

**Fifth Annual Salt Lake County
Silver Pen Writing Essay Contest
Best Vacation Ever**

**1st Place
Kenna Madsen – Riverton Senior Center**

Gifts from a Walrus

The walrus wheeled round and round in a circle. On this particular day I had found a new fascination, it was the walrus tank at Sea World. There were only a couple of walrus going in a circle like a slow monotonous merry-go-round, and I was leaning over the side of the tank mesmerized by them. All of a sudden one enormous walrus rocketed up high along the side of the wall right in front of my face. A dank odor blew my way as I felt the prickle of his whiskers on my face. It surprised me but excited me at the same time. He slid down the side of the wall and started his ritual again. Then he shot up again in front of me pushing up so high that we were chest to chest. His head was about as big as a beach ball, and his nostrils about as big as silver dollars. I thought I saw a sparkle in his eye. Down he slipped into the water and around the tank he went. My heart was beating ninety miles a minute, but I just had to keep watching him. It was so exhilarating. As he came up the third time our faces touched. WOW!

I wanted my sweet husband to be able to have this connection with this walrus, too. So as Dave came up the hill I said, "Hurry stand right here and put your head down like this." I showed him how. He gave me a baffled look and I said, "Just do it and you'll get a big surprise."

The children and I stepped away and sure enough the walrus came up right in front of Dave's face and blew his nose all over my husband. Now I hate to be crude but this walrus just covered my husband in sheets of snot. It was so sticky and it was everywhere. It was on his shirt and in his hair. He was trying to shake it off his fingers and wipe it off his face. He looked over to me for some help but I'm ashamed to say I had fallen to the ground rolling back and forth getting a cramp in my side from laughing so hard. People around us were clutching their sides or their shoulders were shaking up and down from laughter.

I feel awful that I couldn't have been any help to Dave in his hour of need. Luckily there was a restroom close by and he went to get cleaned up. It took a while. After he realized I hadn't put him in that position to get sticky and slimy on purpose we had a good day. That took a while too.

A lot of years have gone by since that wonderful vacation and Dave saw the humor in it long ago. It really was the funniest thing I've EVER seen, and is one of our beloved family stories.

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**2nd Place
Carol Esterreicher – Sandy Senior Center**

Mildew, Humidity, and Mosquitos!--Magnificence! The Best Vacation Ever

I ignored the humidity, dealt with the mildew, swatted the mosquitos, and basked in the magnificence of the best vacation ever. Disney World in Orlando, Florida in 1971 was an exquisite experience for us. Traveling from our southern Maryland home, we camped in several locations as my husband, Joe and I planned our pilgrimage to the “promised land” with our 7, 9 and 10-year-old children. We learned to pitch a tent. We “cooked” on a cool little green propane stove –all the time wondering how many times we'd have to cook this way in order to boast that we had camped all the way to our destination. We anticipated privileges we knew we could enjoy at the several fancy hotels—even though we were economy guests at the campground. Hotel guests were likewise privileged to enjoy campground movies with us. Christine, Jeanne, and Joey had their sights set on the water slide and an inviting pool table.at the Polynesian Hotel! Yes, we planned to spend sometime in the campground too.

Disney World was a dream come true. The Country Bears Jamboree had everyone clapping and singing and no longer complaining about the long wait line we hardly remembered now. We learned to endure long lines as we anticipated each adventure—20,000 Leagues Under the Sea must have been very much like the experience you would expect peering out the windows of a submarine. Joe and I rocked to the energetic music of Tobasco—mostly very attractive Spanish girls. The stage appeared dramatically rising from below the floor and the lively music guaranteed an hour of flavorful and rhythmic entertainment we'd talk about long after. The roller coasters, parades, and Disney characters everywhere playfully posing for photos delighted us and met our expectations for a vacation we couldn't possibly experience anywhere else in the world.

Each night the mildew, the humidity, and the mosquitos intruded on the magic spell of the Magic Kingdom. I noticed it more difficult to sleep because a musty odor was collecting in our tent. I did my best to get really exhausted during the day so I could just “crash” into the sleeping bag without paying attention to inhaling. I learned, after a few days, that experienced campers were tossing their sleeping bags into the dryer in order to freshen them. It wasn't until we packed up after our last meal on the plastic table cloth that I discovered the layer of mold on the underside—it took only a week in Florida's humidity to collect all that growth!

We look many 35 mm slides to view on a movie screen when we got back to Maryland. To my great satisfaction, we now have a slide scanner I am using to “rescue” those deteriorating photo treasures. Many of the slides are still in tact and it's wonderful to think of them as surprise gifts to our unsuspecting adult children—memories that capture the absolute best vacation ever.

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3rd Place

Helen Chapman Droitsch – Mount Olympus Senior Center

Best Vacation Ever

From the moment that me and my bright red VW cabriolet, top-down, rolled out the Martha's Vineyard ferry ramp, I began to breathe. To let go. I had used most of the 45-minute ferry ride to convince myself that this vacation was really happening. It was October, my favorite time of year on the Vineyard – few tourists, lots of parking places in Edgartown and Vineyard Haven. I breathed in the cold sea air, the screeching sea gulls. I welcomed the waves washing against pebble beaches, and then retreating, leaving a stream of seaweed behind. When it was too cold to sit on the beach, I could snuggle in the deep sand dunes. I could stalk the monarch butterflies with my trusty Nikon, macro lensing down for a good shot. When shoeless, the sea grass sharp edged my toes. Then I would run fast through the icy Atlantic wavelets, watching the silvery sands retreat under my feet. .

I toured old gingerbread houses in Oak Bluffs, I snacked on Oak Bluffs Friend Clams. Or then sometimes, I would relax in a hammock strung up on the balcony of the Edgartown bed and breakfast. I could walk down to the Patisserie, for a chocolate croissant and their café au lait, I might load my VW up with blankets, sandwiches, camera gear and crackers for a day on the Menemsha pier. I could snap pictures of the wind surfers in their slippery pitch black wet suits, riding boards decorated with sails of red, blue green and yellow. I loved how they looked like multi-colored seals as they pushed their boards out towards the waves.

I might stroll through the orange red gold leaves crackling underfoot at Menemsha Pond, or I might take a long leisurely walk in the misty mornings down the barren beach between Oak bluffs and Edgartown, or down South Beach, especially fun on cold wet days. I could watch year-rounders and their kids, complete with yellow and blue slickers, running with their dogs. I might visit the Black Dog, and sip their thick creamy clam-filled chowder. I could walk along Vineyard Haven road in late evening, when the sky was beginning to turn a cobalt-blue, and wish on stars that I had not seen for months in DC.

Or I might sip a hot chocolate on the balcony of the tribal gift shops at Gay Heads, loving the rich purples, azure, pink, orange cliffs merge into darker hues as the sun went down. When difficult thoughts came, I banished them with a deep breath, and concentrated on every moment. I woke with the sun, took naps when I felt like it, mostly in the dunes, or nestled in blankets in the back seat of the VW. Most of all I could decompress from a truly difficult winter in every part of my life, and allow myself room to breathe, and read and smile.

I was content. I was reunited with my spiritual home. For ten wonderful days.

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Honorable Mention

**Glen Martinson
Best Vacation Ever (An Adventure Down Under)**

Sidney Australia is a jewel with the interesting architecture of the Opera House, a magnificent bridge and picturesque harbor. My wife was wearing a new opal necklace from Coober Pedy as we stood on the deck of our cruise ship watching the shimmering lights of the city.

We sailed away bound for a new adventurous day in Melbourne. At the Queen Victoria Market, we bargained for boomerangs and didgeridoos.

In Hobart, I bought a postcard of the Tasmanian devil. We escaped from the historic convict settlement in Port Arthur and sailed to the pristine fiords on the southern tip of New Zealand. It is still a primitive wilderness, just as it was when Captain James Cook explored the region in 1770.

Dunedin is rich in Scottish history and home to a unique species of yellow-eyed penguins. A stop in Christchurch rewarded us with a finely carved Kiwi bird, stunning botanical gardens and the world class Canterbury Museum. We smelled the hot pots and saw the hissing geysers in Rotorua. I looked quite foolish doing the haka at a Maori Village. Auckland is called the city of sails. The view was gorgeous from the top of Mount Eden, an extinct volcano.

The last day of our trip was on my birthday and all I had bought for myself was some post cards. We visited one last shop next to the airport. I noticed a bowl made of Australian and New Zealand coins welded together. It was a one of a kind piece of art, but too expensive. Later, I passed through customs wishing I had bought the item, but now it was too late. Inside the airport there was a small store with the same name. I asked the proprietor if I could still buy the bowl from their other store. "You Yanks have always got some kind of scheme going don't ya?" he replied. "But Sir," I said, "This is a guaranteed sale! What if I mind your store while you go down to the security area? Your employee could pass the bowl to you." "Alright," he said reluctantly. "I'm locking the register. If any blokes come in, keep 'em happy 'til I return."

A group came by and I greeted them with my best Kiwi accent, but it sounded more Aussie. They were from the states and didn't know the difference. I was showing them a sheepskin when the owner returned. He was elated to get another sale and I was thrilled with my elusive gift.

I flew out of Auckland with a smile on my face and my treasure safely tucked away. We jetted all night over the wide expanse of the Pacific and crossed the international dateline. The next day, we touched down in L. A. and it was my birthday again. I had two birthdays in a 48 hour period, got one unique present and had the vacation of a lifetime.

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Honorable Mention

**Kathy Larson
Sailing the Caribbean**

My worst nightmare had come true. My children were lost somewhere in the Caribbean, and our family vacation had turned into an unimaginable crisis.

Our family was on an incredible 12 day cruise to the Caribbean islands and Panama Canal. All twelve of us were basking on the deck of a luxury cruise ship, enjoying food, music, sun, family, and ocean waves. We were anticipating each port of call, looking forward to adventures, shopping, the zip line, hiking the river, and sightseeing the various islands during our shore excursions. We had been at sea a couple of days, and had arrived in Belize. Our youngest son and his wife needed a little private time, so they booked a snorkeling expedition to a small island. They assured us they would get back to the ship on time. Reluctantly, I watched them depart.

At the end of the day's adventures, we gathered beside the pool, sunburned and weary, sipping fruity concoctions in iced glasses. Our ship had left port and was cruising rapidly toward the western horizon when the loudspeaker announced that Tom and Jade L. were to report to the purser's office. In confusion we called their cabin, then went to the purser's office, when we were informed they had missed the boat. There were only two options: fly to the next island, wait for two days until the ship arrived, or fly home. I knew Tom did not have the resources for either of these options.

We kept praying for a miracle. Time passed slowly, but only an hour had ticked away. My husband and I were sitting near the side of the deck when he spotted a boat coming from behind us, moving fast. We crowded around the windows, watching the boat approach, and felt our ships' speed slow. The speed boat approached, drew alongside, where there was a ladder and several crewmen. We could not believe our eyes. Several stories below us we could see Tom and Jade. The waves slapped viciously against the ship, rocking their small boat. The crewmen assisted Tom and Jade, while both boats were still moving, to climb aboard, while the ladder continually moved up and down.

After getting cleaned up, they shared their story. They had forgotten about the time change, and missed their boat. They contacted the dock master who helped them obtain a fast boat; a part of the shuttle service that the cruise line had contracts with. It cost \$250.00, which was exactly the limit on their only credit card. They had then received permission from our ship's captain to rejoin the cruise.

Tom said that it was his fastest boat ride, jerking them from side to side as the small boat broke through the high waves. The front of their boat was almost vertical at times.

The nightmare over, the Caribbean was once again paradise, and we sailed smoothly for the remainder of our perfect vacation, keeping everyone together while on shore.

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Lana Price

“BEST VACATION EVER!” AMERICA..... THROUGH MY EYES.....

June 1, 2011, I begin my lifelong dream trip across the United States to visit friends of old and relatives never met. This trip, planned for thirty years, was now coming true. No longer in my 40's and the certainty that the trip could no longer be done on a motorcycle as originally wished-for...I packed, primed and gassed my vehicle and with my check-off list, I set forth.

My first goal was a visit to Mount Rushmore National Memorial in South Dakota, en route to New Hampshire. After clicking pictures of those stony faces in the hills, I venture over and pay my fee to gawk at the powerful mountain carving of Crazy Horse Memorial which commenced in 1987 and is mammoth in comparison to the historical stone-foursome.

Captivated by the stone-carved Indian, ultimately I depart and experience sporadic thunderstorms throughout Indiana and Ohio. Crossing New York State, I surrendered to the temptation to detour to Niagara Falls, where the gargantuan waterfalls gush 24 hours a day, misting visitors who are adorned in plastic raingear and sloppy flip flops. The breathtaking site mesmerized me until the wind and powerful wet mists forced me to depart. Driving towards Lebanon, NH, I visit long-time friends who show me local sights, in addition to the coastline of Maine (another goal accomplished). I enjoyed spectacular landmarks, lighthouses, and sun-drenched beaches.

After days of touring and sharing long begotten memories of old, I traverse down the east coast to Washington D.C. to eyeball the White House and some famous symbolic monuments. I face the menace of ongoing massive beltway traffic around DC just to steal a look at the Mormon Temple which appears to be suspended in a heavenly aura. Clicking more snapshots, I continue toward Chesapeake Bay and Virginia, again visiting with a friend who introduces me to Botanical Gardens and species of birds from the greenish bayou that feast in her backyard.

Time pushes me into South Carolina, where olden friends introduce me to good food, hiking to a fabulous waterfall and much reminiscing of years long gone. Soon the hot weather and major humidity erodes my energy, but I keep clicking my camera to capture my journey through Tennessee, Arkansas, Oklahoma, into Texas. Here cousins provide some missing family history, as well as scenic excursions and historic stories and antiquities of their Texas towns.

Onward, I hope to leave behind the southern heat, crossing New Mexico, into Colorado, I breathe cooler climate and find landscape so distinctive with stone. I cannot stop taking pictures yet I know that my photos will never prove worthy of the capture. Still, I am obsessed with the view and earthly formations, and continue clicking; right into Utah and headed homeward. The trek, near 7,000 miles across American soil, was reality and about as close to ecstasy as anyone can hope for.