

P.O. BOX 239
Blue Ridge Summit,
Penna., 17214

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR

The decision was made at the Thanksgiving table, 1963. We would get an old school bus, outfit it to accommodate the family (seven children and a big dog) for living and travelling and we would drive to our next assignment from Alaska.and we did.

It was early in December, 1963, when we went looking for an old bus that would suit our needs. Our search took us far into the homestead lands. It's odd, but we travelled these same roads before and never noticed any buses. This time we looked at four or five. We settled for one which had already made three trips over the ALCAN (Alaska Canadian Highway). A 1948 29 passenger Chevrolet bus. Then the work began.

Fortunately the owner had already removed the seats and had made no permanent installations. So getting the inside cleaned out was not too much trouble, but to make this tale shorter six months of continous work in the evenings and weekends ended with a very compact and comfortable home on wheels. A rebuilt engine was installed, as was an additional gas tank to provide sufficient fuel for a full days drive. Water tanks, to hold about 40 gallons of water, coupled to a gas instant hot water heater and pressurized, allowed us to have hot or cold water at the turn of a faucet, either at the double sink in the kitchen or at the wash basin in the bathroom. The bathroom also contained a "self contained" johnny and small closets. An innerspring mattress, taken aprt and recovered, made up the cushion and back of the front sofa which converted to a double bed. Across from this, in the front of the bus, is the propane gas stove and cabinet. Cabinet contains the double sink, four utility draws and a large drawer under the stove. Sufficient space under the sink provides storage for canned godds and other kitchen equipment. Over the cabinet, closets with sliding doors provide storage space for dishes, dry cdreal, napkins, etc. The ice box is conveniently located on the side of the sofa and beneath it are two shelves enclosed with doors and a large cold storage box. This provides space to store, juices, etc and left the ice box for daily use. The chest of eight drawers next to the ice box allowed the children storage for underthing, socks, hankies, etc. Afull length closet next to the drawers allowed us to hang our Sunday clothes, and I might add we crammed many other items in there from fishing tackle to canvas beds. On the opposite side, next to the bathroom, we have another shorter close. A gas space heater, vented to the outside, was installed in the bathroom wall and it really felt good on the chilly mornings. The last six feet on either side towards lthe rear, two foam rubber mattresses, cut and recovered, provide the cushions for the sitting and backrest during the day. By night, the back rest are placed between the seats and the whole area is cushioned providing sleeping space for four. Overhead, oneach side, hangersare located which allowed us to suspend two pipe and canvas bunks for the two smaller children.; These bunks are stored in the closet by day. A removabletable, which was attached to the back door, extends between the two sofas and provides eating space or a play area. This table is stored behind the sofa back when not in use. Two gas lights

are installed as well as electric lights. Gas lights are in front and back, while the electric lights are also in front and back but on opposit sides. There is also an electric light in the bathroom. In addition the "six volt" lamps are conveniently placed in the front and rear ends, as well as in the bathroom and closets. A rather heavy bumper platform was built on the back. On this is installed two five gallon propane tank an air bottle to hold compressed air for pressurizing the water system, and a 1000 watt 110 ;volt AC generator. We mostly utilized the gas light because they were most convenient, provided some heat and were noiseless. The bus is wired to accept 110 voltage from the generator or from another external source. A five gallon water can and a five gallon Gas can were attached to the front bumper but the holder vibrated off on the trip. We did salvage the gas can.

An air scoop was installed on the roof at the front and filtering material put in it. This allowed us to somewhat pressurize the inside of the bus and keep out the dust we would encounter on the Alcan. We did encounter the dust and the system worked. The roof was painted white to reflect the summer sun. It was surprising how much cooler this made the interior. Having most of the equipment on the outside or slung underneath the bus, allowed us to utilize the space under the cushions for storage. (we used it all, too). Two spare tires were hung under the frame and extended out under the bumper. Time was drawing near for our departure, so we made curtains from some orange material on hand. These sort of clash with the green exterior but they do provide the privacy desired.

And the day came. Loaded with gas, food clothes we'd never wear, toys and books, pillows, blankets, linens, and numerous miscellany items even to five potted African Violets, we felt secure and confident for the 5000 mile trip that lie ahead. This may be an overstatement of our mental attitude, 'cause you see, the only test trip we took in our new home was a distance of about 40 miles, so we faced many unknowns. After receiving the Good Lord's blessing from Father Lyons, we departed Elmendorf AFB around 0900, 7th July 1964, just eight days short of having spent four years in Alaska. Within about an hour and a half we arrived at Palmer, Alaska. Here we had to stop and have our African Violets inspected by the state agriculture agent. We required a health certificate to carry the plants through Canada and to take them into the U.S.. The plants were thoroughly inspected and Lisa, the little girl, became slightly nauseated when we stopped and we could envisage motion sickness for the rest of the journey. Only 4,950 more miles to go.. Fortunately, she recovered and showed no further effect of travel. At times the trip would have been more peaceful if she had been just a wee bit ill.. Our big dog was unconcerned about the trip for a few days. you see, we gave him tranquilizer pills in the morning and he would sleep most of the day. But after a few days, we believe he became immune, because he didn't sleep very long and wanted attention. So we quit giving him pills and treated him like one of the children. Why should he be given privileges -- let him worry like the rest of us.. Because of the long delay in Palmer, our first stop was made at Aktell Creek campground. We had travelled 236 miles, but they were long ones, Some hills were rather steep and "old Betsy" creaked and growled and we experimented with gear ratios and listened intently for un recognized noises. But we had made some headway and "old Betsy" and the driver were much better acquainted now. That first night found us somewhat more confident because we knew we must have come over some of the real high mountains of the trip. We learned more as we proceeded. Inspection of our vehicle that first night revealed that we had lost a part of the air filter. Fortunately most of it stayed on the engine after it parted company with the carburetor, but one little ring that fitted the whole gadget to the carburetor wanted to stay in Alaska. And it did. We knew we had lost something, a few miles back, but the bus was still running and unnecessary stops were out of the question. The thought of 1100 miles of dusty road without an air filter was not too encouraging. Our log book reads: "Chinook's (our dog) tranquilizers really worked, he sleep all day. Our first night wasn't too bad." We ate well and we slept well. After breakfast we proceeded on our way. At Tok Junction we managed to get a piece of plywood cut to replace the errant ring and we re-established the carburetor the air filter to its rightful throne atop the carburetor. It continues to function ideally. Prior to reaching Tok Junction, a very loud noise caused us to stop and examine the bus for damage. Gas tanks were intact, no water was leaking, all tires appeared ok so with no visible damage, we continued. After transiting about ten miles of very soft clayish fill on a construction project (golliee, we'er glad it didn't rain here) we entered onto the dusty, cobbled, gravel stone graded highway called the ALCAN. Approximately 4:35 PM we crossed into Canada, the Yukon Territory, home of the Klondike and the area immortalized by the poet Robert Service. At 5:25 we entered customs, showed our African Violet health certificate and shortly proceeded on into Canada. We were really confident now. We seemed to be making progress and everyone was taking the trip well. Secretly, we were a little proud of our home on wheels even though her exterior was shabby.

Evening found us parked at Lake Creek camp grounds. The children enjoyed roasting marshmallows over a big camp fire after a dinner of chicken with watermelon for dessert. At this camp we talked with a man from California who was making his first trip over the highway that he had helped build back in 1950 something. We showed pictures of the Alaskan Earthquake and he showed us photos taken during construction of the road over which we were travelling. Everyday we drove through a panorama of scenic beauty. We believe the indescribable countryside, the seemingly loneliness at times, the constant effort to see everything and the uniqueness of it all, seemed to make the days go by rather quickly. July 9th was no exception. This was another day of driving through beautiful country, up hill and down, blind curves, meandering streams and a feeling of accomplishment. Driving the Alcan Highway. Lunch at Kluane Lake provided time for the children to run, shoot the BB gun and roast hot dogs. Until we arrived at Dawson Creek a few days later, camp site are numerous enough and gas stations or general stores, the wilderness shopping centers, were every 40-50 miles. Summer time sees many people and all kinds of rigs on the highway. All with something in common. Driving the Alcan and being a part of this vast wilderness. It is the subject of conversation at the camp sites at night. We stopped to visit a deserted fox farm. Log cabins of years ago attested to man's remarkable existence in this country so many years ago. That evening we arrived at Whitehorse, Y.T., Gas and oil and a tire check revealed that the big bump we heard several days ago must have been a blowout. The inside dual tire on the rear was split from rim to rim. We managed to get a good second hand tire and tube and remedy the situation. We never did use our spares. We were pleased with the price we paid for services along the highway. We had heard of high prices and gouging the traveler prior to our trip but we encountered none of it. Our tire troubles solved, we proceeded in the dark raining night to Wolf Creek camp ground. This was the only rain we encountered on the trip. The tire trouble extended our day to about 10 PM so we were glad to stop for the night. Friday, July 10, the children visited an Indian trading post and were impressed with the handicraft. Another beautiful day for driving. Teslin Lake camp ground was out stopping place for a cook out. We decided to name "old betsy" and painted "Miss Alaska" across the front of the roof. (Now we have thought of adding WE, so it would be "We Miss Alaska") At Teslin Lake, much to our chagrin we found that the tire we had put on last night, was flat. So we drove on to Teslin Lake garage for repairs. After four hours, during which time we took that tire apart three times, we were lucky enough to locate a new tube which we installed and proceeded on our way, Morley River campsite was out home for the night. Saturday morning we drove on to Watson Lake, admired the conglomeration of signs placed there by travelers, added ours, and with ice cream cones in hand we headed for the Northern Rockies. It was late in the evening by the time we got deep in the Rockies. We believe this was the most barren part of our trip. It was very isolated, the road was very narrow and covered with loose, dusty gravel. The sudden emergence from the wooded, brush covered countryside to the treeless mountain tops emphasized the barrenness of the land and made the environment more bleak. It may have been different if we had covered this area earlier in the day. It was about 9PM and we were driving along the mountain stream when the lights blinked off and on and the engine missed several times. Should have stopped right away, but in the hopes of coming to a gas station we forged onward. About half way up a long hill, Miss Alaska decided to call it quits. Lights out and motor stopped. I felt much relieved when a car which was in back of us stopped to help. Investigation disclosed that the hold down on the battery had rattled loose and shorted across the battery. Fortunately we had another battery on the firewall, so we connected the cables to it, discarded the burned out battery and proceeded on our way. Our anxiety lasted only a few minutes and this was because of our position on the mountain. The road was narrow and it was very dark. About five miles up the road we stopped at a service station, gassed up and proceeded to a camp ground a little further

on. We had traveled about 374 miles this day, but it was along one. Sunday, July 12, driving through more beautiful wooded land, about 100 miles north of Fort Nelson, we met some people who had been our neighbors up in Elmendorf. Then as we were driving up a long hill toward Fort Nelson an approaching car slowed down and we heard our name called. Of course we stopped and chatted with a Sergeant and his wife whom we knew in Alaska. They were returning after having a vacation in the lower 48. At Fort Nelson we stopped at a Catholic church and said the Rosary and asked Him for a "safe conduct" ticket for the rest of our journey. The Alaskan Highway is posted every mile. Locations are designated by milepost numbers. Milepost 0, the start of the Alcan, is located in the middle of Dawson Creek. This night, Sunday, we stopped at Milepost 143 campground. Only about 65 more miles of gravel!! The hard road into Dawson Creek starts about 80 miles north of the town. Monday, the sun was shining brightly as we proceeded through the beautiful hills and dales of the Pink Mountains. We were rather elated to hit the macadam road and approximately 11:45 AM we arrived at Milepost 0.

After lunch, shopping and washing five tubs of dirty clothes we boarded the old "blunder bus" to continue our trip. From here on we fought the battle of civilization. We had left the wilderness, the friendly travelers, the cabin dwellers and their rustic surroundings and the carefree living of the pioneers. We felt rather proud that our "hand made home on wheels" had survived the trip so gloriously. We were a little frightened too. Now we were really on our own. Nobody would care if we had a breakdown on the road. Probably nobody would stop. It was not like the camaraderie of the Alcan, where every traveler was his brother's keeper. But we proceeded on, recognized, accepted or ignored the changing attitude of the service station attendant, the impatient drivers and the countryside. Where, on the Alcan, the highway seemed to follow a meandering and carefree path, now the ribbons of concrete are restrained and forced to follow rigid patterns, the fields are stripped of their natural coverage of trees and bushes and forced to yield as man dictates. Yes, there is a difference. On Wednesday, July 15, having driven through Edmonton, Calgary, inspected the Fort at McLeod, we crossed into the United States at Piegan, Montana. A brief stop at customs to show our African Violet health certificate and we proceeded to Choteau, Montana for our first night in the "smaller states". The next day, July 16, we drove past the flood damage around Choteau and crossed the Continental Divide in Glacier Park. We had our moments with the old bus on this hill. Her cooling system was rigged for such an ambitious undertaking, so we made the grade in easy stages. Later on, McDonald Pass posed the same challenge but old indomitable Betsy never gave up the ghost and around noon we arrived at our first destination, Missoula, Montana. Elapsed driving time of approximately 9 days, nearly 3000 miles. After visiting with the family of the distaff side, we proceeded east the following week. Our itinerary took us to Miles City, Montana; Williston, Tolley and Garrison, North Dakota. Then after visiting with relatives at these places, we proceeded east to Chester, Penna., via Minneapolis, Chicago and the turnpike. After a short stay, we headed west through Gettysburg, Penna. and on the Fort Ritchie, Md. our next duty assignment. "Miss Alaska" continued to be our home for about another week until we could find a house to rent. On 16 August we unloaded our clothes we didn't wear, our fishing gear, our blankets, sheets and pillows, seven children and our dog and once more gave up the nomadic life to compete with millions of others in the routine of every day living. Miss Alaska is now used as our second car. And now after four months here we still don't know our street name or address but you can write us:

The Maloney's
P.O. Box 239
Blue Ridge Summit, Penna.
17214