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## **Trip of lifetime was 40 years coming**

By: Rich Breault



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LANCASTER - Malerie Yolen-Cohen pulled her trusty, and more than a bit dusty, Toyota Prius out onto Sierra Highway - Historic Route 6 - and headed to Long Beach on Wednesday morning, determined to complete her 3,652-mile odyssey that began May 20 in Provincetown, Mass.

A freelance travel writer from Stamford, Conn., the 54-year-old drove through 14 states and into the cities, towns, communities and lives of people along the way.

"I love driving and travel, I love eating in restaurants and I love trying out new things," said Yolen-Cohen, seated in the lobby of the Inn of Lancaster, conveniently located on Historic Route 6. "This is a way to combine my (writing) talents with all those loves.

"When I started, it was just a trip, but as it ends, it's a way to focus attention on the smaller town along the route that were literally left in the dust when the interstates were built."

In 1937, Route 6 was extended west from Nebraska to Bishop, Calif., and south to Long Beach. At the time it was the longest transcontinental route. However in 1964, the Bishop to Long Beach segment was dropped from the Route 6 designation.

"I believe it's important to include (that segment)," Yolen-Cohen said. "I wanted a feel for the whole route, the route as it used to be."

Yolen-Cohen wrote of her Route 6 adventure on her blog - StayOnRoute6. blogspot.com. Although she was hampered by a faulty computer charger during the final days of her trip, she managed to write about her travels daily.

"It was six weeks of sightseeing," she said with a smile. "For three to four hours every night I'd upload videos and pictures and write my blog. I'd usually be up to at least midnight, and being an early riser, I was usually up by five or six.

"Yet I had a lot of energy on the trip. I'd wake up every day to something new - that's very energizing."

Yolen-Cohen drove into Lancaster on Tuesday and was given a quick tour of the city by Steve Gocke, representative for the city's Destination Lancaster program.

"We went on the musical road, strolled the boulevard, ate dinner at the Lemon Leaf and listened to music at Bex," Yolen-Cohen said.

Gocke noted that she also saw one of Judy Garland's houses and her school - Cedar Street/Lancaster Grammar School.

"You can tell that Lancaster is a city that takes pride in itself and invested in itself," Yolen-Cohen said. "Downtown was great with its park-like atmosphere, music playing, bicyclists "

Wednesday morning, he gave her a Streets of Lancaster Grand Prix shirt to wear when she goes to the Monaco Grand Prix.

"You mean they can go over 15 miles per hour on the boulevard?" she asked with a smile.

When you drive thousands of miles cross country, you pay attention to speed limit signs. At least you should pay attention.

"I got a speeding ticket in Nebraska, at its western end. I was doing 71 (mph) in a 60 (mph zone), Yolen-Cohen said. "On the route, the speed limits change all the time.

"I know that coming into a town you really have to put on the brakes. And there are some stretches that are so full of life, so many businesses, that you can't even build up speed."

Although she didn't "zone out" during her trip, the 81-mile stretch of Route 6 from Tonopah, Nev., to Benton Spring, Calif., tested her resolve, and eyelids - "It was lulling. Very monochromatic," Yolen-Cohen said. "But I kept paying attention to my driving."

Listening to local radio stations during her trip also helped keep her awake - "I listened to 'Alien Radio,' (KHWK-FM 92.7) coming in from Nevada," she said, noting the station's proximity to fabled Area 51.

During the trip's planning stages, Yolen-Cohen had several concerns, the top three being the reliability of her car ("It did great"), the weather ("I went through Iowa and Nebraska during tornado season, and drove through some thunderstorms, but no hail"), my health - ("What if I ate something bad and got food poisoning?")

Her fallback when she wasn't sure of a restaurant's meat and produce was a grilled cheese sandwich.

Asked to name the highlight of her trip, Yolen-Cohen, answered diplomatically - "There are highlights, but not one that particularly stands out."

She made one last trip to her room and dropped the room key off to Inn of Lancaster manager Andy Holmberg. "I'm happy as a clam that she stayed here," he said. On the motel's lawn was a sign that read, "Inn of Lancaster welcomes Malerie Yolen-Cohen on her "Roadway to Adventure."

"I didn't want to forget the key. I already have two keys to return - to the Old Sea Pines Inn in Brewster, Massachusetts on Cape Cod, and The Balcony House (Bed & Breakfast) in Imperial, Nebraska," she said.

Before leaving Lancaster, she made a stop at Double-D Cupcakes where she ate a Nutella Goddess cupcake - energy for the road - and went to the UPS Store to ship items she wouldn't be able to take on the flight home or leave in her car, which was trucked back to Connecticut.

Then she headed east on Avenue K until she hit Sierra Highway, where she turned right on Historic Route 6 toward Palmdale, Acton, Agua Dulce, Santa Clarita, the San Fernando Valley, Los Angeles and her final destination, Long Beach.

"It's coming to an end. I don't believe it," Yolen-Cohen said earlier. "The ending is a little bittersweet for me."

Even before Yolen-Cohen could drive, at age 14, she began charting out a cross-country trip, and 40 years later she realized her dream.

She plans to write a Historic Route 6 guidebook using her experiences of the trip, photos and information she compiled along the way.

"It will be more service-oriented - what to see, where to stay, where to eat," she said. "It's not meant to be exhaustive. I'm hitting the highlights."

"It's a great way to see America, but not from the Interstates. This is a way for someone to understand this country more."

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