

COAST-TO-COAST -TO-COAST



MY JOURNEY INTO THE LAND OF FAHRVERGNÜGEN

CHRIS ALAN FOREMAN

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Coast-to-Coast-to-Coast: My Journey into the Land of Fahrvergnügen
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Dedication in Doggerel

*God must have humor and have it no end,
for his name spelt backward is now my best friend.*

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THE JOY OF TRAVEL

The perfect road trip consists of three parts: anticipation, realization, and recollection. When each part is enjoyed to the fullest, the result is something called *fahrvergnügen*, a German word which means “driving enjoyment.”

ANTICIPATION—THE LOOK AHEAD

This road trip began during a conversation with my wife in the summer of 2017. Liz’s father had recently passed away, but she had not yet visited his burial plot. During dinner, she expressed a desire to fly from San Francisco to Boston and drive to her father’s gravesite in southern Massachusetts. She hinted it would be *nice* if I could join her. I responded, “How about if you fly and I drive?” She thought a moment then accepted this arrangement. The seed was planted for a coast-to-coast-to-coast road trip.

The seed sprouted a few months later when Liz booked her round-trip flight for May 2018. The parameters of my adventure were set. Liz was free to structure our four days together in New England while I could plan a twelve-day eastward trip from San Mateo to Boston and a twelve-day westward trip home.

A drive across America had long been a top item on my bucket

list, especially after I acquired a 2001 Volkswagen camper. This arctic-white Eurovan was a retirement gift to myself. At nineteen feet long, it contained a fridge, stove, sink, bed, and storage. The pop top and awning provided additional living space. This vehicle was my man cave on wheels.

For several months I took my camper on the road for tune-up excursions accompanied by my little dog, Jody. I ordered camping gadgets through Amazon and downloaded books through Audible. Most of my travel would be unscripted, although I did reserve a few campsites along the seven-thousand-mile route. I coordinated stop-overs with the diaspora of my family in five far-flung states. In order to track costs, distance, and mileage, I developed two simple spreadsheets.

I divided this epic journey into three phases. Phase one was “San Mateo to Boston”. This portion was the longest, going south through Texas, just Jody and me. I planned the southern route for April to avoid possible May heat. Phase two was “New England Tour”. I planned to meet up with Liz at a Boston hotel and drop her off at the same spot four days later. We would visit locations in Massachusetts and Maine. Phase three was “Boston to San Mateo”. I planned my return trip as a shorter northern route passing through Chicago and Denver. This tripart division led me to think of my journey as three distinct but successive road trips.

As the day of departure drew near, I talked with my buddies about the upcoming adventure. Even pool mates in my aqua-fitness class knew about my trip. On the day prior to leaving, I parked my Prius in the storage garage and relocated the camper to the front of the house. I hadn’t even hit the road yet when *fahrvergnügen*

set in. After eight months of anticipation, the hour was at hand.

REALIZATION—THE LOOK AROUND

My dash across America extended over twenty-nine days, April 19 to May 17, 2018. As the days unfolded, I realized in retrospect that my journey served several functions, layer stacked upon layer.

Solitude

First, the excursion provided me with time alone. I am an introvert by nature—bordering on recluse. Crowds drain me. Chatter challenges me. I needed to escape my four walls, allow my soul to wander the outer world and my mind open to explore the inner. I required highway therapy.

Yet, solitude does not mean isolation. I did have company. My sixteen-pound terrier mix proved to be the ideal travel mate. Jody provided companionship without breaking solitude. She served as a constant and comforting presence. She afforded opportunities to walk, rest, and interact with others. She was a warm furball on cold nights and never once complained about my off-key singing or criticized my marginal parking skills. Her tail always wagged and never flagged. Could there be a better companion?

In addition to Jody, my iPad Pro provided virtual company. With the aid of this technological marvel, I could maintain correspondence and keep up with the news, as well as track weather, traffic, and rest stops. A camper—a dog—an iPad: my three-part formula for quality solo travel.

Driving

The road trip also satisfied a need to drive. It must be in my DNA—the driven-to-drive gene. I loved to perch on my driving throne while thundering down a highway, watching the world at whim. Since I was seldom in a hurry, even long road delays didn't diminish my driving pleasure.

Over the twenty-nine-day journey, I drove an average of two-hundred sixty-four miles per day, typically pulling out of one campsite by ten in the morning and pulling into the next before dark. During my eight-hour driving day, I stopped every ninety minutes or so—for refueling, stretching, restroom, eating, or walking the dog. I drove with direction but not destination. If plan A didn't work out, plan B was just around the bend.

Listening

I carefully selected the music and audio books that would accompany my road trip. During previous solo travel, I discovered the value of sound in making the miles more endurable and the journey more pleasurable. During this road trip I spent about 160 hours behind the wheel. The sound system provided the sound track of long-distance travel.

With a variety of music to entertain, audio books to educate, and sermons to inspire, the driver's seat transfigured. At times it became a concert chair; at other times a classroom bench or a church pew. For some portions of roadway, I recall the soundscape more than the landscape.

Contemplation

Throughout the journey, but especially behind the wheel and around the campfire, my mind was free to wander. At times a sight or word triggered a chain of thoughts. At other times, music led to musing. (It's no wonder the root of the word "music" is "muse."). Often, ideas seemed to spring from the ether.

I challenged myself mentally with word games and recitation. I meditated on the nature of life and love and loss. I struggled with my inscrutable God, seeking answers to questions gnawing at my soul. Philosophical, theological, existential—no idea was too grandiose. None was too trivial. Did I solve any vexing problems? No. However, contemplation is more concerned with attaining inside peace than solving outside problems.

Camping

A big part of the adventure was camping out. I called it *hobo* camping. I didn't fish or hike. I never settled in one spot long enough to establish friends. My camping involved an evening set up and supper, followed by a camp fire, reading, meditating, and walking. After dark, the camper transformed into a cozy sleep platform enclosing me within a protective shell of metal and glass.

The morning routine included an early walk, breakfast, packing, and cleaning. I carried out these activities at a leisurely pace, neither dawdling nor rushing. To me, the pleasure in hobo camping consisted in being unfettered, flexible, and a tad unwashed.

My father had been a true-to-life hobo during the great depression.

Searching for work in 1933, he rode the rails from Ohio to California. In letters to my mom, he wrote of encampments and panhandling. Maybe hobo camping is in my blood.

Sightseeing

Within the constraints of my travel schedule, I wanted to see as much of America as possible. While sound saturated my ears, sights filled my eyes. Scanning the near roadway and the far horizon, I saw forests evaporate into salt flats and mountains flatten into mesas. Landscapes changed to seascapes and rivers narrowed into waterfalls. Jody scampered on desert sand and mountain snow.

The most open sky appeared along Highway 50 in Nevada while the most confined occurred along a stretch of Interstate 95 through the Bronx. In Texas I was warned of rattlesnakes and in Colorado of falling rock. I parked beside a Joshua tree in California and under a sugar maple in Maine.

One of the songs on my 1960s' playlist was *America* by Simon and Garfunkel. "They've all come to look for America." Approaching New York City at the blush of dawn, I joined the refrain by counting the cars on the New Jersey Turnpike. The experience cost me \$17.35 when it came time to pay the toll taker.

Visiting

I did not anticipate that visiting family would play such a major part of this road trip. Yet, as I traversed twenty-five states, family

visits added an extra dimension of *fahrvergnügen*. Each friendly face provided an oasis of hospitality as well as a convenient place to do laundry.

I stayed for two days with a sister-in-law in Texas, one night with a nephew in New Jersey, two days with two sons in Virginia, two days with my wife and in-laws in Maine, and one night with a nephew in Colorado. Each encounter was a blessing. I hardly knew my nephews previously. Now I know their children. I had barely seen my nine-month-old granddaughter. Now my camera is filled with her likeness. Each relative turned out to be a friend and each parting proved to be a sorrow. Isn't that how it should be with family?

Pilgrimage

On the third day of travel, I modified the course of my return trip. Rather than race along the southern rim of the Great Lakes, I decided to mosey down memory lane. This pilgrimage diverted me southward a few hundred miles and added an unexpected layer of joy.

I strolled the streets of Bellaire, Ohio, the town of my birth. I spent a morning in Muncie, Indiana, cavorting with vintage college friends. I wistfully wandered through old haunts in Whiting, Indiana. This was nostalgia on steroids. I took pictures of a run-down brick house that I once called home. Then, I walked around an aging school building—fifty years after my senior prom. The sights, the sounds, the smells; so much had changed. So much had stayed the same.

Accomplishment

Lastly, I achieved a personal goal, something significant to check off my bucket list, something I will talk about for years to come. My journey was not primarily a *camping trip*, that is, an opportunity to enjoy the great outdoors. Neither was it a *vacation*, since I no longer held an *occupation* from which I could vacate. The coast-to-coast-to-coast journey was an intentional *road trip* with a goal to attain the summit and return to base camp. Why did I drive from California to Maine and return? In the style of Edmund Hillary, “because it was there”.

RECOLLECTION—THE LOOK BACK

Over the twenty-nine-day journey I kept a daily journal, writing about one hour per day. Usually I typed one thousand words into my iPad just before lights out. This discipline allowed me to re-imagine each day just before it ended. My journal writing captured fresh memories before they grew stale.

Upon my return home, I organized thousands of words and hundreds of pictures. I spent several days knitting together a digital scrapbook that I posted on my website: *chrisalanforeman.com*. This activity seemed to extend the travel joy by a week. In my thoughts and sometimes in my dreams, Jody and I traveled down the highways again.

Once more, to extend the joy of travel even further down the road, I'm expanding an impromptu scrapbook into a polished

memoir. In this way, when I'm too old to drive my camper down the backroads of America, I can turn the pages of this book, reliving the bliss of a dog, an open road, and twenty-nine days of fahrvergnügen.



DAY 1

SAN MATEO, CALIFORNIA TO BAKERSFIELD, CALIFORNIA

273 MILES

TWO ROAD WARRIORS

Thursday, April 19, 2018

Dear diary, today was a big day. I began my coast-to-coast-to-coast road trip! I was restless with anticipation during the night and rose from bed at 5:15 a.m. Liz did not awake, so I moved quietly around the bedroom. I scanned my surroundings one last time before closing the door behind me. I prepared my first cup of coffee and led Jody outside for her morning business.

The camper sat near the front curb pre-packed and ready to go. I slid open the side door and Jody hopped in, skipping her way onto the doggie bed on the shotgun seat. The first glimmers of morning were filtering through the live oaks. The last items I carried aboard were an arm load of frozen food which I packed into the propane refrigerator. Liz was now up and about. As I prepared a travel cup of coffee, we shared a goodbye embrace. At 5:45 I lowered the garage door on my domestic world, scooped up the

morning newspaper, and drove into the twilight.

I arrived at Central Peninsula Church a little after 6:00 a.m. Steve, Robert, and David were already seated around table number seven. Three regulars were absent from this weekly meeting of Men's Fraternity. As we four shared events of the last week, I consumed a breakfast sandwich along with a third cup of coffee. After the Bible study ended, I asked the group to pray for me while I was out of town, missing the next four Thursdays. Steve agreed to lead the group in my absence.

After the meeting I stood in the church parking lot to the rear of my camper. Most men were rushing to work, but a few guys stopped to enquire about my road trip. Someone asked about my large bumper sticker. I explained, "Fahrvergnügen is a German word coined by Volkswagen. It means 'driving pleasure' or, more loosely, the 'joy of travel'".

Steve re-joined me and we re-parked our vehicles a block away at Catamaran Park. We talked as we circled the soccer field. Jody walked for one lap but for the next three she rested on the camper mattress. Steve's a good walking partner and helped me achieve my first 3000 steps of the day. I've worn a pedometer on my hip for the past ten years. My resolution is to get at least 10,000 steps for each of the days I'm on the road. For me, 10,000 steps equal about 4.5 miles. My wife thinks I'm obsessed with getting my daily quota. She's probably right.

On the way out of town I stopped at SMAC—the San Mateo Athletic Club—for a final work out: weights, swim, and shower. On returning to the gym lot, I took my first photo of the road

TWO ROAD WARRIORS

trip: Jody looking at me through the rear window of the camper. She deserved the first-picture honor. My dog has been my camping companion for eight years.

My last stop was at a Union 76 gas station where I topped off the tank. At exactly 10:17 on April 19, the odometer read 137,269 miles. I entered all the start data into my iPad spreadsheet. I was mentally stoked to commence this cross-country road trip.

— PHASE ONE BEGINS — TRAVEL FROM SAN MATEO TO BOSTON —

With joy in my heart, I stepped on the accelerator and pulled into traffic. I sped south on I-280 through San Mateo County, then southeast on Highway 85 and Highway 101 bypassing the sprawling city of San Jose. During this first sixty-four miles, my driving was accompanied by oldies from the 1960s. Ray Charles seemed to play this song just for me: *Hit the Road, Jack*.

After an hour I rested near Gilroy parking across from a shuttered garlic stand. I had received a message from Ken, my camping buddy. He wished me safe travels. When Ken and I camp at adjoining sites he posts a hand-hewn wooden plaque which reads, “Ken and Linda”. I contemplated such a sign of my own, but what should I put on it? I wanted to include some message about my dog. My mind stretched back to a TV western of the late 1950s called “Have Gun Will Travel” featuring Richard Boone as Paladin. I decided to make a sign which would read, “Have Dog Will Travel—Chris and Jody—San Mateo, California”.

From Gilroy I turned east on Highway 152 passing through Los Banos until I connected with Highway 99 bearing south. After a

few miles I noticed something disturbing. A yellow warning light flickered on my dashboard. It was shaped like a circle but I didn't know what it indicated. A dreadful thought popped into my mind. *I'm only a few hours from home. Should I turn around now and cancel this road trip?* I pulled into the next rest stop, fished out my owner's manual, and studied the contents. The flashing yellow circle was the brake pad indicator. What should I do, turn back or charge on? Resolve won. I determined to continue to Bakersfield and seek out a brake specialist.

It was an anxious few hours zooming down Highway 99, passing through Fresno and Tulare. I listened for brake squeals and felt for pedal vibrations. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Finally, I pulled into Bakersfield about 4:00 p.m. A Yelp search lead me to Brake Masters near Highway 58. The manager at the desk said he might be able to get me on the road again. My spirit soared. Two workmen hoisted the camper on lifts and un-bolted the wheels. It was indeed brake pads. However, the manager said they didn't look overly worn. I responded that I had a long trip ahead of me and if the brake sensor indicated new pads I should install them. I walked Jody around the neighborhood as the brake masters re-searched my auto parts.

When I returned the manager reported my VW pads were imbedded with special sensor wires and cost \$525 for the four. He also said he'd have to order them from L.A. which meant they wouldn't arrive until the next morning. I said, "Go ahead. That's the cost of driving cross-country in a classic vehicle." The two workers re-installed the wheels and I left just before the 6:00 closing time.

I consulted my iPad for a place to spend the night. The Park

TWO ROAD WARRIORS

Advisor app identified a nearby Walmart superstore that accommodated overnight parking. Once in the lot, I spotted the huddle of RVs. On their margin I settled my camper. With plenty of daylight, I strolled around the perimeter of the gigantic lot with Jody sniffing and tugging on her leash. After my quota of daily steps, I locked Jody in the camper and entered the Walmart. It proved to be a great place for a restroom, wash up, and snacks.

The parking lot was comfortable and patrolled by security cars. I wanted to maintain a low profile, so I didn't pop the top or extend the awning. With window blinds in place I felt snug. At 6:00 the temperature was warm but by 8:00 it had cooled. By 10:00 I traded my army blanket for a sleeping bag. I read through the morning Chronicle and beat the computer at single-player Scrabble. I also listened to an apologetic lecture called "Natural Theology and General Revelation" by William Lane Craig. During this relaxing time, Jody pawed the blankets for the perfect spot. Once found, she curled into a fuzzy disk insensible to the world.

General Helmuth von Moltke once remarked, "No battle plan



Two Road Warriors

survives first contact with the enemy." For two road warriors like

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Jody and me the saying becomes, “No driving plan survives first contact with the highway.” I had driven 250 miles rather than the intended 325. I would have to make up seventy-five miles on Friday to get back on schedule. Day one came to an unexpected end, but isn’t that what turns an ordinary road trip into an adventure? Yet, what would the next day bring?



DAY 2

BAKERSFIELD, CALIFORNIA TO SELIGMAN, ARIZONA

406 MILES

CRAZY FRED'S TRUCK STOP

Friday, April 20, 2018

It was another day of twists and turns. I stirred from my camper at 6:30 and walked Jody around the lot for our morning constitutional. I entered Walmart at 7:00 when the doors opened, purchasing a large coffee at the in-store McDonald's. It was a fine start to a road-trip day.

I got to Brake Masters just after 8:00. The brake pads from L.A. hadn't arrived yet, so Jody and I went for a long stroll past store fronts and empty lots. After four thousand steps I returned to the waiting room. A woman sat in a corner chair flanked by two teenage daughters. The girls were absorbed in their smart phones but set them aside when they noticed Jody prowling under chairs in search of treats. I asked if they would look after the dog while I visited the restroom. With a nod from their mother they agreed and continued to entertain Jody long after my visit concluded.

The parts arrived just after 10:00. I saw the UPS man come and go. After several minutes, the manager informed me that L.A. had sent the wrong brake pads. However, he escorted me onto the garage floor and showed me my four pads arranged on a table. He reiterated the pads weren't bad at all. In fact, he was surprised a sensor light would indicate they were worn. He claimed they had at least eighty per cent life left. I told him I didn't want to wait another full day in Bakersfield for a second delivery. After a sigh of resignation, I asked him to re-install the old pads and re-mount the wheels.

A mechanic shouted if I wanted the annoying warning light turned off. Yes! So, he cut the four sensor wires. I do plan to get the pads replaced, but not until I'm back in San Mateo. The manager was sorry for the mix-up and said there would be no charge. But since the mechanics rotated the tires, removed and installed them twice, and fixed my warning light problem, I gave the boss two twenty-dollar bills telling him to pass them on to the workers. The dog and I were on the road out of Bakersfield by 11:00.

Barreling down highway 58, I remembered this bleak stretch of road from seven years earlier. Shortly after Kim died I bought a beat-up Westfalia Camper. With my new rescue dog at my side and a photo of my deceased wife on the dashboard, I retreated for a week into the wilderness of Death Valley. It was a time of Job-like wrestling with God.

"I cry unto thee, and thou doest not hear me; I stand up, and thou regardest me not. Thou art become cruel to me: with thy strong hand thou opposest thyself against me. Oh, that my words were now written. Oh, that they were printed in a book! That

CRAZY FRED'S TRUCK STOP

they were graven with an iron pen and set in the rock forever.
(from Job 7:11, 30:21, 19:23-24)”

Once again, in the midst of this desolation, my thoughts turned to Kim and to her bruised body beside the roadside in Rwanda. I recalled our thirty-six years together before its tragic end. *God, tell me one more time. Why did you take her?* I wondered how different my life would have been if Kim had survived. I glanced at Jody in her travel bed. These two never crossed paths. Jody came into my life two months after Kim left it. A sticker on my camper reads, “Who rescued who?” Surely my dog was sixteen pounds of grace. My mood brightened.

I parked beside a Joshua Tree at the Boron rest stop. My lunch was a Walmart-purchased TV dinner warmed up in a special hot box—one of the many gadgets I purchased on Amazon. The electrical cord plugged into the rear cigarette lighter. The warm meal wasn't too shabby. I did some walking and stretching, then drove through Barstow taking I-40 into the Mohave desert.

The external temperature gauge showed ninety-two degrees, but the air conditioner kept the inside comfortable. With music to entertain me and lectures to occupy my mind, the mile markers whizzed by. Jody ranged throughout the camper, moving from her front-seat bed to her blue blanket near the rear window. By 3:00, we had crossed the desert and had entered Needles, California.

Sometimes I create my own stupid adventures. The low-gas indicator beeped on just before Needles. I looked on my Gas Buddy app to check for prices. I couldn't believe it. There was a two-dollar price difference between filling stations! Then I realized I

was sitting near the Arizona state line. I pulled into a California station and put in only \$10 of expensive gas, figuring I'd fill up on cheaper Arizona gas as soon as I crossed the Colorado River.

I continued along I-40 leaving California, but there were no service stations—at least none that I could see. After forty minutes, the low-gas light beeped again. Uh oh. I was still forty miles from Kingman, Arizona. Anxious images popped into my head of me standing by the scorching roadside, thumb out, trying to hitch a ride.

I tried to figure. What was the best speed to conserve fuel? Would it be fifty, sixty, or seventy miles per hour? I'd speed up telling myself I'd get there faster. Then I would slow down, persuading myself I was saving gas. I listened for engine sputter as the miles passed. But God's grace proved greater than my stupidity, at least in this instance. I saw Crazy Fred's Truck Stop in the distance. I had to exit I-40 onto old Route 66, finally rolling up to a gas pump. My twenty-gallon tank consumed nineteen point nine gallons of gasoline. I promised myself I'd never again empty my tank below the half-full mark.

After paying sixty-seven dollars for the premium gas, I bought a few snack items at the shop counter. As I was returning, a man who was slouched next to a trash bin noticed me, my dog, and my bumper. He asked with slurred speech if "fahrvergnügen" meant "fetch". I said *no* but for his guess I handed him a few dollars. After a narrow escape, I wanted to share the grace.

I decided to drive all the way to the Kampground of America (KOA) in Seligman. That would get me back on track. I continued

CRAZY FRED'S TRUCK STOP

past Kingman along I-40 for a few more hours and arrived in Seligman about 6:30. That made it a 406-mile day. Like most places along this stretch of highway, the campground was situated on old Route 66. I was able to park the camper in a tent spot for just \$22.50. Unlike a more expensive RV spot, my smaller space had no electrical outlet or water source. I was certainly camping in the desert. Tumbleweeds blew and wedged under my tires. I had to dislodge several of the nuisance plants before sitting at my designated picnic table.

I walked Jody along the roadway of Route 66 achieving my 10,000-step goal for the day. I'm convinced it's my trusty dog that keeps me healthy and happy. My evening meal consisted of brown rice left over from home with a can of beef stew poured over it. Delicious! I then took an over-due shower and settled in for the night.

At 7:45 sharp I was reminded of home. That's when the *Jody alarm* sounded on my iPad indicating the dog's last walk of the day. The musical reminder is Bach's Air from Suite Three—a genteel piece. Liz and I have made a habit of walking Jody just before our bed time. My dog was with me, but a musical air made me miss my wife.

It was at this moment that I decided to keep a journal of my twenty-nine-day adventure. I knew if I hesitated one more day, it would never happen. I hadn't kept a daily diary since 1974 when I lived in Korea as a Peace Corps volunteer.

I thought about those long-gone days, teaching English in middle school, flirting in the teachers' room with Miss Kim, then

marrying her in 1974. Her principal fired her for marrying a foreigner and we settled in Longview, Washington. I thought about the birth of my two sons, Zachary in 1975 and Simon Peter in 1977. What a life I enjoyed with the wife of my youth! What adventures I experienced with my two sons!

I began tapping the glass keyboard of my iPad. After sixty minutes of journaling my fingers and eyes drooped. As I plugged the gadget into the charger I knew I was committed to chronicling this entire journey. Tell me, are the words *journal* and *journey* semantically related?

I was dozing one hundred yards from a major railroad track. Every twenty minutes or so a long train rumbled by. I rolled to my side and looked out my rear right window to see dozens of military vehicles passing on rail cars across the moonlit desert. The mournful whistles soothed my ears, reminding me of childhood in northwest Indiana. I thanked God for getting me this far and for being with Lizzie as she kept home now 683 miles back down the highway.



DAY 3

SELIGMAN, ARIZONA TO CASA BLANCA, NEW MEXICO

340 MILES

ALONG ROUTE 66

Saturday, April 21, 2018

This morning I awoke restless after strange dreams forgotten before remembered. I glanced out the side window to see the first rays of dawn. It had been a cold night. My weather app said the nighttime low would be forty degrees, but my temperature gage reported a thirty-one-degree morning. My propane furnace kept some of that chill away. Jody spent most of the night snuggled inside my sleeping bag, her little body providing warmth to this big body. I boiled coffee water on the inside burner. That helped warm the interior.

I strayed out for a few minutes about 7:00 but returned to the warmth of the camper. I wrote the second day of this journal, getting myself up to date. By 8:30 the Arizona sun had warmed the campground to sixty-one degrees. It was finally a good morning. Jody and I walked the perimeter of the camp and I took pictures

of the Arizona landscape. After packing and cleaning, Raisin Bran furnished my morning meal.

We pulled out of Seligman about 10:00 and continued down I-40. This Interstate highway is unusual. There are no service stations or outposts along the main roadway. All that infrastructure was built along the old Highway 66 which parallels I-40. So, if you want food or gas you exit I-40 and go a quarter mile to Route 66. Every time I made that exit, I sang to myself “Get your kicks on route sixty-six”—the Rolling Stones version.

I drove about ninety minutes to Flagstaff and filled the tank with thirty-six dollars at a Conoco Phillips station. I did the calculation and was disappointed to learn that my camper was getting just sixteen miles per gallon. However, most of my driving was cruising at eighty miles per hour, so I figured I lost a few miles per gallon with my high speed.

I noticed a Denny’s across the street from the gas stop and since it was about noon, I decided to indulge in my first restaurant meal of the road trip. An open-faced chili steak sandwich was the advertised special at \$6.99. Wi-fi was free but painfully slow. I shot off a few emails and downloaded the S.F. Chronicle to read later. Jody and I walked around a few hotels, then we hit the road about 12:30.

I had been listening to my typical mix of classical and oldies, but as I returned to the highway I put on something different. Back in San Mateo I had downloaded the King James Version of the Old Testament. I drove for two and a half hours listening to Alexander Scourby read Genesis, chapters one to thirty-six. It was

enlightening to hear such a big chunk of scripture in one sitting, from the seven days of creation to the story of Joseph. At chapter thirty-seven the recording began to skip. I had never noticed this blemish because I had never listened to this portion of scripture. I was reminded that the Bible is one book that many people own but few people read.

While listening to these recordings, my mind flashed back to 1970 when I first heard them. My parents owned about fifty 16-RPM vinyl records of the Old Testament which were produced for the American Society of the Blind. My dad played them until they skipped. Now as I was nearing the New Mexico border forty-eight years later I was listening to the same words in the same voice with possibly the same skips. Such are the rhythms of life.

I did pause once in Arizona to observe a marker for the continental divide. I remembered my last view of the same divide. It occurred about a year earlier and a few thousand miles south. As Liz and I passed through the Panama Canal on a cruise ship we steamed under the Millennial Bridge marking the divide. Of course, the continent is much narrower at the isthmus.

A few exits into New Mexico I stopped at a crowded welcome center. After a dog walk and a visit to the facilities, I stretched my tired back on the camper mattress. Jody curled by my side. I read the online version of the Chronicle and worked the puzzle at a leisurely pace. I think I took a nap. When I exited the camper, I was surprised to see mine was the only vehicle parked in the big lot. It was spooky. I wanted to make a parting visit to the restroom but couldn't enter the pavilion. A note tacked to the glass door indicated that all electricity was lost. The entire welcome center

was shut down. We drove on.

After an hour I stopped in Grants, New Mexico, and fueled up. I also bought bottles of Diet Pepsi. In her last email Liz had reminded me to drink lots of liquids. Would she think this six-pack qualified? Then I drove another thirty minutes to this place—the Dancing Eagle RV Park, adjacent to the casino of the same name.

The attendant was in the process of locking the door. I commented, “closing up at six, huh?”

He looked at me funny and said, “It’s seven.”

I couldn’t believe it. I’m usually so careful about changing clocks. Yet, for a day and a half, I was one hour out of sync. That did explain some strange events over the previous thirty-six hours. I moved my watch ahead sixty minutes.

I walked Jody to the casino and I poked my head through the front door. The sight, sound, and smell was off-putting. I locked Jody in the camper and used a voucher to take a trucker-style shower at the Dancing Eagle travel center. As I waited for my number to be called, I browsed shelves of odd trucking merchandise. The shower room was first class, furnished with two towels, shampoo, and soap. As a hobo camper I felt pampered. In the waning sunlight I bought a bag of mixed salad at the Dancing Eagle market. The greens provided an enjoyable dinner.

Earlier in the day I had emailed my sister Eileen a copy of my two-day journal. In an evening response she asked if my itinerary included stops in Bellaire, Ohio, and Whiting, Indiana. No, that

ALONG ROUTE 66

wasn't in the plan, but I reminded myself that my route could be flexible. Should I consider this walk down memory lane? It was now dark and windy and I pulled the sleeping bag up to my chin. It's nearly 11:00 and time to hit the hay. Good night and God bless.



DAY 4

CASA BLANCA, NEW MEXICO TO CHILDRRESS, TEXAS

445 MILES

FOLLOWING THE BLUE BALL

Sunday, April 22, 2018

My eyes didn't open until 6:45 on Sunday morning and then they just stared out the side window into the hazy New Mexico distance. I knew I had a long drive ahead of me so I roused myself shouting to Jody, "We better get going, girl." I stood erect in the peak of the canvas pop-top, lit the propane burner, and brought the kettle to boil. Sipping on my first cup of coffee, I packed inside items like the sleeping bag, blankets, and pillows. After three days wear, I stuffed my dusty black wardrobe into a plastic bag and donned fresh khaki clothes.

I read an email from Liz. She likes the fact that I'm sending her long journal entries from each day of my journey. She said it was like tagging along on my road trip. That was good to hear, an unexpected benefit of my daily writing.

The early cold warmed by 7:15 and I began to break camp. The

FOLLOWING THE BLUE BALL

rear window was covered by the Bear Republic flag of California held in place by mini-magnets. The front windshield was covered by the Stars and Stripes. I removed and folded my patriotic coverings. I stowed the electrical cord, retracted the awning, and packed the collapsible chair. I cleaned and swept away the residue of three western states. The dashboard compass had knocked loose from its Velcro mooring so I had to re-calibrate north. Finally, I grabbed my keys and prepared to leave.

But then I put the keys back into my pocket. I knew I'd be intent on driving miles and miles, so I needed to achieve steps early. An asphalt path skirted the casino road disappearing into the desert horizon. For five thousand steps Jody enjoyed an off-leash scamper, chasing an occasional rabbit under a wire fence. It was 9:00 when we hit the road leaving Dancing Eagle in the dust.

We reached Albuquerque in about an hour. I wasn't fatigued and saw no reason to pause. My mind wandered to an old Bugs Bunny cartoon in which Bugs says, "I knew I should have taken that left turn at Albuquerque". I passed through the city without taking that left turn, driving straight for another ninety minutes. I brunched behind the wheel with a banana and a few handfuls of cheese crackers.

In Santa Rosa I stopped for gas. I popped three hot dogs into the hot box and hit the road. I remembered it was Sunday so I listened to eight podcasts by William Lane Craig on divine revelation. It was engrossing and filled my thoughts all the way to the Texas border at 2:00. Crossing the state line, a road sign read, "Entering central time zone". I was grateful for the reminder.

I stopped at a picnic rest a few miles into Texas. On mustard-laden buns I devoured two of the warmed-up hotdogs giving the third one in small chunks to my faithful canine companion. I received an email from my sister-in-law Barbara asking for my arrival time at Colleyville. I responded “see you tomorrow about 3:00 p.m.” We barreled down I-40 at eighty miles per hour.

About an hour later I found myself entering Amarillo. I was absorbed in theological debate and inattentive to road signs. I continued driving straight east missing my southbound exit. Eventually Google Maps returned me to the right road. I just followed the blue ball down the blue trail. I lost maybe thirty minutes navigating side streets. It made me wonder how I had ever managed cross-country driving in the day of paper road maps.

I was now hurtling southeast down Highway 287. The landscape flattened, now skirted with ponds at every overpass. About an hour down the rural road I filled up with gas at Clarendon. I noted the camper mileage increased to 16.35 miles per gallon and the gas price decreased to \$2.79 per gallon, definitely cheaper in Texas. I was nearing my overnight campground.

I pulled into Childress after 445 miles of Sunday driving. Fair Park turned out to be just a few short blocks off Highway 287. The Park Advisor app spoke of five campsites in this municipal park. As I cruised the grounds I saw lots of buildings, ballparks, and people, but no campsites. Finally, I parked the camper and walked the perimeter. I stumbled onto the camp stalls tucked into an out-of-the-way corner. After re-parking I put three five-dollar bills into an iron slot and was good for the night. My contribution paid for an electric outlet, a parking place, a picnic table, and

FOLLOWING THE BLUE BALL

access to a blue porta-potty. There was still daylight, so I strolled around Park Lake.



The Camper

I brought three packets of Greek flash cards on this road trip. As a 2018 New Year's resolution, I determined to re-learn the New Testament Greek that I had studied at Seminary. As I tell people, "every translation is an interpretation" and I want to know scripture in the original language. So, while walking the trails around Park Lake, I shuffled through one hundred palm-sized vocabulary cards. Jody followed me off leash, scampering off and returning. I prepared a salad for dinner then hunkered in the camper as darkness fell.

I considered Eileen's question. Should I alter my itinerary? Yes! Rather than travel along Lake Erie, I adjusted my return route for stops at Bellaire, Muncie, and Whiting. My calculations showed it would add one hundred miles. I contacted two old college friends via FaceBook and arranged a meeting for May ninth. This felt right. Thank you, sister, for expanding my vision. And thank you, God, for looking after me as I drive the roads of America.

DAY 5

CHILDRESS, TEXAS TO COLLEYVILLE, TEXAS

225 MILES

MY BROTHER'S BENCH

Monday, April 23, 2018

I awoke when the morning sun shone through the front windshield. I figured the camper pointed due east. The night was surprisingly cold. I was grateful for the electric post and for the space heater which chased away the chill. As I stood up I noted my left foot was a tad swollen. I think it was a result of my once broken leg and the 14014 steps taken on the previous day.

I began a hike with Jody around Park Lake. A historical marker indicated that the lake once served as a major watering hole during the huge cattle drives of the 1870s. The Goodnight trail stretched from this point to army forts in Colorado. The crisp April morning sparkled in Childress, Texas. The ex-watering hole was alive with water fowl producing a symphony of splatter and clatter.

I packed, stuffed, folded, and cleaned, then made a travel cup

MY BROTHER'S BENCH

of coffee. I pulled out about 10:00 sufficiently caffeinated for the 230-mile journey ahead of me. After an hour driving down Highway 287, I stopped at a picnic area and exercised using concrete picnic tables for push-up posts. I noted three pick-up trucks that pulled astride public trash containers, each tossing in multiple garbage bags. Where are the Texas Rangers when you need them?

I stopped short of Wichita Falls at McDonalds for an egg McMuffin and coffee. I down loaded the Chronicle and read the news from back home. The Golden State Warriors lost! I wanted something sweet for dessert so I stood again at the counter and said to the young man, "An ice cream cone, please". He looked befuddled and asked me to repeat myself. So, I repeated the words slowly. Then I added, "Sorry, I don't speak Texan very well". He laughed.

Jody and I hit the road and drove Highway 287 for an hour to Bowie where I filled up with gas. Boy, my gas money sure goes farther in these parts. I resumed the trek at 2:15 with my next stop a two-day stay with my sister-in-law.

I thought about my older brother Jack. He met and married Barbara while in the Air Force stationed in Berlin. I was a high-school senior at that time, studying the German language. I was able to share the summer of 1967 with Jack and his new bride. Barbara has been part of my life for the last fifty-one years.

She and Jack migrated from Washington State to Texas in 1978, remote from most family. Over the years, we drifted apart. That changed when Jack lay dying of cancer. I visited him twice in

2008 just before his death. Barbara remarried a few years ago. I don't know. What is the proper term? Is she still my sister-in-law or what?

I got lost in of the confusing overpass system of the megalopolis. I ended up going south instead of east, but I recovered and took side streets following the blue ball down the blue trail. I arrived at Barbara's house just before 4:00. Jay answered the door and Barbara welcomed me in. Jay put their cat in the back room before I put Jody on the floor. I moved my overnight things into the upper guest room, then took a shower.

I rested for a while, then joined Barb and Jay at poolside. We talked for an hour or so about family—mostly about her sons, Alan and Patrick. I rested again until 6:00 then we went for a walk to the nearby park. Barb and I sat on the *Jack Foreman memorial bench* and talked. My older brother had walked along this trail hundreds of times and Barbara installed the park bench with his name engraved in brass. A passerby obliged us with a photo. Then we hurried back to make our dinner appointment.

I placed Jody in her camper-kennel and three of us headed to Alan's house a mile or so away. His wife Stephanie had just gotten off work and she sat next to me in the back seat. Barbara had been bragging about her being an award-winning salesperson at a Mazda dealer. We arrived at Uncle Julio's Fine Mexican Food about 8:00. We chatted and munched the bowls of triangle corn chips dipped in salsa.

My nephew Alan manages the Classic Car dealership near this restaurant and closes down the place. He joined us after 8:30.

MY BROTHER'S BENCH

The five of us had a great time talking and laughing. I showed them old slide pictures from my iPad. We engaged in so much conversation that the waitress had to return to the table three times to take our order. The iron bowel of fajitas lost its sizzle because for every one bite eaten there were ten sentences spoken. We talked until chairs were turned over on the countertops for closing. Much of our conversation centered around Alan's early days and his coming to America from Scotland.

Maybe it's my gift to probe difficult topics and get people talking. I encouraged Barbara to talk about Alan's birth and how she had nurtured him in Berlin. Her spiteful ex-husband came to Berlin from Scotland when Alan was only a year old. He demanded that Baby Alan return with him. Barbara refused but the German police came to her door and said Alan was a British citizen because his dad was British. That was German law in the early 1960s. Barbara was forced to hand over her only child to his father. She concluded with a tear, "I didn't want to, but what could I do?" All this came as a revelation to Alan. Perhaps I helped mother and son bridge some misunderstandings.

It was a great evening and we returned to the house about 10:30. I retrieved Jody from the camper and stayed awake a short time longer. I thank God I was able to reconnect with this corner of my extended family.



DAY 6

COLLEYVILLE, TEXAS

0 MILES

MY FATHER'S CROSS

Tuesday, April 24, 2018

I awoke early in Barb's guestroom bed feeling out of place. The air felt stuffy even with the breeze of a ceiling fan. The mattress felt high. I had to lift Jody up to the blankets. I couldn't figure how to work their coffee maker. I guess I'm a hobo at heart.

My hosts greeted me at 8:15 as I approached the front door. I wanted to take my morning walk while the Texas weather remained cool. I strolled the Tara path for 6000 steps, past the memorial bench, behind houses, and along a stream bed. When I greeted another dog walker with a polite "good morning", she responded with a Texas "howdy". Like Dorothy addressing Toto, I told my little dog, "we're not in California any more".

I rested in my room for a while then joined Barb for a light breakfast of toast and jam. The fajita and chips from the previous evening had dampened my appetite. We talked about the many

MY FATHER'S CROSS

things we have in common. Our two spouses died a few years apart: Jack in 2008 and Kim in 2010. We each remarried about the same time: Barb to Jay in 2014 and me to Liz in 2013. We talked about the challenges of being married to someone so unlike our longtime spouse. I reminisced of Jack; she of Kim.

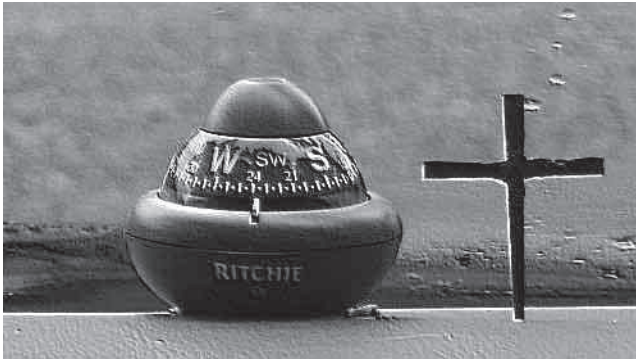
I took a long break in the guest room and read the online paper. Barbara was kind enough to assist with my laundry. I washed and dried two sets of clothes. When I removed my clothing from her new Samsung dryer, it serenaded me with a beeping rendition a Schubert's Trout theme. I wonder how many people could decipher the beeps.

At 2:00 I began a task I had asked Barb to help me with months earlier. She dug out a large jumbled container of individual photographs, photo albums, and framed photos. We put the big box on the tabletop and for a few hours we sorted through them. I was looking for pictures I did not possess, especially of my sons and old ones from my family of origin. After thumbing through maybe 2000 prints, I set a few dozen aside. Then I took pictures of them with my iPad camera. They turned out pretty well. Barbara also gave me one 8mm film roll, three video cassettes, and a few CDs of pictures Jack had scanned. I plan to digitize the lot and return them to her with DVD copies.

As Barbara sorted through boxes, she found a cross given to Jack by my father. The vertical beam was an iron roofing nail. The transit beam was two half nails welded to the center. In my college days I wore such a cross around my neck. This gift from my father had disappeared in my mid-twenties. I stuck this keepsake into my camper dashboard. Now the cross guides the compass.

COAST-TO-COAST-TO-COAST: MY JOURNEY INTO THE LAND OF FAHRVERGNÜGEN

After an afternoon of work, I rested with a Diet Coke, then cleaned and put my camper in order for the continuation of my road trip



in the morning. My stay with my sister-in-law is working out well. Jay and Barb carried on as they normally do, watching TV and reading while I follow my own agenda. It was a perfect host-to-guest relationship. I took Jody for a second walk before we went to dinner at 6:00, leaving the dog inside her camper-kennel in front of the house.

For dinner we ate at Italiani's—my treat. I ordered pizza as did Jay. Barbara ordered pasta with chicken. We talked about RVs, Oregon, sharks, stained glass, and an encyclopedia of abstruse topics. It was interesting to hear fragments of Jay's sixty-seven years on earth.

It's 8:30 now. I just read an email from Liz responding to yesterday's journal entry. Yes, sweetie, the swelling of my foot has passed. Thank the Lord for that. I'm ending Wednesday with some reading. Good night.

DAY 7

COLLEYVILLE, TEXAS TO LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS

381 MILES

APRIL SHOWERS

Wednesday, April 25, 2018

My room was cooler during the night because Jay showed me how to set the air conditioner the evening before. He also schooled me in his fancy coffee maker. I was out the door with a coffee mug by 7:00 a.m. The dark skies confirmed a morning forecast of rain. I walked the Tara trail with a few extra loops, 7000 steps in all. Jody frolicked off leash most of the miles. One hundred Greek cards made the time flash by. The lowering skies sputtered only a sprinkle.

Barbara fixed a breakfast of eggs and toast for the three of us. I told Jay about my next destination, Little Rock Air Force Base. He asked about my time in the Army and I told him of my twenty-year career in Georgia, Missouri, Oregon, Wisconsin, and California. I showed him my green Army ID card which authorized access on to military installations.

I was a bit disappointed. I had wanted to visit both Alan and Stephanie at their local car dealerships, but it was a late-start day for both. Instead, Alan dropped by the house about 9:20. We talked a while around the kitchen table. I gave him a copy of my book to pass on to Stephanie. *Forgive Like a Rwandan: A Memoir of Love, Loss, and Letting Go* is my story of 888 tumultuous days, from the day Kim died in Africa to the day I married Liz in California. The memoir speaks of the “five seasons of Solomon”: joy which tumbled into grief, which settled into sorrow, which brightened into restoration, which burst into celebration.

Just before I stepped into the camper, Jay and Barb posed for my camera by their front door. Since Jack’s death, Barbara has not been related to me by marriage. However, she will always be fully family. Our lives are intertwined with cords of history and affection too stout to be severed.

I drove from Colleyville just before 10:00 a.m. I had to weave my way out of the Dallas-Fort Worth metro area by closely following the blue dot on Google Maps. It seemed like the cityscape extended forever before finally yielding to sagebrush. April showers accompanied most of this urban exit. After sixty minutes of musical accompaniment by the 1970s top forty, I stopped in Cumby for gas. The station was a run-down two-pump affair.

The rain let up, so Jody and I strolled past a few hundred yards of ramshackle roadside. We rambled by a dilapidated motel with broken windows and one kicked-in door. Jody poked her head through the doorway and sniffed. I couldn’t help but wonder what those rooms looked like when they were new and full of life. We returned to the camper and continued east northeast on I-30.

APRIL SHOWERS

We drove for a long stretch toward Texarkana. As we approached the state line I decided to make a side trip. I took note of a town in Arkansas just north of the Red River called “Foreman”. I thought it would be cool for a Foreman to visit Foreman. Distance-wise it wasn’t too far out of the way, although it did add thirty minutes to the driving day.

Now I have a selfie with “Welcome to Foreman, Arkansas” over my left shoulder. But who is the hometown boy, Tracy Lawrence, mentioned on the welcome sign? I drove further down a back road and stopped at the town of Ashdown. After filling the tank, I located a Wells Fargo bank and loaded up on twenty-dollar bills. My initial load of twenty twenties had disappeared, mostly down my gas tank.

I drew near to Hope, Arkansas, when it started to rain in torrents. I passed the big brown sign that announced “visit the home town of President William Jefferson Clinton”. At the 57-mile marker, I stopped at a rest area. I walked Jody through light raindrops then laid out flat on the mattress resting my back. I finally read the morning Chronicle. For a late lunch I finished off two pieces of pizza left over from Italiani’s which had been warming in my hot box. I pulled out of the rest stop in a persistent drizzle.

And it rained continually all the way to Little Rock and continues to rain. I arrived at Little Rock Air Force Base about 6:00. The gate guard checked my ID, saluted, and directed me to make one turn left and a second turn left into the Family Camp. I parked in space 21, but didn’t unload anything because of the hard rain. I’m glad I brought my over-sized umbrella. I used its protection as I walked through puddles. I felt the irony of walking through

showers to take a shower.

The code was 1-4-2-5 to gain entrance. I showered, returned to the camper, then prepared a gourmet supper of ramen noodles with hot-dog chunks. I rested a bit and worked my Chronicle puzzle. I handwrite the cryptoquip onto lined paper, then solve it. It has become one of my daily rituals.

I've been writing my travelogue for just over one hour. I know because I began tapping into my iPad just as I heard the 10:00 *taps* played over a base loudspeaker. "Day is done; Gone the sun; from the lakes, from the hills, from the sky". It was awesome. This is indeed a military installation. And now I end the day with the sound of raindrops plunking on the camper top and thanks in my heart for God's protection.



DAY 8

LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS TO LEBANON, TENNESSE

372 MILES

DELAYS OF TWO SORT

Thursday, April 26, 2018

I heard the rain tapping on my camper roof most of the night. The roof top sat under tall trees, so I guessed some of the louder plunks were water fallen from branches. As I was getting dressed at 6:30 I heard the bugle call *reveille*. “It’s time to get up. It’s time to get up in the morning!” I left the camper and went for a hike in the Fam Camp area. The rain had let up, but the ground was muddy. Jody and I followed a circular nature trail over a few thousand steps. Small markers identified a dozen species of trees.

I lingered a bit, packed a few items, and left the park about 8:30. I filled up with gas at the base station—a good deal—and asked for directions to the fitness center. Just as I approached the gym, I heard over base speakers “an exercise” put in place. I had to wait outside a few minutes until an all-clear was announced.

It was good to lift weights again and in such a fabulous facility!

The military puts a premium on keeping its members fit. I tried to replicate my SMAC workout but most of the exercise machines were unfamiliar. I guess I was there an hour on a dozen or so machines and arm weights. After a good shower and change of clothes, I walked Jody a bit more, stepping around shallow pools of water. I finally left LRAFB about 10:00. It was an excellent overnight stay.

I drove for about an hour and stopped at Brinkley, Arkansas, for a rest. I pulled into a Kroger's grocery store, wanting to replenish supplies. Here's what I bought: a two-bar soap pack, three bananas, a cellophane salad pack American mix, a pack of baby carrots, one link of Polish kielbasa, a quart of apple juice, a small coffee creamer, a bag of Doritos, and a pack of Keebler coconut cookies. I rested a while in the store lot and read the Chronicle. Then I pulled back on to I-40.

I drove about thirty minutes listening to *God in the Dock* by C.S. Lewis. I was engrossed. Then I was stopped dead. Serious roadwork caused a sudden back-up in all three traffic lanes. The camper remained motionless for about an hour. I kicked off my shoes, turned off the engine, and tried to make the best of a bad situation. I actually saw the driver in a car ahead of me banging his forehead with his palm. The poor guy must have had somewhere to go. I had all day to get to my destination.

It was about 2:00 when we started to move again. I crossed the Mississippi River at 2:49 and flashed to Liz a one-word text, "Tennessee!" The highway bypassed Memphis and I didn't slow down.

DELAYS OF TWO SORT

It sprinkled on and off for a few hours requiring my right forefinger to continually flick the wipers on and off. I stopped for fuel and drink at Jackson. Forty dollars filled the gas tank and \$1.29 the coffee cup. I walked Jody around a few noisy trucking lots.

Back on the road, I was making good time until just before Nashville. Then I was stopped again. I figured not road construction this time, but delay of a different sort. I could tell because four emergency vehicles rushed by on the left shoulder. Again, there was an hour-long stop. I sat disgruntled and motionless on the highway. Eventually I crept past the mangled remains of a car several feet off the roadway. I asked God to forgive my impatience. Someone had a far worse day than I.

I had to stay focused driving through Nashville. I took all the road turns that said “Knoxville” and didn’t get lost. Now I was racing against the sun. The KOA was thirty miles past Nashville. As I exited the last turnoff, the setting sun reflected red in my rear-view mirror. I’d say the race to sunset was a draw.

The KOA office in Lebanon, Tennessee, was closed, but I had a pre-paid campsite reservation. An envelope inscribed with my name sat in a rack near the door, indicating site 30. I backed into my site, turned off the engine, and the day’s journey finally ended.

I hurried to pop the top, extend the awning, put out the chair, and kindle a fire before twilight turned to darkness. I prepared my dinner by lantern light: one can of sauerkraut, one-half cut up potato, and one-half of the kielbasa, all brought to a simmer. It was my first fireside meal of the road trip. Since it

COAST-TO-COAST-TO-COAST: MY JOURNEY INTO THE LAND OF FAHRVERGNÜGEN

was pitch dark, I settled in the mobile man cave. With a dog, a warm beverage, classical keyboard, candlelight, incense, cozy space, and cool temperature, I experienced a lovely end to a long day.



DAY 9

LEBANON, TENNESSEE TO WYTHEVILLE, VIRGINIA

335 MILES

WINDING NORTH

Friday, April 27, 2018

I awoke about 7:00 a.m. The grass was wet with dew but a bright sun was drying the landscape. I heated the kettle on the inside flame and prepared coffee. I planned a leisurely morning at this KOA in central Tennessee. I was a bit lazy because I prepared my coffee with creamer and chocolate in an open-topped camping mug, rather than my usual sipper cup. Just as I was finishing the online Chronicle, I reached for the cup and spilled the warm liquid mess all over the bedsheets and mattress. I hopped out of the camper and announced to Jody, “Today will be our laundry day”.

I wiped down the army blanket then hung it in the rising sun. I propped the mattress against a tree facing sunshine and wiped down the interior cabin. Then I gathered one set of dirty clothes and towels, along with the splattered bed sheets, and stuffed them all into a pillow case. I grabbed a tide pod and a handful of

quarters. With Jody happy in the camper, I carried my make-shift laundry bag a short distance to the campground washers. It was two dollars for a twenty-five-minute wash. I returned to the camp site and walked Jody past dozens of RVs.

J-dog was straining at the leash. Somebody called out, “Are you walking that dog or is that dog walking you?”

“Both,” I laughed.

After twenty-five minutes, I transferred the laundry into the dryer: two dollars for forty-five minutes. During this interlude, I began stowing my stuff. About 9:30 I retrieved my dried clothes and bedding. I reinstalled the mattress with the laundered cover, blankets, and sheets, put the clean cases on the pillows, and put my fresh clothes in the proper bags.

There was a vast open field just across the KOA road. I set Jody free and she darted onto the green field. She loved it, sprinting in circles, then away from me, then toward me. Like her human companion, sometimes this canine needs to romp off-leash. After several minutes of frenzy, she hopped through the camper’s sliding door and lapped from her water bowl. We were on the road at 10:15.

I had a bit of a scare. After ten minutes on the Interstate and traveling at seventy miles per hour, I heard a bang and a rush of wind. Jody yelped. My pop-top had loosened! Luckily there is a secondary safety belt that secures the roof. I pulled over and with cars whizzing by, firmly latched the pop-top in place.

WINDING NORTH

I drove for ninety minutes along I-40 to Crooksville where I filled the gas tank. My mileage is now up to eighteen miles per gallon. I loaded my sipper cup with service-station coffee, walked Jody around two neighboring motels, then continued the road trip east. We encountered a half hour delay due to an accident. Again, I passed a car in a ditch, but this one wasn't so bad. While stopped in traffic I noticed my iPad registered a later hour. I adjusted my wristwatch and dash clock to the Eastern Time Zone.

I was engrossed with C.S. Lewis and two hours rushed by. Just past Knoxville, I pulled into a rest stop and walked with the dog. I did a series of stretches, then lay flat in the bed of the camper. I probably dozed, because the next hour passed really fast. I suspect the unsuspected nap is the sweetest. I got back on the road and continued east.

After thirty minutes the road diverged. I-40 turned south toward the Smokey Mountains, but I took Highway 81 north. My eastward trek had ended. It was time to pivot northward to Boston. After ninety minutes of steady driving, I crossed the state line into Virginia. At the first exit I pulled into a Kroger gas station in Bristol. I got fifty cents returned on two twenties.

Originally, I was going to stop at Hungry Mother State Park, but I liked the last KOA, so I stopped for the night at the KOA in Wytheville. The office was still open. I paid thirty-five dollars for my electrified tent site, filled my propane tank for seven dollars, then parked. This site is outstanding. It sits by itself off road, on a grassy knoll, far removed from the giant RVs that cramp most KOAs. A snatch of daylight remained, so I walked

COAST-TO-COAST-TO-COAST: MY JOURNEY INTO THE LAND OF FAHRVERGNÜGEN

Jody around the grounds, then made a small campfire. For dinner I ate leftover sauerkraut and the last two hot dogs. I'm getting up early tomorrow, so it's lights out and I thank God for getting me this far.



DAY 10

WYTHEVILLE, VIRGINIA TO FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA

334 MILES

MY TWO SONS

Saturday, April 28, 2018

At 3:00 this morning I was cold. The thermometer read forty-eight. Since I was electrified, I switched on the space heater. The alarm sounded at 5:00 jarring me from a dream. I set the water to boil while it was still dark. In a few minutes I was enjoying coffee as dawn shown through the camper windows.

A chill was still in the air so I wore my jacket as I packed the camper for departure. At 6:10 I left my campsite and parked by the shower room. The area was deserted except for a few deer that munched grass in the early morning haze. After washing up, I walked a thousand steps with Jody out the front gate and a thousand steps back again. I pulled out of the Wytheville KOA about 7:15.

We proceeded up Highway 81. I was headed for Appomattox Court House, the only planned tourist site I included during this

coast-to-coast-to-coast road trip. The driver's seat that had been a classroom bench converted into a church pew. I put on the New Testament and listened to the Gospel of Matthew. After ninety minutes of scripture, I turned off 81 to cut eastward. In the small town of Blue Ridge, I filled my gas tank and coffee mug. Jody walked me up a side street.

As I strode past rural Virginia houses, I considered the words I had just heard in Matthew 22:29. Jesus responds to a Pharisee's question by saying, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God." I considered, *maybe this is the source of all error... and of all truth*. I prayed, "Lord help me to truly know your scripture and help me to believe in your power to fulfil it."

Back on secondary roads, I didn't get to the civil war site until 10:00. It took twenty-seven of the twenty-eight Matthew chapters to reach Appomattox. I was disappointed at what I saw. This was the actual site of the surrender of Robert E. Lee to Ulysses S. Grant in 1865. However, the actual courthouse had burned to the ground in 1892 and the property lay abandoned for years. The brochures were oblique but inferred that Virginians, as ex-confederates, had little interest in commemorating the Southern defeat. I guess that makes sense. I snapped a few pictures, walked the grounds and left.

Nearby there was a Civil War Museum. I paid ten dollars to get in and spent an hour looking at exhibits. I bought a tee shirt of Grant and Lee shaking hands with the inscription, "let there be peace."

It was nearly noon. I snacked on peanuts and carrots, then headed

MY TWO SONS

to Fairfax for a rendezvous with my two sons, Zachary and Simon Peter. I sent a text telling them to expect me at 4:00. Simon responded that he was on route from New York City to northern Virginia aboard an express bus. I drove backroads for two hours pulling off to the road side just once for a stretch. I tried to listen to the Gospel of Mark, but the stories sounded too much like Matthew, so I switched to Mozart String Quintets.

After a few hours I filled the tank in Culpepper with forty dollars. I was running late, so I rushed on. Finally, I arrived at Burke Lake State Park about 3:30. I passed through a picnic area, then a golf course, to reach the camp grounds. I parked in tent site number one for thirty-one dollars.

Zachary and Ruth lived nearby in Fairfax. They arrived to greet me, bringing my new granddaughter, Genevieve Azalie-Marie—*Zelie* for short. I thought we would picnic here but Zachary was hosting an Elegant Dance event, so I left Jody sequestered in the camper with food, water, and ventilation, and went with the three.

Zachary updated me on his situation. He and Ruth had been married just two years. She worked as a nurse practitioner at a local clinic. Zachary held down two jobs: one as a ballroom dance instructor and a second as an instructor for Power Score test preparation. His life was busy, especially since *Zelie* came into the picture nine months earlier. They talked about moving to Pittsburgh where Ruth might get a faculty position.

Things were falling into place. Simon texted that he had just arrived at the Fairfax train terminal and had hailed an Uber. In a major coincidence, he arrived at Zach's place at the same moment

we did. I saw him exit the car. The three of us embraced. It was so good to be with my two offspring. We sat in the apartment for a while, snapping pictures and watching Zelig scoot on the carpet. Zachary drove to his dance event while Simon and I lingered at the apartment. Then we walked next door to the big mall, leaving Ruth and Zelig to rest.

Simon and I each had a six-inch sandwich at Subway. Then we sat at Peet's coffee. We talked the whole time. A lot of the talk was about Simon's mom and how she would have relished a reunion like this. Whenever I get together with my sons, Kim always smiles as a hovering presence.

We also talked about Simon's overstuffed life. About six years earlier, his wife—Dilia—divorced him, took their two children, and moved from New York City to Pembroke Pines, Florida. Simon shows true commitment to Lorenzo (age nine) and Gia (age seven). His routine is to spend nine days in Manhattan working for an ad agency as art director, then travel to Florida to spend every other weekend with his children. I continue to marvel at such an exhibition of love and fatherly devotion.

At 7:10 Simon ordered an Uber for our trip to Zach's dance studio. As we stepped into the car, he received a FaceTime video call from Florida. I experienced a virtual visit from my two grandchildren. The Uber driver seemed amused by our animated conversation that lasted the duration of the car ride.

Simon and I only stayed a few minutes, just long enough to observe Zachary emcee the showcase event. He is so good at the computers, the sound-mixers, and the patter of conversation.

MY TWO SONS

Zach had parked both of his cars—the Mustang and the Toyota—at the studio.

Simon drove me to my campsite in the Toyota. I showed him my camper with top popped and awning extended. After four hours of confinement, Jody leapt tail wagging through the side panel door. Simon loved it, taking iPhone video to show his kids. My number two son then drove to his hotel for the night.

After Simon left, I ate a small salad and prepared for the night. It's nearly 11:00 and I can hear rain beginning to tap the fiberglass roof. I'm glad I'm all buttoned up for the night. It's time to sleep now. I had a long day and expect another such tomorrow. God is so good to me! How can I not but be grateful to Him?



DAY 11

FAIRFAX, VIRGINIA TO TRENTON, NEW JERSEY

212 MILES

ALONG THE POTOMAC

Sunday, April 29, 2018

Site one at Burke Lake State Park was a great spot to camp, but my stay was short. I left the coziness of my camper about 7:00 a.m. It was cool among the tents and trees. Folks were already walking in bunches on this bright Sunday morning. I boiled some coffee and took Jody for a walk. Soon it was 8:30 and time to depart.

I arrived at Saint Leo the Great Catholic Church in about twenty minutes and texted Zach, “walking the dog/meet you in the parking lot” which, as the church bells pealed, turned into “meet you at the front door” then progressed into “see you inside the door”. Just in time, we sat in the narthex behind plate glass, a perfect location for a foursome which included a bundle of ceaseless wiggle. I held little Zelig on my lap as the mass continued. She squirmed with an occasional squeal. How great to hold my

ALONG THE POTOMAC

nine-month-old granddaughter! As a retired Baptist preacher, I enjoyed the traditional liturgy, colorful vestments, and whiff of incense. The homily was taken from Acts, First John, and the Gospel of John. Ruth displayed a great singing voice.

After church we headed to lunch at Panera bread. Simon met us there driving the Toyota. He told me about the previous late night and how Zachary came to his hotel room and the two brothers talked until 2:00 a.m. catching up with life. I always appreciate when my two sons deepen their relationship. Zelig was sleepy in her high chair and we returned to the house. As she napped, I walked the neighborhood with my sons. We remained in the house a while until Zelig was awake again.

Early in the planning process we had intended to stay overnight in the Shenandoah valley—I was going to camp there—but no one wanted to drive the eighty miles round trip to Front Royal. Rather, we would convoy the camper and Toyota to Great Falls Park along the Potomac.

The parkland was part of the National Park Service so my senior pass got me free through the front gate. Zach was impressed, but I said, “Hey, that just means I’m old.” I was disconcerted as we parked the vehicles. My iPad wasn’t charging! Simon chided my obvious discomfort, but there was reason to panic. What if my iPad died? My entire life was compacted into that small tablet: my journal, maps, spreadsheets, communication, and recreation. This wonder of technology had made itself indispensable.

We walked along a trail that followed the river course. I didn’t realize the Potomac had such impressive falls. We took pictures

of people and sights as we talked and walked to viewpoints one, two, and three. Little Zelig was passed from person to person. It was glorious to have this part of my family together.

After a look around the visitor's center, we headed to nearby Dante Ristorante. I relished a dish of spaghetti and meatballs. I chose not to speak much, eavesdropping on the table conversation among Zachary, Ruth, and Simon. One can learn more by listening than by speaking.

Too soon it was time to go our separate ways. In the parking lot we gave each other a group hug. Zachary headed south with Ruth and Zelig. Simon headed north in the camper with me and Jody. I agreed to drive him to Trenton where he could catch a transit train into Manhattan. He checked the schedule on line. The 7:45 was too much of a challenge, so we aimed for the 8:45. We encountered tolls and bumpy roads as we passed into Maryland, then Delaware, then Pennsylvania. Darkness fell.

South of Philadelphia we left the freeway for gas. Simon spotted a Wawa station and we stopped. After the fill up, Simon drove the camper. He explained to me about Kanye West and Donald Trump. He played Kanye's hip-hop and then contrasted it with Eminem. Sometimes I feel like a dinosaur. So much of pop culture is passing me by.

We crossed into New Jersey and arrived at the train depot. I tagged along with him a short time. It cost seventeen dollars for his ride to Penn Station. We parted and I headed to this Walmart parking lot eighteen miles east.

ALONG THE POTOMAC

I found a suitable place to park for the night, then walked into Walmart and bought a new power cord for my iPad. The cord must have been the problem because now my tablet accepted the charge. I closed the shades and got to sleep about 10:30. I am grateful to God that I have the health and ability to successfully carry out this road trip, now at eleven days and 3323 miles.



DAY 12

TRENTON, NEW JERSEY TO MANAHAWKIN, NEW JERSEY

67 MILES

A NIGHT WITH A NEPHEW

Monday, April 30, 2018

I was restless during the night, not one hundred percent certain my stealth parking was legal in this Walmart lot. But there was no problem. The outside temperature was cold, about forty-five degrees, as the sky lightened. I cranked up the engine because I knew the auxiliary battery was low. The engine heater soon warmed the cabin. Boiling coffee water also helped. About 7:30 I left the camper and walked to the Walmart to use its facilities. This parking lot was super-sized. I circled it for one walk with Jody, then for a second walk reading vocabulary cards. Those two walks amounted to 5500 steps.

I had less than a hundred miles to cover this Monday, so I slowed my pace. I read the Chronicle relaxing under warm blankets. I cleaned the camper and straightened out my paraphernalia. I am always surprised at the amount of trash I toss out after a thorough

sweeping. I left about 10:30. It was only a forty-minute drive to Manasquan Reservoir, a boating and picnic spot. I allotted myself a five-hour bivouac at the lakeshore before moving on to see David Foreman and his family.

I was ready for lunch. I had planned to eat at a picnic table, but it was a cold fifty degrees with gales blowing off the lake. As I prepared a meal under my canvas top, the van shook with the wind. I used one-half of the potato, one-half of the onion, one-half of the kielbasa, and three eggs. The eclectic meal was the first of the road trip I prepared in my frying pan. I finished up these odds and ends and threw out some aging left overs. I'm trying to get my cupboard bare as I approach Boston.

I walked Jody down a dusty foot path through a grove of saplings. I was thinking about my dependable camper. How many Volkswagens have I owned in my lifetime? I began to innumerate them on my fingers. The first was a 1961 powder blue Bug. My dad bought that for me to drive from Longview, Washington, back to college in Indiana. I crashed it on the road to my brother's wedding.

I held up a second finger. Then there was the brown VW Rabbit. That's the one Kim drove to work in Eugene, Oregon, back in 1980. I liked the brand and bought a ten-year-old 412 station wagon. I took that yellow beauty on a road trip with my two boys to D.C. and back. What a great memory. We had to sell both of those VWs when we moved to Korea in 1984.

My forth finger represented the '76 diesel Rabbit I acquired in Wisconsin. I only drove that car a few months. The diesel engine

didn't fare well in the freezing climate. In my late forties, I paid \$6000 for a cherry red Bug convertible. It was a midlife-crisis car. After a year, someone smacked me broadside and totaled it out.

After Kim died in 2010, I bought the Westfalia camper. I traveled throughout California, up to Oregon, and east to Texas in my '87 Vanagon. However, it was too tall for the garage in San Mateo, so I exchanged it for a diesel Passat wagon with 80,000 miles. Unfortunately, the transmission of that camping car smoked out while on a road trip to Yellowstone National Park. Holding up four fingers on each hand, I returned to the lakeside. I slid open the side door and took a nap in Volkswagen number eight.

My bivouac break passed quickly. I got back on the road about 3:30, took the Garden State Parkway south for forty miles, and arrived in Manahawkin at 4:25, pulling into the driveway just ahead of Melissa and two kids.

Melissa told me that David was on duty and she didn't know when he would return that evening. It might be late. My nephew David has a top-secret clearance at McGuire Air Force Base and doesn't divulge his work activities.

I put my overnight things in Xian's room where I was staying. Then I showered and began some laundry. I spent an hour showing camper gadgets to Xian age eight and Kyden age five. They're really good kids. They helped me walk Jody to the far corner and back. There was a young dog and an old one in the house, so Jody experienced canine company. Melissa prepared hamburgers with potato salad for dinner. That was a notch above my standard fare. We made a group call to my brother, Grandpa Frank, then

A NIGHT WITH A NEPHEW

Melissa read the kids some books.

I think Melissa is a fastidious housekeeper. No one else had ever buttoned and folded my camping shirt before returning it to me. I took a few pictures, and now I've been waiting for David's arrival. Is this the end of my day? I'm getting up extra early tomorrow to beat the New York City traffic. So, good night?

David finally came home at 9:00. I walked quietly downstairs and we three sat on the couch for a while and talked about old times and new times. David thinks he will deploy somewhere in the sand box in a few months and may be away for half a year. Melissa is talking of migrating back to Florida to stay with her parents during that time.

Military life can be tough on couples! Back when I was in officer candidate school, I remember my first sergeant telling me, "If the army had wanted you to have a wife, we would have issued you one in your duffle bag."

I was glad I was able to connect with this military family, even though briefly. It's now 11:00 and I plan to leave here in about five hours, so good night.



DAY 13

MANAHAWKIN, NEW JERSEY TO MARSHFIELD

MASSACHUSETTS

345 MILES

URBAN LANDSCAPE

Tuesday, May 1, 2018

Today started with “radar”. That was the wake-up sound of my 4:00 a.m. iPad alarm. I wanted to get up extra early in order to bypass New York City with minimal slowdown—and the Big Apple was two hours away. I strode quietly so as not to disturb David, Melissa, Xian, or Kyden. I had minimum stuff in the house, so I dashed out the door. Fortunately, the door did not lock behind me and I returned to retrieve my frozen water bottle which I use to augment my camper fridge. I pulled into a Wawa gas station on the Garden State Parkway at 4:40. I joked with the counter girl because I stumbled at making change for my coffee at this pre-dawn hour.

The first stretch of driving was very long, about three hours. I began in darkness heading north. Soon there was a glimmer of

daylight over my right shoulder, and day dawned along the turnpike. Traffic congestion increased as the minutes ticked by and I inched closer to the greatest American metropolis. I managed to stay on the blue dot pretty well, but it was a challenge.

I may be getting a toll charge from the New Jersey authorities. I remembered to bring dollar bills, but I wasn't prepared to toss quarters into a coin bin. Sorry Jersey. As I sped and crept past New York City, I finished the New Jersey Turnpike. I didn't possess an entrance ticket, so the guy said I had to pay the max—\$17.30. Such is life.

In New York, I crossed the George Washington Bridge—eight dollars—then passed through the Bronx. It seems like I went twenty miles without seeing the sky: through tunnels, under bridges, and through high walls. I passed through the last reaches of New York State and then I crossed into Connecticut. I stopped at the Welcome Center in Stamford. A big mug of coffee and hours of driving compelled me to dash for the men's room.

I was pleased to be north of the monster metro by 8:00 a.m. Now it was time to make up for my lack of sleep. I pulled the blinds and managed to snooze in the cool morning for about two hours. I ate a few Dunkin Donuts from the service area accompanied by Jody. It was not a suitable place for dog walking—too much congestion, both people and traffic.

As I was about to board my Eurovan, a man approached and asked if he could take pictures of Jody. He snapped several, saying he wanted to give his wife her “cute doggie fix.” After filling up with gas, I left the lot about 11:00. An hour later I pulled into

the Middleton rest stop in mid-Connecticut just to walk the dog. I was in no hurry. It was May first and I gave Jody her first-of-month Trifexis pill, a combination against fleas and heartworm.

I then crossed into Massachusetts about 2:00. Just inside the state I stopped at a roadside place designated “picnic area”. It’s an odd connotation. That term seems to mean “rest stop without toilets”. The sidewalks reeked of urine. It was no picnic for me.

Back on the road I was getting tired of my music. I couldn’t find a suitable radio station, so I made use of my KQED app to listen to Bay Area radio. The times seem to be changing, or maybe it’s just me. As I listened for one full hour to Public Broadcasting, all I seemed to hear were issues of gender and climate. Is that all there is in the post-modern world? I grew weary with the non-news and returned to the grandeur of Mozart.

I wound through the Massachusetts roads and back roads and filled up with gas for the third time that day. As I got closer to my seaside destination, the roads grew smaller and slower. About 4:30 I drove down a tiny gravel trail onto a spit of land. A sign said “no outlet”. Was I in the right place? Then I saw a cyclone gate with the words “military installation”. I had arrived.

The Fourth Cliff military installation was a ramshackle collection of vintage buildings, some in disrepair and some being renovated as cabins for military guests. I signed in just at closing time—fifteen dollars— and nearly left my military ID at the desk. My RV pavement was uneven and I used orange levelers under the rear two tires.

URBAN LANDSCAPE

This installation appeared weather beaten but with spectacular ocean views. I walked and prepared a meal. Next, I scrubbed Jody in anticipation of meeting Liz the next day. It was cool so after her bath I set her next to the electric heater. Jody loved it.

Then Liz called using FaceTime. She had arrived in Boston and was settled in her hotel room. The grand plan was coming together. She was as happy to view the dog as she was to talk with me. In phase two of my adventure, I look forward to spending the next several days with the lovely Liz. She is a blessing to me. It's been a long day, time to disconnect, turn off, and turn in.



DAY 14

MARSHFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS TO CHELSEA,
MASSACHUSETTS

175 MILES

REUNION IN CHELSEA

Wednesday, May 2, 2018

This morning the sun surprised me. At 5:00 bright beams burst through the windshield—But that made sense. The calendar had advanced a day, I had travelled two hundred miles north, and one hundred miles east. I got out of the camper at 5:45 and boiled coffee water. It seemed warmer, already fifty-seven degrees. A sea-scented wind whistled through trees.

Phase One of my road trip was about to end. Phase two, time with Liz, was about to begin. I thought of my wife and how she had entered my life. Thirteen months after Kim's death, I joined e-harmony and soon was dating Liz—eight years my younger and a successful businesswoman. I considered the three C's: compatibility, character, and chemistry. She fit the bill. As I told my family and friends, "I wasn't looking to replace a wife. I wanted to

REUNION IN CHELSEA

reclaim a life.” Our courtship stretched to fifteen months and we married on New Year’s Day 2013. Jody and I moved into her San Mateo home. The road hasn’t always been smooth for the two of us, but we have learned to handle our differences and our marriage has thrived.

I backed the camper off the levelers, wound up the electric cord, and tidied up the camper for Lizzie. Then I pulled out of Fourth Cliff Rec Area about 6:45. Driving slowly through the small towns, I bought coffee at a Seven-Eleven before heading north on Highway 3. I texted Liz, “See you in a few hours.”

I figured I had plenty of time to get to TownePlace Marriott Suites by 9:00. Google Maps indicated it was only thirty-eight miles from my campsite. But soon traffic slowed to a crawl. It was 7:30, then 8:00. Through tunnels, over bridges, traffic, more traffic! Then I took a wrong turn and headed west instead of north. Ugh! It was 8:30 and I made another wrong turn. It was touch and go, but I crossed a bridge into Chelsea and made it to Lizzie’s hotel by 8:50. I parked the camper and left Jody inside.

— **PHASE ONE ENDS — TRAVEL FROM SAN MATEO TO BOSTON —**

AND

— **PHASE TWO BEGINS — TOUR OF NEW ENGLAND —**

I crept up on Liz as she was sitting in the hotel lobby. It was great to see her genuine joy and feel her firm embrace. I barely made it to the buffet breakfast which ended at 9:00. We sat at a table and shared our stories. She wanted to see her girl, Jody, wondering if the dog would recognize her. And sure enough, Jody leapt at her

legs. We took the dog for a walk down side streets of Chelsea. Then we left about 10:15 for Fairhaven to visit the grave of Liz's father. She did the navigation and I drove the sixty-four miles south. The traffic was congested as we began but I soon drove at the limit. We arrived just before noon.

We drove past an iron gate through a large stone archway and parked across from the caretaker's house. We wanted to ask where William Becker's gravestone was located. Just then I glanced a few yards from my feet and there it was. We took photos and shared thoughts.

The stone was engraved for two, for William Becker and Sybil Becker, his wife of thirty-eight years. Liz's father and step-mother had lived in California for two decades, but after retirement they moved to North Carolina. I got to know them during periodic visits to Asheville. In April of 2017, I helped officiate at Bill's memorial service.

Then we walked the grounds with Jody in tow. The Atlantic Ocean was nearby and we watched fishing boats navigate the Acushnet River. Liz talked a while with Mr. Reid, the caretaker. He also chatted with me about my VW Eurovan, saying he was in the market for such a vehicle. Liz had fulfilled her filial obligation and it was time to leave the cemetery.

On the drive home, we stopped for lunch at a service area where I purchased gas. I ate a Burger King chicken sandwich with the last of my baby carrots. We arrived back at our hotel about 2:30. It was an incredibly hot day, up to ninety-five degrees, such a contrast from the trip thus far. And I had supposed I would find

REUNION IN CHELSEA

the hottest days in Dixie.

We rested, then took Jody for a walk. I put on my red aqua-fitness trunks and exercised in the hotel pool. I wanted Jody to share our room, but it cost an extra one-hundred dollars for one night, so I prepared for Jody to spend the night in the camper-kennel. I parked in the farthest corner providing my dog with shade, ventilation, and water. A cooling breeze blew through the camper screens.

When I share a hotel room with Liz, we agree to turn off the lights at 8:00 so I made my last welfare check on the dog at 7:50, then called it a day. Or so I thought.

At 10:30 Liz received a text message and phone call which she ignored. Then the room phone rang. Finally, she responded. It was the front desk. Someone had complained that a dog was barking in my camper. The hotel attendant said we could keep Jody in the room at no cost. And so, we did. Liz loved it. The dog romped and nuzzled. Lights went out again at 11:00. This time for good. That dog is smarter than I am. I couldn't figure how to get her into the room both free and legally, but Jody managed to accomplish it.



DAY 15

CHELSEA, MASSACHUSETTS TO KITTERY, MAINE

71 MILES

EMERGENCY ROOM VISIT

Thursday, May 3, 2018

Since I went to bed so early on Wednesday, I got up at 6:00 sharp on Thursday morning. I walked to the hotel lobby and prepared a cup of hotel coffee for Liz. I left a second time, got my own drink, and went for a long walk with J-dog on leash. I noted that the neighborhood included an interesting population of Puerto Ricans and Arabs. I ate a light hotel breakfast, then popped into the gym, speaking to Liz while she was lifting weights. Next, I swam laps in the little hotel pool.

We rested in the room with legal Jody hanging out with us. I began carrying bags into the camper. Marriott landscape contractors had flung grass debris all over my vehicle and I asked them to blow it off. With a final cup of hotel coffee, we left for Peabody at exactly 11:00 a.m. Our intention was to meet with Liz's Aunt Dix and enjoy a lunch together. Liz was looking forward to a meal of lobster.

EMERGENCY ROOM VISIT

Liz navigated the distance of twenty miles. We carried out our typical back-and-forth banter. Exasperated, I finally replied to Liz, “It’s a miracle I was able to drive all the way from California to Massachusetts without your verbal assistance.”

We found Brooksby Village and Liz phoned her aunt for a rendezvous. I parked in a guest space within this huge retirement community and Liz went into the lobby to locate her aunt. I talked with Dix for just a few minutes beside my camper. She’s a bubbly eighty-nine years old. It was unseasonably hot—in the mid-nineties. Liz returned to the building with Dix to drop off a gift from her mom and to view her apartment. I was supposed to wait a short time until they drove up in Dix’s car.

And I waited. I had some steps to accomplish so I paced the grounds, never straying far from the lobby. I couldn’t figure what might account for such tardiness. Then an unknown woman called my name. She introduced herself as Dix’s niece, Jane. She told me Dix had taken a tumble while getting into her car and an ambulance was on its way to transport her to the hospital. Liz would accompany Dix in the ambulance. I was dumbfounded.

I followed Jane’s blue Mazda to the Salem hospital and parked. I stayed with the dog in the oppressive heat, while Jane went in to find her aunt. After a few minutes I saw Liz emerge through the emergency doors. I gave her a big hug. She felt guilty that she had allowed Dix to fall flat on her face. As it turned out there was nothing broken and no stitches, just a big goose egg on her forehead and an aching arm.

Since we had missed our luncheon appointment, we ate in the

hospital cafeteria. I had a slice of pizza and a portion of onion rings. Rather than the lobster meal that she had looked forward to, Liz settled for a hummus wrap. Then we went to room eleven and spoke a few words with Dix. She had a bandage over her forehead and patches on her eyes. Her speech was quiet, but coherent. She would be okay. We left to continue our journey. It was such an unfortunate accident.

We headed north toward Kittery, Maine, to visit Sybil—Liz’s dad’s wife. About halfway there, along highway 95, we paused at the New Hampshire welcome center. We crossed the Piscataqua River into Maine, then turned at exit four. We got to Sybil’s townhouse about 4:30. It’s a two-story, newer, big place along a rural gravel road. I stayed only ten minutes, then excused myself to check into my hotel—the Coachman Inn—which was just a few minutes away.

Jody and I checked into room 44 for one-hundred-three dollars. I rested and organized the camper. Then I took a cool shower to rinse away the heat. I returned to Sybil’s at 6:00. We sat on sofas and talked, then moved to the dinner table for a meal of chicken and salad. Sybil’s sister Sara joined us at 8:00 with a birthday cake for Sybil. After I finished cake and coffee, I left for my hotel room. Jody couldn’t stay in Sybil’s house because the rented home had a no-dog rule. I was tired and soon went to bed.

Today marks the halfway point of this cross-country road trip: fourteen days down and fourteen to go—3982 miles thus far. God, thank you for your grace every mile of the way. Your love endures forever.

DAY 16

KITTERY, MAINE TO SACO, MAINE

49 MILES

A TOUR OF MAINE

Friday, May 4, 2018

I spent the night at the Coachman Inn Hotel. The early sun brightening the room motivated me to get out of bed. I wasn't due to reunite with Liz until 7:45, so I had a few hours to slowly launch my day. I repacked and sorted the camper, then took Jody for a walk to the nearby Kittery Outlet Mall. I still had time on my hands, so I rested, fell asleep, and barely made it to Sybil's place on time.

Sybil's townhouse shares a driveway with neighbors. The man next door spoke to me as he was loading his car for work. Noting my bumper sticker, he said, "I work in advertising and I can remember in the early 1990s when VW was running those ads. The tag line was 'Fahrvergnügen: It's what makes a car a Volkswagen'. One of the best campaigns ever."

Sybil had scheduled three events for the day. The first began at

8:15. It was her regular two-mile walk with several lady friends. We three hooked up with Sara there. This group walked along the rugged Maine shoreline. Both Sybil and Sara told us about the recent big storm that devastated that coastal area. We walked out on a pier where the ladies celebrated birthdays for two of the group, Sybil included. We sat for a while on weather-worn wooden benches admiring the waves, wind, and granite outcroppings. That first event amounted to an hour of walking.

As a second event, we visited a few local sites. First was Fort McClary. We walked stony grounds and looked down the barrels of iron cannons. The fort was a relic of three wars: Revolutionary, 1812, and Civil. Next, we stopped by the Congregational church where Sybil and Sara sing in the choir. This structure dated back to the 1730s. The church was a large wooden box without running water inside. We asked about the heavy earth-moving equipment excavating near the front door. The ancient church was constructing a modern handicap ramp.

For our third event, we returned to Sybil's house where I picked up my camper. I followed Sybil's car to Sara's house. We lingered for ten minutes as Sara showed us around her place, then we were off. I took the lead with Sara in the shotgun seat as tour director. She pointed out landmarks as we traveled the roads. Our first stop was the iconic Nubble Lighthouse. I said, "if you spun me around the U.S.A., dropped me at this location, I would open my eyes and recognize this as the state of Maine". Of course, I snapped several pictures.

We drove north to Ogunquit admiring the Maine coast and ate lunch at the Oarweed Restaurant. We sat at a window booth

A TOUR OF MAINE



The Coast of Maine

overlooking the sea. I ordered a chicken wrap while the three ladies enjoyed seafood. After the meal we walked along the Marginal Way, a trail skirting the wave-washed coast. We experienced great weather with picturesque views. Finally, it was time to part company. I headed north with Jody, while the three women returned south.

I made two stops before arriving at the Saco KOA. I filled up with premium gas at a Mobil station along Highway 1. Then I stopped at a grocery store and bought twenty dollars of supplies. I arrived here about 4:00. This KOA was forty-six dollars for the night. Site 2A is resplendent with pine trees to shade and peeper frogs to serenade. This campground only opened on May first so it looked rough along the edges. Some of the winter damage had yet to be repaired. Two guys on motorcycles pulled into the

adjoining site. They were noisy at first, but they quieted down. I talked with them a bit.

They're trying to pass through all forty-eight states this summer. Somehow the topic arose about traveling with my dog rather than my wife. I told them my favorite illustration concerning this topic. "Let's do a thought experiment. Suppose you have two identical cars sitting side by side. In the trunk of the first car you place your dog and slam the door shut. In the trunk of the second, you repeat this experiment with your wife. Now, when you come back to the cars a few hours later and open both trunk doors, which of the two will be happier to greet you?" They grinned, seeming to appreciate my brand of humor.

Just before dark, I ate a dinner of Raman noodles with Sybil's chicken pieces and some of her leftover salad. A slice of birthday cake furnished dessert. I made a small fire, walked the grounds, and scrubbed in a hot shower. I completed the Chronicle cryptoquiz at the fireside by headlamp. I really enjoy this style of cowboy camping. And now it's 9:46. I may stay up a little bit longer, but that was pretty much my Friday.



DAY 17

SACO, MAINE TO BEDFORD HILLS, NEW YORK

300 MILES

OUTLAW DOG

Saturday, May 5, 2018

Today was a day of transition. I reached the apex of my journey—Saco, Maine—at 4031 miles. Now I begin my long return to San Mateo, California. The night was boisterous. I guessed rain was falling on the camper top, but it was pine twigs dropping in strong wind gusts. I didn't stay long at the KOA. I stowed all the gear, walked with Jody a few thousand steps, and washed in a cold basin of water. For breakfast, I ate a bowl of Raisin Bran cereal. I pulled out just after 8:00 a.m.

I got to Sybil's house in Kittery just before 9:00. Liz opened the door, looked at her watch, and said "perfect". That's my wife for sure. Sybil gave me a parcel of framed wrapped pictures to carry home. After parting hugs, Liz and I were off to Peabody. When we arrived at Brooksby Village, Dix greeted us in the lobby. Her face is really banged up—a large bump on the forehead, bruised

nose, and sunglasses to cover raccoon eyes. But her attitude remained as positive as ever.

She insisted on showing us her apartment on the third floor. It was overstuffed for a single elderly person. One could guess she had downsized from a large house into this senior living center. Her husband Ed had passed away a few weeks earlier and his presence haunted the furnishings, paintings, and other brick-a-brack. We left about 10:30 and headed for Boston. Liz was hungry so we stopped at a Starbucks for her sandwich.

We were back at TownePlace Suites in a short time. There turned out to be a second episode with our outlaw dog. I wanted to keep Jody in her camper-kennel for the few hours we intended to tour Boston, but Bridget at the front desk insisted we keep her in our guest room—number 327. She said the hotel would waive the one-hundred-dollar fee a second time. I preferred Jody stay in the camper, but we deferred and the dog remained in the room. Then Liz and I were off for our adventure.

The hotel driver dropped us off at Boston Logan Airport. There we paid \$2.30 each for a train ride into the downtown. We got off at the aquarium stop and began to wander. I had never toured Boston and Liz functioned as my guide as we strolled around the city center. I took pictures of buildings, statuary, and graveyards. This Saturday was warm and the streets were crammed with people. There was a taco festival with scores of young folks standing in long lines.

We were relaxing at a coffee shop when Liz received a call from Bridget saying the dog fee was not waived. We owed one-hundred

OUTLAW DOG

dollars. That put a damper on the remainder of our touring. We walked the streets more, but in the direction of the return train. When we arrived at the airport bus station we experienced a delay. The Chelsea bridge was drawn for river traffic and the driver sat in wait for thirty minutes.

Now came the time to leave Liz for my return road trip. I conversed with the hotel manager. He held his arms crossed as I held Jody in mine. My single point was this: “I would have preferred to leave the dog in the camper, but Bridget told us the dog charge was waived. Is this hotel as good as its word?” The manager scowled, grunted, and acquiesced—I supposed. I’m not one-hundred percent sure the one-hundred dollars was waived, so Liz will keep an eye on the hotel bill.

In spite of her frustration, our parting was positive. Liz gave both her husband and step-dog a goodbye hug. I plunked Jody into the shotgun seat, shifted the camper into drive, and both of us were again off leash, looking forward to twelve more days of *fahrvergnügen*.

— **PHASE TWO ENDS — TOUR OF NEW ENGLAND —**

AND

— **PHASE THREE BEGINS — TRAVEL FROM BOSTON TO SAN MATEO —**

My plan was to spend the night near Springfield at Westover Air Force Base. I drove along I-90 and stopped for gas at Framingham, then a little later to eat a sandwich in a service area parking lot. I gave two admiring bystanders a look-through of my camper. I arrived at the front gate of the Air Force base at 6:25. The gate

COAST-TO-COAST-TO-COAST: MY JOURNEY INTO THE LAND OF FAHRVERGNÜGEN

was locked with a sign that read: “gate closes at six o’clock”. I was disappointed but had to drive on.

I drove south on I-91 to Hartford, then west on I-84. I had hoped to stay at a truck stop, but it was designated for tractor-trailers only. I drove on. Near Danbury I approached a roadside stop, but it was closed with barriers blocking the entrance ramp. I crossed into New York State, then headed south. I didn’t like driving at night in an unfamiliar area in a steady drizzle, but I trudged on. Finally, I found this rest stop in Bedford, New York. I parked for the night between two large semis in the truck area. After tacking up my outside flags and shuttering my inside blinds, I fell asleep in my traveling bed, exhausted.



DAY 18

BEDFORD HILLS, NEW YORK TO JONESTOWN,
PENNSYLVANIA

191 MILES

FIELD OF DANDELIONS

Sunday, May 6, 2018

Parking between two large semis provided a shield against streetlight and traffic sound. I slept well, although I did hear some of the monster trucks rumble in and out. It rained throughout the night, but if the rain can't get you, it makes you feel snug. I knew I had a shorter drive this day, so I didn't rush. I walked Jody in a slight drizzle then washed up a little in the men's room. I left the lot about 8:00 a.m.

I continued south on Highway 284 then headed east on 287 across the Hudson River through Nyack. I then drove south again through New Jersey. I decided to pull off the Interstate and paused at Bernardsville for gas. This small hamlet appeared to be a good spot to while away a few hours so I cruised a couple of blocks further to dally in a train station parking lot. The place was

vacant on this drizzly Sunday morning.

There were restaurants around, but I wanted to do some cooking in the camper. I chopped up one-half potato, one-half onion, one-half sausage, and mixed with three eggs. It was a hobo brunch. Jody and I peered through the sliding door at the light rain, munching food as trains and pedestrians passed by. I walked across the street to a Wells Fargo ATM and deposited my \$3600 rent check that Liz brought to me. I also drew out fifteen twenty-dollar bills to feed my gas-guzzling tank. I talked with Zachary on FaceTime. As always, my son spoke but the camera focused on my granddaughter.

Then I was back on the road again. I continued down Highway 202, then turned west on 78. The entire day was overcast with occasional sprinkles. For my Sunday services, I listened to a few podcasts by the Christian apologist, Ravi Zacharias.

I crossed into Pennsylvania at Easton and stopped at Kutztown for gas. The small station displayed home-made shoofly pies, a specialty in this part of the country. I bought a six-inch pie but didn't know what to make of it. The aluminum tin held a flakey pie crust filled with gooey molasses. It seemed to be a pecan pie without the pecans.

There was a large field of dandelions across from the gas station. I unfastened Jody from her leash and watched as she frolicked in moist grass. I remembered my first sight of this wonder pooch. Simon had suggested a dog might provide solace in my widowhood. I conceded that point and went online to seek out a canine companion. I met with the caretakers of a rescue dog named Jody

FIELD OF DANDELIONS

at a park in Oakland. This two-year-old bundle of energy romped in circles provoking Canadian geese into flight. I appreciated her pluck, but was uncertain. I asked God to provide a sign. Then I noted a black spot on her white forehead pointed on one end like a teardrop. That was all the sign I needed. Jody Teardrop Foreman has been a part of my life since.

My dog and I resumed our road trip and about 4:30 I pulled into this Jonestown KOA. Again, the charge was forty-six dollars for one night. I am pleased with my surroundings. I'm encamped right along Swatara Creek. My awning extends over the picnic table which abuts the water. I was tired and after my set up rested on the mattress. A gentle rain tapped at my window. Perhaps my superpower is cat-napping.

As evening fell, I walked Jody around the KOA perimeter. I kindled a fire in the iron pit then sipped a few mugs of coffee seated in my collapsible chair. If there's anything better than gazing into a campfire, it's gazing into a campfire which borders a flowing stream.

I have a theory concerning the visual attraction of flames and flows. Both of these natural phenomena exhibit an aspect of the everlasting. Fire and water are in continual flux, yet appear to be in stasis. Looking into a fire or sitting on a stream bank seems to tap a longing in my soul for the eternal adventure that lies around my final bend.

My simple dinner was a single can of Chef Boyardee ravioli. Without human company, I wasn't embarrassed to consume my fire-heated meal straight from the tin, sparing myself from the

washing of a pot and a plate.

I showered, shaved, and returned to gaze into the embers. On this windless evening the smoke was following me, so I doused the glow and retreated to the camper. I read an email from Liz. She had arrived home safely. And now it's after ten. I thank God for His grace toward me and for my wife's safe return.



DAY 19

JONESTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA TO BELMONT, OHIO

294 MILES

MY BETHLEHEM

Monday, May 7, 2018

I awoke at the Jonestown KOA about 6:00 a.m. I had turned on the electric heater a few hours earlier to raise the inside temperature from fifty to sixty-two. The rain from the day before had passed. Bright beams of sunshine peeked through the tree line. I boiled a cup of coffee and savored the ozone freshness. I walked with Jody two circuits around the large camping area while crunching an apple plucked a few days earlier from the Marriott Hotel.

Things got muddy during the recent rains so I decided to wash my clothes: two camping ensembles and one bedsheet. I unloaded my pillowcase full of laundry into the washer and put eight quarters into the slots. During the thirty-minute washing process, I began to pack, clean, and stow. I yanked loose one of the overhead handles for securing the pop top. Always something! I'll

have to find a screw that will repair it.

And then a crisis struck. When I lifted the laundry from the camp washer, I found my Volkswagen key on the bottom tub. I must have left it in a pocket. As I retrieved it I remembered that the fob served as the door opener. The electronics got soaked! I quickly tried the fob to open and close the car doors. yes-yes-NO. How could I be so careless? So stupid? I had just spent a hundred dollars getting all four doors to operate correctly. I repositioned the laundry into the dryer and went for a walk to decide what to do about the soaked car fob.

As I finished packing the laundered clothes, I determined to take the key fob to the nearest Volkswagen dealer. I was fortunate. There was one along my flight path in Harrisburg. I drove the forty-five minutes to Sutcliff VW and parked among a hundred new Volkswagens. I took the fob into the parts department and explained the situation. I asked for a new battery. The service woman took the battered key fob apart. Water gushed out. She cleaned the circuit board and dried it as best she could. I saw her puff on it a few times.

When she brought it back to me she said, “The light goes on when you push the button. Maybe it will work. Try it before you pay.”

I thanked her. “Maybe your magic breath did the trick.” She laughed. I rushed to the camper and the fob did open and close the door. I returned and thanked her again. The bill was \$5.35, more grace than my foolishness deserved.

MY BETHLEHEM

Since I was off the highway, I drove down a side street to a Walmart. I picked up salad, undershorts, and metal screws. Is there any random assortment of items you can't buy at one of these superstores? I fixed the loose pull handle, then resumed my disrupted journey.

After crossing the Susquehanna River, I rode onto Highway 76—the Pennsylvania Turnpike—and received my toll ticket. This highway is fascinating, passing through several mountain tunnels over the next hundred miles. I was listening to Bach keyboard concertos, lectures on the nature of God, and some solid gold from the sixties.

At one point, to relieve the monotony of driving, I attempted to recite all forty-five presidents of the United States beginning with, “George Washington, 1788 to 1796”. Some of this was challenging and I glossed over a few years just before and after the presidency of Abraham Lincoln. Eventually I worked my way to “Donald Trump, 2016 to present”.

I then stopped at a large turnpike service center. I googled U.S. presidents. The only one I totally muffed was “Rutherford B. Hayes, 1876 to 1880.” Then I stretched and read the online Chronicle.

Getting in and out of the camper, I noticed that my fob no longer worked. Push-push-push. Nothing-nothing-nothing. No light. Since I observed how the VW woman had fixed the fob, I thought I'd give it a try. I pried and banged and got it apart. I wiped the pieces and pushed them back into place. But now the fob light blinked on and off continually! The doors randomly

locked and unlocked like they were bewitched.

I was already much delayed and decided to deal with this problem in the evening. I stepped out the sliding door and walked around to the driver's door. That's when the fob—which still sat inside the camper—decided to lock the doors all by itself. Sure enough. I was on the outside. Jody was on the inside with all windows up and all doors locked. Yikes!

One's forgetfulness is not beyond redemption if one makes provision for it. In this case, I had remembered to tape a second key to the undercarriage of the camper. I had to lie flat on my back on the pavement and struggle to loosen the spare key from sturdy duct tape. But I did it! The spare key did the trick and I was on the road again. If Jody had known the gravity of the situation, she would not have remained curled in a ball. Being a dog, the whole crisis transpired without her notice.

I raced on, turning southwest, away from Pittsburgh, exiting the turnpike. My toll was \$22.45. I passed through Washington, Pennsylvania, and then filled up with gas. I zipped through the narrow panhandle of West Virginia with its winding roads. I skirted Wheeling, then quickly crossed over the Ohio River into my native state. I drove south a dozen miles and at about 5:00 arrived at my "Bethlehem".

Although Bellaire, Ohio, is written on my birth certificate, I remained an Ohioan for a scant year. In this sense, Bellaire is to me what Bethlehem was to Jesus; a place of nativity, but not a hometown.

MY BETHLEHEM

I was the newborn of five children when my parents packed us into the family Hudson, left the town of my birth, and re-settled in Whiting, Indiana. My memories of Bellaire consist of childhood car trips, a grandpa who cussed in German, and a vague recall of perfumed aunts, uniformed uncles, and mischievous cousins.

My ancestral roots in Ohio date back to 1912 when both sets of grandparents emigrated from Eastern Europe. Interestingly, both couples were named Joseph and Mary. My father's father was a coal miner in the Silesian sector of Austria-Hungary. My mother's father mined coal in the Polish salient of Russia. After they passed through Ellis Island, both families gravitated to the coal mines of eastern Ohio.

My father was born in Bellaire in 1915 and my mother in Wheeling a year later. John and Genevieve were high school sweethearts and married in 1934. My father followed the steps of his own father, down into the coal mine. Then he rose through the coal-mining ranks—odd to think my dad was promoted to Foreman Foreman.

A family followed: Jeanne in 1935, Charlotte in 1937, Jack in 1943, Eileen in 1945, and me in 1949. The Stanley mine shut down in 1950 and dad found work at Standard Oil of Indiana in 1951. That same year Frank entered the world as my little brother, the only Hoosier among five Buckeyes.

I had asked my three sisters where I should visit in Bellaire. None of their acquaintance was still alive. My sister Jeanne suggested I visit the Imperial Glass factory where my mom worked in 1932,

just out of high school. I located that on my Google Maps and the blue ball led the way.

I parked my camper on a desolate side street and walked with Jody. Boy! My native town had fallen onto hard times. Storefronts were shuttered, parking meters broken, rust and disrepair rampant. I wanted to take photos with my iPad. The screen was locked and required a password. I tapped in my secret six-digit code — 1-2-2-4-4-9. That was the Christmas eve I was born in Bellaire. How ironic to input those particular numbers in this particular place. I began to walk down empty streets.

The only location that appeared well kept was the town square with statuary of the Civil War and the Great War. Bellaire High School, next to the square, looked impressive. As I walked across the well-tended lawn, I wondered if my mom and dad had once walked hand-in-hand in the exact space where I was now stepping. Did they gaze at the same statues eighty-eight years earlier?

I studied the bronze doughboy standing with upraised arm, celebrating the armistice of 1918. That event took place one hundred years ago. What seemed incredible was this: My high school graduation lay half way between that distant date and this current date. I considered it in another way. A high school graduate of 2018 would look back on 1968 as I once looked back on Armistice Day. Could this be real? If I saw me in 1968 as I exist now, my birth year would have been 1900. My mind still seems young. Could this body really be that old?

I was sad, nostalgic, and philosophic about the nature of time and place. My birthplace of Bellaire, Ohio, remained as remote from

me as the far side of the moon. Yet I felt its strange tug of lunar gravity.

I found the Imperial Glass Museum a wander away, but it had closed at 3:00. I didn't know where else to visit, and so I continued my journey. I drove backstreets toward Barkcamp State Park. I spotted a Dollar Store and stopped to pick up doggie poop bags. I couldn't find them. The girl behind the register said they didn't have them in stock. "What?" I said, "don't people in Ohio pick up dog poop?"

She laughed, "Maybe not. That's why it's so green around here".

By the time I entered Barkcamp State Park, the office had closed. I selected a choice site, circled back to the entrance, and wrote out a check for twenty-four dollars, putting it into the after-hours slot. A man in an RV behind me introduced himself as a visitor from Germany. He and his wife were amused to see "Fahrvergnügen" emblazoned on my rear bumper.

After settling into my site, I popped the top on the camper, extended the awning, started a campfire, and was soon enjoying Dollar Store hamburger helper. I walked with Jody a bit but soon darkness encouraged me onto my mobile mattress. I thank God for His continuing protection and grace. I also thank Him for providing me with the perfect traveling companion: Jody Teardrop Foreman.



DAY 20

BELMONT, OHIO TO NEW CASTLE, INDIANA

252 MILES

THE EISENHOWER HIGHWAY

Tuesday, May 8, 2018

This morning I stirred about 6:00, but the dream was good so I managed to extend it to nearly 7:00. The air was crisp at Barkcamp. The area behind my campsite was marshy and abounded with dead branches and twigs. I ignited the dry wood and put the kettle over the fire pit. Soon I had hot water for my morning coffee. I went for two 2000 step walks. The first was with Jody, mostly off leash, and with my sipper cup of coffee. The sun was out and the birds were chirping. As I walked down a deserted gravel road, I sang the song of Uncle Remus in *Song of the South*, “Zip-A-Dee-Doo-Dah, Zip-A-Dee-A.” I could sing along, “My, oh, my, what a wonderful day with plenty of sunshine heading my way.”

Then I put Jody in the camper and grabbed one set of cards. I flipped through the hundred verbs and nouns over the next

THE EISENHOWER HIGHWAY

2000 steps. I glanced up once and noticed something that read “Barkcamp showers”. I hadn’t realized the park provided such facilities.

After this walk, I packed, cleaned, and stowed. My Volkswagen key fob seemed to be working just fine. Click-open. Click-close. Maybe the moisture had evaporated from the circuit board. I re-taped the spare key to the underside of the camper.

Then I drove the few hundred yards to the showers. The water never heated up, but what’s a fellow to do when he’s naked and committed? It was quick, but I managed to wash the important parts.

About 10:30, I resumed my road trip reconnecting with I-70. In contrast to Pennsylvania toll roads, this road in Ohio was a “free-way”. I drove about an hour and I stopped off at a Loves service station just short of Zanesville. The price of gas seemed to be dropping since leaving the eastern seaboard.

I decided to listen to an Audible book. Before leaving on this road trip, I had downloaded a series of thirty half-hour lectures by the Great Courses called *The Decisive Battles of World History*. The talks turned out to be surprisingly well presented and Ohio zoomed by. The first battle was a chariot encounter between Egyptians and Hittites.

I paused at an Ohio rest stop which was clean and well kept. I prepared a salami sandwich on a hotdog bun, then stretched out on my mattress to read the online newspaper. It was muggy, in the mid-eighties, so I propped open the hatchback and side

panel. A few motorists gawked at this traveling hobo munching a sandwich, nestled with a dog.

I considered my self-designation as a hobo. I remembered my dad once explaining the term to me. “I wasn’t a bum” he said. “A bum is someone who is able to work but refuses. I wasn’t a tramp because a tramp is someone who is unable to work. I was a hobo because I was looking for work, but couldn’t find it.”

After this rest and reminisce, I resumed the road trip. I listened to two world battles each between Greeks and Persians. I figured that each battle is equivalent to forty miles of driving.

At a second rest stop, I walked Jody down groomed trails. I paused to study a plaque by the walkway. This portion of Interstate is designated “The Dwight D. Eisenhower Highway” in honor of the president most responsible for its construction. I mused about Ike, my first president of memory. In 1960 I learned for the first time Americans hold elections to choose their presidents. This came as a shock to this fifth-grader because I figured Eisenhower had been president forever. I guess to a ten-year old, eight years is the equivalent of forever.

I resumed driving and after two more battles I arrived at the state line. Engrossing lectures surely made miles zoom by. I will always associate my transit of Ohio with decisive battles of world history.

When I crossed into Indiana, I saw acres of cornfields. Coincidence? I pulled up to the entry station of Summit Lake State Park at 5:30. It’s located thirty-three minutes south of Ball State University, where I’m meeting with old friends on Wednesday. The entrance

THE EISENHOWER HIGHWAY

fee was seven dollars and a charge to camp was twenty-four. As soon as I backed into campsite 96, Liz phoned. I called back with FaceTime to show her Jody scampering along the nearby shoreline.

I did my usual evening activities: Set up camp, build a fire, and take a long walk. The park is nearly empty and I picked the best site. My high ground is surrounded on three sides by water. Sportsman passed in small boats, their private laughter floating across still waters. Geese continued to honk into the evening, but it's not unpleasant to hear.

Since I consumed a big meal in the daytime, I popped a pan of popcorn for dinner. I ate by the handful as I sat in my folding chair. I dropped un-popped kernels into the flame, my thoughts meandering as the corn sizzled and fizzed. The sun set to my back and stars rose to shine over the lake. And now it's time to douse the fire, end this day, and look forward to the next.



DAY 21

NEW CASTLE, INDIANA TO HAMMOND, INDIANA

233 MILES

OLD FRIENDS—BOOK ENDS

Wednesday, May 9, 2018

Today has been a long day: Muncie in the morning, Whiting in the evening, driving in between.

Just as I was stepping out of the camper, I noticed a spectacular sunrise over Summit Lake. I grabbed my camera and took my favorite photo thus far. The rouge of sunrise filtered through willow trees, deflected off the lake, then reflected from the camper rear window. The word *fahrvergnügen* appeared just below the mirrored image. The photo was time-stamped 5:44 a.m.

I slowly began to break camp. There always appears to be so little to do, yet it always takes so long to accomplish this so little. I stowed the heater and electric line. I packed clothes and blankets and window flags. I prepared and drank two cups of coffee.

The sun was in my eyes by the time I left the campsite at 7:15. I

stopped at the camp shower room. The water eventually warmed and I was able to take a decent shower and change clothes. I got lost, misdirected, and disoriented driving the thirty minutes to Ball State. It had been forty-six years since I had driven these roads. Finally, I parked in a public garage about 8:00 a.m.

I had an hour before my meeting with Mark and Denny so I walked the campus with Jody. I took a picture at every street corner. Because graduation had occurred five days earlier, the roads and walkways were deserted. I discerned three groups of places. Those that were familiar or unchanged, like the statue of Benny and the Teachers College; those that were brand new, like the bell tower of 2002 and the Dave Letterman center; and those that were this weird combination of recognizable but transformed, perhaps like the faces of the two old friends I was about to meet.

I walked all the way down to the LaFollette complex, where my freshman dorm was located. The area was cordoned off. I later learned the massive set of residence halls was being demolished. I remembered it clearly. Fifty years earlier when I entered BSU, construction cranes of an earlier generation were erecting those same dormitories.

I walked back to the centerpiece of campus, the iconic statue of a winged angel surrounded by columns dedicated to the “beneficence of the Ball Family”. Mark Orewiler was waiting for me. He was no longer twenty-one but sixty-seven. I recognized his eyes set in a wizened face. We talked and reminisced for a few minutes, then Denny Harvey walked up, another oldster like us. We sat on a nearby bench talking about our four years together, 1968 to 1972. I showed pictures of my family from the iPad.

Mark expressed gratitude to my sisters for leading him to the Lord when he accompanied me to Longview in 1971. He had remained a faithful follower of Christ and wondered where life would have led without this transformation. Mark was a widower who had recently retired as a bread-truck driver.

The event etched in his memory concerning me was this: Every time I returned to my freshman dorm from Whiting I brought along a roll of salami. I don't remember doing that, but it certainly rings true!

Denny had retired from a series of manufacturing jobs near Fort Wayne. He was the proud father of a daughter and son. We reminisced about our cave adventures of 1972. It was from Denny I learned both the word and the activity of spelunking. He smiled as I recalled him rescuing a companion who found herself stuck in a vertical limestone shaft.

When our rear ends grew sore from the wooden bench, we ambled to my camper and I showed them around my traveling cubby-home. I left Jody behind. They smiled when I termed her my "van guard". We relocated to the Tally Ho student center, sitting in comfortable chairs at the inside Starbucks. Mark, Denny, and I reminisced more as we each drained a cup of coffee.

It was a first-time experience for me to talk in such depth with two men I knew so well after a two-generation hiatus. I said to them, "I knew your twenty-one-year-old face and now your sixty-seven-year-old face. I trust we'll meet each other again sometime, someplace. I wonder what face you'll be showing to me then."

OLD FRIENDS-BOOK ENDS

The two walked me back to my camper and I gave them each one copy of my memoir. Denny surprised me by saying he already owned one which he had purchased online. He got a second copy. And then I pulled away, the two of my old buddies locked in conversation. It was an immensely satisfying encounter—for each of us, I think. I sang to myself the old song by Simon and Garfunkel: “Old Friends, sat on the park bench like bookends.” That was the three of us sitting shoulder-to-shoulder-to-shoulder on a wooden bench near Beneficence; Mark and Denny like bookends with me as the tome in the middle.

I decided to drive past the Christian Student Foundation on Riverside Avenue. I had lived there for a short time after I had transformed from a “hippy freak” to a “Jesus freak”. I had intended to poke in my head and look around a bit. But I stayed for an hour, first talking to a youth pastor, then to the current head Pastor. I even talked by phone to Gary Edwards who was campus minister when I was a Jesus People in 1971. I told Gary he had a lasting and positive influence on my life. I bought two CSF-logged tee shirts and began my journey to Whiting.

I pumped gas outside of town, then drove secondary roads on a northwest trajectory. I was in no rush, stopping in a rest area and at a Walmart right along the roadway. I cruised through towns with familiar names like Kokomo, Logansport, and Valparaiso. Again, I filled with gas, surprised I had driven 170 miles. Perhaps it was the decisive battles lectures that continued to make the driving pass quickly.

I made a wrong turn on Highway 41 and drove through East Chicago entering Whiting through the oil refineries. If Bellaire,

Ohio, counted as my Bethlehem—the town of my nativity, then Whiting would be my Nazareth—the town of my home.

As I entered this hometown, my watch read 6:30. I wanted to visit some old haunts before dark. Wolf Lake Park was first on my list. I couldn't believe the upgrade. As I walked Jody, the grounds looked gentrified. When I was a kid there was a parking lot, a crappy beach, and a rundown change room. Now there were walking paths, play grounds, and quality accoutrements. However, I was disappointed to see the water was now closed to swimmers.

The number-two fire station was just across the street. I remember my dad taking me there for the grand opening. I remember the gift for kids was a cardboard and mirrored periscope. But what was the year? I walked around the building and read the plaque. It was dedicated in 1961.

Beyond the fire station was Clark Field. Oodles of memories flooded my brain, mostly of football and track. I stepped onto the oval running track remembering the laurels I garnered back in my 1968 heyday. I closed my eyes and stretched each leg on the cinders, imagining my high school senior year. I walked outside the chain-link fence to the rear of the field and was surprised to see how nice the shoreline trail looked alongside George Lake. This pathway used to be an industrial wasteland of slag and pollution.

I drove north to my old house, 1750 Lake Avenue. It was recognizable but in a sorry state. I talked to a woman as she entered the back apartment. She said her mother lived there. Across the alleyway, a Spanish-speaking man took my photo in front of the Baptist Church which had been subdivided into rental space.



The Old House

I walked around the block, reciting the names of the people who had once lived in the houses. In my day, the occupants were ninety percent Polish and Slovak. Now most of the locals appeared to be Latino. The streets seemed so different, so familiar, so far from my current estate, so close to the estate of my heart.

The hour was late, but the sun was still high. Then it struck me. I'm on Central Time now, not Eastern! I enjoyed the gift of one bonus hour to continue down memory lane. And so, I strolled down Stanton Avenue to Clark School. It looked so sooty. I guess fifty years of grime will do that. Plus, half of the grand window panes were bricked up.

Because the school was named after the Indiana pioneer George Rogers Clark, there is an engraved concrete panel depicting the

battle of Vincennes along the outside steps. Somehow, I knew the opposite panel depicted Fort Kaskaskia. I don't remember remembering. I must have absorbed the word after viewing it for thirteen and one-half school years. I hadn't uttered the word "Kaskaskia" in half a century.

Finally, I saved my appetite for a visit to White Castle Hamburgers located at Indianapolis Boulevard and 119th Street. They tasted okay, but they didn't measure up to memory. Did I change, or did the sliders?

My bonus hour was up and I headed for the Walmart parking lot next to the shoreline casinos. I planned to stealth camp there, but a sign was posted reading "no overnight parking for trucks". I may have passed the night unmolested, but I checked my Park Advisor app and drove down Highway 41 to a service station on 134th that permitted night-time parking.

And I'm here now at midnight. It's not the classiest place, parked between a pile of concrete rubble and a U-Haul truck, but I don't think I'll be disturbed as I get a few hours of shut-eye. Tomorrow will proceed at a less hectic pace, I pray.



DAY 22

HAMMOND, INDIANA TO IOWA CITY, IOWA

281 MILES

SAME BRICKS—DIFFERENT EYES

Thursday, May 10, 2018

The night was difficult. The ninety-degree yesterday was slow to cool down, so the camper interior remained uncomfortably warm. Plus, semi-trucks moved all night and street lights bled through the covered windows. I tossed and turned until about 2:00 a.m. and slept until about 7:00. With daylight I didn't linger long. I was able to use the service station toilet and buy a cup of coffee. Then I scooted down the road a few miles and parked in the Wolf Lake lot. I napped a bit longer, cool and cocooned. I walked Jody down the shoreline on a foot path. She's a simple dog, content to chase after geese.

I gazed at an island about one hundred feet from shore. I remembered exploring that bit of land in a row boat with my best childhood friend, Jimmy Francis. As discoverers, we christened the place "F.F. Island" in our honor. Jim said it was "Francis-Foreman

Island”. I claimed it was “Foreman-Francis Island.” It’s odd to think that best friend of mine grew up to marry my elder sister Charlotte.

Next, I drove down 119th Street until it crossed the railroad tracks and passed into the Whiting Waterfront. This area has been massively upgraded since I was a local. I drove to the center of the lakeshore promenade and parked. I got out a few quarters for the meter, but it required five dollars from my credit card. The place looks like the palace of Versailles relocated into the Calumet region. There were fountains, monuments, flowerbeds, benches, statuary, and gazebos. My sense of place was knocked senseless.

I walked and took pictures. The stone boulders breaking the lake waves looked familiar, as did the distant gas flares from the BP oil refinery. A whiff of corn odor from the Amazo factory reminded me I had returned to my hometown. A sign by the shoreline read “don’t climb on the rocks”. So sad, as a kid that was always my favorite activity.

As I gazed upon the hills in Whiting Park, my mind wandered to my high-school sweetheart, Arlene. She was the girl who broke my heart back in 1970. We used to romp in those hills. On these footpaths we made innocent vows of eternal devotion. The last I heard, Arlene still lived in the neighborhood. I purposely did not seek her out. I refuse to remember her married name. Even after forty-eight years, those ancient wounds remained tender.

As I pondered the reason for this hurt, the word “forgiveness” sprang to mind. I preached to myself: *Chris, you have never forgiven Arlene for what she did to you. You have never released her.*

And so, then and there, I repeatedly spoke the words, “Arlene, I forgive you.” I released her from her broken promises. *Yes, Chris, it’s a fact. Arlene did forsake you, but it’s also a fact you have forgiven her for that.* My old flame continued to flicker throughout the day, but at each flick, I forgave. I pray that as time passes, forgiveness will douse the embers.

In a melancholy mood I wandered to the west end of the park and discovered Whihala Beach. It seems to me that’s where Bobby Beach existed in the 1950s, a place where impassioned teenagers once parked to view the “submarine races.” The sand looked great, just waiting for hordes of summer pleasure seekers. The manicured beach, combed and tended, seemed to stretch a mile, almost to the distant casinos.

When I was in college, we referred to this northwest tip of Indiana with its polluting oil refineries and giant steel mills as the “armpit of the state.” I’m happy to report that Whiting has upgraded and now markets itself as the “refined community.”

I stopped to gaze at the old Church of Christ on Central Avenue. Within those walls I worshipped with my family for eighteen years of Sundays. I observed the old Walker house on Sheridan Avenue where my sister Charlotte lived for several years. Memories of her four children flooded my mind. The bricks were the same but my eyes were different. I drove back to Calumet Avenue and steered the camper south. Nostalgia was now in my rear-view mirror.

I was off to meet Rob and Cody Winkler at Calvary Church in Naperville, Illinois. Rob the father and Cody his son had traveled with me on two mission trips to Rwanda. Cody was on the

non-profit board of *Come and See* when Kim died in Africa.

I drove down Highway 41 and bought a few Dunkin' Donuts. Then I drove I-80 and crossed into Illinois, listening to Handel's *Messiah*. There were small tolls and false turns before I parked in the mega-church lot. I located the church office but learned that both pastors were off for the day! The church secretary texted Rob. There was a mix-up of some sort. This was the later text exchange between Rob and me:

Rob: "Chris, I'm sorry. I'm out of town. Thought you were coming by on Tuesday. So sorry. Totally missed it. My assistant said you were coming by on Tuesday."

Me: "Rob, my bad. I rechecked my messages. On 2/18 it was indeed Tuesday. On 4/2 it progressed to Thursday. I'm sorry for the mis-communication. We'll get together in the Lord's timing. You have a great church parking lot to rest in. I just talked with a maintenance man who was admiring my VW camper."

I rested in the lot under the shade of a tree and read the Chronicle. Then I was off for Iowa. *Messiah* continued across most of the state. It was hot as I rested at a few roadside stops, stretching and walking Jody.

I passed the exit for Starved Rock State Park. In my Boy Scout days, I hiked there many times. Maybe that's where I first acquired my love of camping. I thought about my dad, the scout-master, who led his three sons to the rank of Eagle Scout. What a loving father he was! I also passed the town of Dixon and a sign that read "Hometown of Ronald Reagan".

SAME BRICKS—DIFFERENT EYES

I crossed the Mississippi River about 5:00 and paused at an Iowa rest stop; another day/another state. I turned north at Iowa City and arrived at Lake MacBride Park about 6:30. This entire campground sits on a downward slope toward the lake. I circled the lot a few times, but it proved impossible to find a level site. I stuck three levelers under two lakeside tires and I'm still rolling to the right in my bed.

I made a fire utilizing a stack of free wood, then ate a supper of potato, onion, and three eggs. There was no shower facility and I was feeling grungy. I heated a potful of water and after dark stripped to my shorts, washing my shivering body as best I could. My bare feet suffered a few thorn pricks. It was time for bed and time to give thanks to a God who continues to look after me.



DAY 23

IOWA CITY, IOWA TO LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

328 MILES

COLLEGE TOWN

Friday, May 11, 2018

The night was odd. About midnight I heard two loud female gigglers. I think they were walking circles in the darkness. They quieted down and I slept. Then they erupted again about 2:00 a.m. This time I heard a male voice scolding them. The giggles continued. Next a squad car came to the scene. The flashing lights shone through my blinds. Soon sweet silence returned.

I began my new day about 7:00 a.m. It was cold, maybe fifty degrees, with a blustery wind. After boiling coffee water, I walked a few thousand steps with Jody. It was looking like rain and I wanted to get a few miles in, so I walked another thirty minutes, this time flipping through one hundred vocabulary cards. No matter how many times I study the Greek, I still manage to bungle a few.

I noticed that the propane refrigerator stopped functioning. Try as I might, I could not get it to work. Maybe my camper is telling

COLLEGE TOWN

me it's time to skedaddle home. I then packed up and about 9:30 headed out of Lake MacBride State Park. The fridge still keeps cold in the battery mode as long as the camper is moving.

I was long overdue for a haircut and thought a college town like Iowa City might offer a good opportunity to find a barber. I filled the tank of the camper at a Sinclair gas station resplendent with a green concrete brontosaurus. Next, I parked near the downtown and walked several blocks. The parking was a dollar. I chose the Hawkeye salon, named for the Iowa University mascot. The barber gave a decent haircut for twenty-two dollars. We talked about my road trip thus far. I also visited a Wells Fargo and withdrew a fistful of twenty-dollar bills.

I walked Jody around a few blocks of the neatly groomed college streets. On one building was juxtaposed side-by-side signs; one read "Campus Christian Fellowship" and the other "Acupuncture and Bubbleology". Yes, I recognize Iowa City as a college town. I had hoped to find a gym, as Liz has been urging, but I was running late. Maybe tomorrow. I now drove on I-80 for the next three hours, stopping just once to stretch, walk, and read the paper from my comfortable mattress.

Back on the road my mind began to wander down some odd rabbit holes. I began to meditate on the sounds of words. I challenged myself to pronounce every monosyllabic word that rhymes with "ash". I counted nineteen English words as follows: ash, bash, brash, cash, clash, crash, dash, flash, gash, hash, lash, mash, gnash, rash, sash, slash, splash, stash, and trash. What I found interesting was this: sixteen of the nineteen rhyming words in some way relate to sudden action or violence. But why is this? There

could not have been purpose behind it. Is there something in my mother tongue that predisposes the sound of “ash” toward violence? That’s my only speculation. Is there anybody in the world who could understand let alone answer such an arcane question?

I stopped a second time for a walk in a light mist that soon turned into a heavy rain. I read an email from Liz. She reports a sore throat and no voice. I pray she’s better soon. I wanted to continue with my lecture series on the great battles, but I made the mistake back home of downloading only one of two parts. I was sad. Battles beyond Hastings in 1066 would have to wait.

I stopped a third time about 5:30 for gas and to order five tacos for supper. I bought a large black “Army Strong” flag. It will replace the American flag as my front window cover. Back on the road, I was soon crossing the Missouri River into Nebraska. Traffic stopped for a few minutes mid-span to accommodate bridge improvements. I was able to study welcoming signs that read, “Nebraska, the good life” and “Home of Arbor Day”.

For a few hours I had been listening to *A Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom. This was my second time through the audio book. The autobiography concerns a family of clockmakers who sheltered Jews in Nazi-occupied Holland. Corrie’s testimony is a monument to forgiveness in the midst of suffering. She survived the Ravensbrück prison, but her sister perished. The landscape in my eyes submitted to the soundscape in my ears.

Absorbed in *A Hiding Place*, I made a wrong turn near Lincoln and drove down a secondary road for a while. Oddly, I didn’t mind the misdirection because I was enjoying the audio book.

COLLEGE TOWN

Eventually I landed at Pawnee State Recreation Area about 7:00. There was an eight-dollar entrance fee and a thirteen-dollar charge to camp. I appreciate the electricity. I can keep my fridge cold, my body warm, and my iPad charged.

Thunderstorms are in the forecast, so I didn't set out my cooking gear. That was all right since I was still full from my three-taco dinner. I made and gazed into a fire, poking it occasionally and sending sparks into the breeze. Then I washed up at a restroom-shower combination, only a few steps from my campsite. The solstice must be just around the corner. There was twilight in Iowa at 5:45 this morning and here in Nebraska evening light lingered until 9:00. That's when Jody curled into a disk and I rolled to my sleeping side.



DAY 24

LINCOLN, NEBRASKA TO BRUSH, COLORADO

402 MILES

BAGATELLE FOR PIANO

Saturday, May 12, 2018

There was noise again during the Nebraska night, but this time not giggling girls. I glimpsed flashes of lightning about 2:00 a.m., then heard peals of thunder a few minutes later. After several more minutes came the hard patter of rain on rooftop. The fast-moving storm blew over in an hour or so.

All was wet when I climbed out of the camper about 6:30, but it wasn't raining. With coffee in one hand and Jody's leash in the other I walked along the shore of Pawnee Lake for about a mile. That first walk with first coffee invigorates body and soul. I let Jody rest in the car and walked another mile, muttering my way through a stack of cards. I paused in my stroll to study the wooden caricature of a Pawnee Indian. There was still some packing and cleaning up, so I didn't leave the park until 8:30.

I listened to a collection of Beethoven pieces as I drove across

BAGATELLE FOR PIANO

the Nebraska prairie. The first notes of a bagatelle—a light musical composition—sounded on the speakers. *Für Elise* was one of Kim's favorites. Music provoked memory and memory provoked tears. *Lord*, I cried out. *Won't these tears ever dry? Don't you care what happens to me?*

Then I thought of Lizzie, of my dog, of my children, of the vigor I possess in this long-distance drive, of my comfortable retirement, and of my continuing ministry to the people of Rwanda. All these are gifts of unmerited favor. Isn't God's grace enough for me? My mind latched onto these words: "My grace is sufficient." I knew they were spoken by the Apostle Paul, but where could I find them?

Continuing to drive, I pondered my relationship with my creator. Even in the abyss of grief following Kim's death, I never teetered toward atheism but toward estrangement. My basic question had never been, "God, do you exist?" but rather "God, do you care?"

I had planned to stop in Grand Island, but with mind ablaze I drove on to Kearney, parking near a gas station. I located the words in Second Corinthians, chapter twelve, verse nine: "and he said to me, my grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." I let those words percolate in my thoughts for the rest of the day.

My camper had transported me and Jody six thousand miles since the road trip commenced on April nineteenth. Now it was time for an oil change. After filling with gas, I drove down Kearny's main street to a Jiffy Lube. It was a good choice. My camper was an odd vehicle. It required expensive synthetic oil and a special

oil filter. A grill on the underside had to be removed for access. I was told the servicing would take twenty minutes but I waited for a good hour. Jody received an extra-long walk. The manager was generous. I got a twenty-five percent military discount and paid eighty-one dollars.

I was hungry and after sixty minutes on the road I stopped at a Walmart lot in Lexington, Nebraska. The ambient odor indicated some kind of meat-packing operation was up wind. I bought thirty-dollars' worth of items from the superstore including another pair of sunglasses. I learned that my mileage-plus Visa card was inoperable. The chip had fallen from the plastic! From the lot I called Visa, cancelled that credit card, and ordered another. I still had two soggy tacos from yesterday's five pack. I chowed them down. A fussy eater I am not. I relaxed and read the Chronicle before heading out about 3:00.

Now my listening returned to *The Hiding Place*. The miles zipped by and soon I passed the sign that read "Welcome to Colorful Colorado." I unwittingly sped past the welcome-center rest stop so I pulled off at a rural crossroads a few exits further down I-76. I parked on a dirt sideroad and consulted Google maps. I noted the tablet time at 4:30 not 5:30. Thank you, Mountain Time, for giving me an extra sixty minutes. I smiled, stretched out, and lounged away my bonus hour.

I still had eighty miles to go, so I hurried on. I stopped in Sterling and filled up with bargain premium gas at \$2.79 per gallon. I strolled around a few blocks before taking to the road again. Soon I arrived at my stop point, the Pioneer Park in Brush, Colorado.

BAGATELLE FOR PIANO

It's unusual for a municipal park to support an RV campground, but this one checked out just fine. There were about a dozen campers in tents and small trailers. Some appeared to be homesteading. I considered: *To me, Pioneer Park is just another link in my joy of homeward travel. To homeless campers, this RV park may be a link in a chain of unending hardship.* Struggling to recall my German, I supposed the opposite of *fahrvergnügen* might be *fahrmisvergnügen* or “driving displeasure”.

The campground electricity was great but the price was greater. The notice read “first night free.” Feeling generous, I stuffed a twenty-dollar bill into a payment envelop and dropped my offering into the iron box. It grew cold and rainy, so after stretching out the blinds, I turned on the electric heater, then turned in earlier than usual.

There was campground chatter while daylight remained, but soon things quieted down. Nasty nocturnal weather dampened the outdoor ruckus. A bright street light penetrated the window blind near my head, so I reinforced it with a second screen. And now it's time to end this Saturday and prepare to meet a branch of the Foreman family I've too long neglected.



DAY 25

BRUSH, COLORADO TO EVERGREEN, COLORADO

111 MILES

FULL DAY WITH A FUN FAMILY

Sunday, May 13, 2018

When I removed the blinds from the side window it was drippy but rainless. As has become my custom of late, I walked one mile with Jody and coffee and a second mile with Greek cards. There was a damp dirt track across from the municipal RV park and the walking was pleasant, except I had to watch out for the occasional cow patty.

It was Sunday and I read chapter ten from the Gospel of John in my Greek New Testament. “Ἐγὼ εἰμὶ ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλὸς” which translates as “I am the shepherd, the good one”. In the same discourse I read, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” I paused in my study to ask God that I may be a sheep who hears the voice of His shepherd.

I think my study of Greek vocabulary is paying off, because I was able to work my way through forty-two verses without looking

up words. It helped that I had memorized the entire gospel in my late twenties. When I ran into a difficult word, I was able to switch from translation mode to recitation mode.

I was planning to meet Patrick at a baseball field where his son Ethan was playing in a tournament. I had ninety minutes to drive sixty miles. I stopped to get thirty-two dollars of gas at a Loves in Hudson, then switched off the Interstate to drive down a side road in Commerce City. That's when I saw the patrol car off to my right. And after I passed it, I saw blue lights start to flash. Soon I was giving a policeman my license, registration, and proof of insurance.

He said I was going sixty-three in a forty-five miles-per-hour zone. I noticed a second car pulled to the side ahead of me with police lights flashing. After sitting in his cop car checking my documents, he returned to my window and issued me a speeding citation. He said three interesting things. First, after I had said, "I can't believe this stretch of road is forty-five". He responded, "I can't understand it either. It's straight and long". Second, he added, "I'm just assigned to speed control today." And third, after a pause he added, "I stop a lot of cars from California".

I believe I'll contest this ticket. The police officer who is a local expert confessed the speed limit is unreasonable. Then he hinted this road was a speed trap. Finally, he insinuated that local drivers are aware of the speed trap and out-of-state drivers are the usual victims. I'll have to wait a few weeks for the citation to arrive in the mail. Oh well! Such are the vicissitudes of life.

Patrick and I had been texting for a while. He had to be at a

crosstown ballpark with his younger son, Vance, age ten. I was to meet Ethan, age fourteen. I soon arrived at the ball park. Jody remained in the camper. I asked baseball fans where the Yetis were playing and located Ethan with number thirteen on his back. I watched the junior-league game a while. I didn't realize this but if a hitter gets to first base, it's almost like a triple. Stolen bases at fourteen years old are hard to prevent. The Yetis lost and Ethan's baseball day was over.

The Yetis tournament was on the east side of Denver and Ethan navigated me to their house in Evergreen on the southwest side. During the drive, I shared with Ethan how I knew about Patrick's existence even before his own parents. I was twenty-three, living with my folks, when the telephone rang. Someone from an adoption agency was asking for my big brother with important information. A few days later Jack and Barbara adopted Patrick into their life.

I parked the camper in a driveway and expanded the top and awning for the two boys to see. Ethan helped me settle into a guest room. I put a load of laundry into the washer. Then Patrick arrived with Vance. Their two dogs, Trooper and Gismo, were introduced to Jody. There wasn't violence, but I kept Jody on my lap for safe keeping.

The day was complicated because at 4:00 Patrick was to pick up Amy at the Denver Airport. Yet at 2:00 the boys were hungry, so we went to a local deli for sandwiches. Then we headed out to the airport. It was fun to converse with this side of my family. Patrick explained that a few years earlier, he worked for Fidelity Investments in Texas, near his mom's place. He grew tired of

FULL DAY WITH A FUN FAMILY

the job and location and felt blessed to work for Visa Financial Services in the Colorado mountains doing cyber security. Next time he visits the Visa headquarters in Foster City near my home, he promised to meet with me.

We got to the airport and waited a while because Amy's flight from L.A. was running late. We hung out by the luggage carousels and I enjoyed conversing with the boys. As I talked with Patrick about my adventures and journaling, he mentioned I was like Jack Kerouac and *On the Road*. I'll send him a copy of my travelogue when it's complete.

To help the time pass, I challenged the boys to guess how many steps it took to walk around the carousels. Ethan guessed two-hundred forty and Vance five hundred. They borrowed my pedometer and it turned out to be one-hundred ninety-five steps.

When she finally arrived, Amy was hungry. We drove to a vegan restaurant in metro Denver. I drank only a vegetable concoction, then treated the family to ice cream cones at a shop across the street.

We got back to the home about 7:00. I freed Jody from the captivity of the camper and transferred my laundry to the dryer. Today was Mother's Day and Amy spent the evening opening cards and arranging flowers. I excused myself about 8:00 and after a shower I'm resting in a king size bed in a downstairs guest room. This Sunday was a downer because of the traffic ticket, but I must maintain my attitude of gratitude. I am loved by God.



DAY 26

EVERGREEN, COLORADO TO GREEN RIVER, UTAH

321 MILES

MOUNTAINS TO MESAS

Monday, May 14, 2018

I awoke at 5:30 when Jody whimpered next to my face. Clearly, she had business to conduct. I was unfamiliar with the basement of Patrick's house, but I soon found a door that led to the back yard. Jody earned both her number one and number two badge.

My mind was still troubled. I continued to mull the traffic ticket of the previous day. I should have asked the cop, "So what's the distinction between 'law enforcement' and 'justice?'" I took a deep breath and tried to let it go.

The sun was soon up and so was I. I took Jody on a neighborhood stroll down empty streets. After a few thousand steps, I carried laundered clothes from my guest room to the camper, then packed and neatened. When I entered the house through the front door, Amy was already in the kitchen preparing breakfast. She is

an organic fresh food enthusiast and was dicing two big potatoes. As I rested with a cup of coffee on the sofa, I said good morning to Ethan, Patrick, and Vance as they appeared in that order.

I ate breakfast with Patrick and Ethan; fried potatoes, spiced black bean wraps, and watermelon. After hugs and farewells, Patrick and Ethan left the house for work and school. Preparing my departure, I filled a bucket with soapy water and washed the grime and bug splatter from my home on wheels. Vance caught the school bus and I sat alone with Amy for a while. I gave her the fifth and final copy of the memoir that I brought on this road trip.

As we talked about deep personal things, she remarked that I reminded her of my brother Jack (her father-in-law), an older male, easy to talk to. I wished this family lived closer to me. I left with a fresh cup of coffee about 9:30.

Soon I was on I-70 speeding west. The sky was misty and overcast. For an hour I drove up and down steep grades, but clouds obscured the majesty of the Rocky Mountain Range. Finally, the skies cleared and I stopped at a view point near Silverthorne to take pictures of the towering Rockies. My altimeter app told me I was at 7200 feet elevation. Jody and I walked up an overlook trail with snow tucked into shaded corners.

I stopped for gas at Vale then drove down a stretch of Interstate called the Gerald Ford Memorial Highway. We paused our road trip at a rest stop along the Colorado River. A long walking path hugged the riverside, providing exercise for me and my dog. I'm beginning to empty my pantry, winding down this road trip. I

fried three eggs and toasted two out-of-date hot dog buns. I then flattened on my back and read the Chronicle. It was a leisurely two-hour road break.

I renewed my listening of *The Hiding Place* and got some serious driving done. As I traveled west on I-70, I studied the tunnels, bridges, and split roadways. I noted that I-70 west was elevated and I-70 east hugged the riverbank, appearing to be two independent highways. As I headed into the sun, the mountains morphed into mesas as the landscape flattened before my eyes. It was amazing. The state of Colorado looked like mountainous Colorado, but as I crossed the invisible line into Utah, scrub desert suddenly appeared. I stopped at a picnic area to take photos of the amazing vistas.

I was closing in on my end point, Green River State Park. After I pulled off I-70, I filled the tank at a Conoco, then drove for just a few more miles to the periphery of town. I was surprised to learn the campsites were nearly full. I'm glad I arrived at 6:30 beating the after-dark arrivals. The young summer hire who signed me in asked about my check for thirty-five dollars. He wanted to know where the check number could be found. I pointed it out to him. I doubt paper checks will exist in another generation.

The sites were small and close together, but this shortcoming was made up for by electricity and showers. I made a smoky fire, then prepared supper, a packet of Raman noodles with instant rice. I had purchased a small jar of kimchi a few days earlier. When I unscrewed the top, the contents gushed all over my clothes. I think the eruption was due to altitude and fermentation. My lame attempt at an Asian cuisine was humble but satisfying.

MOUNTAINS TO MESAS

As I returned from the shower stall it was getting too dark to navigate. I now have my electric heater plugged in just in case the night gets frigid. And now Monday is done. Three more days and I'll be home. Thank you, Lord.



DAY 27

GREEN RIVER, UTAH TO ELY, NEVADA

372 MILES

NECKLACE FOR A DOG

Tuesday, May 15, 2018

I woke up in Utah about 6:30. The night had been windy and some of my camping gear had blown away and stuck in bushes. I made my two one-mile-long walks. I wanted to get an early start on the day's journey, but I dallied and it was 8:30 before I pulled out of the campground.

I stopped at a grocery store in the town of Green River and bought three meals for the day. My breakfast purchase was a donut and coffee which I consumed on the spot. My lunch would be a cellophane-wrapped burrito warming in the hot box. I bought sausages and buns for dinner. Thus, my three-part menu was set for Tuesday.

I caught I-70 west listening to the final part of *The Hiding Place*. It's such an inspiring story. The line that challenges me most is this one spoken by Corrie's father: "I will never turn away anyone

NECKLACE FOR A DOG

who comes to my door seeking help”. Lord, may that be me as well. As I left town the road sign warned, “no services next 100 miles.” This part of Utah was an empty desolation.

I recited words of the psalmist. “I am like a pelican of the wilderness; I am like an owl of the desert. I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the housetop. (Psalm 102:6–7)”

I pulled off at a rest area near Black Dragon Canyon. I saw native merchants laying out blankets, then setting up their wares of Indian jewelry and trinkets. Nothing interested me, but I decided to get a necklace for my faithful traveling companion. The young lady picked out an anklet for eight dollars and she agreed to pose holding my adorned dog. She got a twelve-dollar tip on the twenty.

I left I-70 about 11:00 and filled up with gas in Salina. I zigzagged on a few secondary roads before connecting with Highway 50, dubbed “the loneliest road in America.” I was now listening to the Gospel of John.

This inter-mountain area of America is vast and barren. There always seemed to be distant mountain ranges as well as sunshine one moment and rain clouds the next. I stopped for a short time at the Nevada-Utah state line. I overheard two men talking at a distance, “We’re not only one state apart, we’re one hour apart.” Aha! I turned my watch back from 3:30 to 2:30. When all twenty-one chapters of John concluded, I listened to the Berlioz Requiem.

Finally, I came into Ely, the town where I intended to spend the night. I drove through the Happy Prospector Casino RV

campground and kept right on driving. The grounds looked run-down and neglected. It was time to improvise.

My Park Advisor app reported a remote campground about forty miles down Highway 50. After driving forty-five minutes on pavement, I turned left onto a dirt road, rattling over pot holes and passing scrub brush scattered from horizon to horizon. In one and one-quarter miles I arrived at Illipah Reservoir, a parcel of wilderness overseen by the Bureau of Land Management. It was about 6:00. This place was a hidden nugget. I looked carefully, but apparently camping is at no cost. I'm so glad the casino campground failed and the wilderness one succeeded. There were few people, large spread-out sites, and a remote water reservoir.

I walked Jody up and down trails, rested in the camper and built a fire to boil the kettle water. Then I prepared a sausage and kimchi dinner. As I walked again, I collected woody fragments of dried brush to keep the fire roaring for another hour.

Lying on my back in the dark camper, I began scrolling through my large collection of digital photos. I noticed that about half of them included Jody somewhere in the frame. In some she's posing by the Eurovan, in others she's next to a campfire or in the foreground of scenery. I'm not embarrassed by this mass of doggie pictures. It makes sense. In my fifty years of picture taking, it's not the photographs of mountains or buildings I look back on with fondness. Rather, it's the pictures of loved ones that are close to my heart. And that's just where Jody resides.

I laid aside my tablet. Day twenty seven of my twenty-nine-day adventure came to an end. The desert wind was howling. I loved it. Thank you, God, for allowing me to experience this nomadic episode of life.

DAY 28

ELY, NEVADA TO COLFAX, CALIFORNIA

365 MILES

THE LONELIEST ROAD

Wednesday, May 16, 2018

I had anticipated a cold night. Therefore, on the previous evening I put on heavy sweatpants, a double layer of long shirts, and a wool cap. I slept in my zip-up bag covered under my army blanket. Still I was cold. At 5:15 when I looked at the outside temperature it registered twenty-nine degrees. I turned on the furnace and closed my eyes for an hour longer. The cabin of the camper warmed up, so I crawled out of my sleeping bag and put a flame under the kettle. With that extra heat, I began my day.

The mid-May sun was coming up fast. While walking Jody down sage brush trails, I had to remove my outer jacket. Slowly I began to break camp. The Eurovan was so situated that the rear window directly faced the rising sun. The glass became so warm I draped a damp towel to dry over the back window. When I examined the front windshield, it was the opposite situation. I scraped thick

frost from the shaded glass! Is that the way of the high desert? Freeze the front—roast the rear?

I took a second walk, this time along Illipah Creek Pond. It was really a wilderness place. I wish I could have stayed another day. However, I had a long day's journey ahead of me, so at 8:30 I drove down the gravel access road, turned west, and once more sped down "the loneliest road in America".

After forty minutes, I stopped for gas at Eureka, pumping in two twenty-dollar bills of premium. Then I hit the road in earnest. Both the landscape and the weather turned dramatic. Highway 50 seemed to weave its way through staggered mountain ranges, some snowcapped. The purple ridges always appeared distant, with an endless expanse of sagebrush between the viewer and the mountains. Hour after hour there seemed to be storm cloud in one direction and sunshine in another. Only occasionally did a few drops splash the windshield.

About noon I pulled over at a dirt-road exit. A sign pointed down the pocked roadbed and read "Antelope 80 miles". Did anybody actually drive that far on this washboard road? Jody and I needed some exercise, so I began to walk while the dog began to sniff. With the camper now a speck in the distance, I felt a few large drops of rain. We rushed back to safety just as a downpour commenced; thunder, lightning, the whole shooting match! Is there any cozier feeling than finding shelter in the midst of a storm? By the crashing on the rooftop I thought it might be hail, but to my relief the sound was only the pelting of giant raindrops. I ate two tortilla rolls of peanut butter and apricot jam. I tried to read the online newspaper, but there was no signal. I was too remote.

THE LONELIEST ROAD

Only one mountain range along Highway 50 was unavoidable, the Desatoya. The camper chugged up the winding steep grade, then braked down precipitously into the town of Austin. I filled the miles listening to the Book of Acts, and a few apologetic lectures. Moments of Mozart filled the gaps.

I reached Fallon about 2:00, filled up with sixty dollars of gas, deposited my monthly contribution to CASA at a Wells Fargo Bank, and walked through a Walmart just for the exercise. As I continued through Sparks and Reno, the rain fell in buckets. I put my wipers on high, focusing my eyes on the yellow-painted meridian. My destination was the Gold Ranch Casino. I inquired at the desk and was told my RV had to be “self-contained”, which I discovered to mean “onboard toilet required”. For the second evening in a row I needed to improvise.

I drove across the state line into California on Interstate 80 and experienced a one-hour delay due to shoulder repair. The rain let up. Donner Pass appeared misty and mystic. The Sierra Nevada were the first true mountains I traversed since the Rockies. I drove the steep down grade past the town of Alta. I remembered the time in 2006 when I pastored a group of Korean youth. Kim, Zachary, Simon, and I spent two nights at the Baptist Camp Alta. Sledding, singing, charades; it seemed like a lifetime ago.

I took the exit at Colfax and put twenty dollars in my tank. I drove down a winding road to Mineral Bar Campground which lay upon the East Fork of the American River. I parked in site ten and put twenty-eight dollars into the iron ranger. With my inept back-up skills, I smacked my bumper into a boulder and removed a speck of arctic white paint. Ouch! The ground was uneven and I

used my levelers to make the camper more sleep-worthy.

It was 7:00, so there was just daylight to set up camp and build a fire. I tried to empty my fridge and pantry, anticipating my arrival home. For dinner I finished the hot dogs, cheese, kimchi, mustard, and buns. I discarded miscellaneous food products into the dumpster.

In the quiet of my camper, I turned again in my Greek New Testament to Second Corinthians, chapter twelve. When Paul wrestled with God about his thorn in the flesh, God replied with these words: “*arket sot η cariç mov*” which translates as “sufficient to you is the grace of me”.

I considered, Is this a solution to the problem of evil? No, not even close. Is this a reason for the Apostle’s suffering? No, I can’t say that either. I wondered, after three entreaties, why did Paul receive these words? Answer: Maybe, just maybe, these are the appropriate words that a suffering saint hears when his ears are tuned to God’s voice.

I prayed that God would tune my ears to hear, “My grace is sufficient to you.” Could I learn to embrace this pronouncement? Could I accept that His strength is made perfect in my weakness? With these thoughts whispering in my ears, I concluded the penultimate day of my ultimate road trip.



DAY 29

COLFAX, CALIFORNIA TO SAN MATEO, CALIFORNIA

168 MILES

THE JOY OF HOME

Thursday, May 17, 2018

The night was mild. I shed the sleeping bag at a late hour, relying only on my blanket. About 7:00, I left the camper and packed a few things. I then walked with Jody down the entrance road, turning into the woods on a footpath called “Pennyworth Trail”.

The path ended after a few hundred yards in clear view of the riverbank. I saw ahead of me jumbled boulders and jagged driftwood. How I wished I could have navigated those last fifty steps and plunged my fingers into the stream. I loved to do that sort of thing when I was younger. Now age has robbed me of agility and balance. At sixty-eight it wasn't worth the risk of falling. I sadly turned back. Why is youth squandered on the young?

I finished packing and was about to leave the campsite. Then I remembered one last chore. I filled the kettle and pot with water,

heated them on the inside stove, then began to bathe Jody. I set her on the concrete picnic table, poured on the soapy water, next the rinse water, then rubbed her with my own towel swaddling her in the blue blanket. She would be clean and cootie-free for mommy. I pulled out of the site at 9:00 a.m.

Only three hours remained in my adventure. I continued down I-80 through Auburn and past Sacramento. I was now listening to the Epistle of Paul to the Romans. His didactic teaching is so much harder to focus on than the narrative of Acts. On the far side of Sacramento, three lanes contracted into two causing a congestion of traffic.

In Vacaville, I paused for gas and a final cup of coffee. I was nearing the finish line. I listened to the *New World Symphony* by Dvorak, then returned to the New Testament now advanced to First Corinthians.

I turned south at I-680 toward San Jose, then west at I-580 in Dublin. Approaching San Lorenzo, I heard the wonderful thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.”

I turned south on I-880, then west over the San Mateo Bridge. As I entered Foster City, I heard the identical chapter I had read at the death of Kim from First Corinthians, chapter fifteen: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” At the conclusion of the chapter, I cranked up the volume on Handel’s “The Trumpet Shall Sound.”

THE JOY OF HOME

I now entered the parking lot at the SMAC gym. It was just past noon and I had a few hours before my appointed time to reach home and Lizzie. I took Jody on her long walk around the perimeter of campus then spent some time tidying up the camper. In the gym I lifted weights and showered. It felt good to return to this routine. I weighed myself—two-hundred seven pounds, up four pounds during the twenty-nine-day road trip.

I topped off the camper's gas tank at the same Union 76 Station of the first fill up. These are the closing numbers: 7648 miles over 28 days/4 hours, 442 gallons of gas consumption costing \$1492, setting my mileage at 17.3 miles per gallon and an average cost per gallon of \$3.38 for premium.

As I drove the final few blocks home, I recognized I was leaving the Land of Fahrvergnügen and reentering The Land of Domesticity. I parked in the guest space at 2:00. I paused for five seconds as the final chorus of Messiah sung out: "Amen". And I concur, "Amen. Thank you, Lord, for getting me, my dog and my camper all the way to Maine and back safely." I added, "God, your grace is more than sufficient to me. Your grace is abounding!"



— **PHASE THREE ENDS — TRAVEL FROM BOSTON TO SAN MATEO —**

I put the Indian necklace around Jody's neck and sent her upstairs ahead of me to greet Liz. I heard a squeal of joy. It was fantastic to embrace my wife and talk. She is a gift of grace to me. We played our iPad puzzles and talked more. I opened twenty-nine days of accumulated mail. Then I emptied my camper of clothes and food. Liz and I walked to the corner—two thousand steps roundtrip. My home pantry and fridge were bare, so for dinner I plucked a can of beef stew from my camper remnants.

I had multiple tasks to accomplish after this month-long absence so Liz resumed reading her book. At 7:45, when the Jody alarm sounded, Liz escorted the dog outside for her final front yard opportunity.

Now I've completed my journal obligation, putting the final words on the final day of this long narrative. If I've learned anything at all from this road trip, it's this: "the joy of travel" to be fully appreciated must rest upon a foundation called "the joy of home." Dear diary, good night and God bless.



ROAD TRIP SPREADSHEETS

TWENTY-EIGHT OVERNIGHT STOPS OVER TWENTY-NINE DAYS

number	Date	Day	Night	Nearby Town	miles	Total Miles	cost
	18-Apr	Wednesday	Home	San Mateo, CA	0	0	
1	19-Apr	Thursday	Walmart PL	Bakersfield	273	273	
2	20-Apr	Friday	Route 66 KOA	Seligman, AZ	406	679	\$ 22
3	21-Apr	Saturday	Dancing Eagle TC	Casa Blanca, NM	340	1019	\$ 11
4	22-Apr	Sunday	City Fair Park	Childress, TX	445	1464	\$ 15
5	23-Apr	Monday	Barbara Foraker	Colleyville, TX	225	1689	
6	24-Apr	Tuesday	Barbara Foraker	Colleyville, TX	0	1689	
7	25-Apr	Wednesday	Little Rock AFB	Little Rock, AR	381	2070	\$ 15
8	26-Apr	Thursday	Nashville East KOA	Lebonon, TN	372	2442	\$ 40
9	27-Apr	Friday	Wytheville KOA	Wytheville VA	335	2777	\$ 32
10	28-Apr	Saturday	Burke Lake SP	Fairfax VA	334	3111	\$ 31
11	29-Apr	Sunday	Walmart pl	Trenton NJ	212	3323	
12	30-Apr	Monday	David Foreman	Manahawkin, NJ	67	3390	
13	1-May	Tuesday	Fourth Cliff RA	Marshfield, MA	346	3736	\$ 15
14	2-May	Wednesday	Townplace Marriott	Chelsea, MA	175	3911	\$ 140
15	3-May	Thursday	Coachman Inn	Kittery, ME	71	3982	\$ 103
16	4-May	Friday	Saco KOA	Saco, ME	49	4031	\$ 46
17	5-May	Saturday	Bedford rest stop	Bedford Hills, NY	300	4331	
18	6-May	Sunday	Jonestown KOA	Jonestown PA	191	4522	\$ 46
19	7-May	Monday	Lake BarkCamp SP	Belmont OH	294	4816	\$ 24
20	8-May	Tuesday	Summit Lake SP	New Castle IN	252	5068	\$ 33
21	9-May	Wednesday	Gas-a-roo	Hammond IN	233	5301	
22	10-May	Thursday	Lake MacBride SP	Iowa City, IO	281	5582	\$ 9
23	11-May	Friday	Pawnee SRA	Lincoln, NE	328	5910	\$ 20
24	12-May	Saturday	Brush city park	Brush CO	402	6312	\$ 20
25	13-May	Sunday	Patrick Foreman	Evergreen, CO	111	6423	
26	14-May	Monday	Green River SP	Green River, UT	321	6744	\$ 35
27	15-May	Tuesday	Illipah Reservoir	Ely, NV	372	7116	
28	16-May	Wednesday	Mineral Bar CP	Colfax CA	365	7481	\$ 20
29	17-May	Thursday	HOME	San Mateo, CA	168	7649	
TOTAL Miles							7649
Average miles for 29 days					264		
Average cost of premium gas					\$ 3.38		
Average milage of camper					17.30		
Total Gas cost							\$ 1,493
Approximate cost of camping/hotels							\$ 677
approximate cost of food, etc per day					\$ 16		
total cost of food							\$ 464
Total cost							\$ 2,634

Forty-three gas stops over twenty-nine Days

GAS LOG						
	Date	Time	Place	Milage	Gallons	Cost
start	19-Apr	10:17 AM	San Mateo CA Fill up	137269	Full	
1	20-Apr	8:06 AM	Bakersfield CA	137544	14.2	\$50.00
2	20-Apr	3:52 PM	Needles CA	137814	2.13	\$10.00
3	20-Apr	4:58 PM	Kingman AZ	137871	19.42	\$60.00
4	21-Apr	11:15 AM	Flagstaff AZ	138025	11.5	\$36.20
5	21-Apr	6:10 PM	Grants NM	138262	14.2	\$40.00
6	22-Apr	11:28 AM	Santa Rosa NM	138452	11.07	\$35.00
7	22-Apr	5:02 PM	Clarendon, TX	138676	13.43	\$37.60
8	23-Apr	1:41 PM	Bowie TX	138881	10.86	\$29.33
9	25-Apr	11:18 AM	Crumby TX	139049	9.378	\$30.00
10	25-Apr	1:58 PM	Ashdown, AR	139172	10.85	\$33.00
11	26-Apr	8:26 AM	Little Rock AR	139340	9.7	\$24.26
12	26-Apr	4:13 PM	Jackson TN	139564	12.5	\$40.00
13	27-Apr	11:38 AM	Cooksville TN	139764	13.33	\$40.00
14	27-Apr	5:18 PM	Bristol VA	139970	13.67	\$39.50
15	28-Apr	8:19 AM	Blue Ridge VA	140132	9.127	\$29.20
16	28-Apr	2:10 PM	Culpeper VA	140333	9.377	\$30.00
17	29-Apr	7:02 PM	Edgewood, MD	140476	10.76	\$35.10
18	1-May	4:38 AM	Bannasat NJ	140662	8.878	\$30.00
19	1-May	11:02 AM	Stamford CT	140788	7.19	\$26.60
20	1-May	3:24 PM	Tounton MA	140967	12.029	\$38.00
21	2-May	11:20 AM	New Bedford MA	141110	8.89	\$30.06
22	4-May	2:05 PM	Ogunquit ME	141276	9.29	\$30.28
23	5-May	4:38 PM	Framingham MA	141420	8.49	\$30.25
24	6-May	9:55 AM	Morristown NJ	141677	10.814	\$40.00
25	6-May	1:22 PM	Kutztown PA	141751	10.41	\$35.00
26	7-May	3:44 PM	Smithton PA	142001	10.82	\$40.00
27	8-May	11:19 AM	Zanesville OH	142140	12.66	\$40.00
28	9-May	1:40 PM	Muncie IN	142376	11.05	\$40.00
29	9-May	4:51 PM	Plymouth IN	142489	9.79	\$28.11
30	10-May	2:33 PM	Joliet IL	142648	10.55	\$40.00
31	11-May	9:58 AM	Iowa City IO	142868	11.43	\$32.00
32	11-May	4:35 PM	Avoca IO	143070	11.47	\$36.00
33	12-May	10:58 AM	Kearney NB	143312	16.134	\$50.00
34	12-May	5:44 PM	Sterling CO	143543	13.79	\$40.00
35	13-May	10:25 AM	Hudson CO	143640	9.35	\$30.40
36	14-May	11:45 AM	Vail CO	143781	6.26	\$22.52
37	14-May	6:17 PM	Green River UT	144011	11.2	\$40.00
38	15-May	11:10 AM	Salina UT	144118	8.22	\$27.45
39	16-May	9:22 AM	Eureka NV	144427	10.93	\$40.00
40	16-May	1:39 PM	Fallon NV	144602	17.95	\$60.31
41	16-May	6:26 PM	Colfax CA	144746	5.48	\$20.00
42	17-May	10:27 AM	Vacaville CA	144831	7.89	\$30.00
43	17-May	2:08 PM	San Mateo CA Fill up	144917	4.36	\$16.74
43	Gas	Average cost	Miles per gallon	Total	Total	Total
	Stations	\$3.38	17.30	mileage	gallons	cost
	43	per gallon		7648	442.071	\$1492.91
		premium				