

Drive, Ride, Repeat

*The Mostly-True Account of a Cross-Country Car and Bicycle
Adventure*

By Al Macy

<http://AlMacyAuthor.com>

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Version: M01 FEB 2015/08/13 10:11

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to my wonderful proofreader (and wife) Lena, who despite being a born-and-raised Swede, speaks English better than most Americans. Plus, she puts up with me.

Steve Lord, a good childhood friend who you'll meet at several places in this book, was an insightful and thorough editor. Many thanks to him for fine-tuning my recollections and pointing out problems that needed correcting.

Thanks also to Janine, my sisters (Carol, Linda, and Gail), KCowan, Lara, Marie, Bob, Andy, Rosie, REWahoo, Dudelsak, Sengsational, Coogie, and all the others I roped into providing free editing.

PROLOGUE

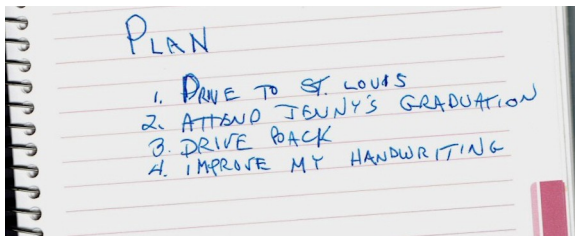
Welcome to the journal of our car/bike/camp trip from California to St. Louis and back.

Now, hold on, I know what you're saying: "Journal? Oh boy, here it comes: 'Today we went here, and then we turned left, and we drove to that town, and we had crackers and tomato soup, and I got diarrhea, and then we visited Aunt Joan.'"

No, it's not going to be like that at all, except for maybe the diarrhea part. I promise that if it starts sounding like one of your brother-in-law's boring slide shows, I will stop this book, and we'll turn around and go home. I mean it.

My wife (Lena) and I ride our bikes a lot, so when we travel, we bring our bikes and do day rides. This way, we avoid the hardships of real bicycle touring, yet can still feel snobbishly superior to the other tourists.

We have, of course, planned the trip in minute detail. I have written down this plan, and here it is:



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The plan also includes numerous charts and maps. Well, one map:



In case you find our adventures too stimulating, and need a break, I have interspersed the journal chapters with thought-provoking life tips, stories from my past, and descriptions of my wacky inventions. You'll read about puking in a thunderstorm, and how Morfar's buddy swallowed a trumpet. You'll hear poignant anecdotes about what happened when doctors discovered a golf-ball-sized tumor in my wife's brain and how everything we owned burned. Here's an example of the kind of stories you'll read:

A few years ago, I needed advice on setting up payroll for my small company, and drove down to my accountant's office to speak with his assistant. It was an informal operation—the kind with overstuffed chairs, worn rugs, and an office dog. A few weeks after this meeting, I called and said “Hi, I have some questions about the payroll system, could I please speak to Sadie?” Unfortunately, I hadn't really paid attention to the names, and it turned out that “Sadie” was the name of the office dog. So now, whenever I go there, I expect them to whistle for Sadie, in case I want to ask her about stock options or retirement plans.

So, those are the kinds of stories you have to look forward to if the journal gets too exciting. Someone suggested that I make them “sidebars,” but since I don't know what a sidebar is, I'll just put them in their own chapters.

Concerning photos, apparently having hundreds of pictures in a book is some kind of literary faux pas (well, excuse me!), so I've limited myself to one or two photos per chapter. I cried a little when I stripped out the

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excess pictures, because I really like photos (especially my own), but I still have binders full of photos (and some videos) on the web. So for the full brother-in-law slide show experience, follow the links on my author web site, AlMacyStuff.com.

CHAPTER ONE

MEET AL (THAT'S ME)

My great-grandfather was born in a small village ... Ha ha, don't you hate it when you read a biography, and it starts several generations back? So I'll skip all that and give it to you in a nutshell: I'm a character and a cheapskate who married a frugal wife. We were able to squirrel away our money so that we could retire early and do interesting things. While working, I was a neuroscientist (with a real PhD), a computer game programmer, a jazz musician, a chef, a CEO, a clam digger, and a technical writer.

By the way, for these childhood memories, I'll invoke a quotation from Mark Twain: "When I was younger I could remember anything, whether it happened or not; but I am getting old, and soon I shall remember only the latter."

I do remember that when in school, I was the class clown. For example, here's a joke that I played on my best friend Steve—it's something I'd never do today.

We were at the ocean on the south shore of Long Island. I decided to make him think I'd drowned. Nice friend, right? Somehow I was able to swim far enough underwater that I could come up undetected down the beach a bit. I even got up onto the shore behind Steve without him noticing. We were on a deserted section of ocean, and according to Steve, one minute I was there, and the next minute, gone. He grew more and more panicky, and ran back and forth trying to see me, yelling my name. When I came up behind him, laughing, he was relieved but angry. Terrible joke, huh? He still mentions it when we see each other.

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That kind of humor gets socialized out of you. For example, a few years ago my older sisters were visiting me in Oakland, CA, and they were out walking on a deserted road. I was running, and I snuck up behind them and made a roaring noise like a bear. They both jumped off the ground. One farted and clutched her heart and the other wet her pants. So, although that sense of humor is inside me, I've had to learn to control it before I kill someone.

Perhaps the bear noise prank was some kind of unconscious payback for something that happened when I was six. My older sister was babysitting me while my parents were having a party. I'd probably been watching some crime show, and I wanted to know if I could get loose if I were tied up. So Sis tied me up, and even gagged me, as per my instructions, with a red bandanna. She then went down to the party and forgot all about me. I spent hours trying to get loose, and managed to fall between the bed and a table, with my sweaty, tear-streaked face down among the dust bunnies. My sister says that when she finally remembered, she raced up to free me, and as soon as she got my hands untied, I started hitting her.

The funny thing about that is that although this still haunts my sister to this day (she apologizes every time she sees me), I have absolutely no memory of it—the description above is from what she's recounted.

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In this next picture, taken in 1964, I'm the one holding the milk, and the blonde on the left is the one still holding the emotional scars from that episode.



One more story (and it's bike related) to show you what I'm like: When I was 13, I had a steering wheel on my bicycle. I somehow bolted an old steering wheel from a junkyard onto the bike's stem. It actually worked quite well (the bike had coaster brakes), and it let me use my favorite joke: "What's the most unreliable part on a vehicle? It's the nut that holds the steering wheel."

So, enough about me. Let's get to the trip, and I promise not to play any tricks on you.

CHAPTER TWO

SHAKEDOWN CRUISE

April 21, 2009—Gold Bluffs Beach, CA: To check that we had everything we'd need, and especially to check out the air mattress that I'd gotten for \$4 at a garage sale, we went on a quick one-night camping shakedown trip.

Camping isn't much fun if you aren't comfortable sleeping. If you're counting the minutes until dawn and wishing you were on a nice, soft bed of nails, you're not going to be a ... well, a happy camper. So a good mattress is job one.

The garage-sale mattress was in like-new condition. As comfortable as our mattress at home, it fit in the tent like a cork in a wine bottle. The pump inflated and deflated it in about one minute using four rechargeable AA cells (in D cell adapters).

At 1 AM, something was up, and I started dreaming I was on a waterbed. By 3:30 AM the mattress had deflated completely, without any assistance from the batteries, and we were *on the hard ground*. This is the ground that has gotten significantly harder since turning 50 (I was 56 when we made this trip). Since the mattress fit the tent so snugly, we had to get outside to blow it up again, and it stayed inflated until morning. When I got home, I tracked down the leak and repaired it with PVC cement and duct tape. This sounds kludgy, but it is the officially sanctioned procedure.

But we had a good time in general, and a great breakfast of eggs, bacon, and home-baked bread. All systems were go for our trip.

CHAPTER THREE

MEET THE NAPINATOR

April 16, 2009—Home: We didn't want this trip to interfere with our favorite hobby, napping, so it was time for one of Al's wacky inventions: The Napinator.

The main reason I can't sleep in trains, planes, or automobiles is that my head falls to one side, and I wake up. Those little blowup neck pillows have never worked for me; I need something made out of scrap lumber. The Napinator is just the ticket, and will keep our respective heads from rolling from side to side while sleeping in the car. Slip out the normal headrest, slip in this torture-device, add a soft pillow, and it's nap time.



CHAPTER FOUR

MEET LENA

Time for some background on my wife. Lena is not a “character.” If you were to say to her friends, “Boy, that Lena sure is a character!” They would squint, look at you as if you had tiny monkeys coming out of your nose, and say, “Who, Lena Macy?” I tested this, and that is precisely what all her friends said, except one who said: “Are those tiny monkeys coming out of your nose?”

Lena is a level-headed, born-and-raised Swede. She was born above the Arctic Circle, in JokkMokk, which is pronounced “Yuck-Muck.” I had her pronounce it carefully for me, because I figured you wouldn’t believe me. Her personality complements my wacky inherited traits, just as her steady chemical engineer income was the perfect counterpoint to my up and down revenue stream.

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This is not to say that Lena doesn't enjoy life. She's a lot better at that than I am, actually, although you wouldn't know it by looking at her facial expressions. When she's at rest, she may be happy on the inside, but if you look at her, you'll want to put her on suicide watch. She got that from her family. Here's a 1999 photo of Jenny, Lena's Mom, Lena, and Lena's dad having a rollicking good time.



Apparently Lena's grandfather was, in contrast, a character, and there are many stories to back that up. In Swedish, the term for a grandparent is based on precise lineage. For example, "morfar" (pronounced "moor - far") translates to "mother father" and means your mother's father. "Farfar" would be the father of your father. "Morfarsmor" would be your mother's father's mother. Get it?

It's not a bad system, and is shorter than saying, for example, "My great-grandfather on my mother's side, and her grandfather's side." Luckily, nobody cares about ancestry in the USA, so we don't have to sweat those kinds of details.

Anyway, Lena's morfar Alex (pronounced "Ah-lex") was a colorful character. During World War I, when he was in the King's Technical College in Stockholm, his dorm room had a bed with a big brass knob on it. There was a standing competition to see if anyone could open his jaw wide enough to put his mouth around the knob. No one had ever succeeded until Alex's red-haired buddy Sven, his jaw loosened by large quantities of alcohol, finally did it.

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