

Going Nomad

A Caricaturist's Fanciful Grand Scheme

by Al Rodriguez



This August marks one year since my wife, Elizabeth, and I got rid of most of our stuff, moved into an RV and officially became nomads. Now, I'm pretty sure I'm not the first caricaturist to fill his spouse or girlfriend's head with fanciful grand schemes of living on the road, traveling the country and beyond, being spontaneous and carefree, while working gigs and saving money along the way to support this nomadic lifestyle. Nor will I be the last, I presume. Artists of all kinds have been doing this for centuries. Right?

Let it also be known we did this on purpose. It was an advantageous choice we both made under the most ideal conditions. This wasn't a desperate decision concocted due to being foreclosed upon, evicted, or pushed out onto the streets by forces beyond our control. Nope, none of that. We simply knew

we wanted to uncouple ourselves from our hometown of Miami at some point before rising seas placed our beloved house, which sat just a few short blocks from Biscayne Bay (and had been made-over by one of those HGTV shows for goodness sake!), financially and literally underwater. So we sold it while the



housing market was still hot and rented until we figured out our next move.

I'm not here to argue the causes of climate change, but from where we were living, we could plainly see it was definitely happening and relatively fast. Research informed us that a number of issues would affect us and our neighborhood well before we saw manatees floating by our sliding glass doors. Saltwater intrusion into our drinking water; rising homeowner's insurance rates followed by the inability to get insurance; as well as falling property values would just be the beginning. So we opted to avoid all of that.

The snag? There wasn't a particular place we wanted to move to just yet, and we had and still have a thriving business in South Florida. Elizabeth had quit her corporate job, which she was so over with and joined my world of working events. We bought a couple of photo booths, which she mostly ran and operated. She also learned tarot cards and palm reading and started working her own gigs. We became one of those cute couples that worked gigs together. She also helped expand my caricature artists biz into booking all sorts of entertainment by tapping into the list of local entertainers I'd already been working alongside for years. She was a natural.

Meanwhile, the caricature business had taken an interesting turn. Digital caricatures were becoming a real thing with the evolution of the Cintiq and other portable pressure-sensitive tablets. For the entrepreneurial, tech-savvy caricaturist who was partial to traveling and didn't freak out over troubleshooting glitches on the fly, this meant a whole new world of possibilities.

Since going digital, trade shows and corporate events have become a bigger part of my business. This means a lot more out-of-town gigs, which suits me since I love to travel. It wasn't long before flying to gigs became the norm, rather than the exception.

So how did all this turn us into nomads? I mean, we had a good thing going, right? Why not just move to higher ground if we're all so worried about some flooding? Why get rid of most of our belongings to live in an RV?

Did I mention the RV we moved into is a thirty eight-foot Class A motorhome with expanding slide-outs, a full bath and a half, washer & dryer, king size bed, three



Look where are travels have taken us so far!

flatscreen TVs (one of which is outside), residential refrigerator and an electric fireplace? We also tow a car and Vespa with it so we can easily get around wherever we decide to park the RV. So we're not exactly roughing it. We weren't prepared to give up certain creature comforts and go full-on Klemke. (I love ya, Sam!) When we decided upon our new home, we traded in a small hybrid travel trailer we'd bought a couple of years prior to go on a cross-country trip to Burning Man, which was essentially our introduction and training into the world of Recreational Vehicles. Little did we know then this would plant the seeds to a humongous lifestyle change.

on the road not just possible, but fairly easy, and your clients, especially your local ones, don't need to know you're roaming about the country in a motorhome. And whenever we feel the need to be back in Miami, we still can be. Turns out Florida is a great place to spend the winter months if you're living in a motorhome.

So how do we book and work gigs while being all gypsy-like? That's been the trickiest part to figure out as we're still working out the kinks, but since more of our business now requires traveling, what difference does it make if I'm flying in from Miami or some other part of the country? And yes, if the planets line up and the timing pans out, I can,

**Feel free to follow their adventures at
www.OurBigWindshield.com and
www.instagram.com/ourbigwindshield**

Going nomadic eventually became the solution to our conundrum and an opportunity of a lifetime. Since we didn't know where we wanted to relocate, this gave us the chance to sample different places. We can spend some time and try out a city, state or region without the huge expense of moving there. Meanwhile, we can continue to keep Florida as our base and book events there. Gigs we can't work ourselves, we simply book other artists and performers on 'em. Technology today, more than ever before, allows us to operate the company seamlessly from anywhere. Smartphones, hotspots, voice-over IPs, Dropbox, booking management websites, mailbox forwarding services, etc. all make running a business

in some cases, drive our motorhome there, or close enough to avoid paying for a flight and hotel room. Being uber-flexible and having a willingness to change plans quickly are paramount with this new lifestyle. Having Southwest Airlines' "No Change Fees" policy is a godsend (Thanks, Jeff Mandell, for that tip so many years ago!).

But not all our gigs are travel worthy. A good chunk of our business are still the typical 2-to 4-hour local Florida jobs, and I'm missing out on working many of those events while galavanting around the U.S., as it would be cost prohibitive to fly back to Florida for every little gig. So, for now we plan on spending the winter months in Florida, when we're usually the busiest with

local gigs, and slowest with travel gigs. Spring and fall are typically trade show seasons, so traveling more for gigs then, hence we can pretty much be anywhere as long as we're near an airport, which isn't always as easy as it sounds, we're learning. We spent this last spring in Colorado and flew outta Denver (What's with that scary blue demon horse they have out there, by the way?) and Grand Junction. Summer usually slows down a bit for us, so that's when we can travel more for pleasure. Perfect for wandering around in a motorhome!

At times, flying back to Florida makes sense, just like flying anywhere else. Easier in fact, since I'm so familiar with the area and have places to crash. If a few gigs line up, I can work them all on one round-trip ticket.

Taking on more commissioned projects is another way to make up some for those gigs I'm not working. The same advances that have been making digital caricatures possible for gigs, make taking on studio pieces more convenient

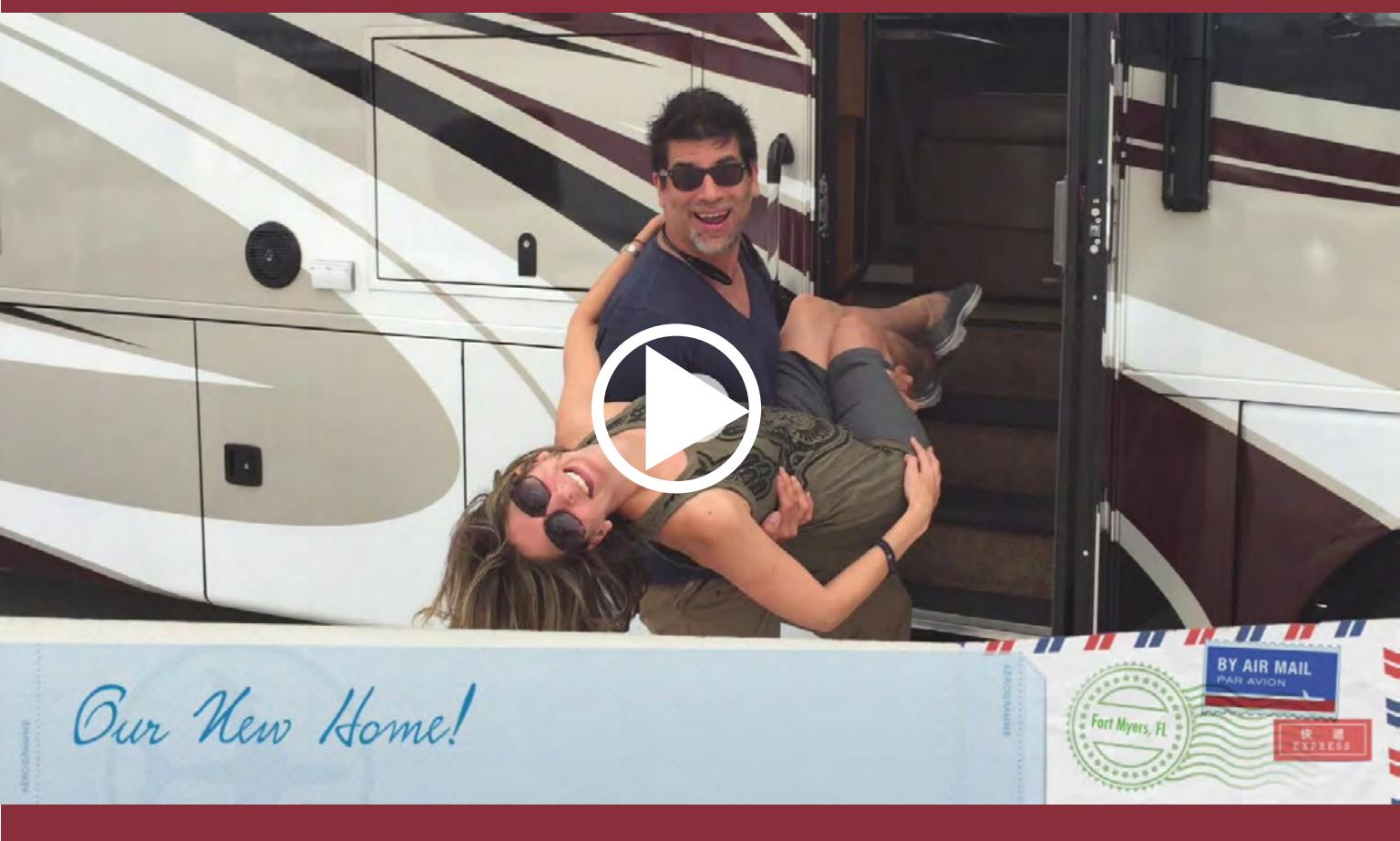
as well. I don't need as much studio space now as I used to since I'm working digitally. In no time, I'll turn the front passenger seat of our motorhome into my corner office and art studio. I just have to put all my gear away whenever we hit the road again, so Elizabeth has room to sit there and be my co-pilot.

You may be wondering why we're not doing fairs and festivals. Seems like a natural option, right? We realize its been the go-to income source for traveling artists, but I've spent nearly 30 years building a business of booking paid gigs and frankly never felt I was all that great at the retail thing, though having it as an option is nice to know. I have been wanting to just pull over on some of these roads in the middle of nowhere and step up my iPad connected to that TV outside with a sign posted "Last Chance for Digital Caricatures before the State-Line!" Curious if anyone would stop?

So, a year in now! How's the grand scheme been working out? Pretty good actually! It's been mostly working out as

planned, but it hasn't been without its challenges. People often tell us "you're living the dream!" I remind myself of that whenever I'm dumping our waste water tanks, or dealing with any of the less than alluring aspects of RV living. Like anything, it has its pros and cons. It ultimately comes down to what you want outta life. We wanted the freedom to travel and experience more of the country. We also saw how a house full of stuff can be more a prison than a prize, that we hold on to a good chunk of stuff just because we feel we may need it some day. Hence, we just continue to acquire more stuff, move into larger homes, pay more for housing just so we have room for all that stuff, then when we get more space, we fill it with more stuff. And for what purpose? Life isn't a contest to acquire the most crap. It's meant to be lived.

So, if this is a lifestyle change you're considering, here's a list of some pros and cons you may want to keep in mind. Let's start with the cons first.



Cons:

- Inconsistent access to fast internet. Sometimes no internet at all. Not good for business or streaming Netflix.
- Some campgrounds really cram you in like sardines.
- Smelling our neighbor's sewage at times. (Probably a sub point to the whole being crammed in thing)
- Having to move our motorhome when it's not convenient. Many campgrounds have restrictions on length of stay, so you can't always stay longer and leave when it suits you.
- Pulling into new campsites can be a quite formidable task at times. Especially if we need to back in. I'm still amazed I'm allowed to drive this huge land-barge around without a special license!
- Like a house, motorhomes require maintenance. I've become way handier than I ever thought I could be.
- Not always easy to find someone to service our motorhome, particularly on short notice. Some things just need to be done by a professional.
- Motorhomes depreciate, unlike most houses or condos.
- Stopping for gas can be stressful. Our big rig doesn't maneuver as easily as

a car, so finding a gas station that can accommodate our size can be tricky at times. Truck stops aren't always the answer since the truck fueling lanes are usually diesel only, and we run on gas.

• Having to be aware of low clearances. We don't want the top of our home getting ripped off because we unwittingly drove it under a low-lying bridge. So no Starbucks drive-thru for us!

• Although we'd like to be more spontaneous, we often have to book campsites way in advance to get the ideal spots. Otherwise they book up and our options become limited. This is true of Florida in the winter, for example.

• We don't often know what we're getting until we arrive. Some campgrounds may guarantee a type of site, but not a specific site. Or we book a site with full-hookups (electric, water and sewage), but realize once we're there the electric is only 30 amps, as opposed to the 50 amps we really need to power everything, and running our generator isn't usually allowed. This can be problematic when it's really hot outside and we really want to run both of our air conditioners. That's right, we have two.

• Having to be mindful of how much stuff weighs. Downsizing so that everything fits in the motorhome is one thing, even

then, we can still be over our motorhome's weight capacity. So no art book collections!

• And like anything, there's always the unexpected, which you can't prepare for, like a nest of ants shorting out our power transfer box, or the bird that crashed into and took out our side mirror.

Pros:

- Being able to travel, getting to know, see and experience more of this country.
- Having the freedom to choose where we want or don't want to be.
- Having the ability to migrate to more desirable climates.
- Being able to easily relocate if we're being threatened by hurricanes, floods or wild fires.
- More options to adjust our budget in relation to our ever-changing income or cash flow.
- If we wanted to, we could find public land to camp on and just live off the grid. For free!
- If an area, region or city interest us, we can just visit and hang out there for a while.
- We have a lot less stuff to worry about.

- Living in a motorhome is cheaper than when we lived in a house in Miami. Hence more money we can save and do the things we really want.
- No monthly rents, mortgage, or lease agreements to get locked into.
- No utility bills. Electric, water, sewage and often cable TV is included with campsites.
- Mail forwarding service has completely eliminated junk mail from our lives. Didn't see that one coming!
- Ability to go where the work is.
- Kinda feel like we're on vacation much of the time.
- Being able to travel while having most of our belongings with us.
- No matter where the motorhome is parked, we're always home when inside of it. Our bed, our bathroom, our throw pillows, our satellite TV, our gluten-free snacks, our "Star Wars" DVD collection, etc.
- While traveling, we can just pull into a Walmart parking lot and stay the night.



Cracker Barrel, Cabela's and a few other establishments also allow this.

- At times, we get to live in beautiful surroundings with some really awesome views.
- We can visit friends and family without concerns over accommodations, or out-staying our welcomes.
- We can take our home north into Canada

- or south into Mexico. How crazy is that?!
- If we find our current campsite less than desirable, it's always temporary.
- If we really hate the campsite or grounds we're in? Nothing is keeping us there and we can just leave.

And best of all...

- In-laws don't pop by unexpectedly since they can't usually find us.

So what now? Well, my goal is really just to master this nomad thing. It's just now, a year in, that I feel like we're getting the hang of it. I knew going into this, we'd learn a lot along the way, and the more we figure out and adjust to, the easier, more enjoyable and less stressful it'd be. Meanwhile, we've been discovering things in our great country we didn't know existed. We've been in awe of so many places we've seen. And we're meeting a lot of nice people we wouldn't otherwise. We haven't decided where we want to settle down yet, but we're living the dream and having a crapload of adventures along the way. **ef**

