

Danville News
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Ours is a big country. I'm sitting here waiting for the sun to rise over Monroeville, Alabama and announce Wednesday. I have driven just shy of 1100 miles since Monday morning. Today, Tuesday, should be easier as I'm only heading next door to Mississippi. Got to listen to Johnny Cash and go to Jackson. A sudden thought of home intrudes: I'm wondering if my congregation will look after each other.

Virginia's tail is especially tedious. I left Wytheville yesterday morning. I drove Route 81 toward Chattanooga with the sun rising over my left shoulder. My left arm was already sunburnt from the day before. Driving past Rogersville. I'd demand a new name if I lived there. 81 is a busy road with busy people busily going somewhere. Watch out when the car merging is battered and dented, driven by an old lady wearing a baseball cap, the bumper decorated with faded Sunoco stickers.

Steinbeck on his jaunt across our country named his vehicle Rocinante after Don Quixote's horse. The conceit is forgivable. I've toyed with the notion of naming my Miata. Should I choose the name of Sancho Panza donkey? Or something more exotic? Calypso? Bellepheron? Tardis? Or perhaps Cutty Sark? I always did fancy myself a clipper ship captain. It's very odd how I ended up being a lighthouse keeper instead.

God bless cruise control. Watch out for the cars parked at an angle along the berm, white plastic bags fluttering from the driver side window. Watch out for the blown tires, resembling elephant hides after a kill. With each exit ramp I wonder what more curious and more interesting eateries lay beyond the interchange. Beyond the ubiquitous Hardees and Applebees.

I note the signs along the way:

- © Authorized vehicles only
- © Road closed, merge right
- © Orange and white collapsible plastic barrels. What happened to the old metal ones?
- © Pilot open 24 hours
- © Rest Stop
- © Oversize Load
- © Fog Advisory Area

- © Leaving Fox Advisory Area
- © Pilot - open 24 hours
- © Next Rest Stop 73 miles.

Time to figure out the iPod my daughter loaded for me. She scoffed at me putting all my favorite CD's in a shoebox. After some sharp words I realized the iPod works best when the radio is turned on. I hit Music. Hit Album. Scroll with my fat thumb down to my fancy. I fancied 'The Band.' Talk about your memories. That was my first real kissing date. With Linda Bonner. She laughed when I changed shoes to drive. Good thing I got my license because I got it only that morning. And I had purchased tickets at the Garden State Art Center to see 'The Band.' I never occurred to me I'd fail. Heck, I had a date that night. Linda ended up marrying the guy who beat me out in class elections as 'Class Friendliest.'" He beat me by one vote. I voted for him. He got Linda too. He buried her three years ago. I went to the viewing.

Dad couldn't teach me everything about driving, but he taught me well enough. The day after I got my permit, Dad took me driving. Turn here. Slow down. Stop slow. Let's veer right here. He took me onto the entrance ramp of the Garden State Parkway at rush hour. "Get use to it," he laughed.

Driving resembles playing a game of tag with trucks. Or better, avoiding being tagged. I note the truck names:

- © Old Dominion
 - © Schneider National
 - © UPS
 - © Overnite Express
 - © GOD
 - © England
 - © My favorite was Toch Foods, specialists in chicken.
- It was a tank truck!

Given my sports car vantage I'm also becoming an expert in truck mud flaps:

- © Heil
- © Peterbilt
- © Freightliner
- © Maverick
- © Volvo
- © Great Dane

I decided to detour into Chattanooga. A map would have helped. And a compass. This town twists and turns. Somehow I crossed the river and ended up on the North Shore. But I found the bridge to go back over. From the bridge I spotted the Riverfront tourist area. Descending onto that shore, I wound my way around. Parking was pricey so I just pulled over on the curb. I only needed to see. I saw what I needed to see. Piers. River tours. A few bikinied young women sunbathing. A paddle-wheel moored on the opposite shoreline.

Here, over a hundred and fifty years ago, the powers-that-be rounded up the inconvenient Cherokee and stuffed them on barges. In those days, they didn't have cattle cars. Thus began the Trail of Tears.