

THE GREAT ADVENTURE

By Barbara Lee Collins

In March of 2003, Betty accepted the job of Children's Librarian in the Musser Public Library in Muscatine, Iowa. Dan resigned from his job as Assistant Manager of the California Institute of Integral Studies bookstore and the Collins Chapman family moved from San Bruno, California to Muscatine, Iowa. Betty's parents joined in the venture. Barbara Lee flew out ahead of time and helped pack and do the final cleaning. Then she and Betty and the three children, Gabriel 8, Larkin 5, and Ian 2, drove out. The big challenge of this was the food. Because of food allergies, meals had to be cooked fresh. No restaurant or snack foods would do. Hale flew to San Francisco and he and Dan drove a Penske rental truck filled with furniture and boxes. The estimate was that there were 110 boxes of Dan's books - a total of 5,000 volumes weighing 2.9 tons. They left San Bruno two days later than Betty and her carload. The following story is an account of the car trip.

The big day for the move from California to Iowa had finally arrived! The good-bye parties for Gabriel at school and with Danny and Jake had been enjoyed successes. The tomato-and-egg throwing party with Lenny and Bojesar (Bobby) had been spectacular. Good-byes and gifts had been exchanged between Larkin and Mary and Mikayla. Ian was frustratedly getting accustomed to being blocked off in his high chair by more and more boxes. Dan and Betty and Barbara Lee had sat on the kitchen floor until midnight shredding documents and enjoying "adult conversation." Dan had purchased a nifty hot plate and wide-mouthed thermos for the trip. Plans had been made to arise at 3 AM to make final preparations for the car trip with the intended blast-off at 4 AM. Just before heading to bed, the time had been changed to be up at 4 and off by 5. But wouldn't you know it, Barbara Lee woke up at 3 as originally planned. A listen to Betty's deep sleep characterized by soft snores validated the change of time.

Promptly at 4 AM, the alarm clocks went off and Betty and Dan and Barbara Lee jumped into action. Hamburger was cooked and hot dogs broiled. Breakfast over and the thermos bottle packed, last minute things were stuffed into an almost overflowing car. Although Dan was helping to load the car, he and Hale would head out a couple of days later driving a Penske truck loaded with boxes (including 110 book boxes) and furniture. Hale still had to fly from Kansas City, Missouri to the San Francisco airport. Right at 5 AM, three sleeping bodies were wrapped in blankets and transported to the car with the hopes they would sleep until 7 AM. But alas! Almost immediately color started to creep into the sky. One baby slept, but Gabriel and Larkin roused and began to thrill at the beautiful, soft colors that filled the sky as the sun rose over the Sierras. This was their first sunrise to witness and they were thoroughly awed. As the morning wore on, Ian, too, came awake and thus began the first day of being in the car hour after hour. There was a stop for the children to have breakfast, but Gabriel in particular was more interested in wandering around and exploring the rest area than in eating. Finally, it was back in the car and on with the journey, Gabriel saying, "We're about half-way there, right?" There were many pleas to get out and walk or run around and general dissatisfaction with riding all day. At last, the day ended with a motel with a pool in Elko, Nevada. The pool was a success in restoring good humor and a start in winding down for the night. Larkin was

enraptured with the shower curtain in the bathroom. It boasted colorful tropical fish on its surface. This first night Grandma was the popular one. Both Gabriel and Larkin decided to sleep with Barbara Lee. As the night progressed, there was less and less room between Barbara Lee and the edge of the bed. At one point, it appeared that Larkin had gotten up and gone to sleep in Betty's bed. However, Gabriel rolled over and there she was under him. Barbara Lee finally got up, went over to the other side of the bed and crawled in there. Much roomier!

The next day did indeed start at 3 AM for Betty and Barbara Lee and by 4 the hamburger had been cooked, the car re-packed and three sleeping children transferred from the bed to the car. Hopes were high that this morning they would all three sleep until their normal getting-up time around 7 AM. Foiled again! This time by being so close to the next time zone - Mountain Standard Time. The sky began to be suffused with a beautiful sunrise over the Wasatch Mountains, and once again Ian slept and Gabriel and Larkin awoke to view the awesome skies. Of course after that they stayed awake. Apparently the message of yesterday had gotten through. The more stops made during the day, the longer into the evening the driving lasts. There were fewer requests for breaks.

A neat thing happened that day. Snow was spotted along the roadside. For about three miles Betty had been thinking that she would pick a spot and pull off the road so the snow could be enjoyed. Just as she sighted a convenient and safe spot, Gabriel said, "Can we get out and play in the snow?" Immediately, Betty pulled the car over to the side of the road and parked. Gabriel was astounded and said, "Did you do that just because I asked you to?" What a feeling of power and specialness. Everyone but Ian tumbled out to play in the snow awhile. He was content to watch from the car. Without gloves or mittens or heavy winter coats, everyone was satisfied with making foot prints in the snow and throwing a few snow balls. The sun shone brightly all day. Larkin was seated by the window that had the sun shining directly on it. Betty gave welcomed blasts of air conditioning from time to time, but if that continued too long then Gabriel, who was in the front seat, became cold. Larkin did well in putting up with the situation. For about a half-hour, however, Betty switched Larkin and Ian. Larkin enjoyed cooling off, but Ian was indignant and kept demanding, "Let me out of here. That's my seat." The night-time stop was in Laramie, Wyoming. Everyone was hot and tired by this time. So that Betty could buy food for the evening meal, a grocery store stop was made. Ian was absolutely insistent that this stop be at a Safeway store, a known factor for him. But would there be a Safeway store in Laramie? There was - what a relief! There was much guessing going on in the car as to what Betty would be able to find. The most pressing hope was that she would find a watermelon. What joy when she came back with not only watermelon, but blueberries, hamburger, and rice. A motel was spotted. Fortunately, there was a little bit of snow on the motel lawn to keep the children happy. While Betty went in to make reservations, everyone else, including Ian this time, walked or played in the snow. Later, a delicious meal cooked on the hot plate revived everyone's spirits. This motel, too, had a pool. The promise was that at 8 PM the water slide would be turned on. The kids suited up and they and Betty headed off to the pool. Barbara Lee tidied up and had just lain down for a nap when the door burst open and in came Betty and Larkin and Ian. Gabriel was trailing down the hall behind them. They were in the pool when the water slide went

on with a LOUD noise. Gabriel came unglued, but didn't want to get out of the pool. Betty set off for the room and he got out and followed her. He was shaking with cold by this time. After drying off and getting into his clothes, he laid on the bed under a blanket with Barbara Lee. Betty and the other two returned to the pool. Gabriel said, "The noise came so suddenly I couldn't handle it. If I could have had time to prepare, I think I would have been all right. I knew I would be cold if I got out of the pool, but I also knew I had to get out some time, so I finally climbed out."

That night all three children wanted to sleep with Betty. Gabriel had noticed the light in the ceiling smoke alarm and was a bit scared. Perhaps because Gabriel was, so was Larkin. After all the kids were asleep, Betty put Ian in bed with Barbara Lee. He hardly stirred during the night, so never knew he had slept in a "strange bed" all night.

The routine of the following morning was up at 3, off by 4 again. This time all three "sleeping beauties" lasted until almost seven. How nice for Betty and Barbara Lee to have some precious uninterrupted time for conversation.

Another moment of possible trouble with Ian came when Nebraska was reached. He immediately said, "Where's the buffalo?" Everyone was a bit puzzled by this question, but assured him all eyes would be on the lookout for buffalo. At last, the light dawned! Ian's beloved United States Map puzzle had a picture of a buffalo on the state of Nebraska. So obviously, there had to be buffalo in Nebraska. By noon the temperatures were in the 80s. A much needed lunch and rest stop was made in Gothenburg, Nebraska. There is a sod house in Gothenburg with some barbed wire sculptures in the yard. To Ian's joy, one of the sculptures was a big buffalo. His faith had been rewarded - Nebraska does have buffalo. The other sculpture was an Indian on horseback.

Also in Gothenburg, in a park setting, is a Pony Express Station. It was not open for tours, but had a plaque on it which told about Pony Express days and the function of the station. Behind this building was play equipment. There was a wide sliding board, some swings and a circle of four or five horses on springs. Ian took to the slide, Gabriel to the swings and Larkin to the horses. She kept moving from horse to horse just as the Pony Express riders did. She did wonder with so much time on horseback how the riders were able to "pee." A great mystery to be solved later. Other children came to play also and Gabriel enjoyed the challenge of trying (and succeeding) to swing higher than one of the other boys.

After a delightful time in Gothenburg, everyone piled back into the car to head for Kearney, Nebraska to visit an interesting museum that is actually an archway built over Interstate 80. As the tired five were walking from the parking lot to the museum entrance, a loud noise erupted in the sky. To everyone's delight, a flock of Sandhill Cranes were majestically flying overhead. That would have been worth the stop all by itself, but other interesting things awaited inside the museum. One display window appeared simply to be a pretty prairie scene. But soon the grass started swaying and the sight and sound of birds filled the air. Then a low rumbling noise began and the floor started to vibrate. When curiosity as to what was happening had reached a fever pitch, a herd of buffalo came thundering over the hill and swept into sight. Oh, what rapture! Indeed Nebraska has buffalo and not just one. After watching this a few times, the tough decision was made to continue on through the rest of the museum. Another display window contained a Pony Express re-enactment. Shouts of "He's coming!" could be heard and two men were seen

to hurriedly saddle up a horse and stand waiting as the Pony Express rider came galloping up. The waiting men transferred the mail bags to the new horse while the rider disappeared from view for a few moments. Larkin and Barbara Lee decided that was the "pee" opportunity! This display, too, rated several watchings. Then on to the rest of the museum. At one point where there was an actual window overlooking the Interstate, there was a radar gun for measuring the speed of the cars and trucks going by - one for the westbound traffic and one for the eastbound traffic. Gabriel had a grand time watching and clocking the traffic. After he had had enough, the journey was re-traced back to the Pony Express window for a couple of more viewings and the buffalo window for several more spellbound watchings. To round out their visit, Gabriel and Larkin were allowed to buy Davy Crockett style coonskin caps.

A lady in the museum described a lovely park in town and gave the directions for getting there. On the way another grocery store stop was made. This time Ian had no requests for it to be a Safeway. Thank goodness, since there was none there. Betty went in to buy more fruit. To counteract the impatience of the waiters in the car, Barbara Lee timed how long Betty was gone and Gabriel and Larkin and Barbara Lee made guesses as to how long they each thought it would take her. To everyone's amazement, she was back in a flash - 7 minutes. Gabriel had guessed it exactly.

The park was delightful. The hot plate was set up and a meal of hamburger, hot dogs, and fruit was soon being consumed. The children were obviously about at the end of their traveling rope and were irritable and complaining. Some people told us that Lincoln, Nebraska was an hour's journey from Kearney. Barbara Lee knew that Lincoln is a 3 ½ to 4 hours drive from Lamoni. So, after feeding the kids heartily and giving them a couple of hours in which to run around, the car was re-packed and the decision made to press on to Lamoni instead of staying all night in Lincoln. Another stop was made first to fill the car with gas and to buy some cold bottled water to drink.

As night came on, the lights of the city faded away and the car zoomed along through the Iowa countryside. Hunger struck again! The inside dome light was not working, so by feel Barbara Lee tried to find more fruit for the kids. Instead, she found some baby food jars - emergency rations. Gabriel and Larkin each wanted a special kind. It was too dark to read the labels. What to do? Gabriel opened the glove compartment and held the bottles up to that light. He was able to read the labels and fortunately found one he wanted and one Larkin wanted. Ian went to sleep instead of eating.

Stars began to appear and soon the sky was absolutely studded with them brilliantly shining down. Gabriel and Larkin were thrilled and awed by them. Never before had they seen stars in a dark environment. It was fabulous. Larkin said, "I love Iowa." After awhile Larkin, too, fell asleep. Suddenly, three deer came bounding across the road in front of the car. Gabriel exclaimed, "Cool."

At last Lamoni and Grandma and Grandpa's house was reached. Alas, Barbara Lee didn't have a house key and Hale was en route to Iowa with Dan in a Penske truck. She did know an extra key was in the shed. Betty shone the car headlights on the shed and the key was found. It didn't unlock the basement door as expected, nor the kitchen door. Only the front door was left. What if it didn't open that one! Uncle Jim, who has a key also was out of town. Fortunately that bridge didn't have to be crossed. Betty got the key to

work in the front door lock, although it was very reluctant to do so, and everyone trooped into the house.

What a relief to be out of the car after a long, long day. Ian was carried in and placed on the couch in the living room. Larkin and Gabriel wanted to see the room that was Betty's when she lived in Lamoni. Soon the three of them were exploring the closet, looking at Betty's model horses, etc. Ian was nowhere to be seen. Barbara Lee went looking for him and there he was, standing frozen in place on the couch. Apparently, just waking up and finding himself alone in a big, unfamiliar room was a little too much for him. He gratefully joined the others in Betty's room when he was invited.

Later, everyone gathered in the basement apartment. Larkin got Ian some rice cakes and juice. As she explained, "I saw his little ribs sticking out." Ian dropped some rice cake crumbs on the floor and immediately slid out of his chair and said, "I'll pick them up." Company behavior to be sure. After more exploring and hot showers for Betty and Barbara Lee, the whole group trooped off to bed. Iowa at last.

The next morning, Betty, Gabriel, Larkin and Ian got back into the car to begin the four hour trip to Muscatine, their new home. It was an arduous trip because Gabriel's stomach began hurting, but finally after a bathroom stop, they made it on in. Close to their destination was a falling-down barn. When asked what had caused that, Betty unthinkingly said, "Oh, probably a tornado." Immediately Gabriel protested, "**You don't mean to tell me** there are tomadoes in this country." Mr. Carter, the landlord, was waiting for them at the new house. When the question of tornados was posed to him, he said, "Oh no, the town's location on the Mississippi River keeps tornadoes from striking Muscatine." What a relief. Betty could have kissed him.

The following day, as the children were running around outside barefoot, Dan and Hale were braving weather that would have even challenged the mail carriers - rain, snow, and sleet. But that is a story for another day.