

Alaska Alone

Exploring the Northwest solo taught this Good Sam member a lot about herself.

BY MALIA LANE

I had the best of all worlds when I started fulltiming in 2001. For the first two years, I drove my motorhome in tandem with my best friend as he drove his Airstream. He showed me the ropes and helped me untangle them.

But when I got hooked on the idea of spending the summer of 2003 in Alaska, he couldn't join me. Armed with his constant inspiration and encouragement, I decided to carry on alone. Scared spitless but spilling over with excitement, I took off down that road for real instead of only in my dreams.

I am completely and hopelessly enamored with mountains because their enormity can make me feel small and insignificant or larger than life all at the same time. Alaska promised visions of some of the grandest of them all.

It was definitely a different dynamic traveling alone. I have always found RVers to be very gracious and helpful, but they seemed especially so after finding out I was on my own. If I ever thought I'd be lonesome on the road by myself, boy, was I wrong. I made lifelong friends while sharing this great adventure.

I know I'm not the only single woman RVer who ever made that trip, but you would have thought so from the

reactions I got from people I met. The word "inspiration" came up often in people's reaction to what I was doing, but instead of imparting inspiration, I gathered it from the people I met along my way.

There were times I stood and cried at the side of the road just from the sheer exquisite beauty I witnessed. Then there were times when I woke up freezing at 4 a.m. with a broken furnace, when my generator wouldn't generate and when I had to replace the house batteries. During those times, I'd cry with fear and frustration and be disappointed in myself for my own reactions. Crying in awe of the beauty that surrounds me is far easier to understand than sobbing over a repair bill. I mean, is it reasonable to expect to drive a house 5,000 miles and not incur some repair costs?

Sometimes I thought of the reactions of friends and family when I told them what I was going to do, and how the general consensus was that I was either very brave or very stupid. There were times when I felt like both, but I was still willing to trade security for adventure.

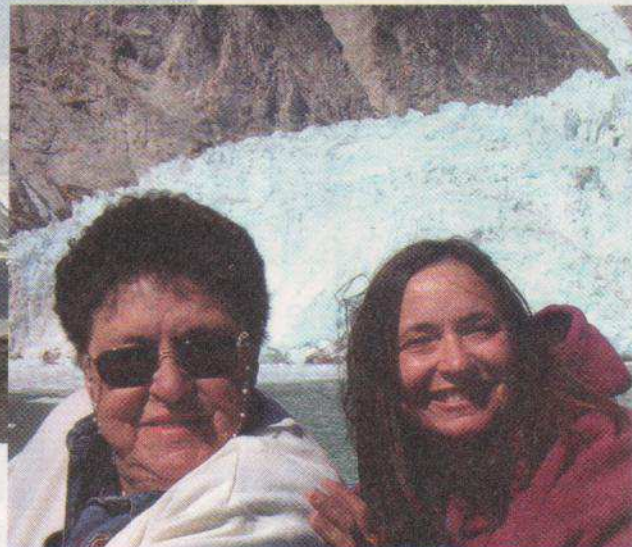
So I cried with joy again when I saw the WELCOME TO ALASKA sign. I made it — maybe not without problems and frustrations, but I came all the way through Canada's Yukon and into Alaska all by myself!

I got to Valdez so early in the season that the owner allowed me to park lengthwise on the water for the most expansive view. I took 100 pictures a day trying to capture the subtle difference in the mountains as the light and clouds moved across their faces and how different the water was in the morning versus the evening. I saw eagles soaring every day and had a bear in my backyard in Anchorage.

My 78-year-old mother joined me for the return trip and I



The trip wasn't made totally solo, as the author's 78-year-old mother joined her for the return trip. At first her mother was against full-time RVing; she now thinks it's the best thing that's happened to either of them.



still have bruises on my arm from her nudging me, "Look at that — just look at that!" Before this trip, she had been against full-time RVing, but now she thinks it's the best thing that's happened to both of us.

It was such fun and the best blessing to have her share those experiences with me. We went on glacier cruises and blew the budget by taking a flightseeing tour of the great mountain Denali. No word or static image can convey the majesty of the view afforded by having that wide range of vision, and we just didn't want to land.

At Denali National Park we saw at least 13 grizzlies and, while there, I was convinced it was the time to fulfill another dream. How exciting to be able to say that my first white-water rafting experience was down the Nenana River in Alaska.

Looking back, I feel like the summer flew by, but in

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other ways it felt like a lifetime. My emotions ran the gamut, that's for sure. From a feeling of accomplishment that I came so far alone — to doubting the wisdom of ever taking off on such a crazy and risky dream — I felt it all. If what life is all about is to just experience life and learn as much about ourselves and others as we can during our time here, then I truly did live a lifetime that summer.

And the most important thing that I experienced was a recommitment not to let fear

rule my life. If I had, this 52-year-old woman wouldn't be here to testify from very personal experience that with a little faith, even baby steps can get a gal all the way to Alaska. ●