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A Good Old Fashioned Family Road Trip

BY EMILY VOLMAN

Several years ago, while my husband and I lived in California, we planned the perfect vacation: a long drive up the picturesque Pacific Coast Highway. The plan was to weave our way from Los Angeles along the winding, cliff-dangling scenery all the way to Santa Cruz. And, of course, being the über dog parents we think we are, we wouldn't have dreamed of taking a trip without our German Shepherd / Labrador Retriever mix, Josie.

The first day, Josie settled right into her backseat lair. She was perched high enough in her 5'x5' plush bed to see out the window, had a secured bottled-water trough and plenty of treats to give her that extra five pounds of vacation weight we all know so well. As we drove through the country, my husband and I even called back to her when we saw something she ought to see and enjoy. "Look, Josie, cows!" we'd say, and she'd drowsily lift her head. Well, at least we were excited.

On day two, we decided that the trip needed to be more interactive for Josie. There was too much driving and not enough romping. As we drove along somewhere just before Big Sur, luck would have it that we noticed a huge fenced-in cattle field with a set of stairs leading over the fence from the highway. Sure, this was probably private property, but we didn't see any people or livestock around. All we saw was an opportunity for Josie to let off a little steam on wide-open land.

We pulled over, strapped on the leash, grabbed Josie's lucky tennis ball and headed over the fence. As we turned her loose, the look on her face was worth whatever trouble we might get into if someone caught us. If you've ever seen the movie *Braveheart*, it was that same "FREEDOM!" expression that William Wallace made as he headed into battle.

She ran as fast as she could into the wild blue yonder, and then she was gone. Gone, as in disappeared. Gone, as in fell into a crater or was pulled into a vortex towards the core of the earth.

My husband and I looked at each other for one brief second and then took off running after her, albeit blindly, since she'd left us in her dust trail. We were filled with sheer panic, and I seem to vaguely recall screaming at my husband that this was all his fault.

As we neared her, I saw one of her legs sticking up into the air. I just knew she was hurt: my heart completely sank. How could we have ever been so stupid? Not only have we broken the law by trespassing, but we let, nay *encouraged*, our only beloved pooch to explore a dangerous, unknown field!

Fearing the worst, we finally reached her, and not only was one leg up in the air, but all four were at full mast. She wasn't hurt. To the contrary, she had discovered bliss: in other words, a large cow pie. And she was rolling in it. Gleeefully. Her eyes tumbling back in her head with pleasure.

Let me take this opportunity to remind you that we were on a road trip. A *long* road trip. Our next destination (read: shower) was at least a hundred miles away. Even though she was clearly having fun and finally getting into this vacation, we dragged her out of that field at light speed and proceeded to wipe off as much of the bovine excrement as we could with a towel we had in the trunk. We then had no choice but to lay the towel across my lap and have me hold her on top of me until we got to the hotel, lest she otherwise make a disgusting mess of the backseat.

Now that it's been some years, trips and doggy accidents later, it's hard to decipher (thankfully) the cattle aroma in our car anymore. But I like to think that each time we announce "Look, Josie, cows!" a little piece of "pie" floats back into her brain.

Emily Volman is a comedy performer and writer who actually enjoys animals slobbering on her face. She lives in Franklin with her husband and two dogs, Josie and Jasper.

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