

# Driven by desire

Seeking new horizons,  
learning new lessons  
in a home on  
wheels



*We shall never cease from exploration  
And the end of our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.*  
—T.S. Eliot

After seven months, 12,000 miles, 30 states and one province, Amber and I are back home in Portland. Our motor home Betty, however, remains on the road.

When we started this road trip last May, we didn't have a particular quest in mind. Our itinerary was loose—a rough outline of the country—and our goals were similarly grand but undefined.

We knew only that we wanted time together, away from the daily grind of deadlines and obligations. We knew we wanted an adventure. We knew we wanted something different.

Different, we got plenty of. We visited at least 360 different bathrooms, for starters. We parked alongside pickups sporting bumper stickers like "Coon Hunters for Christ" outside stores with names like Hoggly Woggly.

We also had more than our fair share of adventures, each unique to the regions we explored. In New England, we outran Hurricane Floyd as it chased us up the coast from Provincetown to Maine, where we played castaways marooned on the good ship Betty in a campground-turned-marina.

We got the thrill of our first alligator sighting in South Carolina. It was nowhere near the size of the 12-footer that flashed us a prehistoric grin (actually a long, lazy yawn) in Florida's Corkscrew Swamp. But that first one, the four telltale bumps of its eyeballs and snout only two yards away from our kayak, told us for sure that we were not in Kansas anymore.

In Texas, we turned our backs on the Lone Star landscape of George W. Bush and instead sashayed down to the gay rodeo.

There's nothing like watching lots of big hunky cowboys tenderly two stepping with each other—and the next morning wrestling bulls to the ground—to make you whip out your rainbow flag.

Then there was the adventure inherent in coaxing 27-year-old Betty out onto the road

each day. After she blew a tire going 55 mph on an overpass in the center lane of a downtown Houston freeway, Betty's ripe old age seemed less charming and suddenly more precarious. Still, she made it through that and 10 other fix-its along the way. It was a proud moment indeed when the odometer clicked over to a full row of zeros: a fresh start for this home on wheels that seems determined to keep on trucking.

Betty wasn't the only one offered a fresh start. Amber and I abandoned our two separate, spacious residences in Portland for less than 60 square feet shared 24-7. Only one person in the "kitchen" at a time. Only one person in the "hall" at a time. No way out without stepping over the other.

We abandoned the autonomy of individual lives for the perpetual negotiations of an experience jointly determined in its every detail.

Linked to our former lives only by e-mail, the occasional phone call and periodic general delivery packets of bills, we pulled up our roots and every night merely paused—in 28 county and state parks, nine National Parks and Monuments, 10 National Forests, 15 commercial RV campgrounds, seven homes of friends and family, three women's lands, one Indian reservation and one Kmart parking lot.

And here's what we didn't expect: In every single one of these places, we felt completely at home.

On the refurbished red hood of Betty's propane cookstove, we carried a bon voyage magnet that says "home is where the heart is." As little space as Betty offered, she was a place where our hearts grew bigger.

Very few days were constrained by "shoulds" and "have tos." Our life on the road was driven by desire. Curiosity and happenstance fed a growing knowledge of what we wanted, a knowledge too easily obscured—for me, back home—by my usual live-to-work routine.

The routine of life in Betty was anchored by simple things: three cooked meals a day, naps when we needed them, chores kept pleasant by their manageable scale.

I had to go on the road to discover the pleasures of domesticity.

Portland will always be my home. But we're not ready to say goodbye to life in Betty. As we celebrate the holidays here in the rain, Betty is basking in the Southwest sun, awaiting our return for phase two of the adventure.

■ HOLLY PRUETT is at home in Portland—for a while at least. Destination suggestions for her further travels can be e-mailed to [hjpruett@aol.com](mailto:hjpruett@aol.com).

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