Travels with Wrigley: Vision Quest for Man & Dog
by Bruce Branit

What happens when you put over 13,000 miles on your car, yourself and your dog in just over 6 weeks? You get an experience you and your dog will never forget. Last summer, following my father's passing away, I found myself at a crossroads. I found myself asking the big questions: What is it all about? Why are we here?

Faced with these kinds of questions, Native Americans in times past would pack a bag and head out into the wilderness for a "vision quest". So that's what I did. I decided to take some time off and just drive. Where? Everywhere. The only things I needed were my truck to sleep in and my trusty companion of nine years, my dog, Wrigley. I knew taking Wrigley on this travel around the country would complicate things, but benefits far outweighed any logistical problems. After all, my dog could use a little vision quest of her own.

We headed up the coast of California and quickly settled into life on the road. After a few days, Wrigley accepted this new adventure and was an exuberant, unconditional passenger.

A typical day consisted of waking early and hitting the road. I tried to hit all of the major cities, national parks, and roadside attractions I had never before seen. I averaged about 300 miles a day. Sometimes I spent the entire day in one city or place. On other days I traveled from...
campground to campground, motel to motel, stopping at various tourist traps and sights along the way.

Wrigley was the ideal traveling companion. There were no arguments as to which road to follow or which radio station to listen too. It was a simple journey with no definite path.

Wrigley’s routine was much like mine. As we drove each day, she would peacefully watch the horizon and pass the time deep in dog-thought. Kind of a zen state for dog and master. When the next stop came it was a time to check out new scents and experiences, meet other travelers, and get new perspectives. All across the country Wrigley served as a magnet for meeting and talking with some wonderful people.

As each day grew to a close, I would try to find a campground, or a cheap dog-friendly motel. I found that many motels, including all Motel 6s, accept pets. Motel nights were relaxing. Usually this meant a shower and a good night’s sleep, as well as a chance to recharge my laptop and answer e-mail. Each night I would get out my well-worn atlas, and look one more day down the road. On other nights we found campgrounds to sleep in. My Jeep was outfitted with a large enough area to sleep in.

Wrigley either slept beside me or out on the ground next to the fire. There were so many wild sounds and smells for a city dog to take in, eyes wide and peering into the dark. Other nights when my hoped-for destination just proved too far away, I would simply pull over, lock the car up and grab a little sleep until the sun came up. This may seem a little dangerous to some, but tinted windows and a 75-pound watch dog tend to give you more confidence.

After the first week, a revelation settled in. I was actually doing this! And to top things off, really enjoying it, too. We walked the streets of San Francisco, dodged cabs in New York City, toured Chicago by water taxi, and had a beer in New Orleans. We drove through giant redwoods, crossed to Seattle by ferry, and drove across the ocean on bridges to Key West. We camped near the glaciers in Montana, within earshot of the geysers of Yellowstone, and on the beaches of Montauk at the Eastern tip of Long Island. We hiked the Grand Canyon, explored the Kennedy Space Center, and got an education at Gettysburgh. We payed homage to Devil's Tower, Mount Rushmore, Niagara Falls, the Alamo, and Kitty Hawk.

I have been asked a lot, “Did you get bored of all that driving?” I really never did. When every mile was a new one, there was always more to see. Just seeing the way the country evolves from region to region, climate to climate is better than any television or movie one could hope to watch.

Wrigley lived the life all dogs need to live at least once -- day after day of exciting new experiences.
The only constant each day was that something new would pass by. A new smell, a new ocean, or a new desert. We explored snow-covered mountain passes, noisy mega-cities, parched deserts, and sandy ocean keys. The only underlying principal in my mind and in Wrigley's was to see more, do more, experience more and learn more about the world.

It is amazing how much to life there is when every day brings new experience. And that is the final lesson I had in my mind as I pulled in to my driveway back in L.A. No matter what happens each day, no matter what you see and do, the only thing that is important is to have given yourself some new experience that day, to have seen something new or experienced a new vista. And that lesson is universal to all people and, judging from my dog Wrigley's behavior, to all dogs and animals too.

That's the vision I found on this quest.

Visit Bruce Branit's website, The Big Road Trip.

Bruce Branit is a digital artist creating visual effects for major commercials, television shows, and movies. Originally from Kansas City, Bruce moved with his dog, Wrigley, to Los Angeles in 1996.

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