

The Journey from Distraction to Engagement

Florida to Glacier

It may help to provide some background leading up to the latest on the Road from Distraction to Engagement. I found out around ten years ago that my objective to make money no longer satisfied my soul. The last ten years has been and continues to be a quest and pursuit of engagement.

Along for the ride are my lifelong twin gremlins Sparky and Erebus. Sparky and Erebus are working pretty much overtime as the summer of 2008 approaches. Perhaps you recall the cartoon character energy companies used to encourage us to be a real American's and consume as much energy as we possibly could. Sparky looked like a guy who stuck his finger in the light socket and became totally energized with bolts of electricity forming the outline of his body. Sparky is my gremlin of anxiety. Sparky is omnipresent in my life waiting to turn the rheostat up full tilt sending a million volts of anxiety through my head.

My other life gremlin is Erebus. Erebus is the Greek god of darkness. Erebus sits on my shoulder holding a rope attached to a 50 gallon drum hanging over my head. When Erebus gets his way, he lowers the drum over my head until I cannot see engulfed in darkness. Erebus and Sparky work hand in hand while Sparky normally takes the lead. Sparky will turn up anxiety causing Erebus to lower the drum until I am trapped in an electrified drum and can't get out. My reaction to being in the electric drum is to become agitated, irritable and otherwise not much fun to be with.

Sparky and Erebus have been working overtime lately. My standard coping skills which are to live smoke, drug, alcohol and caffeine free, exercise regularly, read a constant supply of Zen and Quantum physics books is failing me. I battle Sparky and Erebus daily while struggling to find an engaged rather than distracted existence.

Valerie is coping with the aging of her 25 year old horse companion, her 88 year old deteriorating father, and her own assortment of health issues. And we are both coping with the challenges, stress and strains presented by our 25 year old daughter's devastatingly disabling mental illness . It seems there are really no fixes for our challenges. These burdens have created visible stress fractures in our 31 year marriage. My irritability has reached new heights to the point where Val views my departure as relief.

It is with that background that my good friend Ron has volunteered to ride shotgun on the voyage west. What a friend!! He has agreed to spend a week with me driving to West Glacier Montana for his 55th Birthday present. You don't get many friends like that.

With an overflowing, steaming thermos of mixed emotions, Ron and I pull out onto Interstate 95 headed north from Jacksonville on the winding road from Distraction to Engagement.

The next 2700 miles will be the start of fifth wheel school. When this crazy fifth wheel germ of idea was created, diesel was less than two dollars a gallon, my F250 had 60,000 miles and I was committed to getting something as small as possible. As we pull onto I 95 diesel can now run as high as five dollars per gallon, my F250 had to be replaced by a GMC 350 dually and I ended up with a 38 ft huge rig. After searching the fifth wheel market I found in order to carry motorcycles and not sleep with them, 38 feet was about as small as possible. Ron and I are rolling down the highway in a rig that is in excess of 50 feet and over 13 ft high. Sparky and Erebus are working overtime.

My hope is to get around 10 miles to the gallon. With what I consider a small tank of 34 gallons, I hope to get a usable 300 mile range. The best we can get is 9.1 and the worst in a strong headwind uphill was 6.4. I sold my beloved 2004 BMW to fund this trip so gas mileage at this point is not a deal breaker. After having been on the road from Distraction to Engagement for the last decade, experience has greater value than material things. The RT had to go.

Driving a 50 plus foot rig causes you to enter a whole new world. Planning fuel stops, changing lanes, passing vehicles offers Sparky all kinds of opportunity to wind me up. I will soon learn the RV'ing is a two person enterprise.....Thank goodness Ron has come along. We manage to sort out finding truck stops, paying for fuel and getting back onto the road. At the end of the first day I am feeling pretty good and looking for a place to stop. We swing into a truck stop, line up the rig, start our generator and spend the night lined up along the other generator noise bellowing trucks. All in all, it was a good first day with no major problems. Drive, stop for gas, pee, drive, etc. We drove over 600 miles.

A couple of things really scare me about driving this thing. Driving the rig into a spot where I can't get out and spending the night really gets Sparky's attention. I will come to learn there are other situations to worry about, but that is later down the road.

It is the end of the second day and I am getting real tired. We found a hotel with a big parking lot only to find out there is no room. And there are no rooms for at least another 32 miles. 32 miles might not sound like much, but having driven around 700 miles and unsure there would be a place to park in another 32 miles, I was really disappointed. Yep this is it, my fears are realized. I am going to have to drive this thing when I am dead tired looking for a place to park. No that just won't do. I went back to the Super 8 front desk and asked if we could spend the night in their parking lot. She said sure no problem if I would loan her Ron for the night. Ha ha I just made up the Ron part but I had Ron going. We used the Super 8 bathrooms and get a fairly good night's sleep.

On the third day I saw a life size model of Dino the Dinosaur while driving by a gas station. I couldn't help but think that Dino and I might be a lot alike. Dino walked around the land consuming energy required to keep that big huge body moving. All the while he was walking into extinction. I sort of feel like I am Dino driving this truck getting 9 miles to the gallon with two little fossil fuel babies (motorcycles) inside the belly of the beast. Am I riding into extinction? I don't think so, but this form of distraction that leaves a carbon wake a mile wide may very well go by way of Dino.

As the third day came to a close I am starting to get tired. We are way out in the middle of nowhere and it is time to stop for the day. We pulled into a small town and managed to get the big rig parked and spent the night in the hotel. We have pretty much stayed to the plan of eating food I prepared in an attempt to avoid fast food. We eat chicken salad and as luck would have it, there is a Dairy Queen next door. Nothing like a frozen artificial food product covered in artificially flavored chocolate liquid to lift the spirits.

We get up early and have breakfast at Taco Johns which happened to be next door to the DQ. Yum Yum We take off in an attempt to get to West Glacier today, 2700 miles in four days. With much help from Ron, we find West Glacier KOA. We checked in, got the map with our assigned spot and set off to park.

Sparky had turned me up full throttle as I entered the first turn into a parking lot filled with RV's, and trees. I made the first right and immediately noticed huge repair invoices nailed to pine trees. Geez, I rubbed my eyes and realized the trees did not have invoices nailed to them, I was seeing scars, dings, gouges and otherwise perfectly healthy trees, damaged by RV traffic. Darn that is not good.

I drive about 100 yards and this place is narrow, narrow, narrow. I took a left and went about 200 yards and found myself in high anxiety. I cannot make the turn. I tried twice and the rig will not navigate the turn without taking out trees, windows, bumpers etc. Of course the park has lots of folks camped who paid extra to see the guy who got lost and can't get his rig unstuck. Eyeballs are everywhere. Nothing like an audience.

What to do? I read in my RV for dumb asses that walkie talkie's can be very useful, so I had a couple of them with me. Ron jumped out the rig and had to be my eyes and ears. I can't see anything behind me and this is my **first time** backing up. I have to back 200 yards of twisty road just to get to the point where I can decide what do next. At this point if I could have walked away, I would have. Screw this. How the hell am I going to back this thing out of here?

Ron takes up his post behind me. We sorted out our language in advance so we could communicate in the event we had this kind of mishap. I start backing down

and Ron said go to the left. Ron please tell me curbside or street side. I don't know which is your left or right. OK, come on back now turn the wheel to the right. Geez Ron, tell me curb side or street side. Telling me how won't help. After about 30 minutes of attempt after attempt, we manage to get the rig backed down and worked out our communication. And we are still friends!!!

I drove back down the entrance road and turned right to a road that has RV parking spots that are beyond narrow. I only have 12 inches on either side of my wheels and once again have to navigate thru the trees backward into my space. We manage to get the rig in the spot and hook everything up.

The next day the snow covered Montana Mountains call me for a hike. Ron and I ride to the park and go our separate ways. Ron is off to explore Lake McDonald and I head for the woods. After hiking a while I saw the Entering Grizzly sign. Let's see here, no hiking alone, no food with strong odors, etc etc. Yep that about covers it, I am walking alone with two salami and cheese sandwiches in my pack. I hike to Fish Lake in the rain. Sparky and Erebus have been beaten back and all is good. This is why I came here. Good exercise, nature and Sparky/Erebus and nowhere to be found.

As I walk back down the path a young couple holding onto each other while hiking ask, did you see any bears? No I replied, but I did encounter a menacing toad.

Thursday I took Ron, my very much valued co-pilot to the airport. It was sad to see him go. I drove back to the rig, got on my motorcycle and headed back into the park for another hike. I attempted Mount Brown Lookout, a 10.6 mile round trip hike that had 4500 ft of elevation gain. The wheels fell off halfway through the ascent so I came back down and detoured onto less demanding terrain.

Friday I took the bike up to Logan's pass and hiked back to Hidden Lake. I teamed up with a local forest service engineer and his wife. They have lived in the area for 40 years. Stan also trained others in avalanche work. We hiked to the lake with a great side trip up the snow covered mountain. Skiers were hiking to the top so they could ski down. It was really magical with a beautiful mountain goat appearing at just the right time. We got to the top of a big ridge when Stan took

off skiing down the mountain in his hiking boots. What a site. Sort of like barefooting on water. Again Sparky and Erebus have vanished.

On the way back to the trail head Glaciers raw nature became evident. This is not Disney World. A family with a young boy was running around where he shouldn't and fell thru the snow into a waterfall. They got him out and had to call in emergency medical help. They said he would be fine. I hope so.

I got back to the rig in time to witness one guy rip the bumper off his fifth wheel on a tree, and two rigs leave with their TV antenna flying high and proud. But probably not for long. TV antennas are pretty fragile designed to be stowed, not flying at 60mph.

The guy next to me pulled in with his toy hauler. I was hopeful I would find someone to ride with. I watched with anticipation as he lowered the ramp. I was curious to see what he might have back there. Dang not a bike in sight, they use the garage for their dog house. The garage is filled with dogs and dog beds!!!!

Today I am taking some time off to begin putting my thoughts down on paper and trying my best to beat back Sparky and Erebus. I am privileged to be on the Road from Distraction to Engagement.