

THERE AND BACK AGAIN

A Volkswagen Tale

How do I summarize a yearlong trip in a '72 VW Bus named Olive? A trip that takes two corporate cubical junkies from 3000 sq ft of household trappings and "stuff" to 50 sq feet of compact German engineering in a mobile office...

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How do I tell you about the beauty and splendor of nature that rolled out before us as we traversed North America, or of the wonderful, warm-hearted people we met along the way who would not take no for an answer as they opened their homes to us in the sweltering 110-degree summer heat, or the blustering winds of hurricane Irene?

I could try and describe what you see as you drive around the twists and turns of the Gaspé Peninsula during a moonlit night – a coastal drive with dozens of tiny bays and quiet little fishing villages, the moonlight shining on the water like a million

diamonds. Lake Louise early on a cool morning with its turquoise glacier-fed waters surrounded by snow-capped mountains. Or the sudden appearance of a large moose running astride us as we make our way across the ocean of colorful fields which stretch to the distant horizon on the great Canadian prairie.

Perhaps I should begin by telling you about the wonderful people who invited us into their lives and homes, who shared with us their stories of escape from communist Czechoslovakia many years ago; the artist who told us of a private beach to spend the night in Liverpool, Nova Scotia; the kind stranger in Montana who bought gas for our bus, just

Just got the bus.



New Orleans Friends.



Baja Beaches.



Saskatchewan Prairie.



Rocky Mountains.



Coffee House in Loreto, Baja.



It's funny how a VW bus touches such a wide range of people. Young children laugh and smile and older folks always have a story of their own adventures in a VW

because a VW brings him such fond memories. We also met a soldier in Texas, who owned a VW while stationed in Europe and met his wife there too. I invite him into Olive so he can reminisce; it's funny how a VW bus touches such a wide range of people. Young children laugh and smile, while older folks always have a story of their own adventures in a VW.

Olive has instant appeal to everyone. When we randomly see signage for a car show, we decide to pull into the small, one-street town and are amazed to see such a selection of restored autos. Olive pulls into the middle of the street, where they make a spot for her. The crowds quickly form – it seems like the Mustangs and Corvettes are totally forgotten as the growing mass encompasses our bus, with an anxious audience yearning to hear how two middle-aged, non-hippies

make a living in a pretty green bus.

We have traveled over 22,000 miles since we bought our bus in August 2010. Eight months of restoration in a warehouse, and then we embarked on our new life in May of 2011, a life that countless people have expressed envy for, time and again, as we shared our story. "You guys have the right idea" we'd hear them say.

We got a wonderful going-away gift from my folks, a Volkswagen camper cookbook by Steve and Suz Rooker. With our new cabinets I designed, we »



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Our private beach.

have ample counter-top space for the SMEV two-burner cooktop and sink combo unit – the sweetest thing. And not wanting an ugly propane tank dangling from the outside of our bus, we opted for one-pound mini tanks inside the bus. Our fresh water is a five-gallon tank from a watercooler which fits nicely inside the cabinets under the sink. An electric fridge provides lots of space for our food and runs off two deep cycle batteries which also give the tiny amount of juice needed to turn on the LED lights I placed in the new headliner and roof trim. After removing the gas heater we needed some



Getting her daily rub down.



New Mexico blizzard.

way to keep warm so picked out an Alpaca comforter, which was a good investment. The original motor, with only 85,500 miles didn't need a thing; She ran so smoothly and powered us over the Rocky mountains and across the massive nation of Canada before the original Solex carbs quietly gave up the ghost. Replacing them with new Kadrons was the first of the new parts to replace the 40-year-old tired ones. The starter died in

New Orleans and the transmission in San Diego, but with new shiny parts she runs as good as the day she rolled off the production line. I understand that not everyone would want to live like this; some like the big screen TV and hot tub or walk-in shower. But living like this is really not that bad. Local swimming pools have all these things for less than ten bucks. Local pubs feature all the sporting events we feel we can't miss,

but what we realise is, there's really not much on that we care to watch!

We commenced this lifestyle after selling up and deciding to travel. After a coffee to discuss our plans, we had picked up an issue of VW Camper & Commercial magazine and saw the beauty of restored buses. With that image in mind we thought we'd look online to see if, by chance, we could find one. Within 48 hours a bus showed up for sale in Vancouver. We liked what we saw and took the two-hour ferry ride to inspect her closely. On the way over we decided to name her Olive, after the publishing company that we own.

How do you end an adventure like

this? Do you end it at all? Have we stumbled upon nirvana and found that life is more than working 9-5 and commuting to the cubical. We will be heading up the west coast of the United States through to May, heading to what we call 'home' – Vancouver Island, British Columbia. We will have circumnavigated the entire continent, including six weeks in Baja, Mexico; we have walked for six hours in Washington DC, hunting down the Constitution; we have stood completely soaked at the very front of a boat as it sailed the showering mists at the base of the thundering Niagara Falls; we have pulled into burger joints to have complete strangers notice Olive and invite us to dinner, even putting us up for a night; we've seen snow covered cacti as we drove through a blizzard in the deserts of New Mexico; we weathered two hurricanes on the east coast, and freezing temperatures as we pulled away from the Grand Canyon; and we've entertained crowds parked in front of yet another Starbucks on the cobble-stoned streets of Savannah, Georgia, with it's haunting trees and century-old buildings.

After a coffee to discuss our plans, we had picked up an issue of VW Camper & Commercial magazine and saw the beauty of restored buses



It's the magic of a Volkswagen bus. It's one of the only vehicles ever made that causes spontaneous smiles to break out on people. No matter the age, no matter the status in life. We have had bikers give us a friendly wave and lawyers offer to buy our 'baby'. No matter who you are, you will always have fond memories in a Volkswagen bus. ☺

A Spiritual Journey

The Hutzlers are also dedicated Christians who see their decision to sell up and 'travel the earth' in a VW almost as a calling as much as any personal adventure. Whatever your beliefs, it is great to hear about the people they've met and the happiness they, and their little green VW, have spread along the way - as ministries go, they probably don't come much cooler!



Working hard.



VW Rally- Bar Harbor, Maine.



Owen Sound, Ontario.