



**"Every path hath a puddle."** ~George Herbert, "Jacula Prudentum"



# AN AMERICAN ODYSSEY - A TALE OF A TRIP AND MISSING TIKI

*By Maureen Cawley*



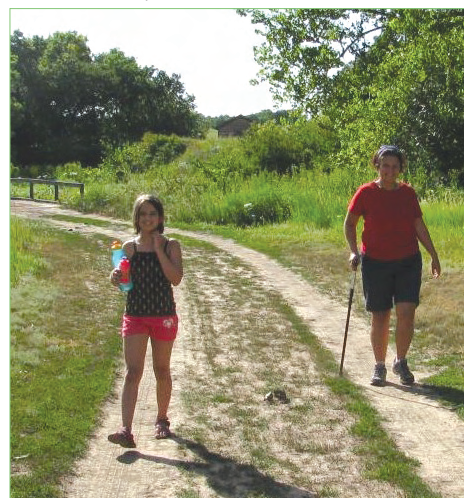
Katie, Emmett and Anna Cawley take in the view at Monument Valley, UT.



The Cawley's at Sequoia National Forest, California.



Anna, Troy and Emmett on San Clemente State Beach, California.



Anna Cawley and her Mom, Maureen, limping along the Oregon Trail ruts at Rock Creek Station Nebraska.

It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.

That pretty much sums up last summer. A trip of a lifetime, followed by a totaled car, three broken bones, and months of limited mobility. But I can live with that.

The cross-country trip had been in the back of our minds for years, something we would do when the kids were old enough (but not too old). There were so many things we wanted to see. My husband, Troy wanted to surf in San Diego, and I wanted to sip wine in Sonoma. It was a someday kind of thing, contingent upon getting time off work and finding the money. In short, it was one of those things we thought we'd talk about a lot, and probably never do.

But the stars aligned last spring. Troy's grandmother, Nen, left us a small nest egg. The kids aged (but not too much), and we were restless, bored. It was time to leave my job with a local newspaper (that shall remain nameless), and Troy needed a new perspective, so when he managed to get one month off from work, I started planning.

We crammed the minivan from top to bottom with camping gear and a bunch of other stuff we didn't need, and like many adventurers before us, we set our sites west.

Unlike early pioneers, however, we had Google maps, cell phones, reservations and air conditioning. It was a fact, not lost on our children as we crossed the Mojave Desert with the car thermometer, reading 114 degrees.

"I'm glad I'm not in a horse and wagon," my youngest, Katie said.

But every day brought something new. We explored underground caves at Luray Caverns in Virginia. We hiked and swam in waterfall pools in the Blue Ridge Mountains, and we strolled among Blue Grass fiddlers on Main Street in Floyd. We rocked it out in Memphis to Elvis and blues bands on Beale Street, and we kicked up our heels in Texas. We marveled at nature's towering red rock sculptures in Monument Valley, climbed ladders into ancient cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde and gaped into the Grand Canyon. And all that was in the first week.

When we set up camp in San Onofre for our first night in California, we were in a fog of road fatigue, but we couldn't stop smiling. The next week was a Southern California dream of sunning, swimming, surfing, and cold drinks by the campfire, punctuated with visits to San Diego and LA. At night, the Pacific Ocean sang us to sleep with a familiar lullaby.

Next, we headed north to hug giant sequoia trees in fairytale forests. In Yosemite, we took chilly dips in mountain springs and had sev-

eral too-close-for-comfort bear encounters, before arriving in San Francisco, ready for a break from roughing it. My dad's cousin Jerry played host on a four-day culture and culinary tour of that amazing town.

Every day, we looked at each other in awe that it was really happening, and we tried to ignore the ominous feeling that somewhere down the road there would be a karmic price to pay. How could we possibly be so lucky?

And then it happened—exactly what I feared, and when we least expected it. In San Francisco's Mission District, I aimed my camera at Mission Dolores, took one step forward over the curb and crumbled in the gutter with my right foot throbbing.

Jerry encouraged me to see a doctor, but I had better things to do. Instead, I wrapped the foot, took ibuprofen and headed to Sonoma for wine-tasting, cane in hand. It was just sprained, I told myself, it will get better. And it did. Sort of.

At least it didn't hold us back. I limped along the Oregon trail and at Sutters Mill where the Gold Rush began. I viewed bison at a Wyoming ranch and marveled at miles and miles of corn in Nebraska. I posed with Abe Lincoln in Springfield and toured Tom Sawyer's home in Hannibal.

And it wasn't until we had crossed the North Wildwood bridge that I admitted to myself that maybe I did need to see a doctor. Within a week, I was recovering from foot surgery—a fractured metatarsal.

And that's not all. Four days later, while on the way to lunch we were broadsided in Wildwood Crest by another car. Our van was totaled, and I was damaged—unable to crutch and stuck in a wheelchair for two months. Four days later, my son Emmett broke his arm. Three weeks later, my daughter Anna broke her finger, and several times during the ordeal, my loving husband almost lost his mind.

"Stop saying it could be worse," my friend, Suzanne warned.

But it really could have been. We might not have made it home. We might not have gone at all.

My theory on the disastrous finale to our dreamy trip is you have to take the good with the bad, and the very good with the very bad. Another theory is that we mistakenly brought home a Tiki, and like Bobby Brady in Hawaii, we are doomed until it's returned.

For now, however, the curse seems to have subsided. We are all mostly back to normal, though I admit, I am still looking for that Tiki, and if I find it...and if we can get the time off work and the money...I would be glad to return it to wherever it belongs.

