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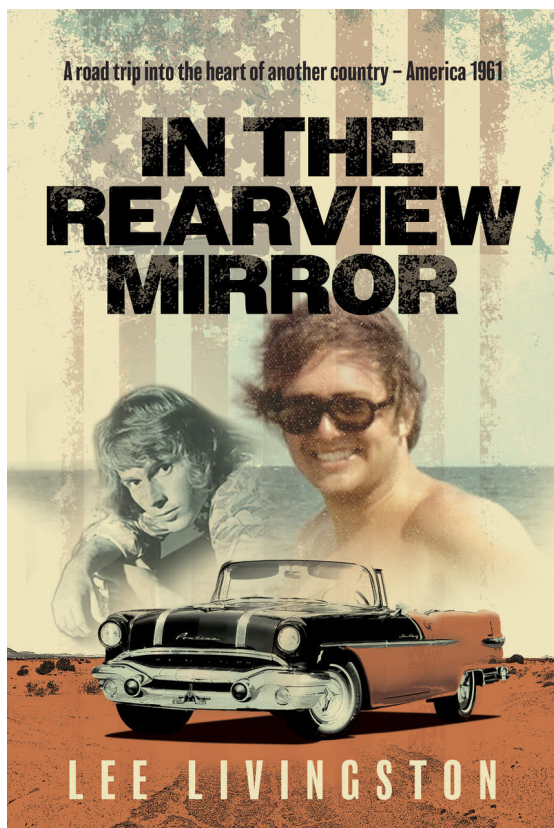
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"A nostalgic, no seat belts, eye-opening page turner!"

-Gary Witzenburg, Motor Trend

In the Rearview Mirror

By Lee Livingston



“In the Rearview Mirror” is both an engrossing time capsule of pre-Vietnam America and a bittersweet meditation on youth, loss, and the journeys that define us. Hop in, roll down the windows, and hit the road for an unforgettable ride. In 1961 the interstate highways were just being built, JFK was a newly elected President full of promise, and two best friends, after high school graduation in Cleveland, Ohio, drove west for summer jobs at Sequoia National Park.

Join Lee Livingston and his friend “Dango” as they set out from Cleveland on an audacious cross-country adventure that would shape their lives forever.

Ride with them as they decide to hitchhike over 2,000 miles back across the country after wrecking their 1956 Pontiac Star Chief. A true, wild, and wonderful

"only in America" adventure ensues. Experience 1961 Las Vegas through the boys' eyes. Encounter a Santa Fe bull. Get their take on Blaze Starr. Hop a freight train across two states. Find out how "Dango" got his name. Discover an America of wide-open roads and wide-open people. See the positive relations between races before the America of assassinations and riots in the later '60s. Not only do the boys learn about their country, but they also begin to learn more about themselves as they hurtle towards adulthood with reckless abandon.

"Written proof that coming of age in the '60s was more fun than it is today. If you loved American Graffiti, chrome and big inch V8 engines, you'll love this." -**Tony Swan, Car and Driver**

But this is more than just a nostalgic tale of youthful recklessness. Interweaving their road trip with poignant flashbacks and flash-forwards, Livingston explores the complexities of male friendship, the passage of time, and the struggle to find one's place in the world. As an older and wiser narrator, he grapples with the tragic fate that would befall his friend and reflects on how those pivotal weeks in 1961 echo through the decades.

"Exciting, warm, funny, touching, and tragic. A can't-miss trip for all ages looking to experience the innocent and guilty pleasures of the early '60s." - **Bill Harris, Entertainment Tonight**

It's a classic new "road story" and a revealing "coming-of-age" tale. Every new mile brings a new story-filled with humor, danger, and self-discovery. They meet an unforgettable cast of characters, from kind-hearted truckers to desert drifters, each offering a glimpse into an America that once was. Through laughter, hardship, and unexpected friendships, they navigate an unforgettable journey that changed them forever.

To learn more, go to: <https://openroads1961.com/>

About Lee Livingston



Lee Livingston knows how to tell a story. He began writing ad copy for McCann-Erickson right out of college and eventually rose through the creative ranks there. After a successful run in the ad business, he launched his own film company in 1980 and told stories with pictures for the next 40 years. And he was very good at that, too.

Born in 1943 in Los Angeles, he grew up in Cleveland Ohio. His father was a senior executive with Bechtel and his mother was, not surprisingly, a writer with published articles in Redbook and Ladies Home Journal, among others.

After graduating from Claremont McKenna College, Lee attended UCLA and learned the film and TV business from the best. He joined the Army reserve at the height of the Viet Nam War and was assigned to a unit of creatives, many of whom went on to great fame as agents, heads of film studios, and Hollywood power brokers.

In the early sixties, Lee and his friend, Dango decided to drive out to L.A. for a few weeks. That turned into quite an adventure, the subject of his new book, *In the Rearview Mirror*.

Lee lives in Sandy Springs, GA with his wife, Linda.

An Excerpt from *In the Rearview Mirror*

A best friend in high school is a friend for life, except when he shoots himself at twenty-nine.

The first time I had a clue Dango might be a little crazy was when he threatened to throw himself off Moro Rock back at Sequoia National Park in the summer of 1961. That was not some idle threat he was going to jump and just stub a toe. No, that was going to a leap into oblivion.

Moro Rock proudly juts out from the park of giant trees high in the Sierras. A massive promontory of bare granite with a quarter-mile footpath of steps and handrails carved into it so visitors can climb up to its peak viewing point. There, looking to the west out over the foothills and the Kaweah River canyon below, you can make out the dirty haze of the endless San Joaquin Valley. Looking to the east, the highest mountains in the Western Divide are so close they almost reach out and smack you. Snow-capped Mount Whitney, front and center.

If you looked down, well, there was just no point in looking down; you couldn't make out the canyon floor past Moro's sheer slope, I just knew it was over 6,000 feet until you hit something, and after 6,000 feet it wouldn't make any difference what you hit. Yet, here I was, at dusk, on that late July day, actually worrying about the drop-off from Moro Rock because my big lug of a friend had climbed under the guardrail and was now standing, back pressed spread-eagle against the slope, arguing with me.

"We've got to go back home," he said.

"Bob," I replied. Dango was his high school nickname. I only used his real name when we were fighting. "When you get back on this side of the rail we'll talk about it."

"I will," he said. "When you agree to go back to Cleveland next week."

A grown-up would have left him there and called his bluff. I, on the other hand, a very mature 18-year-old, leaned back, took a sip from the one remaining beer in our Hamm's six-pack, and wondered what I was going to do to handle this bizarre situation. 'Cause truth be told, I wanted to go back to Cleveland, too. I just wanted to figure a way to do it without getting killed by my dad.

The reason the two of us were perched on that granite dome in the Sierras and not sweltering away in the Cleveland humidity was because of my father. He knew somebody in Washington, D.C. and had pulled strings to get us summer jobs of a lifetime working in a national park. Dango and I had even driven down to D.C. over Christmas break to seal the deal. We met the gentleman in his gray Department of Interior office and presented ourselves with sports coats and ties to show him we were upstanding college-bound men. Perfect for stocking the shelves, unloading trucks, and running the ice house at the Sequoia Village Market. The meeting lasted about 45 minutes. We stressed how much we really wanted the jobs; he talked what a good experience it would be for us and how he didn't like the Cleveland Browns. Not one word was said about giant sequoias, nature or the environment.

Two days after graduation from University School, Cleveland's finest all-male prep school, Dango and I loaded up my '56 black and red Pontiac Star Chief convertible and headed out for California. What a ride! Top down, radio up and a cold brew here and there when we could see for miles and be sure to spot the Highway Patrol. We alternated driving and pulled off the highway for catnaps. No stopping to spend the night. We were in a hurry because we were 18. Food was beer, coffee, burgers and candy bars. The country flew by in a blur of cornfields, wheat fields and silos, gas stations, overpasses and Burma Shave rhymes. *"If daisies are your favorite flowers keep pushin' up those miles per hour!"* And boy did we push that powerful Pontiac V-8. The Star Chief barreled down the straight-aways and hugged every curve like a racer. How could it not help but hug the highway with a wheelbase close to six-by-eleven feet and a curb weight of over 3700 pounds. Daisies were the furthest thing from our minds. We had decades to go before we slept. We were two privileged, white, American boys on the road to California and points beyond.

"Come on, Lee," Dango bellowed from the slope. "We don't go back now, we're gonna miss it all. The last summer we'll all be together."

"Getting tired?" I asked. "Don't make any quick moves."

After my attempt at sarcasm, I looked at him, perched over the void and I began to understand our close friendship. We were made for each other. He was always impulsive and a little crazy. I thought things out too much and played it way too safe. He pushed, and when he went too far, I pulled him back. I also knew at that point that I'd bring him back from Moro Rock and get me to go back to Cleveland. His next question cinched it:

“In 20 years will it make a difference?”

“What?” I said, not knowing where he was going.

“You think your dad, or the guys at the market, or anyone for that matter, will give a damn that we cut out on our jobs early any more than a couple of weeks after we do it?” he said.

“What’s that got to do with 20 years?” I replied.

“Just taking it to the extreme to make a point,” he said.

He had me and I knew it.

Lee Livingston: Storyteller

