



By Sandra Carson

# Exiled in America

## My big travel adventure for love of a Cobra...

Picture this scene... Boxing Day 2007 at the family luncheon, the big boys huddled over a computer, the inquisitive wife sipping her wine as she passes by with the cheeky remark "what mischief are you lot up to?"

"Just looking at cars on e-bay, might buy myself a Shelby GT500. I'm a bit busy, so will you go over to the States and organize the paperwork for me?"

"Of course, your wish is my command."

That statement had many witnesses. They all stood by the man, who repeated what his wife had said some days later. The mission was to go over to the States to buy the Shelby, remain in the States for 90 days and then some...this would comply with government regulations to register and drive the Shelby Cobra in its original state here in New Zealand.

The plan took a life of its own

My real estate marketing career was put on hold for 102 days. The biggest worry? The Shelby Mission was to be a solo journey. Luckily, a girlfriend agreed to join me for the first three weeks. The first part of the trip took us through five states – California, Texas, Virginia, Georgia and Florida – from LA by air to Dallas Texas, and the much anticipated Shelby. It was love at first sight – what a beautiful car and a delight to drive, smooth and comfortable, 6-speed and very, very special. Only 6,000 were made and driving it made us feel special too. Everyone looked, with the car creating a stir wherever we went. People wanted to talk to us and couldn't believe someone would come so far to buy a car and take it home. "Don't you have cars in Noo Zealand?" Not like this!

We headed for Virginia, just 48 hours before Dallas was hit with torrential rain and flooding, and a chance meeting with a lady proudly displaying "Kiwi Lady" plates. Linda Senior left New Zealand over 30 years ago to marry a handsome Marine called Ernie. He was gobsmacked listening to his wife chatting away with a flawless Kiwi accent after only five minutes with Nadine and I. You can take the girl out of NZ, but you can't take NZ out of the girl. Even more co-incidental was the identity of Linda's

father- Grenville Hughes, well-known jockey and race horse trainer. Nadine's career is in the race horse industry, so you can guess the topic of conversation.

After beating the floods in Texas, we amazingly just missed a tornado that tore a path through downtown Atlanta only five days before we arrived, closing the hotel across the road from where we had reservations. We breathed a sigh of relief. We had such good weather, while there were tornados and devastation all around us. Was this the Luck of the Irish?

Next stop was Orlando. Disney World Resorts are a force to be reckoned with – Epcot Centre, Futuristic Theme Park of the Disney World Resorts was our unanimous best choice. Twelve hours of fun and fantasy left us exhausted, but we were back for the next two days to Animal Kingdom and Magical Kingdom. Sadly for me, Nadine's trip was at an end and I was truly on my own, unable to go home until the three months were up. So with positive thoughts battling the homesickness, a great set of wheels and GPS – what more does a woman need? – I headed off alone, with plans to stay places a week at a time and so properly experience these parts of America. I left Kissimmee on May 4, driving south on the Turn Pike that spans the length of Florida, with strategic exits to Okeechobee Lake (where the local Indians run the tourist attractions), West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Alligator Alley. I took a ride on an airboat skimming over the famous Florida Everglades – alligators aplenty! Moving on to Miami, where I had been warned not to stay, with the highest murder rate in the world – and then as far south as possible, to the Keys. What an awesome experience! The Keys are made of dozens of islands joined by bridges, the longest seven miles long. A Key West experience not to be missed was sipping a Margarita at the famous Jimmy Buffet Bar 'Margaretville,' watching the sunset while gazing across the Gulf of Mexico with 90 miles of water separating us from Cuba. Next stops were Naples, Fort Meyers, Sarasota and St Petersburg – a nice change of pace with shopping high on the agenda.

I must mention an extraordinary encounter in Florida. I am a keen golfer, and in my usual open way asked a group of women