

Commentary...

Adventures of a professional vagabond

By Reecy Pontiff
Correspondent

Right now I should be playing Annie Oakley in the Rocky Mountains, or a bawdy wench in a Renaissance village — but instead of planning a future of the past, the pandemic has presently plunked me down in Sisters.

I'm a professional vagabond who migrates between Jeep tours in Colorado and working on the Renaissance faire circuit in the eternal project that is my vintage Airstream. COVID has clipped my wings.

I was born with wanderlust. At 18 I scored a photojournalism gig at a local paper in the D.C. area, but the next year my itchy feet demanded a move to a miniscule flat in Edinburgh, Scotland for six months with a friend I'd made on the burgeoning internet. I flew home on September 26, 2001, an eerie time for international travel.

After a stint back in Virginia as a bumbling apprentice mechanic, I enrolled in a B.A. program at a university in Australia — some kids go to college on the opposite coast; I opted for the opposite hemisphere. In our rural city, I was one of the weirdest weirdos around. I worked for a skydiving company and edited the university newspaper. 2.5 years later I left with the same two suitcases I'd brought, plus one degree and a short-lived marriage.

Upon returning to the

States I moved to L.A., where I couch-surfed and found a job scanning headshots for an extras casting agency. I upgraded to receptionist/catch-all at a tiny non-fiction production company whose biggest claim-to-fame was "Buns of Steel" in the '90s.

Thanks to some persistent networking I became assistant to the co-executive producer of Jimmy Kimmel Live, a welcoming work environment blissfully free of the usual Hollywood screaming. Yes, I met Jimmy and some other celebrities. Ask me sometimes about being handler for Elliot Gould, Jason Alexander and Danny Devito. Later I worked as an historical researcher for History and Discovery channel shows.

In 2008 the economy bombed and the TV jobs dried up. Four months, 60 applications, and zero job offers later I decided I'd rather tend bar in New Orleans than La-La Land. I sold everything that wouldn't fit in my sedan and rode away from the Sunset.

I lucked into a dank basement room at an artists' flop-house in a crumbling antebellum mansion next to the I-10 overpass. It took me a nail-bitten month to find a job in the French Quarter at a microscopic absinthe bar nestled next to St. Louis Cathedral.

New Orleans became one of my artistic homes. Gigs emceeing and performing smutty songs in the blossoming neo-burlesque scene fell

into my lap with regularity. I recorded my first album, "The Fabulous Sideshow Apocalypse" and promptly switched from guitar to ukulele, still my professional weapon of choice. Under the sponsorship of a local bicycle tour company I wrote the first bike tour of the Lower Ninth Ward. The seasonal nature of my work allowed me to spend a summer playing music on the streets of Berlin, Germany.

Back in New Orleans, our downstairs neighbor was murdered while we entertained guests. Soon after I fled the city.

A long and rambling road trip led me to Montana, where I shacked up with a narcissistic mountain man on his beautiful off-grid homestead for seven months. The emotional pain was almost as concentrated as the list of skills this city girl acquired there: shooting, gardening, butchering, canning, tractor operation. The off-roading experience would become a profession when I moved to Colorado Springs for the next few years and found a job giving Jeep tours gussied up like a vintage cowgirl.

After Tetrising all of my belongings into a car for so long I began to ponder trailer life. I hunted for vintage campers until a fellow vagabond offered to sell me her beat-up but liveable 1976 Airstream Argosy.

I found myself in Phoenix, Arizona, where their Renaissance festival was about to begin. I was offered work selling art for

a printmaker who specializes in forgeries of Albrecht Dürer pieces and this would have been my third season working for her across the country. I've also put up my own stage act of original bawdy tunes on the circuit as well. Last summer I returned to the Rocky Mountains to professionally hoot it up in a Jeep. My annual schedule was solidifying and I'd hoped to repeat it in 2020.

I first heard about a virus decimating Wuhan, China, from a shabby hotel room in Zimbabwe during a five-week odyssey through southern Africa. Fifteen days later I scurried down the East Coast to play two weekends of smutty songs at a faire near Miami, then swung through New Orleans for Mardi Gras on the way to the next festival near Austin, Texas.

It wasn't until that faire was shut down by the county after our third weekend that I realized the severity of the

COVID crisis. I returned to Virginia and podded up with some select friends and family for a couple of months until I saw that my livelihoods were likely on hold through at least the end of the year. I was offered a housesitting gig in Sisters by the mother of a former New Orleans housemate and seized the opportunity.

My time here in Sisters has been productive, if a bit lonesome. I spend my days maintaining and improving the trailer, walking the Peterson Ridge Trail with the dog, learning the piano and, as of recently, writing the occasional piece for *The Nugget*. Though I understand how fortunate I am, I wonder when I can get back on the road and get back to work. For now I'll wear a mask, hope for smoke-free skies and cross my fingers for the health of the world.

Reecy Pontiff can be seen and heard at www.reecypontiff.com.



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