



## Let's Hit the Road, Toads!

**R**OAD TRIPS AND SUMMER VACATIONS were one and the same for me growing up. Our summer trips alternated between heading east to visit my dad's family in South Dakota, or south to visit my mom's family in California. Regardless of the destination, there was something magical about a road trip.

I remember the excitement of packing my up suitcase stuffing the last few items into any corner that had space. We would load all the bags into the car the night before (did car prowlers not exist back then?!) and lay out our clothes on the floor, ready to hop into them when first light came.

It was always "early to bed, early to rise" when it came to leaving for family vacations. Sleeping the night before was so difficult to do, as I would lie awake in bed thinking about the adventure awaiting us. I'd curl up in bed, a cool summer breeze drifting in through my open window and carrying with it the sound of the older neighbor kids who were still playing in the street and running up and down the neighborhood lawns. While I envied their ability to still be up while I was in bed, I knew I was getting the better end of the deal: I was going on a road trip!

When morning finally came, it was go time! After the last minute bathroom stops, and double checking that the house doors were locked and everything we needed was in the car, my dad would issue his standard final call: "Let's hit the road, toads!" And with that, my sisters and I would scramble into the back seat of the car, setting up shop in our new digs as we settled in for the long ride. The seat assignments were always the same: my sister Courtney sat behind my dad, my sister Shannon sat behind my mom, and I sat in the middle, which as it turns out was the best

spot. I had an unobstructed view out the front window, and was in the direct path of the air conditioning.

To pass the time, we did a variety of things. On some trips, my mom would read a book aloud to us. One year as the car traveled down the road my mom read *The Last of the Really Great Wangdoodles*, which turned out to be one of my favorite stories of all time. Back then, iPods, Gameboys and smart phones weren't on the radar, tempting us to plug in, tune out and disconnect; rather, we were connecting, snuggled together, eyes wide with wonder as the story unfolded as rapidly the open road before us.

It wasn't all reading. There were snacks, dispensed by my mother in a very judicial "one Wheat Thin for you, one Wheat Thin for you, one Wheat Thin for you" countdown, which she repeated until we had even mounds of crackers loaded up in our napkins. The tunes would flow freely from the cassette player. Highly influenced by my father's music preference, if the windows were open as our car rolled by, you would hear the tunes of the Clancy Brothers, the Limelighters, and the Kingston Trio. Could anything sound as delightful as three young girls belting out the verses of *Charlie on the MTA*?

The piece de resistance, however, was a game my sisters and I played in the back seat called "Get that Footie Away From Me!" The game went like this: taking advantage of my prime middle seat location, and of my Gumby-esque flexibility that came with youth, I would swing my left leg up onto Courtney, and my right leg up onto Shannon, and try to hold my ground. In turn, they would try to swat my feet away while singing, "Get that footie away from me!" We couldn't tire of it. Mile after mile, the game went on, peppered with peals of laughter.

Our road trips truly defined the phrase "getting there is half the fun." The other half came when we got to our destination and got to see something new. Regardless of whether we were 50 miles away or 1,500 miles away, seeing new sites, getting away from our regular stomping grounds, experiencing new places and being out of town for a getaway was cherished fun.

Getaways have never lost their appeal for me. I love road trips and get excited about seeing somewhere new. If you haven't taken a getaway in a while, let me challenge you to do so. Not sure where to go? Check out our Summer Fun story on page 78, where we feature four great getaways – one for each of the cardinal directions: north, east, south, west. From Kelowna, BC, to Priest Lake, Walla Walla and Ellensburg, there is summer fun to be had all around us. You just have to decide in which direction the fun will take you.

So come on, let's hit the road, toads!

*Blythe*