

Travels With Vamper:
A Graybeard's Journey
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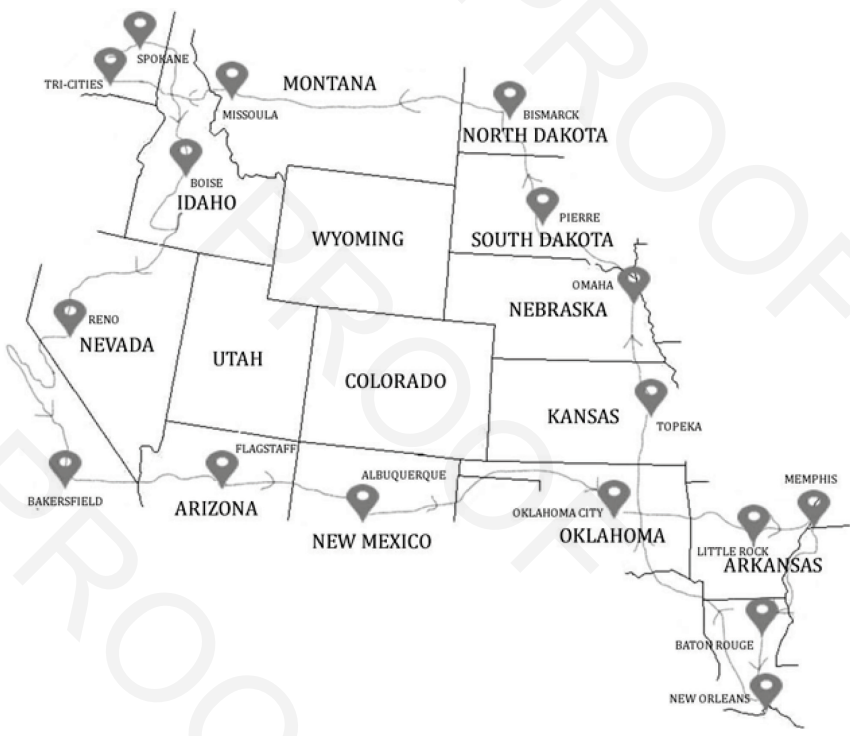
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*For my daughter, Charlotte, whose amazing journey
I have been blessed to share.*



Retirement, June 2016

I didn't want to retire, but they gave me an offer I couldn't refuse. Not a *Godfather* bloody horse head, but a Jesuit university's inducement in the form of a big check. From a social justice perspective, I suppose the reward for thirty-six years of work is the work itself. But there is also the matter of paying bills and living out one's golden years in measured abundance free from the threat of financial hardship. So, after almost four decades of teaching law and lawyering, I decided to take the buy-out of my position as a tenured professor and embark on the rest of my life's journey—a journey whose direction and course were not yet decided or in any way self-evident. I had gone to law school at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington and, after three years of private practice in my father's law firm, I returned to the same law school as a professor. Fourteen-thousand days of repeated trips to and from the law school had carved a worn and accustomed path. What now to do? I knew, instinctively, what not to do. I did not want to wake up the day after my retirement lamenting the loss of my old life. I needed to put distance between that life and whatever lay in the future. And then it hit me—a road trip! Not a short, humdrum road trip but a real adventure, a journey that would rekindle my imagination and teach me something new.

A few folks, including my wife, Diane, lifted their eyebrows when I announced I was going to buy a used camper van and travel the country alone in celebration of my retirement. I knew I was no John Steinbeck, but my idea was to create a *Travels with Charley* road trip with a dash of *Blue Highways*. Donald Trump was pushing and shoving his

retirement philosophy that is forward-looking and eager instead of retrograde and listless. I don't know, maybe I'll take up wind-surfing.

And what of Vamper? In the past year, aside from our Grand Canyon trip, he was parked to the side of my driveway, disconsolate and inert, like an unhappy sheep dog chained and shunted aside with no opportunity to run and bark and love. As the days and weeks went by, Vamper's battery ran down and I could see his tires flattening and his windows growing opaque with dust and pine needles. One day it became clear to me that my obligation to Vamper was to give him life, not to treat him like an unalienable piece of property whose attachment to me trumped his inherent need to travel. My travel days are not over, but I remembered the words of the old Nes Perce Indian spoken many years ago on the banks of the Salmon River: "Don't worry about the car. There are lots of cars." While Vamper is not just another "car," and will always be a special memory, he is replaceable whenever I decide to take another road-trip. I advertised Vamper online and included several photos of our journey through middle America. He was purchased by an older couple who drive frequently on long trips from Spokane to the mid-west. I like to think of Vamper humming along the highway, taking happy people to happy places.

