackinac Island and Interlochen music camp, deer rides in the evening, morning swims in the lake. A long drive to Woods Hole, Massachusetts, with lobster for dinner.

By happy chance, the Rambler more than once took us to Jenny Lake, the result of retreating glaciers 12,000 years earlier that had carved out a pristine pool, now surrounded by pine forest and part of the Grand Tetons National Park in Wyoming. Beyond the lake, the melting ice had carved out what was now called Cascade Canyon, where a mountain river tumbled down the rocks and fed Jenny Lake.  On the opposite side of the lake was a campground, populated by travelers like ourselves, a small store, a building with showers and toilets, and a particularly creative cadre of hungry black bears who had some pretty good ideas about where their next meals were coming from. One night a particularly ambitious bear opened the metal latch to our cooler, rolled the cooler around for awhile for fun (waking all of us up), found a package of bacon, consumed it, and left. We saw his (or her) furry rump through our tent doorway. My parents, sleeping in the relative safety of the car as usual, watched with concern. Perky, our valiant watch dog, trembled and whined.

Jenny lake was perfect in every way, its icy clear water, its rocky beach, a flat-bottomed Park Service launch that took passengers across the lake to hike the canyon, its magical, moss-laden woods. I have always kept the vision of Jenny Lake with me. And I have returned a few times with my own four children, while staying in log cabins at the Triangle X ranch, and found it unchanged.