

ESSAY

More than a road trip

BY KAY MACDONALD
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There are some trips that are mundane by nature, but in Michigan, a drive for any reason is worth the robber baron's gas price.

Even a trip to my dentist in southern Michigan was nice on a day when the sun was shining for the first time in a month and all the trees were pale green with hope. The grim reality of novocaine and dental drills and bills dimmed on such a day.

We left at 8 a.m. and, true gourmets that we are, the first thing on our agenda was a sausage biscuit at McDonald's. Maybe being on the South Beach diet for two weeks had some bearing on it but mostly we remember how good those biscuits were when they were first introduced while we were on vacation in Texas some years ago. Those biscuits got us through hundreds of miles of Texas flatlands, and they made it worth facing the dentist.

Eating our biscuits and drinking our senior coffees, we drove along a rural highway and passed a little church that gave me something to think about for the entire day — maybe longer. A sign in front announced in big emphatic black letters, "Eternal Life ... Free Coffee!" Think about it. What more could a mortal hope for? Eternal life and free coffee! Or maybe it was Eternal Life OR Free Coffee. That's a hard one. I couldn't face life, much less eternal life, without coffee.

Lawns were graced with lilacs and daffodils and tulips ... and pick-up trucks. There was a veritable used car lot parade of pick-ups



for sale. Most of them were big, shiny, expensive looking late models, sporting their FOR SALE in huge front windows. What's going on? Do people just get tired of their big, new, bright metallic blue vehicle? Are they bored with their cherry-tomato-apple-fire engine red trucks? Don't they go fast enough? Isn't there enough room in the garage for something so shocking in yellow?

I don't understand this phenomenon at all. When we buy any car we choose the smallest, best-gas-mileage, least expensive transportation we can find and then we drive it until it rusts into a heap of dust in the driveway as evidenced by the 1994 Escort we were driving that day. The auto industry would be in receivership if they had to depend on us.

What prompts others to buy a truck that costs only somewhat less than the

national debt, gets eight miles to the gallon, will climb vertical cliffs in its knock-your-eyes-out color and then offer it for sale eight months later? (And from appearances, never out of its wrapping, much less over a mountain.) Is this the wave of the future? No more picket fences and bird baths? Just giant trucks in Faberge colors sitting square in the middle of front yards begging to be taken out for some exercise?

We like to read signs along the road. Burma Shave didn't have a thing over some of them. One of our favorites that has stood along that route for years announces "Egge's For Sale." Are they female eggs? Could they be pantyhose for chickens? I need to know. I want to meet the person who has conducted business proudly for 20 years by proclaiming "Egge's For Sale."

Aside from the humor, I

am irritated by signs that confidently proclaim "Your going to love our steaks." Who can take seriously any promise that doesn't acknowledge the difference between "your" and "you're"?

Here's another one we found: "Flours and Sedling's." Down the road a ways, "Flee Market." Is this where felons hide out until someone purchases them? It boggles the imagination to think of walking down a row of bargain-priced criminals, picking out the one you want to take home.

I love the little yard sheds that are sold along the highways. No more rusting metal boxes to house lawn mowers and flower pots. Now they are made of wood and my favorite is a log cabin model with two cute front windows and a porch with a railing and roof. I wish I were 10 again with a club house like that and a sign over the

door that says, "No Boys Allowed," although any club house I had would have said, "No Sissies Allowed. Dogs Welcome."

All day I thought about the hide-outs my friends and I had and the peanut butter sandwiches we ate and the orange crates and broken chairs we decorated with.

Radio stations can be entertaining. Our Escort radio isn't great and the stations fade out every 50 miles or so. We listened to pieces on NPR, Rush Limbaugh and Golden Oldies. I learned some great new phrases: On an ex-hippie running for congress, "The Cappuccino Liberal." Concerning the ups and downs of the stock market, "Sucker's Rally." A comment of Rush Limbaugh's, "Stupid is a cash crop."

We listened to an hour of old songs and because we've driven this road for 40 years, we had listened to these same songs on the same road when we were young. That was when gas was 27 cents a gallon and we had \$5 to our name and drove a Volkswagen, and we could make the trip down and back and buy a hamburger each and still have a little change in our pockets when we got home after a nice day.

I almost forgot about the dentist on our way down and that is no small victory. But we had eternal life and free coffee to look forward to and a veritable Flee Market of used pick-ups to admire. And you can bet your booty, I thought about everything except the dentist.

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