



Greetings of the Season from the Olsens!

We hope that you are doing well. Our family is busy as usual. All three boys are involved with the church Christmas play this year. Peter (17) is in control of the stage lighting, Jonathan (12) is the narrator, and Joshua (7) sings in the children's choir. In spite of record high gasoline prices, we will be able to look back on 2007 as "The Year of the Road Trip." You can learn all about our adventures by reading this newsletter.

Route 66 – It's Still Here!

Route 66, also known as "The Mother Road" or "The Main Street of America," was established in 1926 and became completely paved by 1937. This popular highway extended all the way from Chicago, IL to Los Angeles, CA and was a major artery for east/west travel across the USA. It was used by Dust Bowl emigrants in the 1930's, WWII troop and supply transports in the 1940's, then reached its heyday in the 1950's-60's.

In the early 1900's, this route was known as National Old Trails Road. Its precursor was a primitive wagon road that followed an old Indian trade route. This historic wagon trail is still visible in some places. Lt. Edward Fitzgerald Beale led an Army expedition along this road in 1857. Beale's entourage included 25 Egyptian camels being tested as military pack animals. A transcontinental rail line, constructed adjacent to the wagon road in the 1880's, is the same one that can be seen running parallel to I-40.

In the 1970's, Route 66 was bypassed and replaced by interstate thruways. The last active piece of Route 66 near Williams, AZ was decommissioned in 1986. The longest remaining stretch of Route 66 is located in northern AZ. Today, Route 66 attracts nostalgic travelers who seek to recapture the classic spirit of adventure.

Our family has been interested in Route 66 ever since getting Pixar's computer animated Cars DVD last Christmas. Most of the movie including the plot itself was based on real people, places, and cars along Route 66. The Southwestern portion of the route in particular was the main setting for the film. In February we took our first drive on Route 66 and we were hooked!

From then on, our whole year centered on the Route 66 theme in what turned out to be an ongoing road-based unit study. We explored Route 66 from Grants, NM to Santa Monica, CA—which

includes the towns of Gallup, Holbrook, Winslow, Winona, Flagstaff, Ash Fork, Williams, Seligman, Peach Springs, Kingman, Oatman, Needles, Amboy, Barstow, Victorville, San Bernardino, and L.A.

Along the way we discovered ghost towns, boarded-up mines, the historic Wigwam Motel, old roadside signs, rock art, a dilapidated little red schoolhouse with its tin ceiling still intact, an 1880's wooden windmill standing in the middle of nowhere, abandoned gas stations and cafés, wild burros, herds of pronghorn antelope, a "haunted" hotel and a mysterious 1949 Ford Coupe driven by a shadowy figure that seemed to be following us.

The most serendipitous discovery was on our first trip when we ventured onto a cattle road to stop and watch trains go by while we ate a picnic lunch. We found a BLM marker that said "Historic Beale Wagon Road 1857-1883." After that, we kept coming across Beale's name in other places, too—such as at Laws Spring near Williams, AZ where Beale's party left their mark, and at El Morro National Monument's "Inscription Rock" in NM.

On side trips off of Route 66 we toured the Gold Road Mine and the Grand Canyon Caverns, drove to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and to the top of Bill Williams Mountain, traveled a little-known back road from Williams to Jerome, touched a steel girder from the World Trade Center tower in Winslow's 9-11 Remembrance Garden, saw roses and irises growing wild in the forest, camped in a meadow of dandelions on Mount Taylor in NM, viewed the Perseid Meteor Shower while camping near Meteor Crater, walked among lava flows and cinder cones (San Francisco Volcanic Field in AZ, El Malpais National Monument in NM, and Amboy Crater/Pisgah Lava Bed in CA).

Who would have thought that Route 66 could be so much fun! It was the perfect place for our teenage son to obtain miles of highway driving experience, and the busy railway kept our younger boys happily occupied for hours. They would wave out the car window at a passing train, then the engineer would blow his horn and wave back. Route 66 makes for a great family outing. Just be sure to bring plenty of water, snacks, and fill up the gas tank before heading off the beaten path. As Bobby Troupe wrote in 1946: "If you ever plan to motor west, travel my way, take the highway that is best. Get your kicks on Route 66!"

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Do you have any Route 66 memories? We'd love to hear yours! Please write and share it with us! ☺

"At Christmas, all roads lead home." ~Marjorie Holmes, American author

Richard's 50th Birthday

Richard dreamed of climbing a 14,000-foot peak for his 50th birthday. We all wanted to go along with him so that we could share in his triumph. We prepared for the trip by taking a daily walk up a steep hill near our house to get in shape. In addition, Richard and Peter hiked to the top of Humphrey's Peak, the tallest mountain in AZ at 12,633 feet. The rest of us also went up there to see how far we could get. After reaching the halfway point, Josh got too tired to continue and mom had to give him a ride down on her back – kind of like carrying a 60-pound pack!

Our ultimate destination was 14,048-foot Handies Peak in the wild and rugged San Juan Mountains of southwestern Colorado, located in the Rocky Mountain range. The San Juans are part of the Colorado Mineral Belt and featured prominently in the early days of gold and silver mining. Major towns in the area - all old mining camps - include Telluride, Silverton, Ouray, and Lake City. This was going to be a real adventure because none of us had ever been to the Rockies before. The four-wheel-drive road to the trailhead was an exciting trip in itself as our Ford Expedition meandered past "ghost town valley" and traversed over 12,640-foot Cinnamon Pass.

It was 110° back home in AZ on that Labor Day weekend, but high up in the mountains we saw patches of snow! At our 11,600-foot campsite the temperature ranged between 41-64°. Josh and Jon unfortunately were both feeling altitude sick, so Mom stayed with them while Rich and Pete took off on their six-hour hike. Handies Peak is among five other 14,000-foot peaks in the area, as well as numerous thirteeners. Rich said that the panoramic view from the top looking out over the sea of San Juan summits that surrounded them was incredible.



View from Handies Peak

Tanks a Lot

A secondary theme of this year seemed to be World War II tank warfare. We visited the General Patton Museum, which was built on the site of his desert training camp. We stopped at the Yuma Proving Ground, one of Patton's maneuver areas. We also drove by the location of the Camp Bouse army base, where soldiers were secretly trained to use a special new tank designed for night battles.



3 Boys on a Dune

California Here We Come

We traveled to CA twice this year. The last week of September was our vacation. We did some camping, visited an open pit gold mine, discovered another historic highway/wagon road/Indian trail, climbed a sand dune, saw the Salton Sea, played at the beach, went to Legoland, visited a Creation Museum and *Way of the Master* ministries, drove around the San Pedro/Long Beach ship yards, and stayed at Rich's uncle's house in Palos Verdes.

We went to CA again on Thanksgiving. After a big turkey dinner, we brought some leftovers with us (thanks to Rich's sister Jan) and spent that night camping out in the desert. On Friday we took a look at Hollywood, the Santa Monica Pier, and the Third Street Promenade. On Saturday we saw the Malibu fire, but the highlight of the day was getting to meet evangelist and author Ray Comfort who was open-air preaching at Huntington Beach.

Speaking of which...do you know that JESUS, the star of CHRISTmas, is the Greatest Gift? It's true! All you have to do is open your heart and let Him in! "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, to give you hope and a future. If you call upon me, I will listen to you. You will find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you."

God Bless You! ~ Rich, Teri, Peter, Jon & Josh

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