

Beans and I on the Loose
A Traveler and his Cat Exploring America.
Book One
2017

Getting to
Know *You*

JOHN LEE KIRN



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A traveler and his cat exploring the back roads of America

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By

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As if it really matters...

Getting to know you,
getting to know all about you.

–Julie Andrews

The King and I

Rodgers and Hammerstein, 1951

Getting to Know You

Our First Year Together

My wife left me.

I shouldn't have been surprised yet I was. She caught me off guard one day saying she was going to move out. "We need time apart."

I should have seen it coming but didn't really think about it actually happening. We had simply grown apart over the last few years both having dissimilar interests in life. She had been laying plans for some time evidently. A plan to move to the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in a small touristy ex-gold mining town near her girl friend who she had visited several times over the years. She liked it there and I supported her decision. I helped her get a few items of furniture out of the house and helped packing the U-haul truck she had rented. Then I accompanied her to nearby Napa where we secured the dolly to transport her Honda CRV. With everything ready to go, we said good-bye to each other and that was that. I watched her drive away as I sat there in my little VW Golf. On the drive back home to Santa Rosa I wondered *now what?*

I walked into the house and immediately felt it bright and cheery. The dark cloud of negativity that had been hanging for the past few years had seemed to have vanished. *This is nice.* I continued on with my life as if nothing had changed. Every day I would go to the bordering State Park to hike, jog or ride my mountain bike on the trails. Winter was approaching but this year I would not take a road trip to warmer climates as I had always done. I felt a responsibility to the house. The house was slowly becoming a drywall prison to me but I was oblivious to it. I thought I was happy but didn't know I was really becoming very bored.

I had pretty much given up on watching television by now. Television merely was a wasting away of time when you think you have nothing else better to do. Over the coming year I eventually began watching NASCAR. That there should have been an indication that things weren't right. Besides my love for reading my main source of entertainment were watching movies online and YouTube videos. I discovered these YouTubers who were living the life of a nomad, fulltime on the road in their RV, trailer, van and even passenger cars. This struck a chord with me. For the past ten years I had been making long trips exploring America. Here were people doing this as a lifestyle. Could I do this myself?

My cat Sinbad had accompanied me on most all my adventures. He was now getting up in years and had been on a special diet for the last two years combating the failing kidney problem most cats face in their twilight years. My second winter "single" was now approaching and I vowed to not spend it in the cold wet conditions of Sonoma County in northern California. I thought Sinbad had one more road trip left in him; a winter escape together in the warm sunny southwestern part of the U.S. But Sinbad had other plans.

I had left the house one morning for my usual outing on the trails of Annadel State Park. When I returned home I saw he hadn't touched his food. The bowl of kibble looked the same from the night

before, undisturbed. *This is not good. Could this be the beginning of the end for my dear Sinbad?* He seemed his normal self otherwise. As the days passed he moved around less, sleeping more and more. He had become even thinner than before and still had not eaten. One day I took him outside so he could lie in the grass one last time enjoying the cool feeling and smells. I could tell he enjoyed that moment. That evening he was by my side in my chair as I watched a movie on my laptop. He slowly stood up, jumped down from the chair, kind of staggered over to my desk and lay down underneath it. He had never laid there before. I got up and laid down beside him gently petting his soft golden fur and telling him it is was okay. He closed his eyes, purred and seemed to drift off to sleep. His breathing became fainter and less frequent. In a couple of hours he was still and my beloved faithful companion of seventeen years was gone. I had done all my grieving two years earlier when he first became ill and I thought I was losing him then. The vet helped him recover and with that special diet and medication we were able enjoy two more years together. I laid Sinbad to rest the next day in a special box I had built two years before.

I now was looking at going away for the winter cat-less. Sinbad and given me a gift and freed me from the trauma of him dying many miles away from home. Now I needed to make the best of his gift to me. All our trips in the past were trips of constant motion. We were always moving on to see what was over the next hill, around the bend in the road. This time it would be different. I wanted to test myself and see if I could stay in one spot for a long time without going bonkers.

Over the next five months I discovered *Yes, I can do this*. I attended what is known as *The Rubber Tramp Rendezvous*, a ten-day event held in the desert of Quartzite, Arizona in the month of January. I had heard of this gathering of nomads from watching YouTube videos. There I made new friends and was able to see how everyone lived the nomadic life, fulltime life on the road in their RV. Yes, this was the life for me. But how can I pull it off? I sat down and carefully crafted an e-mail to my wife. I explained to her that the money she was spending for rent could all be directed to her love to travel internationally (I had long since given up international travel for a host of reasons) if she were to move back to the house and I into the motor home fulltime. I said how I longed to follow my life-long dream of traveling and found that others do just that. She e-mailed me back in a short time saying she was for it. *Yes!* The die had been cast. Now I had to make good of it.

I said goodbye to my new friends sometime in March and headed for home facing the daunting task of disposing of my life there. I arrived home, walked into the house and was overwhelmed with what I had to do in order to begin this new chapter in my life. In what I expected to take weeks if not a month or more I accomplished in a mere ten days. Bags of clothing I hadn't worn in years were given away to Goodwill and the Salvation Army. Boxes of personal effects (junk) were packed up and donated or tossed in the trash. It began as a difficult and scary process but once I got into it, it kind of felt good to rid myself of all of this "stuff". I still had my little VW Golf to deal with. One day I parked it outside near the golf course that bordered our home with a FOR SALE sign on it. Before the weekend was over it sold, seen by a golfer whose daughter needed a car to replace hers that had been wrecked in San Francisco. I loved that car and knew it would be hard to part with but I was happy to see who it went to and even more thrilled as to how easy it all went when I feared it would be a trying exercise that would delay my departure. Everything was going way too smoothly. Was it a sign of this was meant to be?

I still had one more major task to accomplish – I was still cat-less.

All the while of purging my life of my *life*, I had been looking online for a cat. I naively had thought I would find a cat somewhere, someplace during that past winter in the desert. Fate would bring into my life an abandoned cat at a rest stop, a Walmart parking lot or grocery store give-away of kittens. It didn't happen. My online searching began with orange Somali cats like Sinbad. There were very few out there and I realized that this would be unfair to the cat. I'd be seeing Sinbad in it. I needed to broaden my search. Most all the cats out there available for adoption were older cats. I wanted a younger cat where we could live out our lives together. I was getting closer to the point of being able to leave the house for good and it looked as if I would be doing so without a companion to share this new chapter in my life.

As I lay in bed one evening Craigslist came to mind. *I wonder if people give away animals on Craigslist?* The next morning I checked it out. Yes, pets were there. The first cat that came up in my area was this year and half old female tortoiseshell. I scrolled on through the other cats on offer but kept coming back to this tortie. I called the people. Yes, she was still available. We made arrangements to meet midway between our homes at a nearby Pet Smart parking lot the next day. The young man pulled in next to the RV. I could see this dark furry cat sitting in his lap. He stepped out of his car and came around to meet me, thrusting this cutie into my arms. She melted into my caress. I asked what her name was. *Rainbow Dash* something. "My daughter named her" he said. *Well that's going to change real quick.* As I held this sweet cat... he dug out her litter box, bag of crap cat food and scratching arch. She lived in an apartment with two dogs and the young girl and they felt she needed more attention than they were able to give her. Right. I think there was more to it than that. I gave him the fifty dollar adoption fee, an assurance that the new owner would be sincere or so the general custom was in adopting animals from private parties. I told him she's going to have a good life and he went back to his car and drove away. We walked into the motor home and I said to her "This is going to be your new home...Beans."

Why Beans? Beans was a Warner Brothers Looney Tunes cartoon character back in 1935. Unfortunately at the time, Beans the Cat was introduced along with Porky Pig. Theater goers were enamored with the stuttering porker and Beans the Cat was eventually dropped a year later. In more recent times, 2011, a computer-animated western film came out released by Paramount Pictures. *Rango*. One of the main characters was a no-nonsense strong-willed female desert iguana by the name of Beans. I loved the character and so that is how Beans got her name. She responded to it in no time at all and pretty much has lived up to the character's personality which includes a good-hearted devotion to the most important person in her life.

Beans spent only a few days in the house quickly making herself at home. In short time she was running around, chasing me or me chasing her. She'd arch her back, take a sideways stance with her fur up and tail fluffed then come at me with a mock attack. She was so cute and I was so happy to have her as I felt she was with me.

The day soon came for me to drive away from my house for good. I was ready for this. Beans was not! Although she made the ride to the house on adoption day without so much as a squeak, we hadn't gone a block that morning before she started howling. This was not good. I stopped and tried to console her, then continued on down the street. The howling only intensified. What to do? I pressed on hoping she'd calm down or wear herself out. She didn't. I stopped again, this time to put in earplugs; that is how loud she wailed. After an hour of this she finally settled down...some.

We made it to my daughter's house three hours later where I spent a couple days visiting. Beans seemed content to stay in the RV. The next morning we said our goodbyes and I drove away towards my new life. Beans immediately once again started in howling. *No, no, this can't be!* In half the time from that first day of trauma she stopped screaming and eventually settled in on my lap. From then on, every day was fine and she never again carried on. Not even a squeak. I sincerely believed that she thought she was being driven off and that I was going to give her away. When she realized I wasn't going to abandon her she grew confident that she would be with me always.

A few days of travel later we arrived at our first destination Poverty Flats, a free dispersed camping area near Overton, Nevada next to the Utah border. By now Beans had settled in to life on the road very well. She took to wearing Sinbad's harness with ease and we tried some short walks. She quickly associated the harness with getting to go outside. I thought about it some as we walked and reasoned that she probably had never been in the out-of-doors once in her short life, ever. All she ever knew was that cramped apartment with two dogs and a little girl. There was a whole big wonderful world to explore. The first thing she would do upon going outside would be to roll in the dirt. Sinbad would do this but I had forgotten that. Every day she'd be filthy dirty. During the rest of the day she'd be content to sit in the door looking out, or just lying on the step enjoying the fresh air, as if she'd been living this life all of her life. After a week on the road she understood what "no" meant and would stop whatever she was doing. She grasped the meaning of "come on" and would continue on walking. She figured out how to backtrack her steps to prevent from getting hung up in the retractable leash cord. Then she discovered lizards!

Inside she developed a means of telling me she wanted food. She'd gently tap me on the arm while I would be sitting at the table. That was all. I reinforced that behavior by immediately stopping whatever I was doing to feed her good canned food and it has been working great ever since. We're both training each other you could say. Nothing seemed to spook her. If I flip the switch to activate the slide-out and she's on it, she stays put and goes for the ride. Her favorite place to sleep is on top of the slide-out. Sinbad never ever went up there. She trusts me to step over her not being fearful of being stepped on. I have noticed the heat from the sun affects her more than it did with Sinbad. No doubt her dark coat is the reason. On one walk she over did it and I had to carry her back home. Now she knows her limit and turns back for home when she's gone far enough. She's since realized the benefit of shade. One day she slipped out from her harness. Instead of running off she allowed me to come to her and put it back on. Whew! Beans had quickly lived up to be everything I had hoped for and even more in a new travel cat.

We toured nearby Valley of Fire State Park from our camp at Poverty Flats. The park is a geological wonder filled with multi-colored layers of red sandstone. A hundred-fifty million years ago the area was all shifting sands and now is compressed into these scenic rolling hills of rock. The weather forecast called for temperatures approaching one hundred degrees so we needed to move on, preferably to higher elevations and cooler temperatures. We ended up in Utah near Zion National Park along North Creek, a tributary of the Virgin River which runs through Zion canyon. Our camp was idyllic with a creek side setting beneath the shade of towering cottonwoods. Each day I would take a refreshing dip – well the water wasn't that deep, I had to lie down in it – in the creek right out from our front door. Beans would go down by the water, even getting her feet wet. This is something Sinbad never did. He wanted no part of any body of water, especially the moving kind. I thought it odd as how my swim suit would dry out stiff as a board each day. Then one day a small herd of cattle came waltzing down the creek, pooping and peeing along the way. That was the end of my getting into the water to cool off. At this camp Beans

learned about red ants. She got stung on her paw and from that day on she has given ants a wide berth. We pretty much had the campground all to ourselves but with the approach of the coming weekend I knew that would change so we moved on to even higher elevations, just over seven-thousand feet.

I discovered Losee Canyon in Utah. It has the geological formations of better known Bryce Canyon only much smaller area. Losee Canyon had a more intimate feeling to it. A nice mile long trail looped through the canyon where one could enjoy the wind-blown sculptured columns of red sandstone up close. At this camp Beans continued her education of the great outdoors. She found her first Darkling Beetle, more commonly referred to as a stink bug. If irritated the beetle will stick its rump high in the air and emit an invisible toxic smelly spray. Beans received the full effect. As with the red ants, she now just ignores these beetles whenever she comes across them during her walks. Also while here, once again Beans slipped out of her harness. I looked outside to check on her and there in the dirt lay the harness minus cat. Mild panic set in and I rushed outside. I found her on the other side of the motor home. I calmly approached her talking nicely and she just stood there allowing me to pick her up. Whew! It is so nice to know that I don't have to worry about her running off from me. I immediately adjusted the harness tighter and she never slipped out of it again.

When we arrived at Richfield, Utah, Beans had been on the road for two weeks. After lunch one day I took Bean's harness and leash, held it up and said "Want to go for a walk?" She jumped down from her perch on top of the slide-out and stood by the door. As I bent over to slip the harness onto her she stood up, put her paws through the loop of the harness, pulled it down slipping her head through the loop while still standing! An unbelievable act to see and it warmed my heart. Here she went for her longest walk, well over a quarter of a mile. I likened it as having a small dog walking alongside of me. While at Richfield we encountered our first electrical storm one evening. Lightning flashed and thunder was immediate and deafening. Beans calmly laid there looking at me. I was astounded. Poor Sinbad would be scared senseless seeking shelter somewhere within the RV. I've had cats all my life and all would be frightened by thunder, gunfire or the explosion of fireworks on the Fourth of July. Beans continued to amaze me each day.

We continued on northward through Utah and crossed over into Colorado just west of Grand Junction to Rabbit Valley, a Bureau of Land Management (otherwise known as BLM) site. This was a great free camp area in high desert type environment. I was able to ride my little motor-powered mountain bike all around exploring areas I would not be able to drive to and were too far to hike. After a few days of peace and quiet the nomadic urge to move on was too great to resist and so move on we did, to Dinosaur National Monument. I found there were free places to camp at the eastern most edge of the Monument. Once there the directions were confusing. I drove a mile or so in on a road which only looked to get worse. With no place to turn around I backed out all that way. Having got myself in situations like this before I am pretty good driving a small house in reverse. I eventually found the proper place to go but all the spots were not RV friendly, none anywhere near level. I had to use the leveling blocks which made it manageable. Here Beans walked into some low ground hugging cactus and got a few stickers in her hind foot. I carried her back to the RV and wondered if she'd tolerate my trying to get the stickers out. Nope! I had to sit on her while she howled and finally pulled a clump of three out and turned loose one pissed-off cat. A few minutes later we were friends again. I sincerely believe she reasoned out what I did was for her good. I didn't bother driving over to the main part of Dinosaur. I've been there before and doubt nothing had been added in sixty-five million years and why deal with all those tourists?

Now, even being mid-May, I found myself seeking warmer weather. As I toured the Utah Museum of Natural History in Vernal, tiny snowflakes floated through the air outside the windows. We headed for nearby Pelican Lake following Claire's (my GPS girl) directions through someone's ranch which eventually became a road suited only for a tractor and was no longer feasible in a RV. After retracing my route I took the long way around following the satellite image on Google maps. Finally we made it to Pelican Lake which should be renamed *Mosquito Lake*. The only redeeming factor was although there were a bazillion of these pests flying around I wasn't bit once. Beans was fascinated with the water, walking out onto the flattened beds of reeds even getting her feet wet. Sinbad would have had nothing of that.

We went back towards Vernal and I caught sight of a brown BLM sign on the road pointing off to McCoy Flats. This was unlisted on my free campsites website so I drove in to investigate. It turned out to be a great place, peaceful and quiet but otherwise just brush and rocks. Unfortunately there was nothing really worth hiking off into to explore. Yet here it would be Bean's first real capture in the wild. She did get a grasshopper at Rabbit Valley but more importantly here she caught her first lizard. She dove into a bush and came out with this lizard in her mouth. Being that Sinbad never hunted or if he did was never successful, I was amazed at Bean's catching this reptile. She toyed with it a little and the lizard's tail broke free wiggling about doing just what the deception was supposed to. It distracted Bean's attention and the lizard made its escape to live on – minus a tail. Bean's was baffled. *Where did it go?* The next morning we went for a walk and she wanted to go back to the same wash. In no time at all she had herself another lizard, twice as large as the first one. This lizard did something I've never seen a lizard do before. It just stopped moving, as if *playing possum*. Bean's lost interest and walked off. I picked up the lizard but couldn't see any injury. Sitting on my arm I carried it back to camp where I took some good close-up photos of it. Then it seemed to *come to*, moved a bit then scurried off with lightning speed. Seeing how fast it moved just amazed me that this cat is even faster.

By now I had worked up a strong desire to be in the forest. Months of desert living and then being just plain old scrubland will do that to me. We moved northward to the Ashley National Forest near the Wyoming border with Utah. We were at high altitude at 8343 feet and filled with aspens. Beans was ecstatic to be here. I doubt she had ever been in a forest in her short life. Ah but there was a catch in all of this. Even only days away from the official start of summer the wind at that altitude was cold, too cold for this west coast boy to be happy so our stay there didn't last long. I had to get back down to lower elevations. We dropped down 2000 feet to Fort Bridger, Wyoming, an unexpected find. Fort Bridger was a 19th century trading post later turned into a military post in 1858. Many of the buildings still stand and the tourist can walk around viewing the history there. But what really peaked my interest were the nearby "Black and Orange" garage camp traveler cabins built on the Lincoln Highway back in 1929. These are the only remaining traveler cabins along the Lincoln Highway to my knowledge. Sinbad and I toured the Lincoln Highway back in 2014 but I somehow missed this. The best part is that the cabins were restored in 2009 to how they looked back in 1930. Several of the cabins were staged with period clothing and luggage inside just as if you had traveled back in time and were peering through the windows into someone's vacation cabin. It is definitely worth a stop and see.

Ever since I was a young boy and learned about the building of the first trans-continental railroad and the famous golden spike, I wanted to go to the place where the two tracks met, Promontory Point on the north end of the Great Salt Lake in Utah. You have to drive some thirty miles out of the way of going anywhere else just to reach the site. Who'd want to do that? Or so I thought. When I arrived I was amazed at hundreds of people milling around generally being a nuisance waiting for one the trains to arrive. I honestly felt I would drive out to the middle of some grassy plain where a tall granite monument stood with a brass plaque bolted to it describing "On this very spot on May 10, 1869, the Central Pacific's *Jupiter* and the Union Pacific's *No. 119* met to complete the first trans-continental railroad...blah, blah, blah."

The Park Service stages an reenactment of the ceremony that took place on May 10, 1869, complete with players in period dress reciting speeches given for the event. Now I say "nuisance" for it seemed a fair number of people were going around doing just what they were told **not to do** when they paid their admission fee. That would be taking souvenir rocks from the track bed, walking around areas you were not supposed to be walking such as along the track where the approaching steam locomotive would be spewing out boiling hot jets of steam, or laying coins on the track for the train to flatten. I notice things like that. I watch people. One lady had parked her big fat butt on a wooden wagon next to the sign PLEASE KEEP OFF WAGON while waiting for the train to arrive so she could snap her picture. When the ceremony began there were kids yelling and screaming, babies crying and the ceaseless murmur within the crowd of people not paying attention. Even with the aid of a sound system I was able to only pick up bits and pieces of what was being said. I gave up and walked off to read signs and browse the gift shop while the herd was corralled out by the ceremony site. I find myself taking this tactic more and more of late. I can read information signs and look at displays without having kids walk in front of me or simple-minded adults standing next to me reading the information out loud. Use your inside voices people! After the ceremony ended and the crowd dispersed I returned to the locomotives to take some pictures. The two locomotives are replicas faithfully recreated down to the finest detail. The only bad part in my opinion was that they were all shiny and carefully painted up in bright colors as if they just came off the assembly line back east. I'd better appreciate it if they looked as they did back in 1869 for consider, they had just worked their way across the country building this railroad and were obviously filthy dirty, weather worn, all black, and completely covered with dirt, soot and grime. The bling was more attractive and everyone was impressed, except me .

Nothing is real. In fact today there are no railroad tracks leading to or from the area at all. That original first line was out of use by...??? (one of the facts lost to me due to the cacophony of noise from the inattentive crowd) as a new line was built at (where did he say?). What exists today at Promontory Point is 1.7 miles of track laid down on the original track bed for the monument. This short section of tracks enables the Park Service to run two fancy colorful locomotives back and forth upon for the tourist's amusement. The original 19th century rails were torn up and repurposed. The newer track is of steel for they used iron back in 1869 due to the Civil War. Of course, none of the original railroad ties exist either. And who's to say this is the very exact spot that the last railroad tie made of ash from the state of...??? (insert another fact lost to the ceaseless clamor) was laid? As I was trying to compose my shot of the replica last tie this twelve year old or so juvenile delinquent was standing on the nicely stained and polished beam of wood embedded in the gravel. His mom eventually told him to move so "...the man could get a photo". He moved over some leaving a foot inside the track as a token of protest for having to even move at all. "Your foot is still in my photo" I said. He moved it. "Click" "Now you can put your

foot back” *you little shithead* and I walked away. In the photo you can see how someone had stood there grinding the sole of their shoe onto the small shiny stainless steel plaque nailed onto the tie. *There! I left my mark.*

It seems that families are more unruly and disrespectful towards others than they used to be not all that long ago or is it just me who has become less tolerant of the ill-mannered? As I drove back the thirty or so miles I thought about not only this but many of my experiences at popular National Park tourist attractions. It never gets better with the passing of years, only worse, and is amplified by the ever increasing numbers visiting our nation’s wonders.

I drove east a short way to the shore of the Bear River for the night and try to clear my head of the circus I had just left behind. The first order of business, clean up all the litter strewn about the small boat launch area as I wouldn’t be able to sit outside and enjoy the scenery with all that trash in my view. I’ll refrain on going off on this topic for now. The next day we moved on into Idaho where I picked up the Oregon Trail at Soda Springs. Soda Springs was a much anticipated stop for the pioneers on the Trail for here they could relax, refresh their livestock and take in the warm therapeutic waters of the warm thermal springs. Unfortunately this piece of history now lies submerged beneath a man-made reservoir. Also it is said that you can still see the Trail as the wagons wheels ground deep ruts into the earth as they passed right by where we were camped. Unfortunately at this time of the year the grasses were thick and lush and I was unable to locate the wagon wheel ruts.

I saw on my paper map the little town of Freedom situated right on the Wyoming/Idaho border. I had to go see it. Freedom has a population of two-hundred fourteen and sets at 5,777’ in elevation. The border of the two states runs right down the middle of Main Street. Being that the Post Office sits on the east side of the street, Freedom is Freedom, Wyoming. The community was settled in 1879 by Mormon polygamists in order to escape arrest for polygamy. They could be free from Idaho police by simply walking across Main Street into Wyoming. We were now on the Mesa Falls Scenic Drive out of Ashton, Idaho. I pulled over into a turnout to view the Lower Mesa Falls that are sixty-five feet high. Up the road a way was Upper Mesa Falls at one hundred fourteen feet high. Ah, but there they wanted to charge me five dollars to see a bunch of water fall over a cliff. Ha! I continued on up the road.

I found a free camp area online near Island Park, Idaho along the Henrys Fork River. This was an ideal little camp right along a flowing stream of water. All the other campers were nestled back in under the trees and as the spot I chose was out in the open, I had no one around us for the two days we stayed. I like to be out in the open plus with two hundred forty five watts of solar panels on top I do need the sunlight. The site was just west of West Yellowstone by twenty three miles. We did go into town and that was enough tourist exposure for me. I had no aspirations of going into the park and dealing with the traffic and the hoard of tourists. Instead we continued northward on into Montana for a couple of free camps. I stopped at a Walmart in Whitefish-Columbia-Kalispell (I never knew which town I was in) to resupply. When I came out from the store and was walking across the parking to my horror I saw the wind had caught and flipped up and open the skylight vent on the cab-over portion of the motor home. The horror part is that Beans likes to lie on top of the slide-out and is now only eighteen inches from the opening! I panicked thinking for sure she climbed out to do some exploring. Oh the relief to find her calming lying on the slide-out as if nothing had happened. This clear Plexiglas vent cover had been nothing but a nuisance. It has three settings of open and any one of the first two is prone to the wind catching it and

throw it wide open to number three position which is what had just happened. I have to remember to shut it tight and latch it whenever leaving the RV. In addition to that, being clear the sun just pours into that opening. I have to keep a foil covered insulated Styrofoam panel in the space most of the time. One good thing is that it would be so hot in that space I use it to defrost meat or keep pizza or cooked chicken warm by setting them on the panel. We stayed at a Forest Service camp, Yaak River Camp along the Kootenai River near the Idaho border. The two rivers met right at this campground. Here Beans discovered climbing trees is fun. Coming back down was something yet to be learned but after several more trees she started getting pretty good at it. Her going up is limited to the length of the retractable cord on her leash.

Crossing the panhandle of Idaho was as far north as we could go without going into Canada. You may be wondering why we didn't go on into Canada. Well I have a little bit into British Columbia years ago. That was long before 9/11. Now the world has changed. Along with air travel security, border security I just don't have the tolerance or patience for anymore. Also, I don't have the necessary paperwork for Beans to cross borders. With Sinbad it wouldn't have been a problem for he'd hide if someone came to the window. Not Miss Beans! She'd be right there in the window in the border agent's face. "*Meow*".

After just an hour's drive we were in Washington. Washington proved challenging to stay at. You needed a Discovery Pass (thirty dollars...I think) and I just couldn't figure out how to get one through their online site. Well to be honest, I wasn't planning on getting one as I didn't think I'd be in the state long enough to make it worth the expense. With some work I was able to locate a few free places on our route over to the Grand Coulee Dam. By then I was fairly frustrated with Washington and put together a couple of long drive days south and east back into Idaho at Moscow. On those drives we passed through Lind, Kahlotus, Washtucna, Hooper, Pampas and Dusty. All were little towns that now showed very little life left in them. Their Main Streets had more closed and boarded-up businesses than they did stores with WE'RE OPEN signs in the windows. Lind seemed the least distressed. It had a very nice city park with banners on the lampposts welcoming the traveler and advising them that Lind is "Home of the Combine Demolition Derby". Now that would be something to see.

We worked our way south along Highway 95 that skirts along the Salmon River, then the Little Salmon River and over on to Highway 55 towards Boise, Idaho. Everywhere we went the presence of mosquitoes would be the deciding factor as to whether we stayed or not. I can tolerate most any pest but with mosquitoes I draw the line. At one camp in a forest setting I thought we were good but when I took Beans out for her initial exploratory walk the little blood suckers soon found us. Yes, even Beans was under attack. The remainder of the day and that evening we were prisoners inside of the motor home. I don't like to use repellent for it just leaves this sticky smelly feel to you—must be the DEET. I found an alternative online, Picadridin, and pick up a can on the next shopping trip. At the next mosquito infested camp I gave it the test. It smelled okay, felt fine and by god, it actually worked keeping the little buggers at bay. They would fly around my head but never land. Once I developed some faith I was able to let go the annoyance of them flying about and enjoy myself out of doors. It is really a rewarding to buy a product that actually does what it is advertised to do.

Being in hot weather was another unexpected issue. I just didn't expect it here in Idaho. So I reset my focus on camp prospects at altitude. I located Prairie Campground which was not hot, had shade, and was at the confluence of two streams which drowned out the nearby highway noise and best of all...no mosquitoes! I visited with our neighbors who were an older couple from Idaho and had been camping for

years. We were comparing notes as to how things have changed particularly in the fellow campers we encountered in these modern times. The old guy would bring up the very exact observations I had been having which had gave me concern as perhaps I've just become some old curmudgeon. So it wasn't just me with a bad attitude. I gave it more thought after our visit which concluded how some people are just **Disrespectful, Inconsiderate, Rude Tourists** or otherwise known as **DIRT**. And with that, later in the day some DIRT moved in nearby and so Beans and I left the next morning. This proved to be a good in the end for the next camp just down the road a few dozen miles had a very good cell signal. The camp was situated in a broad flat valley. Being wide open I could see for miles and miles. Here that fact really set in with me. I like wide open places. That is why I like the desert so much. Most people like forest settings and as they are nice, I just don't seem to set well within them. I get this confined, closed in feeling especially if I cannot see any further than I can throw a rock, that's if I didn't hit a tree first. I like the wide open sky filled with sunlight in the day and stars at night. And, most will think I am truly nuts on this one, being camped right next to a fast flowing rushing stream isn't all that romantic as I imagined it would be. That first night at the previous camp I couldn't get back to sleep from all the rushing water noise. I had to put in my ear plugs. Then the next morning I found myself shutting the door to the RV just for some quiet as the constant noise was getting to me. So this new place was like heaven. In talking with the old couple that day the lady brought up the point that the upcoming weekend was a four day holiday weekend – Fourth of July! I had no idea. I just don't pay attention to holidays anymore for everyday is a holiday for me now. So I kind of panicked wondering what was I going to do and where can we go to escape the madness. This little valley, Lake Creek just north of Sun Valley, Idaho would do just fine.

There was a side road right near camp that went up into a little canyon to the Taylor Creek trail head. One weekday when the crowds were away I decided to go for a little hike. I was on my way fairly early in the morning so the canyon was still in shade as I walked to the trail head. Once there a local woman had just pulled in and parked. I mentioned to her how I had wished I had brought my gloves being as it was so cold out of doors. She agreed which I am sure was out of total kindness on her part for she was wearing shorts and a tank top. Idaho women! She said she was going to do the trail in reverse as it would be in the sun more than the normal beginning of the trail. Great! I'd follow her for I had no idea otherwise and she obviously knew what she was doing. She turned to me and made the comment as to how nice the sounds of summer were and that was the last time I saw her anywhere within speaking distance. The trail immediately went up, climbing nonstop and she was gone. This continued on for a full mile with no level places. Climb, climb, up, up. The trail head is at 6393 feet in elevation and tops out at 7504 feet at the summit. For me it wasn't so much the climb itself, but the altitude. I am used to one tenth those figures hiking back home. I was grumbling, sniveling, wheezing and whining. And I was thinking about heart attacks. Each time I would stop to take in the view, shoot a picture, drink some water, catch my breath, I'd look up ahead on the trail and see this tiny little figure in red hiking shorts and turquoise blue tank top way, way up there and still climbing. *Oh Lord, is there no end to this?* Once I slowed my pace down from my usual three miles per hour it went better for me...sort of. Finally I reached what I assumed was the top. The trail leveled out and I was able to motor along at my comfortable hiking pace and enjoy the walk. Just as I began to feel as if I might survive all of a sudden there was an explosion of birds out from the brush right by my feet. It scared the bejesus out of me! I had spooked a grouse hen from the brush which in turned scared all of the other little birds around her in the process. *Geez-Louise!* Eventually the trail began a gradual descent and after 3.82 miles I was back at the trail head. I tried to make the best out of my decision in following the woman. If I were to have taken the trail in the proper direction that steep

mile would be at the end, all downhill and no doubt would have taken a toll on my worn-out runner's knees.

I follow on YouTube fewer than ten nomad travelers such as myself. There are dozens out there. Most of those I do follow I do so because they travel with a cat. I don't do YouTube videos as they involve too much work what with all the videoing and then editing. Then there are all the weirdoes out there who leave nasty comments on your videos. In the YouTube community there are referred to as "haters". Anyway, one of those I follow is Amanda and her cat Dilbert who travel around in a Class B van. A Class B is essentially a van all fixed up inside with everything I have in The Little House on the Highway, but with much less space naturally. While there at Lake Creek camp Amanda posted a new video and she was showing her new camp just outside of Sun Valley. I left a comment as to the fact that we were very close to Sun Valley ourselves waiting out the upcoming Fourth of July weekend. She got back to my comment and invited us to where she was so we could meet. Well, this was kind of brave of her in the fact as I said there are a bunch of weirdoes out there, but I guess based on comments I had left over the past few months she determined I was a harmless old man. Besides, I have a cat so I can't be all that bad. As for me, well this invite would require me to step out of my comfort zone. I'd be camping **with** someone, not just near someone. And what if she wasn't like she portrayed herself on her videos? What if she had issues, was irritating or just downright crazy? Well, if she can be brave then I guess I could too. I agreed, especially after she reassured me that where they were would be perfect to weather out the upcoming Fourth of July weekend. After less than a thirty minute drive the next morning and I found her van off all by itself in another ideal valley nestled in between two tall mountain ranges. I got situated, turned off the motor and she came out from her RV greeting me with a hug. That was nice and we were immediately comfortable with each other right away in spite of the thirty-year age difference. We were both introverts, liked our space and for the most part found people annoying, wanting to be well away from them. The meeting of Dilbert and Beans wasn't so warm. Dilbert was a sweet all black cat who reminded me so much of Sinbad. Dilbert was old, scrawny with age and on a special diet for his kidney issues just like Sinbad. Seeing him was one thing but when I petted his soft silky fur it triggered hidden buried feelings within me. I got a bit emotional. I still missed my Sinbad dearly and wasn't aware of it. Here I was seeing my beloved Sinbad in his final years. Meanwhile Beans was all excited to have someone to play with. Dilbert wanted none of that. *"I'm too old for that shit! Leave me alone."* Beans eventually got the message and went back to being Beans doing Beans things ignoring Dilbert who kept a constant eye on her.

One morning Amanda came out from her RV looking exhausted. She explained to me how she had hardly slept any that night. The problem was she had mice in her vehicle and they kept her awake most of the night with their little clawing, scratching and scurrying about. She had been dealing with this all through New Mexico, Utah and now Idaho. She had trapped the occasional mouse every once in awhile, and poor Dilbert was at that age in his life that he couldn't care any less. I suggested to her we take a whole day – tomorrow – tear apart her RV and see if we kind find how they are getting in and maybe eradicate the vermin in the process. "What else do we have to do?" Amanda was all for it. That afternoon we went to the ACE Hardware store in nearby Ketchum. While she selected various mouse catching devices I grabbed some spray foam sealant to fill all the open spaces leading to the outside. At the checkout counter the young girl figured out what we were up to and suggested we get some steel wool to

stuff in those voids. “The mice will chew right through the foam.” Smart Idaho girl. That evening Amanda set out her traps. When I got up the next morning and walked over to her RV, five dead mice were laid out on display on her rug. I was glad to see this for I didn’t want any unexpected surprises while tearing apart her RV and inadvertently squeal like a little girl. We began clearing out all her stuff. It didn’t appear any way they could come through her closet so she was spared laying all her clothing out in the dirt. When the interior was built the company enclosed the rear wheel wells with boarding in a box shape. This was a lot of wasted space that held only some duct work for the heater and a few wires and hoses. I removed the screws to the “lid” on one side and there I found an empty nest. This was a good find. One interesting moment was spraying the sealant around the opening where the sink drain went outside. All of a sudden there was a loud “whomp” and a flash of flame. The volatile fumes from the sealant were set off by a pilot light to her refrigerator. This knocked me back, singeing the hair on my arms and Amanda yelled “Are you okay!?” This scared both us enough to call it quits. I had everything put back together and she started putting her gear back inside sorting as she went making a pile of unwanted items to go to the thrift shop. Meanwhile I was working on trying to get the dried sealant off from my skin where I had stuck my arm in it while lying on the floor in all types of unnatural positions reaching into all the nooks and crannies. By then we were done for and relaxed with some beer wishing we could have pizza delivered to us out in the boonies. For some reason, maybe women’s intuition, she felt there were two more mice still unaccounted for. She set out the traps again that evening. That night I gave up trying to sleep. Three o’clock in the morning and Beans felt like playing with her toys running around the motor home. “Beans, stop it!” I got up to go pee, turned on the light and noticed a lump under the rug. *Must be one of her toys.* I pulled back the rug and there was a dead mouse. “So that’s what all the ruckus was about.” I tossed her kill outside and went back to sleep. The next morning Amanda proudly showed me number six mouse in a trap. I then showed her number seven that Bean’s had killed. I figured in all the commotion we were doing in her RV that one mouse vacated over to my RV which was a bad decision on his part. So Amanda was right, there were two more and this left me wondering *so how did that mouse get inside my RV?*

And then there was the BAD day. One day I was sitting in the doorway of the motor home talking with Amanda when all of a sudden Beans leaped over my shoulder to the outside and took off. Shit! “Beans, come here. Come here Beans.” No, she had other thoughts as I followed her over to the embankment behind camp. There she went over the edge and down the slope. I was in a panic state by now. I’ll pause this story to say that Beans and I play around, rough house and wrestle inside the RV. She loves to do this. She never bites or claws but both teeth and claws do play into this but she restrains them, just as if playing with a sibling. I can grab her head, roll her around, grab feet, legs, belly, anything but her tail. She does not like her tail messed with. Now, back to the chase. At what I felt was my last chance to grab her I made a bad decision, a serious mistake not even thinking but just doing as I would with Sinbad. I could always grab Sinbad’s tail to stop him from going anywhere I didn’t want him to. He liked to hang out the window as we drove and I would hang onto his tail as a safety measure so he wouldn’t accidentally fall out. And so, out of habit, I grabbed Beans’ tail. She screamed, whirled around and sunk her teeth and claws into my hand and forearm. I know she was frightened and thought something, not me, had caught her. I let go, she reversed course and vanished, and I began sliding down the steep embankment unable to stop. Fortunately about a hundred feet down was a large tree that had fallen and I was able to stop against it or probably would have kept going to the bottom of the canyon. Incidentally, all the dead mice had been tossed down there, somewhere, and it stunk. After realizing I wasn’t going to

the bottom I then wondered if I had just slid over mouse carcasses. I was able to slowly make my way up on a diagonal to where Amanda stood frightened to death. She thought for sure I was going all the way to the bottom many hundreds of feet down. She helped me up to flat ground asking me if I was okay. I said I was, but really wasn't. She then reassured me that Beans was okay as she had seen her run back inside the RV. For this I was so very happy, and now truly was okay. I didn't care how bad I was hurt. Back inside Beans was up top in her usual spot looking down at me. "It's okay sweetie." Amanda and I went to my little bathroom and she helped clean and dress my wounds. I fumbled around for some first aid supplies coming up with items that probably dated back World War Two. Amanda made it clear to me "You need to get yourself some decent first aid supplies!" She was right. The leg that was under me as I slid down the leaf covered rocky ground looked like someone had taken a swipe at with a cheese grater. The arm and hand didn't look as bad but inside was another matter. I was concerned about infection and so did NOT want to go to an emergency clinic. I'd keep an eye on it. I wrapped an ACE bandage around it to help keep the gauze bandages in place so my arm and hand wouldn't leak onto my bedding. The next couple of days the arm and hand had naturally swelled, became slightly discolored but then no more became of it and gradually cleared up. Ten days later the last of the scabs came off from my leg. Beans never again darted off and I was very lucky.

After two weeks at this great camp we needed to move on as most stays in National Forest lands are limited to fourteen-days. Amanda was heading northward while Beans and I were moving south. We exchanged contact information and would keep in touch with one another. I saw on the paper map how close we were to Craters of the Moon National Monument and being it had been many years since I was there last I decided to visit. As normal, nothing was as I remembered it which is kind of nice, like it being all new to me once again. I found a fairly level spot and paid, yes I actually paid real money, to camp for three nights even with no cell service. Imagine that. One of the days I walked over to the visitor center to browse around and noticed they had for sale eye protection glasses for the upcoming great celestial event that was to occur five weeks away – the all American total solar eclipse. This event had been talked and written about for years preceding it and I was planning to take advantage of my new nomadic lifestyle by setting myself in the right spot for the show. There had been news stories about cheap *Made in China* knock-off eye glasses being sold that really didn't protect your eyes from the solar rays and you could burn the retinas of your eyeballs. I bought a pair knowing I was buying approved quality eye protection plus supporting the Park Service in addition.

After hiking and exploring all the trails in the Monument we moved on eastward. Dirty laundry was building up and I'd been putting it off long enough. Just outside of the little town of Arco, Idaho was an RV park and right there in sight from the highway I saw the word LAUNDRY on the side of a building. I wheeled on in, bought a fistful of quarters from the RV park owner and did my stinky laundry. This would prove to be so much nicer than a laundromat with a bunch of people milling about. With the dirty deed done we continued on to Idaho Falls, veered northeast enjoying the beautiful scenery of Idaho. But I had no plan and wasn't sure as where to go until I looked at the map. We were closing in on our previous camp at Henry's Fork. *Why not go back there, Beans?* I pulled in off the road, followed the dirt road the mile or so and there, right by the water's edge stood our site vacant, waiting just for us. It was meant to be. I think Beans' remembered it and was happy to be back. Nothing had changed except the water was warmer now and more enjoyable to sit in and soak. I spent a few days doing nothing much but watch gophers push up mounds of dirt and the occasional fly fisherman wading past.

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