

Worst Case Scenario – Road Trip

By Karel Murray

Books glorify the concept of a vacation, especially if enjoyed at an exotic location. My work peers have discussed the virtues of “going on holiday to get away from the rat race” until I believed it was truly possible. Even close friends and family insist that I take some rare time off just to “hang loose”. How one actually does that without hurting themselves is beyond me.

As a result of this ongoing influence, my husband and I will be taking a few days off to travel to Baudette, Minnesota...which may be known to you as The Lake Of The Woods. With only five days to go, it's time to mentally prepare for this undertaking. I know, you are probably wondering what could be involved in “preparing” for such a trip? Well, I try to visualize the routine mundane issues as well as the worst thing that can happen and pre-plan for any event. Once I've mentally rehearsed the process, when faced with the real thing it won't seem so intimidating. I bet you're thinking it sounds logical, right?

Travel time to Baudette is at least nine hours by car. My husband prefers to drive. He gets easily bored being a passenger and resorts to critiquing my driving. For some reason, he gets a bit upset if I follow another car down the highway, rather than passing them. If an exit is going to be coming up in 3 miles or so, why should I pass? Heck, we're only going 5 miles slower than the speed limit. What's the hurry? We are on vacation! Rick seems to think this type of driving creates extra stress and takes away from the enjoyment of being on vacation.

There is the slight issue of multiple stops along the way. When I urgently point to an exit with an especially alluring truck stop or shopping center, Rick does a double take and snorts “Again??” I've been trained to never pass up that last chance to use a bathroom that meets my “clean” meter. Along with wearing freshly laundered underwear, my mother indoctrinated me into taking advantage of every stop I could... just in case. In case of what, you ask? In case there are three rest rooms in a row that aren't fit for human occupation. What if we have to drive for 200 miles before we get to a decently sanitized location? Worse, yet, what if I miss a shopping deal of the century because we chose to zoom on by? Sometimes, drivers behind us must think that Rick is learning to use a clutch in our car. Start. Stop. Start. Stop.

My siblings and I were trained using Pavlov's method when it comes to sleeping in the car.

This is the primary reason why Rick is adamant in being the designated driver. As a small child, my mother routinely gave me and my brother and sisters Dramamine before any drive lasting longer than two hours. This small pill, used for motion sickness, had a bonus side effect of inducing sleep. Imagine...five large children, all crammed into a Cadillac backseat, brutally adjusting our sitting positions to gain more personal space. Dramamine to the rescue! To stop the yelling, kicking, and last resort pinching, drugging us seemed to be a viable and reasonable alternative. Within 15 minutes of taking a pill, we conked out and drooled for four straight hours. Because of this chemically induced sleep routine, it is now a habit for me to doze off the moment the car motor is turned on.

That's a problem when I'm driving.

I'll start out on a two hour drive and end up having to pull into a Wal-Mart or motel parking lot and take a nap for 20 minutes. What am I supposed to do when my eyes are crossing and slapping the cheeks no longer works to stay awake? My driving time frames are usually increased by 20% to allow for the possible nap. If no sleep is needed, then I have bonus time for shopping. Everyone wins.

My husband feels that all of our road trip challenges will be solved with the purchase of a motor home. He has advised me that I can work at a table, use the restroom, and take a nap as if I was in the comfort of my own home. Excuse me. We are hurtling down the highway at 70+ miles per hour. Besides the prohibitive cost of purchasing such a vehicle, the movies have convinced me that motor homes just aren't an option. In almost every horror movie I've seen, the vampires and werewolves always look to the motor homes first for their meals. Yup, people in a can. Just pull open the door or pry off the roof, and there is lunch. I'm sorry, not this gal. No way. You say there aren't critters like that out in the real world? Ha! My luck, it will be a rabid gopher with a can opener. Cute, but deadly.

What to pack will be my first challenge. If I pack summer clothing, invariably, the weather will turn bitter cold and I'll spend three challenging days trying to make my blue lips look fashionable. On the other hand, if I only take slacks and long sleeved shirts, I know I'll be condemned to sweaty armpits and hair plastered to my forehead because the weather turned unseasonably warm. Worse yet, Baudette will experience both extremes in temperature on the same day - probably within the same hour. I've often thought that clothing designers had

weather on their mind when they touted the new holey blue jean craze last year. The holes were for ventilation. Clever indeed. Like a fox!

Have you ever seen a storm surge over a lake, which only a few moments earlier felt like the most pastoral scene on earth? Wispy animal shaped clouds can turn into ominous, low hanging pillows that literally make you feel like you are being suffocated. Your breath is sucked right out of you, either from alarm, or the heavy humidity. The birds stop whistling, squirrels take cover, and the fish dive to the sandy protective bottom.

Creeps me out.

That's when the lighting show begins. Let me rephrase that. It isn't an innocent show, its purpose is to locate and light me up like a pin ball machine. Large cracks of thunder boom across the choppy water as if to laugh at my futile attempts to avoid being struck. Have you ever been so close to a lightening strike that your hair stands up on end? I imagine I could eliminate some hair products designed to build lift into my hair style. It's a bit drastic, however.

There are two kinds of insects – day bugs and night bugs. Day bugs are those you can see in the light, butterflies, bees, and box elder bugs. Night bugs are the ones that you can't see except when you suddenly turn on the flood lamp. Then the large mothras, lumbering June bugs and roaches skitter across the deck flooring and flutter against the light bulb. I know they are there...silent, ever vigilant night bugs just waiting to crawl into the sleeping bag or through a crack in the bathroom window.

I met my first night bug at Girl Scout camp. Our open air privies were located a short walk away through the woods from our tent. After I was finished going to the bathroom, I reached to pull my pajama bottoms back up, when I glanced down and saw the largest daddy long leg spider clinging to the inside of my pajama leg. I froze, knowing that if I made one move, it would leap out of my pants and onto my chest. A counselor found me still locked in the death stare 30 minutes later. She pulled it off my pants by holding one of its legs. I swear its long arms reached for me as she casually tossed it aside. It hung on the wall, balefully watching me leave. I wouldn't use the latrine for two days until I was sure it was gone. That's when I discovered I didn't like the nature alternative. Either way, there are night bugs. Just waiting.

Whenever I go on vacation to Baudette, I know potentially I could face a battle to the death against the mosquitoes. These instruments of torture swarm around

my body the moment I step outside of the car. They dive so hard, they literally bounce off my forearms. I believe they are big enough to carry away small children. Within 100 yards of the cabin, the air turns dark with an undulating cloud of bugs, poised to attack. Pre-walk precautions include slathering your arms and legs with so much repellent, you gag on the smell and your eyes burn from the stinking mist that erupts from the spray can.

The main thing to do in Baudette is fish for Walleye and Northern Pike. Walleyes I don't mind so much...they are fairly large fish with no teeth that gulp up the bait and you reel them in. Northern Pike and Muskie are another thing entirely. They have teeth, like to nibble, leap, fight, and get totally ticked off. The bullies of the lake. Now, I understand that the fish are fighting back. After centuries of humans dredging their neighborhoods and pulling out their family members, fish are leaping out of the lakes and hitting people in the head!

I knew it! A mass fish conspiracy that could surge into something dreadful. What if, through the fish network, their ocean cousins get the message to attack? I can see the headlines now..."Family of four escapes injury while lounging on their pontoon boat when it is crushed under the huge bulk of a falling whale – details at 10:00"

I'd tune in for that.

Maybe this trip I'll actually hear a Minnesota Loon return my sigh as I lounge with my iced tea at the cabin table playing solitaire, trying not to watch my father-in-law gut a fish. That unique haunting sound will make it all worthwhile as well as having some great quiet time with the people I love. Maybe a person could get used to this.

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