

Beans and I on the Loose
A Traveler and his Cat Exploring America.
Book Three
2019

Seven Months
of Summer

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...

Summertime,

And the livin' is easy...

Porgy and Bess

Summertime

George Gershwin, 1935

Seven Months of Summer

ARIZONA

We had arrived at our winter retreat in Quartzite, Arizona on October 10 the previous year, 2018. I planned to do something different that time in that I would pay a hundred-eighty dollars to stay in any of the four BLM (Bureau of Land Management) LTVA (Long Term Visitor Area) camps. This would permit us to stay in the area for up to seven months (Sept. 15-April 15) rather than having to move around between several free fourteen-day stay limit short term BLM camps as I had always done in the past. In addition to the extended stay privilege I had access to free water, free dumping of waste water and free trash disposal. So in all it isn't a bad deal and could work out to be as little as eighty-six cents a day camping. That is pretty cheap "rent".

Now having said we arrived on October 10 this was much earlier than I had planned. We were in Winslow, Arizona when the weather turned; it became quite cold—by my standards which aren't all that forgiving when it comes to cold—and I checked the weather in Quartzite. It showed to be over ten degrees warmer and so we headed to the western side of the state. At the same time I received a message from my friend Joanna who I had met a year previously in Quartzite. She was camped in one of the LTVA areas, the one closest to town. This hadn't been in my plan as I was thinking more of way out in the hinterland away from all the people and hub-bub. I learned she had volunteered to work for the BLM a couple days a week checking campers in and in doing so she did not have to pay the one-eighty fee. She got to stay for free. This is why she was where I didn't necessarily want to be. Yet, I figured I would go see her and maybe stay for a week or two at the most. I could tolerate close camping for at least that long. I ended up staying with her for five months! It wasn't all that bad. I could walk into town for supplies rather than breaking camp and the "neighborhood" for the most part was quiet and entertaining. People watching can be a great past time.

Sitting in one spot doesn't provide the stories as does traveling around the country does in the remaining months of the year. But occasionally a story does surface and here are a few encounters during our winter lay-over before Beans and I began a new year of traveling the back roads of America.

A Special Christmas Moment

I was standing outside one of only two small grocery stores in Quartzsite reading the bulletin board ads. Nearby was a frail elderly woman, dressed in a red full-length garment, blonde hair rolled in a bun on top of her head, carefully positioning herself in her roll-around wheel chair. Several bags containing her possessions hung from the arms and back of the chair, her cane poking out in the back. The lady in red moved real slow, had difficulty in doing most everything and was attempting to make arrangements for a ride to her doctor sifting through her papers and digging out her phone. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a woman walk up to the lady and slip her a few dollars. The lady in red said "I'm not begging." The woman told her "You keep it. Merry Christmas" and she walked away. I talked with the lady in red. She was deeply moved by the gift and told me she had been having trouble lately with people stealing from her (I didn't inquire as to details on that) and couldn't believe someone just gave her a few dollars. I said "Maybe this is a sign that good things will come your way now." I told her how that act of kindness on

the part of the mystery woman and my being witness to it just made my day. I wished her well and couldn't get the lady in red out from my mind for several hours afterwards.

The Lady at the Water Fill-up Station

I drove down to the larger LTVA south of Quartzite to top off the water tank in the RV. There are four pipe outlets for water fill-up each stand about four feet high, a faucet on each side. As I was filling the tank a lady pulled in on the other side of me. She was in a small SUV type of car. She was heavy-set, may have been in her forties, hard to say as she was bundled up against the cold. Wearing a heavy coat, knit cap, long black braid of hair and bare foot except for flip-flops; it was too cold for me to not have anything on my feet! She was filling a white five-gallon bucket. She was going to do her laundry. "I need to get a hose like yours" she remarked as the water shot out from the faucet some of which wasn't making it into her bucket. We got to talking.

I learned she had been bedridden for three years, with little or no use of her arms and legs following a traffic accident. She said "I used to exercise, do Zumba dance workouts and run 5k runs. You wouldn't know that to look at me now." She would tell her daughters, "If I ever get out of this bed, I am making a big life change."

Her prospects never looked good until she stopped taking the medication the doctors had put her on. Gradually she recovered, became mobile and left her prison-in-a-bed life. She told me she would watch YouTube videos while incapacitated and learned of this nomadic life on the road. She had packed what she needed in her car and this was the first time she had ever been in the desert. She was living out of a tent and so very happy. "I walked five miles yesterday!"

I have heard similar stories about the detrimental effects of prescribed medications. Someone once told me they didn't trust doctors. "They don't know anything. They don't care. They cause more trouble than they cure. They charge the earth and if you don't get better they blame you for it. After they blind you or cripple you, so that you've got no choice but to sue them, where do you have to go? To a lawyer! And that's worse!"

The lady hefted the five-gallon bucket full of water into her car (remember, less than a year ago she couldn't even lift her leg or arm) and we exchanged good-byes. I wished her the best. She left me inspired for the rest of the day.

Walking to Woodstock

Every once in awhile during our five-month long stay in camp I would see this older man walking by heading for town a mile away; grey hair, grey beard, slightly built, day pack on his back, usually wearing a tie-died shirt. A couple of times I had come across him walking down the dirt road to the LTVA camp area south of us about two miles distant. He would be carrying two one-gallon jugs of water, sometimes sitting in the shade of a mesquite tree taking a break. One day during one of my hikes we met on the road and I just had to say something to him.

"I see you walking by my camp, in town and sometimes way out here on Yuma Road. Just wanted to say I admire you walking everywhere you go."

"Yep, I walk all the time" he said. In fact I came to learn that that was his only means of transportation—walking. He mentioned the upcoming fiftieth anniversary of Woodstock. "Bethel, New York. I'm going there, walking." Bethel, New York is 2200 miles from Quartzite, Arizona, if you are a crow. By road it is 2529 miles! He told me how he had gone to the original Woodstock event. He was thirteen years old and got picked up by the local law enforcement as a "teen runaway" and sent back

home. That would make him sixty-three years old today, seven years my junior. I wished him well and continued on with my three-mile hike. I hope he makes it. He will. [Unfortunately later in the year the Woodstock celebration event was canceled]

Dave

Dave moved in near our camp a few months after we had arrived. He was sixty-seven, had a rough leathery face much like Rolling Stone Keith Richards or actor Tommy Lee Jones. His dark shoulder-length hair was always unkempt and appeared greasy and went along with his scraggly beard. He walked slowly, slightly off-kilter and was hard of hearing. He had done three years in the army, a Vietnam veteran, got out in 1971 and said "Screw the world". A tour in Vietnam will do that to you. He bought a Harley Davidson motorcycle and rode away. He joined a Maine chapter of the Hells Angels but that lasted for only six months. "They had too many rules."

Over time he wound up buying a sailboat, a pure sailboat with no motor. He lived full time on the boat out of Key Largo, Florida. He sailed all about in the area including to Bermuda for eight years until a hurricane de-masted the boat and he was unable to afford the repairs. He still has the boat parked on a cousin's piece of land up in Maine.

It was at this time fifteen years ago he bought eighteen acres of land in the wilderness near the Maine/Canadian border. He built a log cabin with a flat roof, dirt floor, no electricity, no plumbing and lived there for fifteen years. All heating was done with wood and he spent most of the summer cutting up wood to get him through the brutal winters. Then one day he discovered people were growing pot on his land. In Maine you are only allowed to grow six plants; this was a whole field of marijuana plants. He talked to them about this. "You're gonna get me in trouble." They ignored him doing nothing about the plants so he chopped down the plants. They in turn burned down his cabin. "Oh well, I was getting tired of walking a mile through snow to get to the road anyway." He sold the land, bought an old van, a travel trailer, loaded up Harley number ten and left Maine for a life on the road as a nomad.

Dave has had Harleys all his life. This may explain his hard of hearing problem. On Harley #8 an old lady in an Oldsmobile turned in front of him and he centered punched her in the driver's door. He walked away from the accident; the old lady went to the hospital. Witnesses told the police it was her fault. With Harley #9 he was rear-ended by a car going fifty miles-per-hour. Dave went sailing for over a hundred feet. This time he sustained a broken back. "I got glue in there holding me together." He was in a wheelchair for a year and now is supposed to use cane. "I keep forgetting. It's in the trailer somewhere." This is why he walks slow and off-kilter.

Dave was nothing like he looked. He was kind and soft-spoken. He gifted my camp mate Joanna a hundred watt solar panel that was on the top of his van. "Here, you can have this." He had a weakness for Pepsi Cola polishing off a six-pack or more every day. A few weeks after Dave moved in we eventually moved south a mile to a quieter location away from the highway noise. We learned later Dave had had an accident on Harley #10. He was motoring along at eighty miles per hour when his weathered old rear tire went flat as he approached a right angle turn in the middle of nowhere on a lonely desert highway over in California. The accident broke his ankle and further disfigured his face.

Greg

We never knew his name for sure; was it Craig or Greg? So for a couple of months we referred to him as Craig-Greg. He was camped about a hundred yards from us in a beat up old brown GMC passenger van. A small equally abused little old fiberglass camper trailer sat in his camp site. Greg would drive

everywhere he needed to go. Every morning he would drive into town to McDonalds and get some sort of breakfast. Using the drive-up window he didn't have to get out. He would buy the daily newspaper and then pass it on to others in camp. Towards the end he quit doing this as no one ever showed any appreciation for his newspaper. Lunch time he'd go back into town and maybe hit Burger King, again not having to get out due to the drive-up window. Dinner most likely was the same routine. Other campers always were on the lookout for Greg and sometimes brought him meals, us included. We never saw him out of his van. Sometimes he would be taking a nap, in the van sitting behind the steering wheel. For all we could tell it looked as if he had died there in the driver's seat. Greg would come by and show us "treasures" he would pick up at the give-away tables at each of the four kiosks and sometimes "gifts" left behind at the dumpsters as people would leave things outside the dumpster that may be of use to someone. Greg kept me supplied with lots of books. After I read them I would return them to him as he was taking the load back home for his daughter. Home was a flyspeck of a town on the map in the southeast portion of Iowa. Sometimes when Greg would come by we had to be sure to be upwind from him. Joanna especially would pick up on his smell. She would not hesitate in telling him he needed a bath. I think most of the smell came from his clothes as he never did laundry and traces of his fast food meals were always present dribbled down his shirt. As the months went by the back of the van grew ever so much packed with all of his finds. Greg informed us he had been coming to Quartzite for thirty years now and felt this would be the last time he would make the trip. He was ninety-six years old. Overlooking all of Greg's short comings the fact alone that he was still out here doing this at his age was an inspiration to both of us, especially me. "Greg, when I grow up and want to be just like you." He'd smile. He was still sharp as a tack and very witty but he knew it was becoming more difficult for him to make the drive, to get around and one could not help but notice the growing cataracts in his eyes.

We met many people while there for those five months. Everyone has a story. Two people had heart attacks while there. Each was transported to Phoenix for repairs and the installing of electronic devices to keep the heart ticking properly. Both within weeks were walking around. Joanna while working at the check-station met many more people of course and was in contact with the BLM rangers often. Occasionally a camper would come in and register a 'welfare check' on a fellow camper. These originated usually from the fact of just sitting there in your own camp and not seeing any activity at all from a neighbor's camp over a period of time. So they would bring this to the attention at the check-in booth, a welfare check was written up and the rangers would go out and check. Most of the time it wasn't anything except that the individual just holed himself up inside like a hermit. Yet there were the other instances. One ranger informed Joanna that they discovered eight individual cases last year of people having died in their RV.

For nearly a year I had been having issues with my Motoped cycle. If you can picture a beefed up mountain bike with a 50cc motor, this is what the Motoped Survival bike is. It had been giving me problems for the past year requiring frequent adjustments to the settings of the valves. Over time the problem grew worse and the bike lost power. Around the first of the year it would barely run going no faster than if I was peddling a regular bicycle. I finally gave up and parked it. A couple weeks later, with nothing else to do, I removed the head on the engine. I discovered the intake valve was burnt and had receded into the head. It was then I seriously gave thought to just get rid of this Chinese-made knock-off clone of a Honda motor and put in a true reliable Honda 50 engine. Research showed that the engines alone were hard to come by and a rebuilt motor would go for nearly a grand and that was when supplying

your own motor which I did not have. Oh how I longed for the 1979 Honda Trail 90 that I had completed restored and foolishly sold some years ago. Also I wished I had my nice mountain bike with me that hung from the rafters in the garage back in California. I thought back over the past couple of years at how many times the bike would have been nice to have, surely now as the Motoped was down. I hadn't brought a bicycle with me for I had that damn Motoped. I decided when my time was up in Quartzite I'd make the dreaded trip back through California, to the house, and get the mountain bike.

Over the winter Joanna had secured a camp host position at a small Forest Service campground in Wyoming. That was to begin in May. She wanted to spend time with family in Colorado before beginning her new job so at the end of March we left Quartzite for Lake Havasu City at the California/Arizona border near Needles California. There we camped for two days and then parted ways, her to the east and Beans and I would head west to California. After Joanna drove away I decided to take a walk up the narrow rocky road that led into the canyon near camp. I had seen several vehicles go in up that way only to soon turn around and come back out. I assumed camp spots were not to be had up that road or it just became impassable. I hiked in a half a mile or so and was surprised to see an old van and travel trailer parked just off the rocky trail. I saw someone outside and planned on complimenting them on dragging that trailer up there and getting parked as they had. That person turned out to be a lone woman and her blind little dog. I met Kat from Oregon. I'd guessed her to be in her early forties. She was tall, short spikey hair sticking out in all different directions and had the prettiest blue eyes you could imagine. She wore a dirty brown t-shirt, equally dirty levis, and flip flops on her dried cracked weathered feet. She seemed pleased to meet me and we shook hands as we introduced ourselves. Her hands were rough like those of a construction worker. Her voice gravely but she was very pleasant to talk with. I eventually told her how impressed I was that she got her twenty-six foot long trailer up that road and parked as she did. I come to learn that she had just bought both the van and trailer recently and didn't have any money left to get it registered so was kind of "hiding out" up there until she was in a better way. She also let on that she had just left an "unpleasant situation" in Oregon. She bought the van through an ad on Craigslist for four hundred dollars and the trailer for one hundred dollars—two different sellers. She said she checked to make sure neither were stolen property before making the deals. The white van looked well used with ladder racks up top and a good share of dents in the body along with a cracked windshield as it had been used as a telecommunications service van. Despite its appearance it got her and the trailer across the Mojave Desert from Bakersfield without a problem. The trailer was equally abused looking on the outside; the inside was a whole other issue. I stepped in and went no further than the doorway as I took in the total chaos in front of me. Everything was in complete disarray as if the trailer had rolled over and landed up on its wheels once again. Her clothing, the few possessions she had, parts and pieces of the trailer, building supplies, cans of food and dry goods, all were strewn about on the floor. No cabinets remained. The interior had been totally gutted. Some exterior walls were exposed to bare wood framework and insulation. All that remained from how it once looked was half of an interior wall separating the living area (such as it was) and the "bedroom" where a mattress lay flopped on the floor. A hanging portion of the kitchen counter top remained and the cabinet that held the original refrigerator was still in place and worked...kind of, she said. Along one wall someone had installed a wood burning stove. Next to it a Pepsi Cola cooler case—not working. In the middle of the floor lay her deaf and blind little dog unaware I was there. She had lots of ideas and plans to fix things up and I didn't judge her any since she had only had the trailer for three weeks. She pointed out all the tools and power tools sitting on the shelf up front that came with the trailer. "They alone are worth over the hundred dollars I paid". She admitted she

wasn't all that knowledgeable when it came to fixing things but she wasn't afraid to try. I admired her spirit and although I liked her I knew I couldn't get involved. I wished her luck and continued on my hike. I'd really like to run into Kat again someday and see how she had come along. I think she'll do fine.

As we made our way north over the next couple of days I had a lot of time to think. The Motoped had become an albatross to me and I resolved to get rid of it as is. I'd take my loss and move on. Maybe I could find a Honda 90 Trail bike. I had looked online and the few out there were parts bikes, needed a lot of work or were highly priced.

On April first I arrived at the house. It was good to see the ex. We hadn't seen each other in three years. While there I went through the things I had left behind when I had purged my life of all my stuff and junk before going on the road full time. What I left behind were the things I didn't have the courage to get rid of at the time. Now three years later it was easier to let go. They didn't mean anything to me any longer. I wanted to help her clean the clutter, simplify her life and do various little projects around the house that she was unable to do herself and was reluctant to pay a handyman for. In return, she fed me like a king. A week into this I finally got around to putting the Motoped on Craigslist at one-third the price I paid or 'best offer'. I got hits right away which kind of surprised me. Many offers were very low and a couple guys wanted to come see it that weekend. But when a kid from Sacramento offered two hundred dollars over the asking price I said he could have it. I wasn't going to wait through the weekend as planned and deal with tire kickers. He came on a Friday morning, paid cash, was happy to have it and I was happy to see it go. That went much easier than I had anticipated. At the same time a very nice looking 1972 Honda Trail 90 showed up on Craigslist and amazingly it was right there in town!

Over the winter Joanna was always trying to convince me of "the power of the Universe". She would tell me that if there is anything you want, you put the word out there in mind and thought and "the Universe will provide". Yeah, right. But over those months too many things happened to support her belief and it began to get creepy to me. Little things like how she wished she had a hummingbird feeder so we could feed the humming birds around camp. Two days later I came by a hummingbird feeder someone was giving away. She wished she could afford a 100 watt solar panel to keep her battery for her trailer charged up. Within a week, Dave walked over and gave her that solar panel. He didn't know she wanted one. And so now here I was wishing to get rid of that Motoped—which I did very easily at more than I had hoped for—and even more amazing, a Honda Trail 90 bike shows up looking every bit as good as the one I had (new tires, battery, other parts and pieces, everything clean, rust removed and polished) and for a price lower than similar bikes online needing work. I bought it. Four weeks later after arriving I never thought I would be driving away having accomplished everything I had.

I so desperately wanted to put California in the rear view mirror and in the last week of April Beans and I were back on the road. This year of traveling I would strive to do shorter drives, stay in places longer, stop driving earlier in the day and be in no rush to move out in the morning. And with that thought I put in a long four hundred mile drive on the very first day. I wanted out of California that bad. That's my excuse. We stopped in Fernley, Nevada between a Walmart (no overnight parking allowed) and a Lowes. The next day was a short drive on Interstate 80 to Imlay, Nevada followed by another short drive to a rest area at Valmay. My new driving plan bit me in the butt the next morning at Valmay. We woke up to snow falling. Knowing snow was in the offering I should have pressed on the day before. We could stay put but the forecast predicted temperatures to drop down to twenty-five degrees that night. Dying a frozen death at a lonely rest stop along a desolate Nevada highway isn't my way of choice for checking out. I decided

to drive the remaining hundred-ninety miles to the Utah border—so much for my new traveling plan. We drove on to Elko where I stopped for a bite to eat and see what we would be dealing with further on in Wells, Nevada where the altitude was the highest at over six thousand feet. Snow was forecasted all day for Wells. I reasoned the sooner I got through there the less chance for the snow to build up. As it was I hit it just right with no snow falling over the high passes. Pure dumb luck on my part and I was even able to relax some and enjoy the snow-covered scenery. Crossing the border into Utah we dropped in elevation and stayed at our usual camp area near the Bonneville Salt Flats just outside of Wendover. No rain, no snow and sunny skies were predicted for the following week.

UTAH

That night after I turned out the light and tried to go to sleep Beans decided to start playing around up front. “Beans, stop it!” *Groan*. I got up, pulled back the curtain and saw the dashboard lights were on. *What did she do now?* Then I recalled having driven through the snow storm with the headlights on. I had forgotten to turn the lights off! It was now five hours later! The battery wouldn’t turn over the engine. The Dodge Sprinter has a battery boost button on the dash. I had never used it before. Supposedly you push the button, the circuit switches over to the coach batteries to start the motor. I tried it and lo and behold the engine started right up. *Whew! Thank you Beans and thank you Dodge*. I fed Beans extra bit more as a reward.

We spent three days there at the BLM Silver Island Mountains Recreational Area. I took the new-to-me Honda Trail 90 out twice thoroughly enjoying the bike over the Motoped Chinese junk motor powered bicycle. With just 40cc’s more in engine displacement it could do so much more in addition having a low range gear option giving me four low gears to climb long steep grades whereas the Motoped struggled and I had to pedal to help it along. It would take me awhile to get over that poor decision I made several years ago selling the other Honda Trail 90 and then later buying the “Survival Bike”.

One morning I woke up to the sight of runners passing by our desolate camp. Watching them pass by stirred up fond memories for me. For my thirtieth birthday I gave myself a present. I was overweight and out of shape. I would change that. I started jogging. The jogging craze was full-on in the late 70's. I couldn't even make it around the high school track once without hallucinating. I stuck to it and later entered a local running event of 5km (3.1 miles). I was hooked. I loved the competition. Over the next ten plus years I entered races of all lengths. I even did a marathon (26.2 miles)...once. My goal was to do the marathon in less than three hours. I made it with a minute to spare. Never again! I stuck to the shorter races of a half marathon and under. Ah, but eventually all those miles of hard training and racing took a toll on my knees and I had to quit running. Another twenty years passed and we moved next to Annadel State Park near Santa Rosa, CA. and I got into hiking the trails there everyday. I loved it. Occasionally I would see people running the trails. That lit a spark in me. I started jogging again. Fortunately this time I was in much better shape and soon progressed to running the trails I hiked. Oh my! Such joy. This was so much better and more fun than running on streets. But I was older now and a problem soon reared itself. I had developed a smooth and efficient style of running while racing. This style did not bode well on trails. I ran barely picking up my feet and thus frequently would get tripped up by even the smallest rock. Several times I crashed and burned picking myself up with skinned palms and knees. I couldn't change my style of running and I couldn't risk breaking bones miles way out in the wilderness. After about five years of this nonsense on February 29, 2016 I ran 4.3 miles on a trail. It was to be my final run.

I researched and found out these runners were taking part in the *Salt Flats 100*. The event comprised of three different lengths of your choice: 50 km (31 miles), 50 miles and a 100 miler. I watched them all morning into the afternoon. Oh how I wished...

The next morning when we left I drove on out the asphalt road to the salt flats itself, which were under water. There stood the finishing line on the paved road. I had passed a woman and a man on the way to that line, still walking and running twenty-seven hours after the start of the run the previous morning. No doubt they had slept some over the night. That day we put in a hundred sixty-five miles of driving before finding a Walmart Campground in Saratoga Springs, Utah. My new driving plan was going by the wayside fast.

I tried to get back with the program and split the driving distance of our ultimate goal in half with an overnight stop at an abandoned Denny's restaurant in Salina, Utah. The next day we arrived at Willow Springs north of Moab, Utah. We had been there a year and a half ago and I wanted to return as I still had some exploring to do. One of the features of this area was fossilized dinosaur tracks embedded in the slick rock. When I found it before I discovered just beyond was a back way entrance into Arches National Monument. This I wanted to explore on my new more reliable motorbike.

I slowly drove down the rutted dirt road and was amazed at how many people were there being the start of only the second week of May. *Doesn't anyone have to work anymore?* Many of the people were very young. *Shouldn't you be in school?* I was concerned about having to camp near someone when I spotted an incline up to a small table-top plateau of a hill. The Little House on the Highway motored right up on top. *Oh, this will do just fine. No one will come up here. There's not enough room.* Ha! That evening two cars pulled up the hill and set up tents right out our back window. Okay, they left right away in the morning. I rolled out some stumps left behind for firewood and created a little barrier blocking the road in. This pretty much solved the problem yet I was living in constant fear someone would still move in. Cars would slow down at the bottom as they drove by eyeing the real estate we had.

I tried to forget about it and enjoy my time there. My first motorbike ride took me out to those dinosaur tracks and beyond. I was stopped at that back road entrance to Arches N.M. by a new sign posted. Among the long list of things you couldn't do were: NO TWO-WHEELED MOTORIZED VEHICLES. THIS INCLUDES STREET LEGAL MOTORCYCLES. Well great! So much for my grand plan of exploring the seldom seen portion of Arches National Monument.

When the weekend arrived the place became a zoo with all the mountain bikers and ATVers not to mention my self-imposed worrying about the increasing amount of people passing by thinking of trespassing; I wasn't enjoying myself. The three day Memorial Day holiday weekend loomed on the horizon. I knew this place would be a madhouse. One day a guy parked down below and came up to the RV. *"Hello?"* His name was Trevor and he was wondering how long we were going to be there. He and his wife Jenny with their newborn were camping outside Moab along the Colorado River in their old Airstream trailer. I told him I was going to leave early that coming Monday and they could have the spot. I even suggested they come up Sunday so as to not lose the chance for what seemed to be the primo spot of Willow Springs. He was ever so grateful and they arrived that Sunday afternoon. I was surprised he got that long Airstream up the slope and maneuvered it into position behind us as he did. I met his wife Jenny. She had beautiful thick red hair framing her freckle-filled pale skin. What is it with redheaded women? I love 'em.

We left for town Monday morning where I stocked up on some groceries, filled up with fuel and found some free water. One task was to send all the required paperwork to register the Honda Trail 90 in South Dakota. With errands done we backtracked north beyond Willow Springs to Klondike Bluffs. I had not been there before. I found a nice little spot in a cove at the base of a hill away from where most other people were camped. There were far less campers here and it looked promising. Especially so in the fact there were no ATVers, just mountain bikers and they don't go so fast stirring up dust. Plus mountain bikes are quiet. Not so much their owners though.

We stayed the full fourteen-day limit at Klondike enjoying everything it had to offer. Dinosaur tracks were close by, within hiking distance from camp. One set of dinosaur tracks were a longer trek of five miles and that hike proved to be one of the best I had done in quite awhile. It was very remote with no one else to be seen. Early in the hike as I was cutting cross country through the sagebrush I came upon a reddish orange heart-shaped chunk of jasper, weighing eight or nine ounces. This three inch long two inch thick rock will probably be the best find of my lifetime. I'm always looking for heart-shaped rocks but to find one with the perfect multi-coloration of a real heart in a three dimensional form, I'll never do better. The entire area was spider-webbed with trails, many exclusive to mountain bikers and hikers. I finally took the mountain bike down off the rack and went for a ride. It had been over three years since I last rode on trails and learned straight away I was out of shape. I had some work to do yet still, five miles later I had enjoyed myself. And I explored all around on the Honda 90 also. On one ride I ran out of gas two miles from camp. I knew it was getting low but just didn't know what was *too low* when looking into the gas tank. I was still learning the bike and hadn't taken the precaution to put some gas in the auxiliary fuel can strapped to the side of the bike. I had to push the motorcycle back those two miles, not something I was too thrilled about especially since this was right after my maiden voyage out on the bicycle! At least I wasn't so out of shape that I could push a motorbike for two miles across the desert.

A few days we had some showers and the terrain would become a muddy mess in camp. I realized the RV had sunk a bit into the muck. Another rain was predicted and I decided to pull out a day early and just camp along the terra firma road out for the night avoiding more mud on departure morning. Well the sinking of the RV had wedged the support blocks under the steps in that it took a bit of work digging them out just so the steps would retract when I started the engine. Then more work digging out the leveling blocks under the tires. It was a good thing we left when it was dry (the rain never materialized). We left the following morning under clear skies heading northeast to just over the Utah/Colorado border at Rabbit Valley, a place we were at a year and a half ago that has made our top five list of favorite places to camp.

COLORADO

Rabbit Valley

Rabbit Valley is part of the McInnis Canyons National Conservation Area sections of which are beautiful red rock cliffs and canyons. With the Honda Trail 90 I had a much more reliable machine under my butt and was eager to explore deeper into the Conservation Area than I had with the Motoped. The bike has a set of low range gears which is put into operation by shifting a small lever down under the side case of the engine. Before hills used to cause me to have to stand up and pedal or worse yet, get off and push. Now I could easily motor up with the bike in low range. A virtual mountain goat it is. Map boards set up at various trail heads would pinpoint where you were and where you could go. I noticed further

south was the Colorado River and it appeared to lay at the bottom of a deep canyon—possibly a smaller version of the Grand Canyon? I wondered. I wanted to go check it out. I went many miles in, crested a rise and could see off in the distance that I had many more unknown miles to go crossing a broad flat valley before even getting close. I sat there and thought about it. If the bike crapped out, if I crapped out, or worse still got hurt, no one knew where I was. Being alone I really had no business pressing on and reluctantly turned around and headed back for camp. This is one of the reasons I have always traveled with a cat. I worry about them more than I do myself. Having a cat waiting for me back at camp keeps me from doing stupid shit. Therefore most all my trail riding was done on trails I had been on before but that's not to say I was bored or didn't have fun. But it was on my mind *I've seen this and done this already* much of the time. Same held true for hiking straight out from camp. It all seemed so familiar even though it had been a year and a half ago.

I had made a “redneck” repair to the exhaust pipe on the bike before leaving the house. I bought a muffler wrap repair kit from the auto parts store and made a fix to a blown out portion of the exhaust pipe. I had little confidence in this product and it didn't disappoint. At some point at Willow Springs or Klondike the wrap gave way and the exhaust gases were blowing through. I had also discovered a leak in the gas tank. This small crack was a result of the seat rubbing against the metal—the gas tank is under the seat and the seat cushion rests on top of the tank—and fatigue eventually led to a small crack, fortunately on top where only fumes or gasoline splashing about was all that leaked. I did a repair to the crack using JB Weld but this didn't hold. I did a second repair, roughing up the metal for the epoxy to stick better. This worked better but a blister still presented itself at the crack although hadn't leaked out any. So at Rabbit Valley I did two repairs the way they should have been done the first time. I cut metal patches from a beef stew can. I carefully cut and shaped one patch to follow the curve of the exhaust pipe and secured it in place with JB Weld. After that set overnight I then wrapped a tin can ‘bandage’ around the whole pipe synching it tight in place with two hose clamps. As for the gas tank I cut and shaped a small metal patch, epoxied it over the weakened part of the gas tank and then added more JB Weld around the edges. I had already added extra rubber padding to the seat where it rests on the tank. The repairs worked fine and held. I also did my first miles-per-gallon test running the tank dry (I had spare gas with me this time) and the bike recorded a ninety mile-per-gallon reading. That's nice.

The not-so-grand day at Grand Junction

After a week I needed to go into the nearby town of Grand Junction. On the way I stopped at the small post office in Loma to buy two money orders. One was to renew the license tags on The Little House on the Highway which was due in June. While in Moab I had sent off all the paperwork to get the Honda 90 registered and licensed for South Dakota. I eventually found out a motorcycle had to be over 120cc to be street legal in South Dakota. That's weird. It doesn't matter if it is a street legal motorcycle; it must be of a certain engine size in South Dakota. I decided to just get the title in my name through South Dakota and deal with a license some other time, in some other state. I may not even bother. Most all my riding would be off road anyway and the bike still has the old classic blue California plate on it so who's going to notice? It will only be in Arizona while at Quartzite that I would be riding on the street going to the market for milk and such. And to see some of the off road vehicles and ATV's buzzing around the streets of Quartzite it's not like the police there give much of a hoot anyway.

Arriving at the post office a half hour too early before the window opened I decided to continue on to Grand Junction and take care of some business, errands if you will. First off would be to drop off the mountain bike at a bike shop for repairs. When loading it up the evening before I discovered one of the

fork seals was leaking. I figured I may as well deal with it now rather than putting it off as the fact that the Grand Junction area being a mountain biking paradise they had quality bike shops whereas the further north we went such may not be the case. I chose Ruby Canyon Bicycles as they had great reviews and was situated close to the other places I needed to go. Well Ruby Canyon turned out to be in the heart of town, the foo-foo district for tourists and parking a small RV was an issue not to mention the streets were lined with those infernal parking meters. I found a large parking lot two blocks away at the Two Rivers Convention Center. Only thing was it had signs posted: PARKING FOR TWO RIVERS ONLY. VIOLATORS WILL BE TOWED. I'd take my chances. How can they possible tow away my home in the short time I'd be away? I rode the bike to the shop, checked it in with John and hurried back. Beans and The Little House on the Highway was still there. Whew! I dropped off a week's worth of trash in the nearby construction dumpster and drove off to my next task – laundry.

Now I was aware of card operated laundromats before but never had seen one until then. I walked in with an armload of dirty clothes and my bag full of quarters. The machines did not accept coins. You had to buy a card at what looked like an ATM machine, and that in itself only accepted bills. Back out to the RV to get three dollars which would cover the two-fifty charge per load to wash. The machine greedily ate up my three bills as I fed them in, spit at a credit card and the display showed the card had two dollars and twenty-five cents on it. I had lost seventy-five cents for a “card fee”! Two twenty-five would not cover one load at two fifty. Back outside I went for another bill, fed it into the machine along with my card and I now had three twenty-five in credit and a bad attitude. There was no one there to complain to so I loaded a machine, stuck in the card and it began filling with water. Not trusting any of this or my ability in figuring anything out I was at least pleased with hearing the water filling the tub. When the wash was done I went over to the dryers which were twenty-five cents for eight minutes. I did two drying loads, and handed off my card to a pretty lady who just walked in. “Here, you can have this. It has twenty-five cents on it and I will not be using it.” “Sweet” she said. Yes I am. The one and only thing good about laundromats is when you drive away from them.

One day some time earlier I noticed the connections to the filter for the filtered water spigot at the kitchen sink was leaking. I decided to deal with that today. I went to a True Value hardware store as I felt it would be easier to get some personal help in getting the parts I needed rather than at a big box store like Lowes or Home Depot. I had already made some attempts for a fix with new compression fitting sleeves but they leaked each time also so I figured I needed a whole new compression fitting. The True Value Big Boy figured out the correct fitting to replace what I had. I then asked about a new water line for I wanted a longer line to work with and not have such a bind at the filter. Only thing was I couldn't figure out how to get the existing blue plastic line out from the old spigot. Big Boy was helping another person at the same time so he called in for help. A younger version of Big Boy arrived. He took the spigot and pulled on the plastic line so hard he stretched it thin like a piece of spaghetti! Well now it was unusable! Big Boy number one tells Big Boy number two to go in back, cut out the bad part of the water line and attach a compression fitting coupler in that space. “We won't charge you for that.” I left the store only to realize Mr. Moron (Big Boy number two) had secured the new compression coupler in place with the mounting hardware still on the spigot! I could not get the mounting nut, spacer and washer off past the coupler! I decided to go to Lowes. There I talked with a guy who informed me that those lines do not come off. They are put in at the factory and come that way with a couple feet of line coiled up. I showed him what dumbass had done. “You can't get it off without ruining more line and then you don't have enough left to work with. You'll have to get a new spigot. True Value needs to make it good by you.” He takes me over to aisle 61 where a new spigot complete is sixty-nine dollars. “They're not cheap” he says. Grrr!!!

Back across town I go to True Value and talk with manager Julie. I showed her what numbnuts did and tell her what I learned at Lowes. She tells me to go buy what I need and get a copy of the receipt and she will refund me the purchase price. Well I wasn't expecting it to be that easy at least without a fight. Back across town again, this time I tried Home Depot. There I found a new water filtration spigot that looked more like what I had, not all fancy for the home like the one that Lowes was, and it was much less at twenty-two dollars. I bought it and had to buy water line for it plus new fittings for my water filter with nice guy Steve figuring it all out for me. Once more back across town and True Value Julie, after several attempts at inputting the information into the register leaving behind a pile of incorrect receipts by the wayside, gave me my refund. Somehow I ended up with five dollars more than what I paid but that wasn't enough that I could claim for my inconvenience. I'd need much more than five dollars for that! But I took it anyway and went next door to buy a Subway sandwich for it was now three in the afternoon; I hadn't eaten and was fading fast. I made it back to the Loma post office before they closed at four-thirty and got my two money orders mailed off, returned to Rabbit Valley and picked a new spot down the road from where we were before.

I had wanted to get something for all the crystals and pretty rocks I had found over the winter at Quartzite. A nice display case would be nice but that would be too big for the RV. Near Lowes was a Hobby Lobby and there the sales lady steered me over to some plastic containers for jewelry and handicrafts. This would do nicely. I bought a stack of five little round containers about the size of a silver dollar in diameter. Once I had camp set up and my cup of tea, I removed the plastic wrapper from the stack. You can imagine my disappointment in finding there was only one lid. The other four containers screwed into place acted as a lid for the container below it. This is not what I wanted! Well I decided I would put the crystals in, screw it all together and use it until I found what I really wanted. It was only three dollars so it wasn't like I wasted a lot of money. Stacked up and sitting on the table it didn't look all that bad and I grew to accept it thinking this was better than having five containers rolling around while we are driving. I liked my new crystal rocks display. It would be a couple days before I would attempt to install the new water spigot for I knew something would go wrong or that I needed some other part. But when I did finally screw up the courage to take it on I discovered that good guy Steve at Home Depot did alright. It all went in with little hassle and best of all, no leaks—always a joy—plus the spigot looked nice too, not sticking up as high as the old one did.

At our new camp spot the first time I took Beans for her walk, and she always loves to walk the washes, we were coming upon piles of crap and toilet paper left behind up and down the wash. No need to go into my disgust in seeing this. I tried to overlook it but I only lasted two days. One morning I was on shit detail. I went up and down the wash with my long handle grabbers, picking up TP and putting it into a soda pop carton. The poop I left alone. I do have a limit as to what I will do on shit patrol. After cleaning up a dozen or so deposits I burned it all in a nice fire in the rock fire pit along with other trash left behind by previous idiots.

Trail 8

Things were going good and our immediate area was looking nice. I was ready for some exploring on the Honda 90. Each time I went out I tried to do a different trail but was beginning to feel I had done most all of them. Yet the one I selected this particular day was new to me. Once I crested a rise there spreading out before me in the valley below was the Colorado River. I had found it! I was so delighted for this route wasn't as far out as the one a week before. I took pictures and enjoyed the peaceful scene. Now I would

have to double back on the way I came in and knew there was a long steep rocky uphill I would have to negotiate. Nearby was a branch route, Trail 8. I had seen the other end of Trail 8 coming in. Maybe going back via Trail 8 I could avoid that long climb. Off I went into new territory, new sights, and new adventures. The trail was a single track trail down into a canyon. There were numerous rock ledges, boulders, more rocks, stair-steps of rock, I took it slow and easy hoping it would smooth out soon. It didn't. What to do? I certainly didn't want to go back up what I just came down. I pressed on. Eventually I reached the bottom of the canyon and saw the trail went up the other side. I was hoping it would follow the canyon floor up and out. *This is not good.* I started up and it was just as I feared, very much like what I had just came down through. *Surely it's got to get better.* It didn't. It only got worse for I eventually ran out of trail. I had no idea where the trail went or what even happened to it. I parked the bike and walked around looking. No trail. I had no choice. I had to go back the way I came, only now climbing up over all those rock ledges. The fun meter had now hit zero. Thank goodness the little Trail 90 had that low range gear selection. I turned back and started fighting my way back up out of the canyon. For most of it I had to get off the bike and walk it up over rocks and steps allowing the motor to do most of the work. I eventually reached one point that was so high of a ledge that for the first time I felt I could very well be trapped, unable to get out. I won't try to hide the fact here: I was scared more than I had ever been on a hike or riding. I simply did not have the strength in my puny little arms strung with spaghetti thin muscles to lift the bike up onto the foot and a half high ledge. Several times I had to stop the bike and study for a path of least resistance, usually approaching at an angle, which the bike could somewhat pull itself up along with my pushing. I was hot, thirsty, sweating, tired, out of breath, shaky and scared. I'm seventy years old for heaven's sake! I thought of others I've seen around my age, heart attack candidates just to walk to the store. That filled me with a little bit of confidence in myself, but that confidence was waning fast. Twice the bike fell over, once pinning me under it with the motor racing. I quickly turned off the key. I do not remember how I got out from under the bike. I can only recall the exhaust pipe heat on my leg. I was getting very religious by now. With the engine racing, the rear tire burning rubber on the ledge and my lifting and pushing as if my life depended on it (I'll not get all dramatic and say it did but I damn well felt like it did at the time) I finally got up on the ledge and out from the rocky portion, moving once again. When I reached some soft sand and knew I was getting close to the top, the junction of Trail 8. When I did make it back onto level ground I cannot express the relief I felt. I sincerely believed I would have had to walk up and out that canyon leaving the bike behind and try to get some help. I knew now I would make it back to camp. I was so grateful the little bike—which I had come to name Gracie a few days earlier—was ever so reliable and started with one kick every time I had to shut it off. *Thank you Gracie for getting me out of there.* I was still shaking, breathing heavy, exhausted and frightened as I rode back to that steep rocky uphill I was trying to avoid in the first place. I stopped at the base of the slope, drank more warm water and rested allowing the adrenalin in my blood stream to filter out. Sitting there I let a family of ATV riders come down the slope and pass by. One of the riders was a little nine year old girl on a small ATV, her feet barely touching the floor boards. I complimented her dad when I asked her age. He said she had been riding since five. The little girl was fearless maneuvering down those rocks. I warned them about Trail 8. After what I had just been through, this climb would be a piece of cake. Well normally it would have but in my current state it did provide a challenge as I was so weakened already. Back on level ground I motored back to camp, stripped down, washed up, tried to rehydrate myself and felt I needed to lie down. Beans came and laid down beside me. She had never done that before even if I was to lie down or maybe take a nap. They know when you are troubled, stressed, not yourself. Oh my sweet Beans. It took two days for me to fully recover and feel myself once again.

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